The day laborers and The new times / Hans Kirk ; translated and with an introduction and notes by Marc Linder.

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Hans Kirk

The Day Laborers

and

The New Times
THE DAY LABORERS
&
THE NEW TIMES
About the **Translator**: Marc Linder, who taught on the social science faculty at Roskilde University Centre in Denmark for three years, has translated two volumes of German fiction—Johannes Bobrowski, *I Taste Bitterness* (Seven Seas Publishers, 1970), and Fred Wander, *The Seventh Well* (Seven Seas Publishers, 1976)—and was certified as a simultaneous interpreter for Danish and German by the United States Department of State. After receiving a Ph.D. in political science at Princeton University, he worked at universities in Germany and Mexico. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he represented migrant farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley for seven years on behalf of Texas Rural Legal Aid before coming to the University of Iowa in 1990, where he is a professor of labor law. Among the more recent of his fifteen books are *"Moments Are the Elements of Profit": Overtime and the Deregulation of Working Hours under the Fair Labor Standards Act* (Fānpihùà Press, 2000); *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (University of Iowa Press, 1999), which received the Theodore Saloutos Prize for the best book in agricultural history; and *Void Where Prohibited: Rest Breaks and the Right to Urinate on Company Time* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

About the **Author of the Foreword**: Elias Bredsdorff was Head of the Department of Scandinavian Studies in the University of Cambridge, where he was professor of Danish for three decades. The world’s foremost expert on Hans Christian Andersen and author of numerous books in English and Danish on Danish literature, he was also a leading figure in the anti-Nazi resistance during World War II.

About the **Publisher**: Fānpihùà Press, which accepts no revenue from its books, publishes at low prices works that increasingly profit-driven university presses refuse to consider. Fānpihùà Press also publishes Marc Linder’s translations of Hans Kirk’s *The Fishermen* (ISBN 0-9673899-2-5) and *The Slave* (ISBN 0-9673899-4-1). Its books are distributed by Iowa Book & Supply: (319) 337-4188/iowabook@iowabook.com and Prairie Lights Books: (800) 295-BOOK/info@prairielights.com
Hans Kirk

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and

The New Times

Translated and
with an Introduction and Notes by
Marc Linder

Fänpihuà Press
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Foreword

In 1928 a Danish novel entitled *Fiskerne* (*The Fishermen*) was published in a first edition of 1,000 copies. Scandinavian critics received it as a masterpiece, and it soon became a best seller, constantly reprinted, so that in 1960 it reached a ninth edition. After the novel had been televised in six installments in 1977, it reached a circulation of 370,000 copies, thus becoming the top best seller of the century, by then translated into twelve languages.

In Britain Penguin Books bought the English rights and announced that an English version would be available in 1950. But knowing the high quality of the original, Penguin found the English translation so unsatisfactory that they refused to publish it. For that reason an English version was never printed—until the year 2000 when an American professor of law, who had happened to read it, found it such a literary masterpiece that it should be made available in English, and he decided to translate and publish it in the United States.

In this Foreword I want to pay homage to two persons without whom not only *The Fishermen*, but also other important novels by Hans Kirk would not have reached the U.S. book market.

The first, of course, is the Danish author, Hans Kirk, the son of a country doctor in Jutland, who came from a family of fundamentalist fishermen and poor peasants on the west coast of Jutland, whereas Hans Kirk’s mother came from a background of well-to-do farmers and landowners.

Hans Kirk himself was born in 1898; he was educated at an elite Danish boarding school and was later admitted to the University of Copenhagen, where he studied law. After having taken his degree in 1922 he was employed for a year in the Danish legation in Paris, and then for two years as a civil servant in the municipality of Copenhagen.
He felt, however, that his life was empty, and he decided to give up his career and become a writer whose subject was real people. For a while he wavered between becoming a country postman or a fisherman, and when members of his family had decided to move away from the hardships of the fishermen’s lives on the west coast of Jutland in order to settle down on an island called Gjøl in the Limfjord where they could continue their trade in a milder climate, Kirk joined them, becoming a boarder at the home of his uncle and aunt, while helping with the fishing and acting as a general jack-of-all-trades for the group. It was here that he began to write his first novel.

In *The Fishermen* he describes how a group of North Sea fishermen were forced to move from a rough and hard existence to a milder climate without in any way changing their religious fundamentalism, which brings them into conflict with the religious indifference or agnosticism of the local population in their new environment.

The fishermen are never held up to ridicule, but are described with profound sympathy. Socially they are at the bottom of the scale, but they are proud men and women who are able to put up with their situation in life, for they know that they will get their reward in life after death.

In spite of the fact that it was common knowledge that Hans Kirk was a convinced socialist and atheist, most Danish critics gave the book a warm welcome, calling it an important literary event, and the author was hailed as a new creative writer of great importance.

After the publication of *The Fishermen*, a novel or series of novels was planned dealing with the transition from an agricultural economy to industrialism in Denmark. Kirk’s idea was to describe what happened locally in a small Danish community in Jutland, where the building of a cement factory changed the entire social pattern. Previously the lowest paid group of workers in the country, the day labourers, who did not have any land of their own, worked as underpaid slaves for the farmers and big
landowners whenever they needed them, but with the coming of
the factory these workers gradually became wage earners, thus
having a regular income. As a child Kirk had witnessed the
building of a cement factory near Mariager Fjord in his home
district. He decided that a development that began at the end of
the nineteenth century and went on until the 1930s could not
possibly be told in a single novel, and he therefore planned the
work as a trilogy, of which the first volume, entitled *Daglejerne*
(*The Day Laborers*), was published in December 1936, and the
second, *De ny Tider* (*The New Times*), three years later.

Hans Kirk was busy working on the final volume of the tril­
ogy when World War II broke out, and in April 1940 German
troops occupied Denmark. In June 1941 the Danish government
at the order of the occupying power told the Danish police to
round up as many members of the Danish Communist party as
possible and arrest them. Among those sent to a Danish concen­
tration camp was Hans Kirk, who was not charged with any
crime other than being a communist.

Kirk had managed to bring with him the almost completed
manuscript of the final volume of the trilogy, and he finished the
manuscript while he was imprisoned. But in August 1943, when
the Germans took complete power and the Danish government
abandoned control of the country, some of the political prisoners
managed to escape, while others, less fortunate, were deported
to a German concentration camp.

Among those who escaped was Hans Kirk, who immediately
joined the Danish underground resistance movement, but he had
to leave two manuscripts behind in the camp, which was now
taken over by the Gestapo, and the German guards burned both
manuscripts, that of the final volume of the trilogy, and that of
a novel called *Slaven* (*The Slave*), which Kirk wrote in a Copen­
hagen prison.

After the liberation of Denmark Kirk decided to rewrite the
manuscript of *Slaven*, but did not manage to do the same with the
(untitled) final volume of the trilogy.
The Slave, which is now also available in English, takes place on board a Spanish galleon in 1679, sailing with a crew of ninety-two from South America to Spain, loaded with riches from the colonies. It was published in Danish in 1948 and in English (in Iowa City) 52 years later. In an interview conducted shortly before it was published Kirk said: "The Slave was written in a prison cell in a Copenhagen jail during the last months of 1941 and the spring of 1942. To us who were jailed, it was a last desperate situation, in which we had to ask ourselves if it would become necessary to capitulate vis-à-vis Nazism, which the Danish Social Democrats at that time were ready to do. This book was intended as an answer to that question."

Other important works by Kirk, not yet available in English, are Skyggespil (Play of Light and Shade), a charming book of personal childhood reminiscences, and Vredens Søn (The Son of Wrath), in which the scene is Israel at the time of Jesus Christ. The novel is not about Jesus of the Gospels, but about a well-intentioned rebel called Jeshua who fails to be content in his fight against the oppressors. Kirk saw Jesus as the first communist; he is described as a revolutionary, and therefore he was crucified.

Hans Kirk died of cancer in June 1962. His name is still known by most Danes as the author of The Fishermen, the best selling Danish novel of all time.

The other person to whom I want to pay homage is Marc Linder, who in addition to being a professor of law at the University of Iowa is the translator, editor, and publisher of Kirk’s main novels in the English-speaking world.

After having studied ancient Greek he had a graduate fellowship for three years in Germany in the late 1960s. During these years he made Danish friends and spent some time in Denmark and learned Danish. He studied political science at Princeton University and received a Ph.D. there in 1973, writing his dissertation on economic theory in the Soviet Union and Cuba. After a year as a research associate at an agricultural university in
Germany, he taught social science as a visiting professor at Roskilde University Centre in Denmark. By then he spoke and read Danish fluently, and one of his Danish students presented him with a copy of *Fiskerne* in the original language. Initially he was put off by the religious figures in the book, not being prepared for what Kirk was up to, and he read only the beginning of the novel, but picked it up again a few months later, and it became—and has remained—his favorite Danish novel.

When Marc Linder returned to the U.S. in 1977 he decided to translate the book into English. When he learned about the Penguin translation that had been discarded in 1950, he tried to contact Penguin, but got no reply, and he gave up.

In 1980 he entered Harvard Law School, and from 1983 to 1990 he lived on the Texas-Mexico border, working as a lawyer for a government funded legal services agency representing migrant farmworkers in lawsuits against their exploiters large and small. During these years he continued to write books and articles.

"In 1999 I simply got a bee in my bonnet about translating *Fiskerne,*," he told me in a letter. "I saw the book on my bookshelf and just decided that it was time." He finally got someone’s attention at Penguin, which said it did not own the rights, and so he worked things out with Gyldendal, Kirk’s Danish publisher in Copenhagen. Unfortunately, history repeated itself and publishers were uninterested. Marc Linder wrote to me: “They said: You want us to publish a 70-year-old book by a dead author no one in the United States has ever heard of? Get lost! I wasn’t discouraged, but soon discovered that there were many intricacies I had not thought through—e.g., Jutland dialect and all the hymns! I was lucky to find two Danes here from Jutland, whom I could ask questions of. I worked 12-16 hours a day for months on the translation, introduction, and notes. I completely revised the translation 20-25 times, and even read the entire manuscript aloud three times. A professional translator could not afford to lavish that kind of tender loving care on a book.
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But *Fiskerne* is a labor of love (of labor) for me, which I have spent a considerable amount of my own money on without taking a penny. Proceeds are going to the University of Iowa libraries.”

His translation of *Fiskerne* was published in 1999 with an excellent introduction and precise and detailed notes by Linder himself, whose background research is impressive.

His translation of *The Slave* followed in 2000, also with an introduction by him.

And with the present translation of *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* all Kirk’s major novels are now available in English. I have profound admiration for Linder’s excellent translation and important apparatus of notes, undoubtedly the best and most useful work any translator of Danish literature has done.

**Elias Bredsdorff**

*Former Head of the Department of Scandinavian Studies in the University of Cambridge*
Introduction

In the years following publication of The Fishermen in 1928, Hans Kirk returned to several of the themes he had developed in that book, which a half-century later would become the best-selling Danish novel of all time.1 The impact of the pietistic Inner Mission on the political and social consciousness of the rural poor of Jutland continued to occupy Kirk.2 But in the 1930s he turned his attention away from impoverished quasi-independent workers such as fishermen and toward a socio-economic and psychological micro-history of the rapid transformation of an impoverished, class-riven, semi-patriarchal agricultural community into an industrial society and of agricultural day laborers into an industrial proletariat organized in a national labor union.3

Kirk, whose Fishermen had created the Danish collective social novel, in which a group generates the dynamic and which dispenses with a central character or hero (but nevertheless describes individual characters in sympathetic detail), found this genre equally appropriate for The Day Laborers and The New Times.4 Though they are all collective novels, the later books ex-

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1Already by 1948 it was “a modern classic, read in schools and offered for examination.” Sven Møller Kristensen, “En af dem der ikke snublede i Starten,” Land og Folk, Jan. 11, 1948, at 13, col. 1 at 2.


3This point was stressed in a review of The Day Laborers by the chairman of the Danish Communist Party. Aksel Larsen, “Hans Kirk, Daglejerne,” Arbejderbladet, Dec. 4, 1936.

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plore a historically dynamic socioeconomic development lacking in the seemingly static environment of *The Fishermen*. Similarly, *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* do not mirror *The Fishermen*'s submersion of Marxist analysis of the relationship between the economic base and the psychological and religious superstructure below the surface. Ironically, as one of Kirk’s biographers noted, it was precisely this reserve that enabled thousands of Danish readers to take the book to heart and even to believe that the author was himself an Inner Mission fisherman. Unlike the group of fishermen, the day laborers are depicted in their interaction with other groups in a distinctly stratified class society, which is made more lucid as a totality.

Unlike the characters in *The Fishermen*, some in the later novels fail to perceive the personal integrity and dignity of the members of the Inner Mission, which is so rigorously conveyed in the earlier novel, and mercilessly mock them. Yet all three books testify to what the Icelandic novelist Halldor Laxness called Kirk’s “almost anthropological knowledge of the milieu he chose and the population groups he made himself spokesman for.”

The action in *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* takes place, in the years shortly before and after World War I, along another fjord, Mariager (or Hobro) Fjord, which runs 26 miles inland to Hobro from the Kattegat on the east coast of Jutland and is situated about 25 miles south of the Limfjord, where *The

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5 Werner Thierry, *Hans Kirk* 32 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977). For that reason it is difficult to credit the view that *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* share the objectivity of *The Fishermen* that makes the reader unable to guess where he is to put his sympathy or antipathy. Tom Kristensen, “Den største af kommunisterne,” *Politiken*, June 17, 1962, reprinted in *Land og Folk*, June 18, 1962, at 3, col. 4, at 4, col. 1.


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*Fishermen* takes place.\(^8\) The chalk and clay pits in the area along Denmark's longest fjord provided the raw materials for cement production.\(^9\) The fictional Alslev—an orthographic conflation of the small towns of Assens and Falslev, but in reality the former, which was the site of three cement factories—was but a few miles across the fjord from Kirk's own birthplace in Hadsund.\(^10\) Assens, whose population amounted to 1,287 in 1901 and 1,402 in 1921, was listed in the Danish census as “Assens Factory Town” or “Assens Cement Town” in various years.\(^11\) It is about equidistant (thirty five miles) between Denmark's then second largest city, Aarhus, to the south, and fourth largest city, Aalborg, to the north, which was the country's other cement manufacturing center.

To simplify and dramatize the transformation of an agrarian into an industrial society, Kirk compressed the actual historical development of cement manufacturing in Assens.\(^12\) To be sure, \(^8\)One of the rare English-language works to discuss Kirk’s novels erroneously places the action in the Limfjord region. Scott de Francesco, *Scandinavian Cultural Radicalism: Literary Commitment and the Collective Novel* 126 (New York: Lang, 1990). The overwhelming number of gross factual errors in this author’s brief discussion of *The Fishermen, The Day Laborers*, and *The New Times* raises the suspicion of his inability to read Danish. Id. at 61-72.


\(^10\)Several towns in Denmark are named Alslev, but not in this part of Jutland.

\(^11\)Danmarks Statistik, *Statistisk aarbog: 17de aargang 1912*, tab. 7 at 10 (Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1912); Danmarks Statistik, *Statistisk aarbog 1921*, tab. 6 at 8 (Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1921).

\(^12\)Nevertheless, even in the relatively large industrial city of Aalborg, construction of Denmark’s largest cement factory in 1889-91 left the local population at a loss to understand the great upheaval that awaited them at a time
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the cement factory which in The Day Laborers appears to be built around 1907-1908 (reckoning back from the placement of World War I in The New Times), corresponds to the actual building of the Kongsdal cement plant in Assens in 1907-1909. Support for establishing the plant came chiefly from larger groups of cement users, cement product manufacturers, and a group of master builders from Copenhagen, who lent the requisite share capital in exchange for the plant’s obligation to supply them with a large quantity of cement at below the market price. However, just as Kongsdal began operating in 1909, a price war pressed down prices, putting the plant’s original purpose out of reach and forcing the user-lenders to convert the plant into a normal corporation. Kirk’s account ignored the fact that by that time cement had been manufactured at Assens for more than thirty years, the Cimbria and Dania factories having been built there in 1873 and 1887, respectively. At the turn of the century these two plants, which were already exporting to Europe, Asia, and America, employed 150 and 350 workers, respectively. By

when many were not even acquainted with cement. Jesper Nielsen, Cement-arbejdernes Fagforening at 93.

13To be sure, these factories were small and it was not until the Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory began operating in 1891 and especially after it introduced rotary kilns at the end of the century that the industry began to develop in earnest in Denmark. Within a few years, Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory virtually monopolized the industry by mergers with the other companies. Knudåge Riisager, F. L. Smidh & Co.: 1882-1922, at 53-64, 123-40 (Copenhagen: Langkjærs Bogtrykkeri, 1921).

shifting the focus to the early years of the twentieth century, Kirk was able to use the by then strong national labor unions—thanks in part to the organization of unskilled workers, Denmark arguably had the world’s highest unionization rate prior to World War I—as an outside force to promote and accelerate the formation of working-class consciousness in a backward and closed agrarian region.15

In fact, the Assens cement factories were at the time the largest factories of any kind in Denmark not in the vicinity of a large city. Indeed, the cement industry, which became highly trustified in Denmark,16 was the first branch of large-scale production in which Danish capital achieved parity on the world market. Thus although Kirk’s depiction of the new factory proletariat as consisting of impoverished rural workers was historically accurate and representative,17 the placement of the factory

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Samsøe, Die Industrialisierung Dänemarks 119 (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1928); Betænkning vedrørende Cementbranchens konkurrenceforhold tab. 2 at 12.


17According to Galenson, The Danish System of Labor Relations at 13: “The industrial recruits came not from an independent yeomanry . . . but rather from among the cottars and agricultural laborers who constituted 70 per cent of the agricultural labor force in 1870. [T]he young men and women who entered the factories were not farm-owners fallen upon hard times . . . but rather a dependent group inured to exceedingly unfavorable economic circumstances. . . . They were conditioned, if not to the rigorous discipline of the factory, at least to severe restrictions upon freedom in allocating their time.” Workers at Denmark’s largest cement plant, Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory, which was opened in 1889, were “recruited from the lowest social strata. Many came di-
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itself in a rural area was historically accurate, but atypical. In 1906, there were five cement factories in Denmark, each employing more than 100 and in the aggregate 1,165 industrial workers; by the first year of World War I, eight cement factories employed a total of 1,905 workers.

Kirk himself was an observant child of ten or so at the time of the outset of the events depicted in the novels and his memoirs, published more than a decade after the novels, include many vignettes ‘prefiguring’ events, groups, and persons in the novels. Accompanying his father, a country doctor, on his house calls in the Mariager Fjord area, Kirk met “the disease called hunger.” Already then it began to dawn on him dimly that “one has to choose between the manor and the cottages.” But by and by he also learned that “the real poverty is mute, it accepts its fate apathetically. So long as people can fight and protest, they’re not poor, they still retain a sense of human worth.”

Even as a child he was acquainted with small farmers who, like

rectly from the large manorial farms in the hinterlands, many came from abroad, and most of them were quite young and tough workers, who liked both a drink and a good fight. They were often more preoccupied with making a living hand to mouth than with organizing themselves and fighting for better wages and working conditions.” Nielsen, Cementarbejdernes Fagforening at 17.

18Claus Engelund, Ronald Gernskov, and Lis Tanghøj, “Arbejde og dagligt brød: Om Hans Kirks Daglejeme og De ny Tider,” Litteratur og Samfund, No. 28-29, at 12 (1979) (and editorial comment on inside front cover). Correlatively, Kirk was not addressing the question of the many immiserated agricultural smallholders who were not absorbed by burgeoning factories. Id. at 19.

19Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk aarbog: 17de aargang 1912, tab. 53 at 60-61; Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk aarbog 1921, tab. 50 at 58-59.

20Hans Kirk, Skyggespil 79, 77, 78 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998 [1953]). Denmark’s pioneering proletarian novelist, Martin Andersen Nexo, had a socialist express a similar thought in one of his epic novels: “As long as you can keep the bile flowing, you haven’t completely gone to the dogs.” Martin Andersen Nexo, Ditte Menneskebarn 2:268 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1995 [1921]).
Cilius Andersen, one of the novels’ key characters, had “boozed away” their farms.21

In February 1930, barely a year after having published *The Fishermen*, Kirk was already “grinding away at a book that will deal with the Danish agricultural worker (or more precisely the Jutlandish).” Writing from Hadsund, he explained to his correspondent, Hartvig Frisch (one of the Social Democratic party’s leading members of parliament and cultural affairs spokes­persons), that “I would like to depict the old, ingenuous day laborer, the type one can meet over here, and his son, the politically awake and class-conscious union man, such as we of course fortunately also have them. Whether it will succeed is very doubtful.”22 A year later he told Frisch that he had resumed work on his agricultural laborer novel despite the “hopeless” situation, which, if a writer described it as he saw it, could easily serve as “reactionary propaganda against Social Democracy and the labor union movement.”23 Evidence of Kirk’s focus on agricultural workers at this time is a story he published in 1931 about Marinus Jensen—who would become one of the central characters in *The Day Laborers*—which was incorporated in the novel in large part verbatim five years later.24

But by April 1933 Kirk had definitively abandoned his novel on the rural proletariat: it had become so gloomy and pessimistic that he could not bear working on it.25 The reasons for Kirk’s

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25Thierry, *Hans Kirk* at 51. For an even more pessimistic contemporane­ous assessment by Denmark’s then best-known novelist, see Martin Andersen Nexo, *For lud og koldt vand* 29-33 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1969 [1937]).
pessimism were not far to seek. While writing *The Fishermen*, he had published an article in a radical journal in 1927 titled, “The Rural Proletariat,” in which he criticized the Social Democratic Party for supporting a state-financed policy of partitioning farmland to expand the class of very small holdings. Contrary to the Social Democrats’ goal of forming a socialist vanguard out of the new small farmers, the result of the so-called state smallholders act of 1899 and its renewals in 1904, 1909, and 1914, and especially of the Land Acts of 1919 was the creation of a solid defense against the propertyless rural proletariat. Kirk took the Social Democrats to task for having failed to recognize that in an agricultural country it was first and foremost necessary to organize the rural workers in a broad front against the land owners; instead, by opening the door to the middle class, the Social Democrats had deprived the rural proletariat of its best forces: “The partitioning is society’s safety valve. But it is hardly a so-

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26Lov om Tilvejebringelse af Jordlodder for Landarbejdere, No. 39 af 24de Marts 1899, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1899, at 63-69 (Copenhagen: Schultz, n.d.) provided for state loans to farm workers to acquire small plots.

27On the laws and their implementation, see F. Skrubbeltrang, *Agricultural Development and Rural Reform in Denmark* 259-82 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1953). Although the ostensible purpose of the 1899 law was to provide land to farm workers, owners of the largest farms supported it as a means of retaining labor that had been migrating to cities and overseas (especially to the United States) in search of higher wages. The smallholdings were designed to be large enough to induce the better workers to remain on the land, but small enough so that a family could not support itself and would be “forced” to seek employment on others’ farms. Large employing farmers preferred this solution because it was cheaper than increasing wages. By the same token, farm workers were willing to accept a lower wage in exchange for their own house and land. Following the so-called system-change in 1901, under which the king appointed a cabinet government reflecting the majority in the lower house of parliament, this second dimension of the laws receded. Erling Olsen, *Danmarks økonomiske historie siden 1750*, at 64-65 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1962).
socialist party’s task to look after that part of the machine.”28

Kirk argued that the party should have been pushing for large-scale industrialization and socialization of agriculture. The failure to achieve that goal within a reasonable time would, in Kirk’s view, mean that working-class politicians’ next and final social task would be a “common burial club for the Danish proletariat.”29 He was not, however, blind to the enormous impediments to propagandizing rural workers: “After all, the parish is a small society where everyone is well-known and where the class contradictions do not stand out sharply. A farmer is on familiar terms with his farmhand and eats together with his day laborers—all the little things that have their importance.”30 In many places it was even dangerous to be a union member: “The farmers loathe workers’ organizations the way a cat loathes mustard. It’s not only a fanaticized feeling, but something of a vital instinct. The farmers have by means of their unique political talent, their horse-trading cunning, a kind of sense of what threatens them. There are thousands of farmers who won’t use unionized labor power, and the rural workers’ organizations are rather powerless vis-à-vis them.”31 The educational process was further impeded by the farmers’ domination of the entire pedagogical system. Kirk’s pessimistic conclusion in 1927 culminated in the claim that the smartest thing a farmhand could do was to emigrate to America.32

Kirk’s seemingly slow progress on the novels was in part a function of his need to support his family and his serious writing.


29Kirk, “Landproletariatet” at 111.

30Kirk, “Landproletariatet” at 108.

31Kirk, “Landproletariatet” at 109. Martin Andersen Nexo, who had worked as a farm servant in his youth, reported in his memoirs that common folk agreed that farmers were “the hardest of employers.” Martin Andersen Nexo, Vejs ende 17 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1969 [1939]).

32Kirk, “Landproletariatet” at 110.
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Over the years he wrote, under dozens of pseudonyms, as many as 900 short stories and novellas for Danish weeklies. In the 1930s, when he offered his journalistic services gratis to the Communist Party Arbejderbladet, its editor asked him how he expected to make ends meet, and Kirk replied: "'With help of a couple of bottles of red wine to soften up my brain, in one night I can write two or three short stories for the better part of the sensationalist press—and then most of the month is taken care of economically . . . .'"\(^{33}\)

In June 1936, a few months before The Day Laborers appeared, Kirk again recounted the origins and progress of the novels to Hartvig Frisch:

A few years ago I wrote a book that dealt directly with the current problems of the working class. But when I was three-fourths finished with it, the questions grew and I realized that I had to go deeper if it was not going to become merely a current propaganda novel. I got cracking again. Now I believe I got it right.

I'm just about finished with the first and have written a part of the third volume of a novel-trilogy. It depicts the little cement town Assens on Mariager Fjord, begins with the poor rural proletariat, with the founding of the cement factory, the growth of Social Democracy, the day laborers' development from workers in the old-fashioned sense to industrial workers. You understand: the whole optimistic period in the working class's history in Denmark. Volume 2 will depict the War and volume 3 the rationalization [sic] brought up to date. I think the topic can be rounded out nicely.\(^{34}\)

The manuscript for the second volume of the trilogy, which was initially titled The New Life, was delayed because, as Kirk told his publisher on October 20, 1938, it lacked the "atmosphere

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\(^{33}\)Martin Nielsen, "Han fandt tilbage til sit land," Land og Folk, June 17, 1962, at 3, col. 1 at 4.

\(^{34}\)Letter from Hans Kirk to Frisch, June 10, 1936, in Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv.
of optimism” that the trilogy’s structure required and he had therefore been compelled to rewrite it.35

Although Kirk predicted in 1936 that the third volume of the trilogy would appear the following year,36 he never completed it. One reason for the delay may have been Kirk’s conscientiousness in getting the background facts right. For example, when Otto Gelsted, a noted Danish poet, visited Kirk at his home in mid-1937, he noticed piles of scientific works in Danish and German with learned and forbidding titles like “Textbook on Chemical Technology,” and asked Kirk whether he was preparing to take a degree in engineering. Kirk replied that in writing the sequel to The Day Laborers he had to familiarize himself with the details of the cement factory: “In ‘The Day Laborers’ I happened to confuse a tube mill with a rotary kiln, and I’d hate for that scandal to be repeated.”37

The manuscript of the final volume which Kirk worked on between 1941 and 1943, while imprisoned by the Danish government at the demand of the German occupying powers,38 was nev-

36Letter from Hans Kirk to Frisch, June 10, 1936.
38On June 22, 1941, the day Hitler launched his invasion of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany demanded that the Danish government arrest leading Danish Communists. Some of the 295 arrested were later released, leaving 116 in detention, including Kirk (and the novelists Martin Andersen Nexø and Hans Scherfig). He was also among the 90 who escaped from Horserød internment camp north of Copenhagen during the night of August 29, 1943, when Germany dissolved the Danish police and military and took over the camp. A further 157 Communists who failed to escape were shipped to the Nazi concentration camp at Stutthof, where some were killed. Erich Thomsen, Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Dänemark 1940-1945, at 79-82 (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann
er recovered, despite Kirk’s demand just weeks after the end of the war that the Danish government locate it.\textsuperscript{39} Apparently the Germans had destroyed it.\textsuperscript{40} He resumed work on the trilogy after the war,\textsuperscript{41} telling a reporter as late as September 1948 that he hoped it would appear the following fall:

In this final volume I describe the period in which the dream of industrialism’s blessings bursts. Rationalization brings about a complete catastrophe for the little society that’s narrated in the book. The number of workers in the cement factory in the little town sinks from 1500 to 300, and since most of them have bought a house, it means they’re completely stuck in squalor. . . . If anything I would call it a social-critical novel, and the moral is that people themselves have to intervene in their lives and not let themselves be guided by the play of anonymous forces.\textsuperscript{42}

The close geographic proximity of the settings of the novels

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\textsuperscript{40}A similar fate befell another manuscript, which Kirk managed to reconstruct after the war. See Marc Linder, “Introduction,” in Hans Kirk, \textit{The Slave} v-viii (Marc Linder tr.; Iowa City: Fånpihuà, 2000). Without identifying which manuscript was which, one of Kirk’s biographers stated that whereas one of the manuscripts was wrapped up and buried at the detention camp at which Kirk was held, but was gone when Kirk came looking for it after the war, the other manuscript was found by a Danish policeman among the papers Kirk had left behind in the wake of his escape on August 29, 1943; however, under the influence of the uncertain and unpredictable situation, the policeman thought it safest to destroy the manuscript immediately. Thierry, \textit{Hans Kirk} at 81. In between working on the manuscript to \textit{The Slave} in prison Kirk, who was well-known for retaining his equilibrium, helped comfort other prisoners. Nielsen, “Han fandt tilbage til sit land” at 4, col. 1.

\textsuperscript{41}In April 1947 he told his publisher that he was working industriously on the third volume. Thing, \textit{Hans Kirks mange ansigter} at 283.

\textsuperscript{42}Eric [Danielsen], “Mennesket må selv gribe ind i sin tilværelse,” \textit{Land og Folk}, Sept. 26, 1948, at 9, col. 1 at 2-3.
and the focus on a stratum of the rural poor during the first decades of the twentieth century might easily prompt readers to view *The Day Laborers* as a kind of sequel to *The Fishermen*. One reviewer went so far as to assert that they were so "homogeneous" they "could easily be bound together without cracking the spine..." The reviewer believed that the books were cut from the same cloth because Kirk’s “Marxist historical writing”—which had all of life’s questions determined alone by economic conditions—was perfectly applicable to such exceptional circumstances as those experienced by poor fishermen and day laborers for whom hunger was a daily phenomenon.⁴³ However, regardless of whether such reductionism in fact guides *The Day Laborers*, it is clearly alien to *The Fishermen*, which for that very reason irritated some leftist Danish literary critics in the 1970s.⁴⁴

While *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* are clearly novels about industrialization, surprisingly—given Kirk’s membership in the Danish Communist Party and orthodox Marxism—they do not belong to the Dickensian genre attacking the horrors of proletarianization. Kirk does not portray the formerly intermittently employed East Jutland agricultural day laborers as being exposed to or perceiving heightened exploitation at the cement factory; on the contrary, their much higher and steady wages and year-round industrial employment and their escape from the petty tyranny of large farmers mark them as “people on the way up... in world history.”⁴⁵

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⁴⁵Thierry, Hans Kirk at 52. Although Kirk characterizes the sporadically employed agricultural day laborers’ employers as large farmers (*proprietærer*), in Jutland in 1915 only 21.5 percent of agricultural day laborers were temporary, while 78.5 percent were permanently employed all year round. This divi-
Regardless of whether Kirk’s approach was influenced by the then dominant Soviet literary doctrine of socialist realism and the Soviet view that industrialization was per se progressive—the genre was typified by Fedor Gladkov’s 1925 novel *Cement*, centered on the post-revolutionary reconstruction of a cement factory, in which cement is “the symbol of the unbending will of the party of communists, which cements, binds the forces of the revolutionary people to victory and creative labor”—Kirk consciously chose to infuse the transformation with a spirit of profound optimism and not to write a Jutland version of Upton Sinclair’s *Jungle*.  

Kirk’s decision to provide a relatively atypical account of capitalist industrialization of a rural region, thus ignoring a trajectory of immiseration faced by unemployed farmworkers who migrated to the cities, enabled him to conjure up the optimism that was to be undermined in the third volume by presenting a short-circuited model of the formation of working-class consciousness. (To be sure, Kirk did not leave readers unprepared: the cement factory president’s oaths in the final chapter of *The New Times* about profitability, losses, falling prices, and the need for change foreshadowed the events of the third volume.) It was also designed to give voice to his view that workers’ struggle for their “daily bread” could in itself be heroic, especially as part of a struggle for social liberation in a small parish society.

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sion was even more marked when cross-tabulated with farm size: nationally, 92.4 percent of day laborers on larger farms were permanent compared to 54.6 percent on smaller farms. Danmarks Statistik, *Tyende- og daglejerlønnen i landbruget 1915*, at 25 (Copenhagen: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1915). In addition, at least as of 1920, there were no large farms (herregårde) in the vicinity of Assens. See *Danmark land og folk: Historisk-topografisk-statistisk haandbog*, 3:715-28 and fold-out map of Randers Amt (Daniel Bruun ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1920).


47Thing, *Hans Kirks mange ansigter* at 183, 186.
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budding industry of Marxist literary criticism in Denmark of the 1970s could not forgive Kirk his failure to embed the specific capitalist alienation of labor in the novels. Nevertheless, Kirk’s descriptions were realistic enough that a 1982 history of unskilled factory workers in Denmark devoted half of its two pages on cement plants to excerpts from *The New Times*.

Much of this realism sprang from Kirk’s personal knowledge, gathered during his childhood on Mariager Fjord, of the pernicious impact of the dust spewed out by the cement factories on the health of workers, residents, and the environment. As a child Kirk had sensed “the strange dry smell of the cement dust, which settles like a fine white layer over trees and meadows near the cement town,” and observed the workers bicycling home from the cement factories “gray with cement dust.” The young Kirk had also known that the “hard work in the chalk pit easily knocks out... a man, the fine chalk dust attacks the lungs...” He then wove this childhood knowledge into the narrative. Thus on the very first page of *The New Times*, which introduces the cement factory operating at full tilt, he writes:

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Everything was gray with cement dust. It drifted invisibly down like
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48 E.g., Henrik Damsgaard, *Hans Kirks 30-er-romaner*, “Daglejerne” og “De ny tider” (et brudstykke af industriarbejdernes opkomshistorie) (Kongerslev: GMT, 1975). Engelund, Gernskov, and Tanghøj, “Arbejde og dagligt brød” at 105, 109, while asserting that they did not fault Kirk for not having used Marx’s *Das Kapital* as a template, nevertheless criticized him for failing to explain where the capital of the capitalist who builds the cement factory came from, thus making the capitalist mode of production its own cause and concealing the fact that workers produce a product that is then turned against them as capital. In fact, however, insertion of information about how Høpner became rich in the United States before returning to Denmark would have been merely cosmetic or pedantic and added nothing to the novel.

49 Jørgen Burchardt, *Fabrik* 72-73 (Arbejdsmandens historie i 100 år, No. 1; Copenhagen: Fremad, 1982).

50 Kirk, *Skyggespil* at 79, 152.

51 Kirk, *Skyggespil* at 99.

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ashes from a distant volcanic eruption. It settled over fields and roads, trees and roofs of houses. Even the coats of the red cows grazing on the fields in the vicinity turned gray. You got it in your throat, in your lungs, and it was doubtless the dust that was responsible for the fact that Black Anders’ daughter Matilde . . . began coughing and spitting blood and had to go to the sanatorium for tuberculosis. 52

Nevertheless, this critical workplace and environmental-health narrative pales by comparison with accounts contemporaneous with the events in the novel. At the turn of the century, Carl Christian Clausen published a physical and social geography based on his travels throughout Jutland. In describing Assens and the Cimbria and Dania factories with their more than 500 workers, he called “this wealth-producing chalk-town” “disgusting”:

Even the worst coal dust seems tolerable compared to this gray dust, which can lie like a hazy fog over everything, stops up the nose and mouth, penetrates into the lungs, and makes breathing unpleasant and painful. To a visitor who comes with the steamer out from the fresh fjord, the work in these factories appears the most appalling of all factory work in Denmark. But man is a patient animal who can get used to much, even to breathing this cement-filled air day after day. Nevertheless, when one is once again on board the steamer, when one brushes the dust from one’s coat with one’s hand and from one’s lungs with a few deep breaths, one is grateful to one’s mother because she did not give birth to one to be a day laborer in the cement factories on this beautiful fjord. 53

52P. 269 below. In two further passages in The New Times Kirk also confronted the subject. In the first he calls cement dust “a curse for people” (p. 376 below). In the other he observes that “it wasn’t good to get cement dust down in your lungs. Marinus coughed when he came home, but he didn’t take it seriously. ‘I’m too old to get tuberculosis,’ he said. ‘It cares only for young blood. I’m not running any risk’” (p. 481 below).

53C. C. Clausen and J. J. Nielsen, Danmarks land col. 225 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, n.d. [1903?]) (the part on Jutland is separately paginated).
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Marie Nielsen, a left-wing socialist who visited the novel’s cement factory in 1915, was prompted by the noise, dust, and 12-hour shifts to characterize it as a “hell,” a “prison,” as “wage slavery in pure form without any mitigating circumstances.” Kirk’s optimism-generating strategy was all the more remarkable in light of the fact that, according to Denmark’s quasi-monopoly cement producer, the technology existed (and in places had been adopted) at the time to enable cement factories to operate under conditions “as cleanly and hygienic as in almost every other manufacturing” industry.

In 1937, in the interim between the appearance of The Day Laborers and The New Times, Kirk was asked by (a smiling) Nordahl Grieg, the anti-fascist Norwegian poet and writer, whether it was “your intention to scour the whole country . . . so you can by and by describe one worker milieu after the other.” Kirk, who characterized his novelistic intention as “calling attention to the convulsions in social life and showing the economic social context,” revealingly replied:

No, God forbid! That would be much too boring. The reason I chose the fishermen and these day laborers is that within these population strata transformations have taken place that quite especially clearly show how the changed living conditions change people’s attitude and views. For me that’s what’s interesting.


55Riisager, F. L. Smidth & Co. at 152-55 (quote at 155). Smidth was (and remains) the leading producer of cement industry machinery and co-owner of the major cement manufacturing factories in Denmark. By 1939, it had built more than half of the world’s cement factories and its factory in Aalborg, equipped with the most advanced technology, served as advertising. Id. at 50; Henning Bender, Aalborgs industrielle udvikling fra 1735 til 1940, at 374 (Aalborg: Aalborg Kommune, 1987).

56Gelsted, “Besøg hos Hans Kirk.” Nevertheless, a conservative cultural
Considerable debate has surrounded the question of Kirk’s failure to finish the final volume of the trilogy. In 1948, when Kirk was able to interrupt his intense journalistic activity on behalf of the Danish Communist Party for several months to reconstruct the two novels lost during the war, he chose to finish *The Slave* despite the fact that his readers were first and foremost expecting the third volume of the trilogy. One possible reason not discussed in the literature is that by 1948 Kirk was on the verge of believing that writing realistic novels about the development of the Danish working class was something of a “grind.”

In seeking an explanation, Werner Thierry, one of Kirk’s biographers, speculated that by the years 1948-1953, when Kirk was writing his last novels and exhausting his creative capacity for epic works, the Communist Party’s Stalinist literary party line would have pushed him into the socialist idealism then flourishing in the Soviet Union, “an art form he surely felt that his pen couldn’t touch.”

His chief biographer, Morten Thing, “cautiously” speculates that Kirk abandoned the work because supervening political-economic development no longer made carrying out the original plan possible. That plan was conceived during the crisis of the 1930s and included bringing the story, which had ended in *The Critic* in a very negative and sarcastic review of *The New Times* charged that Kirk’s intention was now clear: “He wants to write the working people’s history in Denmark’s modern age in novel form.” Henning Kahler, “Ny Hans Kirk,” *Berlingske Tidende*, Nov. 15, 1939. In contrast, the Social Democratic party’s leading cultural affairs official criticized Kirk for not having been in the mood to depict the precise connection between the cement factory and the little human society or between the industrialized world and the individual parish. Jul[jus]. B[omholt]., “De ny Tider: Ny Bog af Hans Kirk,” *Social Demokraten*, Nov. 15, 1939.

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*New Times* shortly after the end of World War I, up to date. (Indeed, in 1934, as Kirk was composing the trilogy, production at the Kongsdal factory itself was shut down because it had become unprofitable; Cimbria had closed in 1919.) During the 1930s the trilogy would have climaxed in a rationalization crisis that could have demonstrated to workers that replacing capitalism with socialism was a realistic solution to the problems of daily existence. Such a perspective would have been plausible at the time—after all, the unemployment rate among union workers reached an extraordinary 43.5 percent in January 1933 and the then even higher rate among unskilled union workers was still 25 percent even as late as 1940—and might have retained its plausibility during the Nazi occupation of World War II, but by the late 1940s a third volume that brought the story to a socialist closure during the 1930s would have been overtaken by postwar events and lost its power to persuade.

However, at least one critic has inverted this logic, arguing that the shutdown of the cement industry at Mariager Fjord in 1980 (when Dania was closed) belatedly confirmed Kirk's "prophecy." Indeed, critic and novelist Bjarne Nielsen Brovst went so far as to assert that as a result of Kirk's novels, the closure transformed what might have been merely the passing of "a

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61Hans Chr. Johansen, *Dansk økonomisk statistik*, tab. 7.4 at 292 (Danmarks Historie vol. 9; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1985); Niels Finn Christiansen, Karl Lammers, and Henrik Nissen, *Danmarks Historie*, Vol. 7: Tiden 1914-1945, at 252 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1988); Vagn Dybdahl et al., *Krise i Danmark: Strukturerandringer og krisepolitik i 1930'erne* 127 (Copenhagen: Berlingske Forlag, 1975). Danish unemployment statistics were understated because they covered only workers who were members of union unemployment insurance funds.

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piece of local history” into the end of “a piece of Danish industrial history and literary history. . . .”63 The drastic rationalization and reduction of employment in the cement industry that set in by the 1970s would surely not have surprised Kirk. By that time one of the world’s largest excavation machines totally replaced backbreaking human labor in the chalk pits, while almost fully automated factory processes, producing as much in three days as the biggest cement factory could produce in an entire year at the beginning of the twentieth century, were monitored and guided from computerized control rooms.64

Yet another literary critic has suggested that Kirk’s abandonment of the projected third volume may have been a function of his own immersion in pre-industrial and early-industrial society and class relations, as a result of which he never published developed, realistic descriptions of the urban proletariat.65 A Kirk specialist, Ole Ravn, has speculated that Kirk’s failure to complete the trilogy was primarily a result of his increasingly strong feeling that his journalistic work for the Communist Party daily Land og Folk was politically more important.66 However, several other literary critics have concluded that Kirk intentionally scrapped the third volume after the war because it would have required a critique of the Danish Social Democratic party and of capitalism that would have been incompatible with the Communist Party’s postwar parliamentary strategy of cooperation with the Social Democrats.67

Without any doubt Kirk died a member of Denmark’s Com-

64Nielsen, Cementarbejdernes Fagforening 1896-1996, at 150-51; Burchardt, Fabrik at 73.
66Ravn, “Autonomiens begrænsninger” at 140.
67Engelund, Gernskov, and Tanghøj, “Arbejde og dagligt brød” at 159-68.

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communist Party in best standing. The day after his death on June 16, 1962, three-fourths of the front page of the Sunday edition of the party newspaper were taken up with his photo, his death-bed letter to “Dear Comrades,” and an obituary-encomium by the party’s central committee.68

In his review of The Day Laborers the day following its appearance in 1936, novelist Tom Kristensen was not alone in regarding Kirk as the greatest Danish novelist of the 1930s.69 Another reviewer called it “the most promising novel the youngest generation has yet achieved.”70 Three years later, on the occasion of reviewing The New Times, Kristensen pronounced both books classics the day they appeared.71

The Day Laborers and The New Times are, after The Fishermen, Kirk’s best-selling books, having gone through sixteen and ten editions, respectively. The Day Laborers was promptly translated into Dutch in 1938, followed over the next two decades by editions in Czech, Icelandic, Swedish, Russian, and even Esperanto. The New Times was also translated into Czech, Dutch, and Swedish.72 And preparations for a film adaptation of both novels have been underway for several years.73

72Thing, Hans Kirks mange ansigter at 373, 377-78. In addition to the nine Gyldendal editions of The New Times listed in this source, the book was also published in 1959 by Borgen.
A Note on the Text

The translation follows the text of the first edition and/or the last edition of both novels to appear during Kirk’s lifetime. In particular, the translation follows those editions of *The Day Laborers* in beginning each chapter on a new page. Though out of print and available only in a few U.S. libraries, the earlier editions are essential because the later paperback editions, despite having gone through many printings and being a favorite of Danish high school teachers, are riddled with dozens of typographical errors (including the omission of whole sentences) which may have crept in when the texts were reset to accommodate the Danish orthographic reform of 1948.¹ The paperback editions, which are themselves out of print, were first published in 1965 (*The Day Laborers*) and 1968 (*The New Times*), several years after the death of Kirk, who therefore had no opportunity to proofread them.

Readers who are not familiar with the political, socioeconomic, and cultural history of Denmark that forms an integral part of the novels should consult the extensive notes at the end of the book designed to make this background accessible. The notes also document (and, where necessary, explicate) the large number of express and unidentified quotations from the Bible.

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¹In some instances, errors in the paperback edition of *The Day Laborers* had already been introduced into the text of the 1950 edition, the first to appear after the spelling reform. For example, the colon in “Jens Horse said:” (p. 52) became a period in the 1950 and paperback editions. Similarly, some (but not all) of the errors in the paperback edition of *The New Times* first appeared in a special edition three years before Kirk’s death; the only edition to number the chapters (1-26), its text seems to have been the basis of the paperback edition. Hans Kirk, *De ny tider* (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1959). On the lack of evidence that Kirk proofread these editions, see below note to p. 307 (p. 532).
Acknowledgments

*The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* present even greater linguistic difficulties than *The Fishermen* not only for translators, but even for Danes. In addition to liberally weaving Jutlandish dialect words and idioms into the dialog, Kirk also makes frequent use of antiquated vocabulary and syntax that deviate from standard modern Danish. No wonder that the *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, the Danish counterpart to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, illustrates so many of its entries with sentences from these two novels. Indeed, several words and phrases turned out to be so obscure that seemingly no living Dane, including experts in the subject areas from which the terms are taken, could understand them.

A number of Danes made grappling with these challenges possible. First and foremost, *Gitte Gaarsvig Sørensen* (Special-pædagogisk forlag in Herning, Jutland), despite her gradual realization that she was dealing with a “perfectionist,” in an act of incredible generosity, altruism, and solidarity, (apparently) joyfully accommodated a perfect stranger’s perfectly preposterous request that she permit herself to be bombarded daily, for months on end, with untold numbers of email questions about the pickiest points of Danish language and culture. *A tykkes, a skylder dig tusind tak, bitte Gitte!*

*Elias Bredsdorff*, professor emeritus of Danish at Cambridge University and anti-Nazi resistance hero, provided extravagant encouragement for the whole cycle of Kirk translations. Kirk’s biographer *Morten Thing* (Roskilde University Centre) took time from his own work as a prolific author to draw on his encyclopaedic knowledge of modern Danish history and culture to track down and explain numerous obscure Danish institutions, expressions, and figures. Pastor *Frederik V. Jensen*, in addition to making many midnight suggestions for rendering tricky pas-
acknowledgments


Poul Houe (University of Minnesota) offered great insight into the meaning of numerous unusual phrases and constructions. Søren Beltoft and Birgitte Brinkmann Thomesen (Dansk Sprognævn), Carl Erik Bay (Det Kongelige Bibliotek), Viggo Sørensen (Jysk Ordbog), Jens Brix Christiansen, Mogens Lemvig Hansen, Palle Jørgensen, and Else D’Angelo explained several obscure Danish words or constructions. Bent Ole Borup (Aalborg Portland A/S) explained cement factory terms. Jørgen Hunosse identified the poem on page 43 of The Day Laborers as “The Visit in Heaven” by Sophus Claussen. Two attorneys, Jørgen U. Grønborg of Århus and Thomas Lemvig of Fredericia, explained various aspects of Danish law. Helmi Skærbæk (Roskilde University Centre Library) provided copies of otherwise inaccessible newspaper articles, while Hannah Lindén, Eva Nancke, and Gitte Lunde Johansen (Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv) made available unpublished letters from Kirk to Hartvig Frisch and copies of works unavailable in the United States.

Larry Zacharias (University of Massachusetts at Amherst) and poet Jan Weissmiller, more expert navigators than Odysseus himself, avoided losing errors to the Scylla of underediting without being sucked into Charybdis’s whirlpool of overediting. Nancy Jones (University of Iowa) made a number of suggestions for changes. And last but not least, Marjorie Rahe, whose Danish hot-line was always open when it was needed most, also re-worked the prayer on page 68 of The Day Laborers.

The photo of Kongsdal Cement Factory in Assens on page
Acknowledgments

Cast of Characters
(in order of appearance)

The Day Laborers

Andres Johansen—smallholder
Lars Seldomglad—day laborer
Mads Lund—farmer
Skifter—owner of the general store
Dairyman
Povl Bøgh—day laborer
Boel-Erik—day laborer
M. Bregentved—day laborer
Black Anders—day laborer
Jens Horse—day laborer
Marinus Jensen—smallholder
Cilius Andersen—smallholder
Karlsen—Inner Missionary
Meta—Skifter’s daughter
Gamst—pastor
Tora—Marinus Jensen’s wife
Frederikke—Cilius Andersen’s wife
Old-Jep—Frederikke’s uncle
Magda—Andres Johansen’s housekeeper/wife
Anders Toft—farmer
Martin Thomsen—farmer
Mads Lund’s wife
Mads Lund’s sister-in-law
Schjøtt—lawyer
Anton—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s son
Frands—musician
Dorre—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s neighbor
Nikolaj—Dorre’s idiot son
Kresten Bossen—buyer of Marinus’s farm
Olga—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s daughter
Niels—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s son
Karl—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s son
Cast of Characters

Ida—Kresten Bossen’s wife
Line—Lars Seldomglad’s wife
Konrad—Lars and Line Seldomglad’s son
Dagmar—Jens Horse’s wife
Ulriksen—Grundtvigian teacher
Inger—Boel-Erik’s wife
Sofie—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s daughter
Laurids—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s son
Søren—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s son
Kristine—Karlsen’s wife
Samuel—Missionary and Kristine Karlsen’s son
Johanne—Missionary and Kristine Karlsen’s daughter
Louise—Povl Bøgh’s wife
William—Povl and Louise Bøgh’s son
Thomas Kusk—Marinus’s war buddy
Høpner—cement factory owner
Servant girl at Holle Estate
Madsen—overseer at Holle Estate
Owner of Holle Estate
Tinus—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s son
Vera—Marinus and Tora Jensen’s daughter
Daugård—Færgeby real estate agent
Engineer-Surveyors
Innkeeper in Alslev (female)
Jakob—navvy
Jespersens—couple for whom Meta works as servant
Iver—navvy
Thomas Trilling—navvy
Matilde—Black Anders’ daughter and Thomas Trilling’s wife
Mrs. Marja—Høpner’s fiancée and later Schjøtt’s wife
Innkeeper in Alslev (male)
Laurids—Marinus Jensen’s brother
Cast of Characters

The New Times
(additional characters)

Hanne—singer accompanying the musician Frands
Minna—wife of cement factory worker Laurids sleeps with
Karl Børgesen—stoker and Social Democratic trade unionist
Andrea—Kresten and Ida Bossen’s daughter
Jens Glud—cement factory worker from the heath
Fire warden
Færgeby consumer co-operative manager
Færgeby district clerk
Arelius—Færgeby district magistrate
Harhoff—Færgeby district head clerk
Jespersen—Færgeby policeman
Jensen—Attorney Schjøtt’s clerk
Doctor in Færgeby
Andersen—president of Færgeby Savings Bank
Pastor Faaborg
Jehovah’s Witness in train
Tove Faber—Søren Jensen’s fiancée
Marie—widow who accuses Laurids of fathering her child
Bregentved’s office clerk
President of Færgeby Bank
THE DAY LABORERS
It wouldn’t rain. The sun hung in the sky like a wheel of fire. The grass was scorched, and the trees and bushes were faded in the middle of the summer and gray with dust. There hadn’t been such a poor hay harvest in many years. Once in a while a thunderstorm rumbled in over land. But not a drop of rain came. The clouds lay like black banks on the horizon, and people sniffed the cool air with hope in their hearts. On the warm, bright nights the farmer got out of bed sweaty and went out to look at the weather. The sky was bright—it was blazing from the distant summer lightning over the hills.

There was a prospect of crop failure everywhere, but it was worst in Alslev parish. The soil was poor and needed a lot of moisture. On the high chalk cliffs by the fjord the rye was about to wither, and in the poor heath fields inland the beets wouldn’t grow. Old folks were of the opinion that things had never stood so bad in the world before. The cows couldn’t find food on the scorched grass fields, and they gave almost no milk. If no rain came now, how would the farmers and smallholders get money for interest and taxes? And it was worse for the day laborers, who’d probably come to lack their daily bread.

A crowd of people was always standing and loitering at the counter in grocer Skifter’s shop. They chatted about the weather, about the harvest, about the cattle, which would soon have to be taken into the stable. They spoke calmly and objectively about it, because there was no point in complaining. The drought was the work of fate, and no human was responsible for it. There was Andres, who had a dilapidated farm on the cliff, there were several of the big farmers, and once in a while one of the day laborers came into the store and bought kerosene or chewing tobacco. Skifter stood gloomy and worried behind the counter and listened to what was being discussed in the shifting clusters. Skifter was in the Inner Mission, one of the few Pious in the unbelieving district. He was a widower, and his daughter
Meta took care of the house for him.

"The soil is like bread that has become too hard baked," Andres said. "If the baking keeps on, it'll turn to stone. We'll never get a plow into the soil again—it'll never be able to cut through. It's not going well, folks, we'll have to give up our farms, each and every one of us." "Oh, you surely won't go to a court-ordered sale," said the day laborer Lars Seldomglad. "You've hoarded up enough no matter how things go. But the rest of us will end up on the parish rolls. We can't get money for our labor." Lars Seldomglad looked around in a circle to see whether anyone wanted to protest. But the others found it reasonable enough that many little folks would wind up on poor-law relief in the times as they'd now become. "But the rest of us can't pay the taxes," said farmer Mads Lund. "And if the township can't get the money in, how will it then pay the little folks. No, a year like this one we've never seen the likes of."

The store was small and low-ceilinged, and buckets, brooms, and pots hung from the ceiling beams. It smelled of old tobacco smoke, of kerosene and dried fish. Skifter didn't have a farm, but he had his own troubles all the same. He had to give credit and didn't know whether he'd ever get to see his money. Here in the shop people stood and sucked on their pipes and recounted bad news. Out in the eastern part of the parish there was an old woman who'd lost her mind as a result of the heat and had drowned herself in the well. It was a terrible deed. In Klovhusene a woman had given birth to a child who resembled a wild animal more than a person.

Skifter was a taciturn man, but one day he said: "A fella could easily get himself to believe that the last days were imminent." "What are you thinking of?" Andres asked. "Do you believe the earth has got to perish? That's what people also thought back then at the turn of the century, but it's remained standing all the same. No, the earth, it's old all right, but it's made of good stuff, and it'll stand up to the first jolts, you'll see." But Skifter trotted out what he'd explored in sleepless nights. It was written that when the hour came, there'd be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and now you read in the newspaper
that a comet had come. Maybe it was a warning from God that they should prepare themselves for the final judgment. "Certainly," Andres said and wrinkled his forehead. "It’s possible what you’re saying is right." "It’s in the holy scripture that the Lord put a rainbow in the heavens as a sign of the covenant," Skifter explained and leaned animatedly over the counter. "He promised us that from that time and till the end of the world, day and night and the course of nature wouldn’t cease. But when no rain comes, then isn’t it the course of nature that ceases? Yeah, a fella doesn’t know anything about it, but we do know that the hour will come some day, and that we have to be prepared." "A fella barely understands that you can grasp that," Andres said. "Yours truly doesn’t have the gift for all that speculation."

But the people in the shop didn’t feel that the earth’s destruction was imminent. It was just an ordinary drought, which they’d seen so many times before. The dairyman, who’d come inside, explained that it was probably the Gulf Stream that had shifted. Or maybe it had been too cold at the North Pole, and there wasn’t enough evaporated water that could turn into clouds and produce rain over the globe. The dairyman explained in detail what could be wrong with the earth’s machinery. He was a well-read man and knew how to express himself.

"It’s odd that you can keep it all together," Andres said admiringly. "There’s practically nothing in the world you don’t know about. Oh boy. It must surely be a trifle for you to get the butter up into a higher grade."

The dairyman turned in anger and left, while the others in the store laughed. Andres looked about, frightened. "I reckon the man got offended," he said. "It truly wasn’t my intention to insult him. Well, so you think the world has to perish, grocer. Yeah, yeah, we’ll see. In any event, then you don’t need to be afraid of giving credit. If the world is coming to an end, the money will be lost anyway. You don’t need to be so eager to get what we owe on the books."

Andres winked and smiled into his disheveled, greyish beard. No, if the world perished, Skifter would no longer need to keep accounts and write down what each man owed him.
That's the way the conversation went at the grocer's, at the dairy, at the inn, everywhere that people met. It's just terrible that we're not getting any rain, and what'll become of the harvest? There'll definitely be more than one person who'll have to give up his house and home before the next interest payment is due, because if somebody doesn't have a crop to sell, where's he going to get the money from? But people still hoped that the rain would come so at least a part of the crop could be saved. But no rain came.

The straw was so short the reapers couldn't take it. The harvest had to be done with a scythe. That made work for the day laborers. Old Povl Bøgh, who was over sixty, was frisky as a boy. It was like in the old days before the people became slaves to machines. But the other day laborers in the town of Alslev could also handle a scythe. All of them were working around on the farms, Lars Seldomglad, Boel-Erik, Bregentved, Black Anders, and Jens Horse. Even the smallholders, who otherwise were usually busy enough taking in their own harvest, this year did harvest work for others. They didn't have anything to harvest themselves.

There were Marinus and Cilius by the fjord. They certainly wouldn't get past the next due date for mortgage interest payments. Their smallholdings were situated farthest out on the huge chalk hill, which rose by the town of Alslev and fell steeply down toward the fjord broads. It was bad soil where the chalk in spots shone through. Their crop was so poor in this hard year that it scarcely paid to haul it into the barn. They put cattle and horses out in the grain field and let them find feed there, while they themselves went to work for the farmers during the harvest.

A man came on his bicycle and parked it in front of Skifter's general store. He was squat and somewhat fat, with bulging eyes and thick lips. He was in a long-tailed coat, and the tails were tucked up with safety pins. People were standing in the shop. They looked at him with curiosity—he wasn't a man from the area. “I presume it's the grocer himself,” he said and shook hands with Skifter. “I'm the new missionary in Færgeby. I got your name from other good friends in the Lord.” “So, you're the
new missionary,” Skifter said and nodded. “Then your name is Karlsen according to what I’ve heard.” “Yes, my name is Karlsen,” the missionary said. “And I need guidance here in my new sphere of activity. That’s why I’ve come to talk to you today.”

Skifter called for his daughter so she could take care of the shop while he talked to the visitor, and he walked ahead into the office next to the store. He offered the missionary a chair and sat across from him. He pushed his steel glasses up onto his forehead.

“This calling is of course something totally new for me,” Karlsen said. “I was manager of a seaman’s home, and for a time I was a hawker. I’m in great need of good advice and prayer. How do you think I should tackle the work in this area? I mean, in Færgeby there’s a small circle of God’s children, but out here things doubtless stand dark as far as I can judge.”

“That may well be so,” Skifter said and pensively nodded straight ahead. “Hitherto the Lord’s cause hasn’t made much progress among us. There are many rigid, unyielding minds here, as it is written, and we few God’s children there have haven’t found the word’s gift of grace. That’s why we’re really pleased to get a missionary for the area. And now it might almost seem as if the field were about to be prepared for the seed.”

“I’m glad you have that opinion,” the missionary said.

“I’ll tell you, I’ve pondered a great deal as to what this drought is supposed to mean,” Skifter said. “Of course, there’s a meaning behind everything that happens, we know, and the Lord doesn’t let a sparrow fall to earth without his will. At first I thought that the crop failure was perhaps one of the signs of the Day of Judgment, but that’s probably not its meaning. No. The drought is a sign of the Lord’s mercy. He has cast his eye on this district and wants to lead the people away from perdition. In that way it can be said that he’s preparing the earth for his work by means of the drought.”

“Surely you’re right about that,” the missionary said. “The Lord wants to turn people’s eyes from the worldly. He wants to teach the people that it’s more important to find food for the soul
than food for the body.”

“We all know that the harder it is for us to make a living, the easier it is for us to find the way to grace,” the grocer continued. “When we suffer want, we feel our own wretchedness and sense the Lord’s tremendous power. Wealth and favorable conditions make most people kick against the pricks. The drought was sent for salvation’s sake. Take my word for it that many will pay heavily for the harvest this year. Somebody else is also doubtless going to take his loss, for how should a fella be able to get his money when people don’t have anything to pay with? No, there has to be a meaning in what happens.”

They heard his daughter Meta attending to business out in the shop. She was laughing a loud, cheerful laugh, and Skifter’s face grew anxious. She was doubtless standing and flirting with the young fellows.

“That young girl must be your daughter?” Karlsen asked. “Has she given Jesus her heart? No, I can almost hear it in the way she laughs. So your idea is probably that I should begin by going around on house visits to the farms and smallholdings? But then you’ll have to tell me a little about the people who live here. It’s useful to be informed ahead of time.”

The grocer began by recounting what the people were like in town and the parish. The pastor wasn’t worth including. He was a solid man, who paid for everything in cash, but whether you could call him a Christian remained to be seen. The teacher was a Grundtvigian, and there was no hope of leading him along the path of mercy. There was a single one of the large farmers who’d been a child of God for a great many years. His name was Martin Thomsen and he lived south of the school. Otherwise most of the farmers were frivolous people who played cards or went to the inn and let their children go dancing.

“And the women?” Karlsen asked. “I always put a lot of importance on winning the women. Many people also say my message is best suited for women.”

But Skifter didn’t have anything good to report about the women either. His billy-goat face turned melancholy, while he explained how the women in the parish idled away the time with
coffee klatches and worldly pleasures. It would surely be a difficult job to win them for the Lord's cause. And things weren't much better with the smallholders. The only hope was that the drought and the crop failure might turn their thoughts from the world.

"There's Marinus on the cliff—he'll have to give up his homestead," he said. "He's not going to meet his next interest payment, they say, and I'll also suffer a loss on the credit I gave him. He's a harmless man, but his wife has a rather loose mouth as far as I've been able to tell. They have a lot of children, and you might well try and see if you can wake Marinus from his lethargy. Andres lives next door; his farm is somewhat bigger and poorly managed, but he's got money. He mouths the bible a lot, but if anything I think he's a hypocrite. You have to be careful with the third of the smallholders up there. He boozes, and he also likes to fight. He's a terrible person, Cilius is his name, but it might be worthwhile to talk to his wife. She has her cross to bear, and is doubtless in need of something that can lighten her burden."

The missionary nodded understandingly, and Skifter told about the day laborers. There weren't any believing brothers among them. They lived in sin and unbelieving. There was Lars Seldomglad, who was a mocker and never spoke an earnest word. But maybe there was hope of winning his wife, Line, for the Lord's cause. There was Boel-Erik, Jens Horse, Black-Anders, and Povl Bøgh; now and then Skifter had spoken an earnest word with all of them, but it hadn't had any effect. No, it was a difficult district, a spiritually dead district, and it was only to be hoped that the need that was now in prospect would wake the people up to consciousness of their sin and of how mercy was to be found. And then of course there were those on poor-law relief.

"Well, the ones getting poor relief," Karlsen said hesitatingly. "They're definitely not the best ones to begin with. We must be wise as serpents, it is written. The poorest of the poor also belong to God's congregation, but we must in any event take into consideration what benefits the cause of God's kingdom.
There's no prestige to be gained if we found the band of friends in the poor house. On the contrary, we have to get hold of good, well-respected people, and afterward we can turn to the others and look after their souls' afflictions. I could see first of all visiting the pastor.

"You won't get much out of that," Skifter said.

"We have to sow the seed even if it falls on rocky ground," the missionary said. "Besides, we of course have our instructions. We must never forget that a minister is a shepherd of souls and can become a wonderful brother in heaven."

He got up, and they went out through the shop. Meta was standing at the counter and talking gaily with a few fellows. She was chubby and dark-haired with brown, sparkling eyes. Her neck was pretty and plump, and on her round breast she had a gold heart on a thin silver chain.

"That's presumably your daughter," Karlsen said. "It must be a great comfort as a widower to have her as help."

"Yes, that's Meta," the grocer said. "What I was going to say: with all my heart I'd welcome your joining us for supper, after you've taken care of what you have to."

The missionary Karlsen left his bicycle standing outside the general store and walked on foot through town. He was in a good mood. He'd gotten a sphere of activity here, a fine calling was ready for him. Karlsen had been a gardener, but that hadn't really suited him. Then he'd felt the call and tackled the big calling and for many years he'd bicycled around as a hawker. He was a gifted speaker, and now he'd become missionary at the new Mission house in Færgeby.

Alslev was a poor little village. There were several middle-sized farms around a church, a school, a dairy, a smithy, an inn, and about a dozen small straw-thatched houses. Bare-legged children ran outside the houses and played. The women looked from the windows for the missionary. Word was already out as to who he was. He turned into the parsonage next to the church and knocked on the door. A middle-aged housekeeper opened the door and looked at him with suspicion. Karlsen mentioned his name and asked to speak to Pastor Gamst. He was shown
into a study with a white-scoured floor and many books. A moment later the pastor came.

Pastor Gamst was a youngish, ascetic looking man, nearsighted and with a relatively long nose on his narrow face. He had large bony hands, and it was clear from them that he’d just come from working in the garden.

“Hello,” he said and, blinking, looked at his guest. “How can I be of service to you?”

Karlsen got up. “I’m missionary Karlsen from Færgeby,” he said. “As the pastor knows, we missionaries prefer to work in concert with the local clerics. Alslev belongs to my territory, and that’s why I rather naturally wished to have a conversation with you.”

“So, that’s it,” the pastor said and sat down at his desk. “And what’s the conversation going to be about?”

“About how one can spread the message of mercy in Alslev parish and save sinners from the eternal fire,” Karlsen said somberly. The pastor smiled.

“At the moment it would be better if we could help people with their daily bread,” he said. “Things will surely be tight by winter.” “That’s precisely why we can perhaps reach into their consciences and consciousness of sin,” the missionary said. “Do you want to sate the hungering mouths with preaching”? the pastor asked. “It is written, I will show you what is first and foremost needful,” the missionary said.

Pastor Gamst got up and began to pace the floor with his big hands, black with soil, behind his back.

“Surely you have your fixed wages?” he asked. “Yes,” Karlsen said. “And when you get old some day, you’ll presumably get a pension from the Mission,” the pastor continued. “So you’re more or less in the same position as a parish pastor. You’re secured in all respects in a way that doesn’t betray unconditional confidence in providence. And nevertheless you want to go to destitute people and tell them that if they just repent, they’ll surely get bread on the table.” “I’m going to preach the pure gospel, where it is written: seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added
unto you,” Karlsen said earnestly.

“Here we clerics are sitting in our parsonage,” Pastor Gamst said. “Because, after all, you are a kind of pastor, and you doubtless also have your little official residence. And when we meet suffering, we say to the suffering: Don’t challenge evil. Take your cross upon yourselves. When we see people suffering want, we tell them that the material world, seen in the right light, means nothing. But imagine that the parliament decided to reduce the pastors’ salary by half. Then a deputation from the pastors’ association would immediately put in an appearance in the parliament and protest. It would surely demonstrate with dry numbers that the pastors couldn’t exist on less than they’re getting. And the same would happen with you missionaries if the Mission cut back your salary.”

“It is truly very small,” Karlsen objected.

“In any case it’s bigger than what was granted Jesus and his disciples,” the pastor said. “But in any event you shouldn’t count on my help and support if you’re now going to travel around in my parish and tell my parish children that the wretched harvest is a punishment from God for the sake of their sins. That’s negro superstition and not Christianity.”

“That is to say that you deny the Lord’s omnipotence and the Lord’s judgment,” Karlsen said. He felt well in this situation. It was the first time in his missionary activity that he was having a spiritual clash with a minister. He felt like a warrior of the Lord, and his eyes shone with fighting spirit. “In other words, you deny the gospel. You are charged with preaching. Yes, here one can assuredly talk about the Pharisees and the scribes. . . .”

“Be so kind as not to spit in my face when you speak, missionary Karlsen,” the minister said and dried his face with his handkerchief. “I don’t want to discuss theology. What Christianity basically is neither you nor I know. There are perhaps a few people in the world who have a clue. But in any event it’s not stupidity and brutality, but rather goodness, humaneness, humanity. Naturally I can’t forbid you to stampede around in the parish and disseminate the rumor that Our Lord has become angry with the farmers and has destroyed the harvest. I also can’t
forbid you to preach that in the next week hell will open up and swallow the livestock in its flames. Go say whatever you wish, but I won’t be deacon where you’re pastor. If you want to have a cigar—you don’t—yeah, then we surely have nothing more to talk about.”

“I will pray for you, Pastor Gamst,” Karlsen said. “Thanks,” the pastor said. “But now I have to go out and dig up my onions. Farewell, missionary Karlsen.”

The missionary’s back was erect as he strode out of the parsonage. Before he’d become a missionary, he’d often dreamed about what he’d say to unbelieving and ungodly pastors if he ever met them. He’d give them the pure word of the gospel in their face, the way Luther, the man of God, did it to the devil at Wartburg castle.

Karlsen paid house visits. He struggled about along the sandy roads on his bicycle with a pack of books on the baggage carrier. And now he discovered for real that it was a difficult district to work in. Some places folks sullenly showed him the door. They had no money to buy books with, and they stuck to what they had learned in their childhood. Other places he was invited in and was permitted to interpret the holy scripture and talk about Jesus and mercy. He went to Marinus on the cliff and was seated in the low-ceilinged living room. A couple of children looked at him from the recesses of the room. Marinus came in from the stable, and Tora got the coffee kettle on the stove.

“It’s been a rough harvest, Marinus Jensen,” Karlsen said. “But when that kind of thing happens, there’s a meaning to it. The Lord never acts without deliberation, and in what has happened there’s also a message for you.” “That may well be,” Marinus said humbly and looked as though he were clear about his share of the responsibility for the crop failure. “When we meet adversity, we must first investigate whether in reality it isn’t an act of mercy the Lord’s sending us” Karlsen said. “How have you people lived in this district? In fornication, heathendom, and sin! The Lord has seen it and sent you the first warning. He takes pity on you and is trying to save you from hell and perdition.”
And now the missionary’s voice turned somber and depicted the world’s sinfulness, its deep fall. He talked about the ungodly humans who could think only of this world’s goods and their senses’ lust. But one thing was certain: for the ungodly hell was ready, with eternal torment and gnashing of teeth. Tinus, who was seven years old, began to cry in the corner where he was standing, and Tora took him in her arms.

“You take the child in your arms,” Karlsen said. “That’s the way it is with Jesus too. He is always ready to take us in his embrace and let us taste the sweet grace of reconciliation. However deeply we have sinned, we can cleanse ourselves in the blood of the lamb. That’s the message I came to bring.”

Karlsen took out a book and put it on the table. It was called *The Mirror of the Human Heart*, and it could surely rouse sinners to meditation. You saw the sinful heart where the devil sat with horns in his forehead and a pitchfork in his hand and planned an evil attack to corrupt the soul. You saw arrogance and sloth, wickedness and sinful lust like ugly animals in a circle around the prince of evil. You saw the dying sinner on his death bed where the devil swarmed around and hell’s deep was about to open. But there were also pictures of the pure, saved heart where mercy’s gentle and beautiful animals had a permanent abode. And when Karlsen came to the picture that represented the journey of the believing child of God, his voice turned gentle and mild. Because that, after all, was the way it was when you carried God and Jesus in your heart—then death was to be compared to a wedding party.

Marinus looked at the pictures and nodded: it was truly a good, old book—he’d seen it already when he was a boy. Tora also looked at the pictures, and the children went over to look. And Karlsen preached further about sin’s ugliness and grace’s sweet joy. He closed by asking whether they would come if a meeting were held in the parish soon.

“Oh, I mean I hardly know,” Tora said and shrugged her shoulders. “After all, a body has the children to look after. And we don’t take much account of you missionaries. So many come running around. It’s not more than a year that we had the Bap-
tists here in the district. They also went from house to house.”

“Baptism is heathendom and aberration,” Karlsen said. “I can prove that with the words of the scripture.”

“But they knew how to use their mouths, those people,” Tora said. “There was a tall black one, such a mouthpiece on that guy. In any case you’d be no match for him. If a body weren’t so old, it’s possible that she’d all the same have let herself be baptized again in the fjord.”

Tora stood with her hands at her side and smiled at the thought of the black Baptist. He was fat and coarse and solid, and Karlsen thought sadly that it wouldn’t be easy with her. Coffee was offered, and Karlsen drank two cups. Then he said goodbye and went on. Marinus remained sitting a bit at the table before he went out into the stable.

“A fella scarcely knows what to think,” he said hesitantly. “He had the opinion that the poor harvest was meant as a punishment, and that it was God who wanted to test us.”

“Oh, stuff and nonsense,” Tora said. “Do you think Our Lord is playing with us, like a boy who pokes a dung beetle with a stick. No, what happened was what was supposed to happen, that’s all we know. We can’t change it no matter how much we’d like to. No, I’ve got no confidence in the Pious . . . they chatter away about something they don’t know anything about . . . .”

The missionary knocked on Cilius’s door. Cilius wasn’t at home, and his wife, Frederikke, invited the stranger into the living room. A bed stood in the corner.

“Oh, there’s illness in the house?” Karlsen said.

“No, it’s just my old maternal uncle,” Frederikke said. “He’s lying in there so things aren’t all too boring for him. And of course somebody else could also need company, once in a while,” she added sullenly.

Karlsen stepped over to the bed. He was an ancient man, wrinkled like a winter apple and with skin that reminded you of mold. He looked at the missionary with his pale-milk eyes.

“The Lord be with you,” Karlsen said. The old man gave him a dirty look and sneered with a crooked distorted mouth: “Oh, sili
“What’s he saying?” the missionary asked, and Frederikke explained that the old man was paralyzed and couldn’t say anything but: sili vaasikum, oh sili vaasikum. “And what was his life like?” Karlsen asked. It probably hadn’t been very good. Frederikke explained that the old man had been bad about drinking, and had gambled away the farm he’d been born on playing cards. “You see,” Karlsen said unctuously. “Now he’s lying there with his body and tongue paralyzed and has to repent of his terrible sins. Let’s certainly see to it that what happened to him doesn’t happen to us. There are other sinful games in this world than cards.”

Frederikke didn’t answer, and Karlsen began to question her about Cilius. Where was he? Frederikke didn’t know anything about that; her husband had his own life to look after. “Yeah, yeah,” Karlsen said. “I suppose I’ve heard how things are with him. Most of the time he probably sits in the pubs. You people are in tight straits to begin with, and he boozes up the rest. But that’s not the worst, Frederikke, the worst is that you people are squandering your eternal salvation.”

Karlsen didn’t get an answer and sighed with a worried heart. It wasn’t merely ignorance, but obvious defiance. There stood Frederikke, lanky and sullen, but with some girl-like pouting and something sad about her, though she was a married woman. Karlsen didn’t know what to do except start praying. But he’d barely begun the invocation when a sneer resounded from the old man in the bed:

“Sili vaasikum, oh sili vaasikum.”

“Better not—you’ll make him angry,” Frederikke said. “He can’t stand pastors and preachers. And surely he’s allowed to be left in peace the way he’s lying there.”

“The only peace that counts is peace with Jesus,” Karlsen said gently. “Frederikke, give Jesus your heart!”

Frederikke shook her head mutely, and Karlsen continued on his way. He was dispirited, and he didn’t get to feel any happier at Andres Johansen’s farm. “We’re not going to buy any publications,” the housekeeper Magda said. “These aren’t the times
for that.” “Are you the woman of the farm?” the missionary asked. “No, I’m the housekeeper,” Magda said. “But it comes to the same thing—Andres doesn’t have money to spend on that kind of thing.”

Andres stuck his head out into the kitchen to see who the visitor was. “We’re not buying anything,” he said. “But you people surely aren’t afraid of hearing the Lord’s word?” Karlsen asked. Andres’s face softened. “No, no,” he said. “A fella does well with that kind of thing both holidays and weekdays. Come into the living room, dear man, and make yourself comfortable.”

Karlsen went into a living room where all sorts of old junk was lying in the corners, pieces of iron, bits of rope, cut-up tethers and yokes, barrel hoops, and sacks. Andres explained that it was like a kind of storeroom he had. After all, it wasn’t good for anything to go to waste, and you got a lot of use out of what you went and collected. New things cost money and where should a fella get the money from?

They went on into a shabbily furnished living room, and Andres offered Karlsen a seat in a rickety chair. “I’m glad you came inside,” he said. “You know, we heard that a missionary had come to the district, and a fella can’t get too much of God’s word—that’s absolutely certain.” “Shouldn’t we call your housekeeper,” Karlsen said. “We can hold a little devotional because I sense I’ve finally come to believing folks.”

Andres shook his head. “No, there’s no point in fetching her,” he said. “I’ll tell you she has an unchristian heart. I’d prefer to explain to you how things stand with her—then you can better speak an admonishing word with her in private. She has a mind only for this world’s mammon.”

“That’s bad if that’s the way things are going,” Karlsen conceded.

“Yes, isn’t it terrible,” Andres said. “She’s so greedy for money there’s no moderation in it. After all, we’re supposed to be easily contented and thrifty, that’s the clear word of the scripture, but it’s also written: Let not greed fill thy spirit, for to what end is mammon in the miser’s spirit. I reckon you should talk to her and explain to her that Our Lord himself has given a kind of
guidance for housekeepers with the words: thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Nothing I say counts, and the pastor was all too vague. He's not the man that can bring women to reason.”

“And how are things with yourself? Are you at peace with Jesus?” the missionary asked.

“Oh yes, don’t you worry about that,” Andres said graciously. “I’ve been a Christian man all my days and am looking forward with confidence to my dying day. You can rest assured about that. Believe me, I know they say about me that I’m somewhat scrupulous in money affairs, but if you can get the matter arranged with Magda, I’ll never be afraid of donating a little gift to you for your trouble. A fella knows of course you people collect money when the opportunity presents itself.”

“Maybe we can count on your coming if we hold a little meeting?” Karlsen asked.

“That you can be assured of,” Andres said. “God’s word has always been my guide. Perhaps it can indeed be said that he’s been a tad hard with us in this harvest. But if we just rely on him, we’ll surely pull through. I mean, if a fella is reasonable, he always makes sure to have a bit to fortify himself with.”

Karlsen held a little speech about sin and salvation, and Andres nodded yes to all of it. The missionary had finally found a righteous one among the unrighteous. And after he’d eaten supper at the grocer’s, he bicycled home to Færgeby in the dark August evening. The starry sky shone overhead and was reflected in the shiny fjord. It was light on the farms along the road, and when he rode by, the deep baying of watchdogs resounded. Karlsen hummed to himself: Have to the plough you put your hand, let not your spirit waver—a hymn he liked very much. But in the middle of singing the hymn he came to think of Meta with the brown eyes and swaying breasts. It was a pity she hadn’t found peace.
The awful thing was that Marinus hadn’t met his June interest payment. People usually were able to get a postponement of interest and principal till the harvest was in the barn, but where would you get the money from if the harvest failed? Marinus had nothing else to put his trust in than other people’s help. One day he was talking to the grocer, but Skifter didn’t know any way out.

“That’s plenty rough for you,” he said and shook his head. “But I truly don’t have any means of helping you. You can rest assured that I’ll suffer more from this drought than any of the rest of you. How am I going to collect my money? I lie awake at night and ponder that, and if a fella didn’t know there’s somebody who also controls this world’s goods, he’d lose his mind. And while we’re talking about it, you folks will truly be obliged to cut back all you can on your groceries because I can’t very well justify giving you more credit.”

It was a clear fall day, and Marinus stood for a moment outside the general store in the mild sunshine and thought about what he should do now. There certainly wasn’t any great hope of his getting help anywhere else, but it was surely his duty to try. He walked on and stopped outside Anders Toft’s farm. It lay broad and well-maintained and exuded security, and Marinus got a feeling that maybe there was help for him after all. He turned in at the gate, and the dog rushed ferociously toward him. From the stable door the farmer scolded the animal. He was a heavy, red-blazed man with a crooked, almost melancholy face.

“Well, look what the wind blew in,” he said and came closer. “Hello and welcome, Marinus Jensen.”

“I’d like to have a word with you if you’re otherwise free, Anders Toft,” Marinus said.

“Yes, of course,” the farmer replied. “It’s pretty shameful, but the living room is in no shape, and in the kitchen, you know, the womenfolk are making a mess, but if you’ll come along into
the stable, we can have our peace and quiet.”

They went into the cow stable, where a row of shiny cows were standing and munching peacefully. Marinus felt a bit more secure here in the warm half-darkness and explained how much he was in distress. “You know, I certainly heard some talk about that,” Anders Toft said. “And I can tell you I took it close to heart. You know, you’ve been a friendly and conscientious man all your days, but do you think you’re really well-suited to have your own farm?”

“I mean it’s been a rough year,” Marinus said.

“It’s been that way for all of us,” the farmer said. “You think the rest of us have it easier because we’ve got more land and better land, but you have to remember that we’ve got greater obligations. There are many people who feel that as long as somebody has land, he can easily run a farm, and that the whole thing runs on its own, but that’s truly a misunderstanding. You’ve got to rack your brain a lot to get it to work. I can hire people to do the work, but I can’t escape all that cogitating. If I hadn’t been able to think out the whole thing, I would’ve given up the farm many years ago, I can tell you. And I don’t believe the cogitating is suited to you even though I can’t deny that you’re an awfully sensible man in other sorts of things.”

“I can understand that you don’t have the confidence in me that you want to give me a helping hand,” Marinus said, and the farmer quickly grabbed him by the arm. “You really shouldn’t say something like that,” he said earnestly. “I’ve always been willing to help folks as long as it was of benefit to them. But I don’t want to help if I think it can only harm. And even if I wanted to, I can’t now because I don’t have the money that would be needed. No, I’m not nearly so well off as folks believe. But if you need good advice, you can always come to me. I’ve advised many people in my time, and they’ve thanked me for it.” “Then I’ll say thanks for your kind thoughts,” Marinus said despondently.

At the next farm he was invited into the living room and had to wait about ten minutes till the farmer came. Here the man’s name was Martin Thomsen and he had a reputation for wishing
little people well. He was in the Inner Mission, and on the wall were framed scriptural texts and pictures of solemn, bearded pastors. Finally Martin Thomsen came, a clean-shaven man with nervous facial twitches and his shoulders drawn up a little as if he were always half-frozen. He gave Marinus a heartfelt handshake.

“That’s nice that you wanted to look in,” he said and gave a pale smile. “And you have to excuse me for making you wait, but there was something I had to take care of first. I’m sure I can definitely tell you what it was because you don’t run around gossiping. I was writing a letter to pastor Faaborg. You can surely remember he was pastor over in Spourup five years ago. I couldn’t just stop in the middle.”

“No, no, nobody could ever expect that,” Marinus said. “I also had plenty of time to wait.”

“Right, I’m sure I can tell you I’ve been in contact with him, and now he wants to know how things stand with the Lord’s cause here in the district,” Martin Thomsen explained. “And I’d sincerely like to tell him, as far as I can, because he was truly a good man. I’ve been writing this letter for three days, but now I’m finally finished. Has that missionary there from Færgeby visited you here on the hill?”

Marinus acknowledged he’d been there, and Martin Thomsen walked agitatedly with mincing steps up and down the floor.

“I can say to you that a thoughtful missionary would never have behaved in such a way,” he said. “What good can come of running around that way without seeking advice from the brethren in the Lord? Yes, yes, it’s his own business whether he wants help from those who can help. Pastor Faaborg often asked others for help.”

“It’s an easy matter if somebody is gifted,” Marinus said. “Oh, I’m far from having anything to be arrogant about, and our gifts of course we have as far as that’s concerned also from the Lord and we use them for his glory,” the farmer said. “But I’ve written to Faaborg, as well as I can from a faithful heart, and I’m very pleased he’s shown the confidence in me. But we were going to chat a bit?”
Marinus gave his gloomy report again, and the farmer looked at him sadly.

"I was so pleased when you came," he said. "I thought you came for the soul's sake and not in earthly concerns. But I can't help you with your money affairs. I'm not a well-to-do man, though the Lord bestows upon me my daily bread without sighs and complaint, for the edification of body and soul. The scraps that remain, I give them back to the Lord with a grateful disposition. But if things are so bad for you, have you considered what's wrong?"

"It was the drought that scorched the grain," Marinus said. "And why do you think the Lord sent the drought over us?" Martin Thomsen said. "The world is always ready with an answer, but it will never understand the works of the Lord. There was a point to this drought—it was sent so that worldly children would turn their hearts away from the things of this world and turn to the Lord and his mercy. The drought came so we'd stop paying heed to earthly mammon, and instead repent of our sins and cleanse ourselves in the blood of the lamb."

"Do you think it can be connected that way?" Marinus said. "I mean, a fella can scarcely judge those sorts of things."

"You can be assured that was the message the Lord sent by means of the drought," Martin Thomsen said. "And there will be joy in the kingdom of heaven if you people, who are now complaining and sighing about the loss you've suffered, will manage to turn the loss into a gain. If you search your heart, you're sure to realize you may well be in need of getting your sins washed off in the blood of the lamb."

"A fella does have his flaws, alright," Marinus readily admitted.

"It's not enough that you admit it," the farmer said. "You have to throw off your burden of sin at the Savior's feet. And I don't believe you've done that. Remember what it says in the hymn:

First then I could call Him my Master and Savior,
First then I could look on the cross as a favor,
First then I could give Him my broken down spirit,
In life and in death to rely on His merit.

The adversity you’ve had you must take as a message from
the Lord. And if you learn to submit and find your way to
mercy, then the Lord will surely bless you with this world’s
goods according to your needs. For it is written: Take no
thought for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil
thereof.”

The man had warmed to his subject, and a little streak of
saliva was dripping down his chin. He looked his guest earnestly
in the eye and held out his hands as if he were ready to receive
a repentant sinner at his breast. But Marinus’s head was grind­
ing like a mill. Maybe there was a meaning to it, the man said;
after all, a fella didn’t know about that kind of thing—he wasn’t
a scholar. But presumably no help was to be expected from him
in the hour of need.

“You should consider the words I’ve now spoken to you,”
the farmer said. “If you just understand the one thing: that the
Lord wants to test you. You think you’re not worse than the or­
dinary run of people, but that’s the reasoning that leads people
to hell. What you think is a misfortune can easily turn into good
fortune for you if you know just like the bee how to draw honey
from thistle flowers and the stiff thorns. But if you don’t learn
a lesson from that sign the Lord has given you, then you
shouldn’t count on ever becoming blessed. And it is written:
Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. . . .”

“Thank you for your words,” Marinus said and prepared
himself to go.

“Oh, I’m not one of those who are eloquent with words,”
Martin Thomsen replied modestly. “And I’ve never passed
myself off to be either. If you think what I say is right, then it’s
the spirit speaking through me. And it’s very possible that
you’re better served with the words I’ve given you than if you’d
gotten the money you came for.”

“Yes, I’m grateful for your kind thoughts,” Marinus said.
“Now come on and drink your coffee here,” the farmer said.
“My wife will take it hard if you leave without getting anything to eat or drink.”

Marinus assured him that he had to be off. The farmer accompanied him to the farm gate and warmly pressed his hand.

“You know you can always come here and get a word from me that’s good for your soul,” he said. “And I sincerely wish for you that you may find grace.”

Marinus felt tired and humiliated, but nevertheless he turned into the last farm in the village. It was a red-washed timber-framed farmhouse and the main building was unusually spacious with potted plants in many windows. Here lived the town’s richest man, who was almost to be regarded as a large farmer. He had the biggest say in the parish council, and if he just wanted to lift his little finger for Marinus, he’d be saved. He went in through the mudroom door. A day laborer was sitting alone at the kitchen table drinking coffee.

“Do you suppose Lund is home, Bregentved?” he asked. “I’d like to have a word with him.”

“How do you do, how do you do, Marinus Jensen,” the day laborer said. “Yes, Lund is getting his midday nap, and it generally gets rather drawn out. But then of course he can really come to need some shuteye when he has to listen to those two women yammering all day.”

Bregentved grinned and slurped from his cup. He was forty years old, with a clipped, dark mustache and a couple of fingers on one hand that were grown together. He was the son of a teacher who’d been in the parish for many years, and had an easy time finding work with the farmers. Marinus stood wavering and didn’t know whether he dare knock on the door to the living room. But just at that moment the door was half-opened, and a woman in her fifties stuck her head out. Her upper body was like a board, while her abdomen bulged as if she were pregnant. She was in a black, high-necked dress with glistening spangles, and her thin, crooked nose made her resemble a bird.

“Who is it?” she asked in her big-city diction.

“It’s Marinus Jensen from the cliff who wants to talk to Lund,” Bregentved explained.
The woman disappeared, but appeared again after a bit.
“Feel free to go in,” she said. “Lund is awake.”

A woman was standing in the living room who resembled the other woman from head to toe. She had the same figure, the same bird-beak, the same sharp grey eyes, and she was dressed in exactly the same way. Marinus knew that one of them was the mistress of the house and the other her sister, but no one could tell them apart. The two sisters had the peculiarity of speaking at the same time. It was as if their thoughts were formed identically in their heads and had to get out at the same time. The farmer was lying on a chaise lounge and was still a little weak after his nap.

“Well, if it isn’t Marinus Jensen,” he said. “Please, sit down.”

“I’d appreciate it if you’d grant me an interview,” Marinus said and cast a sidelong glance at the two women who were sitting each at her window and didn’t make a move to move.

“Yeah, just speak your mind,” Lund said. “Don’t pay any mind to the women being here. A fella isn’t supposed to have any secrets from his wife—surely you know that.

Marinus trotted out his business. He stood with his hat in his hand in the middle of the floor and recounted the scrape he was in. The story of his adversity had almost turned into a jingle he knew by heart. The two women listened and exchanged looks once in a while. He’d finished and it was quiet in the living room. He heard the steady movement of the living room clock and the women’s huffing and breathing. He looked down at the floor, while the man and his women conducted a silent conversation with their eyes.

“Yeah, that’s a bad business, Marinus,” Lund said finally. “A fella can feel sorry for you and feel it’s rough that you have to give up your farm, but I’ll tell you point blank how things stand: I can’t help you. I’m into sureties and crap and rubbish so a fella can scarcely sleep at night, and the taxes rise and rise so he scarcely knows where he should take the money from. Many’s the time I wished they’d come and take it all so a fella was free of all that toil and trouble. Have you been other places

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asking for help?”

Marinus mentioned where he’d been and how things had gone there.

“Yeah, so you can see yourself,” Lund said and turned so the springs creaked. “We people with the big farms, we can’t help, no matter how much we’d like to. After all, we’ve been hit by the drought ourselves, you have to remember that, and of course we have to pay ten times as much. Everyone thinks only of demanding, and it’s us who’ve got to pay. But when they’ve plundered us down to our shirts, then presumably they can’t take any more, and then I suppose we’ll have our peace. But what do you think the community would look like if it couldn’t take in any more taxes?”

“No, it’s not going to be easy,” Marinus conceded.

“Easy!” the farmer said. “No, it’ll be a lot more than hard. I dare say, a fella won’t even be permitted to keep enough so he can be buried. I’ll tell you straight out, Marinus Jensen: today it’s you who has to give up his property, and tomorrow maybe it’s me. And it’s not far from being the case that I wish I were in your place. You’ll get your good day-wage and you won’t have all the worries the rest of us are ridden with. You’ll get the money in your pocket and can use it in good conscience without anyone coming and calling you to account. That’s more than the rest of us can do. But as long as I can hang on to the farm, I’ll keep you in mind for work—in any event you can rely on that.”

“Come on, you really have to...”

“...really have to drink your coffee,” the women said in a chorus.

“Thanks, surely I’d better be finding my way home,” Marinus said.

“No, you’ll just...”

“...just drink our coffee,” the two sisters said.

Tired, Marinus sank down on a chair while the women went out for the coffee. They plied him well with coffee and cake, and were so full of sympathy for him and his family that Marinus only now understood his misery for real.
A letter came for Marinus. Tora received it and gave it to him when he came in from work. He turned it in his big hands while he looked at the address. Smallholder Marinus Jensen was written there, and it was from attorney Schjøtt in Færgeby. Marinus couldn’t get it opened, as it were, because it didn’t have anything good to report anyway.

“You know you’re going to have to read it,” Tora said. “God, Marinus, we have to take it as it comes. I mean, the eel also goes into the pan even though it twists and turns.”

Yeah, yeah, then Marinus got the letter opened. And it was as expected a message that the past-due interest and principal had to be paid now. He handed Tora the letter, and she read it and put it down on the dresser.

“Well, I mean, it’s not anything we didn’t know,” she said. “There’s no point in taking it too hard, because what will be will be.”

“Still, it’s strange to think that a fella has to give up the farm,” Marinus said. “A fella sits here with wife and many children, and not a person in the world cares what becomes of him.”

Melancholy and wronged, Marinus looked straight ahead, but Tora plainly was not inclined to take it tragically. Her face was all smiles as if she’d just gotten an invitation to a dance.

“If you’ve got money, you get ahead, if you’ve got none, you’re as good as dead,” she said. “You’ve been an honest man and done your best, and what more can people demand? We’ve toiled equally on this farm, and we’ll also probably toil the rest of our days. You should keep in mind, little Marinus, that the kids are healthy and well-behaved.”

In all his sorrowfulness, Marinus had to admit that, and Tora went on to tell about something that her favorite among the children, twelve-year-old Anton, had said. He’d been examined in school about the parable that it is just as hard for the rich man to get into heaven as for a camel to get through the eye of a nee-
dle. "So why do they keep on being rich?" Anton asked. "It
would sure be smarter if they gave all their riches away. Maybe
they don’t believe in what Our Lord himself said? In any case
I’m sure glad we’re not rich." "So you can see for yourself,"
Tora said and laughed.

Marinus didn’t answer, but slipped out into the stable. He
was not inclined to take it so lightly. The cows stood peacefully
munching, and a ray of sunshine fell in through the door and
made the cobwebs on the ceiling glisten like silver. Marinus sat
down on the milk stool, and his face with its pointy goatee was
gaunt and destitute like an old bird. Now he was to be looked
upon as a homeless man, without house or land or a cow he
could call his own. He got up and stroked Matilde across her
flanks. She was his best cow and sniffed affectionately at the
arms of his jacket, while the little long-haired horses turned their
heads and neighed toward him. Now they’d be under strangers’
control.

But Marinus was aware that his whole life he’d aspired to do
right by everyone and pay everyone his due. He’d given his
animals good fodder, he’d taken care of his land, and he’d paid
his debts and his interest as long as he had the means of doing so.
He hadn’t been an imprudent man, but rather reasonable and
modest in all his dealings.

When he came back in, Tora had put out the schnapps bottle.
Otherwise they drank schnapps in Marinus’s house only on for­
mal occasions.

"Now you’re going to sit down and get yourself some coffee
laced with schnapps, little Marinus," Tora said. "When a fella
has much to ponder, he’s in need of something to fortify himself
with." "A fella can scarcely defend drinking coffee laced with
schnapps when he can’t pay his interest," Marinus said. "Oh,
fiddlesticks," Tora said. "No one can say you’ve got a weakness
for schnapps. And there are afflictions that have to be drowned."

Marinus poured himself a coffee with schnapps, even though
it was broad daylight. And after he’d taken a few gulps of the
strong, spicy drink, right away he felt the whole thing was some­
what easier.
“There’s Laurids, my brother in America,” he said. “We haven’t heard from him in many a year. Of course we can’t know if he made good. If we just had his address, it’d be easy to write to him and ask him for help.”

No, Tora agreed. You’d often read about the big money people could earn in America. And maybe some day Laurids would come back to Denmark with money in his pocket. He was definitely not the man who wouldn’t help his own brother.

There was a knock at the door—it was Cilius. He was broad-shouldered and had a red beard, and his red face flushed like a sun. “Well, there you are sitting and drinking clear schnapps,” he said. “Have one with us, Cilius,” Tora said. “Thanks, I don’t mind if I do,” Cilius laughed. “It’s never happened in this earthly life that I said no to a drink.” And now Marinus disclosed the distressing letter he’d gotten from the attorney. It was all over—he had to give up his farm.

“You’ve always been a nincompoop,” Cilius said. “You could have kept it going for a long time yet. Look at me. I’m up to my eyeballs in crap just like you. But I’m not giving up my farm as long as I can hold on to it. I sold my one horse and two of the cows. If I’m short money, I’ll sell more of the livestock.” “That’s really not legal, and I can’t bring myself to do it,” Marinus said, frightened. “I mean you’re stripping the assets.” “It’s legal to sell off the livestock if a fella can’t provide the feed for it,” Cilius said, self-assured. “Am I maybe supposed to let the animals starve? Show me a place where I can go get a loan or credit?”

Out in the kitchen Tora had gotten a visit from Magda. They sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee. Magda poured out her troubles. Andres had become more and more unreasonable, and it wasn’t easy to know how it would all end.

“He’s so stingy that if his best friend died, he’d steal the five-cent pieces from his eye sockets,” Magda complained. “I can’t get him to pay me my wages. Now I’ve served at his house for many, many years and have been faithful and easy to get along with in all ways. But I’ve never been able to get him to pay me more than ten crowns now and then if I’d like some ma-
terial for a dress or to pay a seamstress. He’ll soon owe me close to three thousand crowns. He says he doesn’t have any money.”

“That would still be a bunch, little Magda,” Tora said. You’d be a good catch.”

“He doesn’t want to marry me either, though he promised it at the beginning,” Magda said. “Menfolk are worse than wild animals. As long as they can manage to lure a poor womanfolk, they forget everything they ever vowed and swore. Andres is an absolute monster. If you ever hear that I was killed, he’s the one who did it just to get rid of his debt.”

And in an agitated voice Magda went on to recount the sins men had committed. There was Konrad, Lars Seldomglad’s son, who was always hot on the heels of the grocer’s Meta. There was Mads Lund, who lived a way of life unworthy of a Christian man and a large farmer. He had two wives. Magda knew all about it. They had a common bedroom all three of them, and the farmer lay between his wife and sister-in-law. It would be odd, wouldn’t it, if he didn’t make a mistake every once in a while, Magda laughed.

“And Cilius...” Magda said. “Don’t talk so loud,” Tora interrupted. “He’s sitting in the living room talking to Marinus.” Magda muffled her voice and told about Cilius. It was absolutely awful the way he drank and went on binges. But what else could you expect from a man who’d come wandering on to the scene with scarcely the shirt on his back. “It was the death of Frederikke’s old mother when her daughter wanted to marry Cilius, and now Frederikke has to lie in the bed she made,” Magda said. “And she can’t have children—she’s sterile. He’s selling the livestock, and you can rest assured he’ll end up in the penitentiary.”

And now Magda became absorbed in conjectures about how Frederikke might have fallen for Cilius back then when he’d come to the parish as a highway navvy. There were men who had a strange power over women. Magda’s voice became deep with horror and she reported on a smith in the parish she was from. All he needed was to have a woman sniff at a handkerchief and he had her in his power. Magda’s gaunt cheeks
flushed as if she had consumption while she recounted how the smith had seduced wives of big farmers—indeed he’d gotten his way even with a deacon’s wife.

“Oh, there sure are quite a few who can do that witchcraft,” Tora laughed. “How did Andres get his way with you?”

The men sat in the living room and got hot under the collar. The schnapps bottle was empty, and Cilius asked whether one of the children couldn’t run to the grocery for more to drink. “Of course,” Marinus said. “But we’re down on the books for an awful lot of money. And it wouldn’t be good if Skifter got the impression that we’re squandering money on schnapps.” “Do you think I buy my schnapps with another man’s money?” Cilius asked, offended. “Let the lad say I sent him, and it’ll be paid in cash. I sold two cows and a horse. So I can surely also give a round. There’s no lawyer who’ll get the best of me. If I have to give up my farm, my successor won’t get anything better than crap. I can also gladly lend you money if you’re wanting—you’ve always been a friendly neighbor.” “No, thanks,” Marinus said. “I respect you as a decent man, Marinus; you can have ten crowns any time you want,” Cilius said.

Marinus shook his head. Ten crowns was a lot of money, and it was a great thing that people showed their trust in you. But Cilius had stripped his farm, and it wasn’t good to become an accessory to that deed. The boy was sent off for the schnapps, and Cilius gave him money to buy candy. “You benefit from all those kids,” Cilius said. “Yes, it’s not so bad,” Marinus said. “They’re all of them healthy in body and soul. Ten men, that’s what a corporal has in tow in war. I would’ve liked to have a full dozen, but it wasn’t to be, and I have no right to complain.”

Cilius turned somber. “It’s nice to have kids,” he said. “I don’t have any, but it’s really not my fault. I once had a boy with a girl down south. The boy just upped and died so I escaped having to pay. But Frederikke can’t have kids.” “There are a lot of women like that,” Marinus said. “I’ve heard they can be operated for it.” “A fella hears so much nonsense,” Cilius said. “No, if womenfolk are too sickly, there’s nothing that can be done about the thing. If the boy wasn’t dead, we could have
adopted him."

The men drank calmly and steadily till Tora brought dinner. She kept the children out of the living room. They didn’t get any good out of seeing their father swilling schnapps. But otherwise Tora was smiling and had cheerful words on her lips. On such a day a man should have the right to nurse a strong drink.

There was the sound of music outside. In the red evening light a thin little man was standing and playing accordion. The children flocked around him; they put their arms around one another’s waists and danced. Cilius looked out the window. “Yeah, I envy you the children,” he said. “You’ve been a nimble man in bed—nobody can take that away from you, even if they put you out of your farm.” “You can say that again,” Marinus laughed. “But a fella doesn’t find a wife like Tora every day either.” “Let’s invite Frands for a bite of bread and a drink,” Cilius proposed. “It’s no fun running around and playing for chickenfeed. He’s no better off than the rest of us.”

Marinus’s mood softened at the sight of his flock of children. He went out and invited the minstrel in. Otherwise, after all, it wasn’t customary for a solid man with house and land to invite vagabonds and musicians into his house. But it was probably the last time he’d be inviting anyone to a party in his house. Frands sat humbled at the table, while Marinus with a gesture invited him to dig in. Afterward Cilius poured him a proper coffee laced with schnapps.

“Can you earn any money?” Cilius asked, and Frands informed them that things were tight enough with the receipts, especially this year, when the harvest had been so absolutely bad. “No, the ones who have something don’t want to give, and the ones who want to give something don’t have anything,” Cilius said. “You better believe I know all about it. I myself had to fight my way ahead in the old days when I couldn’t find any work. But all the same, a fella has it good on the road. He’s free and isn’t accountable to anybody.”

Frands sat round-shouldered and on his last legs and didn’t resemble a highway hero. But the schnapps warmed up his mood; he became lively and took on color, as it were, in sync
with Cilius. “I stampeded on the roads in my youth,” Cilius said. “And it may well come to that again. If they take the property from me sometime, they can go right ahead and take the old hag while they’re at it. I want to die on the road, cheers, Frands, this kind of food and drink you don’t get every day.”

Frands admitted that indeed it wasn’t every day he met with such hospitality. But otherwise life was bearable, especially when it was summer, because winter was bad. He lifted his coffee cup and sang: “You run many a step from farm to farm, and get yourself a bit to scrape by when the cold would harm.” Marinus nodded—the man really had a good brain.

Marinus had an obstinate feeling that he was plunging into wild things, into dangerous undertakings together with people of ill repute. He felt a dizziness in his soul in wandering along a dangerous path. “I’ll have to give up the farm,” he said. “That’s not going to be any secret. I’ve been unlucky, but otherwise I’m a solid man. Let nobody accuse me of anything different. I’ve managed for myself as long as I can, and now I can go out on the road and play the accordion.” The children had sneaked into the living room and watched the musician from the recesses of the room. “They’re waiting for a song,” Cilius said and pointed to them. Frands took his accordion and sang:

In my cheerless chamber I often sit,
thinking of the bygone springtime of my youth,
with tears frequently streaming from my eyes,
as I contemplate my miserable lot.

When ice and snow covers field and lea,
when winter’s costume clothes each town,
when the little bird no longer sings his song,
then wretched, lonely and forsaken, I be.

Lend me your hand, sister or brother,
as I extend mine, so extend yours,
the earth, you see, is, after all, our mother,
the fruit belongs to both you and me.
From Denmark's breast we nourishment receive,
by whose bosom we our first nourishment enjoyed,
and even when I my last parting take,
bid me rest securely in her lap.

Will you forgive me, my God and Maker,
if I have sinned against your Word,
then the burden is light, and dear Father,
forgive me now, forgive me now, my God.

“Hold your head high,” Cilius said. “There’s none among us here who looks down on you. And what do you have to ask forgiveness for? We are what we’re created for, every single person that exists. We’ve gotten schnapps and womenfolk to enjoy. I’ve had my share of both, the one and the other. I’ve laid in the hay with the girls and been in fights where the blood flowed.”

“You’re not the only one who was in on something in his young days,” Marinus said.

“Did you beat a man till he was a cripple?” Cilius asked and looked at him menacingly. But things had never gone that far with Marinus. He’d never been violent. “Then don’t come here and jabber away about what you’ve been up to,” Cilius said and his face blazed in his red beard. “I broke the back on a guy who wanted to take a girl from me, and I’m the man to do it all over again this very day.” And Cilius began to tell about the wild adventures of his youth. Back then there were folks who could drink and guys who could fight, and Cilius had drunk more schnapps than a horse drank water.

“I’ve been down on my luck,” Marinus said. “It was the harvest that failed, and now they’re taking the farm from me. But I’m a solid man, and now you listen good: I’ll manage no matter how things go. You people will never hear anything else about me.”

“I beat a man till he was a cripple,” Cilius said hoarsely. “And if someone tries to tread on me, it’ll be a matter of life and limb. You people know me, my name is Cilius Andersen, and a girl down south tried to pin a paternity rap on me. I drink
schnapps like other people drink water.”

All three of them radiated self-confidence, cheerfulness, and joy of life. Marinus gave it no further thought that he had to give up his property. Cilius sat lost in remembrance of his exploits. He felt like embracing the little musician. “You’re my friend,” he said. “If anybody offends you, tell me. There isn’t a person on earth who isn’t afraid of Cilius Andersen. It gets quiet in the room when I go into the inn. They’re no match for me, they know that, and you’re my friend, and trust me.”

Blissfully, the musician held out his hand. “Lend me your hand, sister or brother,” he sang. “As I extend mine, so extend yours. The earth, you see, is, after all, our mother, the fruit belongs to both you and me.”

It was late by the time the two guests went home. Marinus accompanied them beyond the farm. It was a starry night, and the fjord glittered in the moonlight. Marinus stood for a while and looked out across the property that was no longer his. He awoke late the next morning when Tora shook him.

“Now you better get up, little Marinus,” she said. “Surely you remember that you have to go to town and talk to the lawyer.”

Marinus didn’t remember anything about it. His head was a bit heavy, but if Tora said he was supposed to go to town, he had to go.

“You should never do tomorrow what can be done today,” Tora chitchatted. “The longer we hang on to the farm, the tougher it’ll be to leave.”

“A way out might turn up,” Marinus suggested.

“That’s what the rats think, too, when they’re sitting in the trap,” Tora smiled. “No, you’ve got to go now. I’ve laid out your good clothes, and when you get back, there’ll be an omelet with bacon for you. Just as long as folks have their health, they’ve got to be satisfied.”

Marinus walked to Færgeby and told the lawyer that the money couldn’t be raised. They agreed that it was best if Schjott tried to secure a buyer for the farm. And two weeks later Marinus Jensen’s smallholding was sold.
Marinus rented an apartment on one side of a house down in the town. The old smallholder’s widow Dorre lived on the other side of the house with her son Nikolaj. The parish council had procured them a roof over their heads; Dorre was in her dotage, and Nikolaj was a poor creature and not fit for anything. “That’ll be quite a glory,” Tora said when she viewed the small rooms. “Now a body will be rid of milking. Otherwise I always had to be stuck to the udders on the cows. Now I’ll try out, all right, what it’s like to be a lady.” No, with Tora you wouldn’t have noticed that they’d been turned into day laborer folks from folks with land and property. She got cracking on cleaning up. Because wherever Tora moved in, it had to be clean.

The new man had been there and looked at the farm, both before and after the purchase. His name was Kresten Bossen and he was from north of the fjord. He was a strong-limbed, melancholy man with a mild manner and gentle eyes. “I can see you’ve been keeping good care of your things,” he said. “I’ve taken care of it as best I could,” Marinus said. “Surely I’m allowed to say that.” “I’m sorry that I’m the one chasing you off your property,” the new man said. “But, I mean, we know that if I hadn’t bought it, somebody else would have.” “I don’t hold it against you,” Marinus replied. “I hope you have more luck with this farm than I did. There’s a lot of land, and it’s bad, and a lot of labor has to be put into it if a fella is to have food.” “Jesus will help,” Kresten Bossen said quietly. “One thing you also have to know is that we must bear our trials with a humble disposition, then we’ll receive peace.” Then Marinus understood that the new owner belonged to the Pious.

The last day before the move the children, who’d been in service, came home for a visit. There was Olga, who was slim and light-haired and nineteen, the eighteen-year-old Niels and Karl, who was fourteen. All three of them had had positions as servants with farmers in the parish. Olga had tears in her eyes.
when she said hello to her parents, while the two boys pretended as if nothing had happened. Tora pretended as if she hadn’t noticed her daughter’s agitation. “Yes, now we’re going to have to leave here,” she said. “But we don’t owe anybody anything. It’s bad to owe money, but it’s worse to owe thanks. Your father needn’t sink into the ground—there’s nobody who did anything big for him.”

Marinus happened to think about Kresten Bossen’s words and said piously: “Maybe it’s for the best after all. A fella has to take his trials with a humble disposition.” “Oh, you and your trials,” Tora snorted. “Who’d get pleasure out of continuously testing you? I don’t give a hoot for the Pious and all their chatter. I don’t respect it.”

But Marinus was in a solemn and melancholy mood, and all Tora’s cheerful chatter couldn’t make him change his mind. After they’d eaten, he took the hymnbook down from the shelf. Tora and the children looked at him in astonishment: was Marinus now going to burst out singing hymns? But he meant only to read a prayer from the very back pages of the hymnbook, because what good is the Lord’s word for us humans if not in life’s important moments. Marinus intended to hold family prayers with his children.

He leafed through the book a bit; his big hands, made rough by work, had a hard time turning the thin paper. But finally he found a prayer for travelers. It was a prayer that was appropriate for the day. He read in a slow, monotone voice, and once in a while he stumbled over the solemn words.

“Great God, heavenly father! you who are an almighty, eternal and living God, who guides and governs everything by your godly wisdom and goodness. I pray to you that you will watch over and protect me with your fatherly care on all my lawful ways. For not a sparrow falls on the ground without your will, and the very hairs of our head are all numbered.”

Slowly and sincerely Marinus read the long prayer, and they were quiet as mice at the table. Tora’s face was hard, and she sat and looked down in her lap. “The Lord shall preserve our going out and our coming in from this time forth, and even for ever-
more, amen!’ He put the hymnbook away. Little Anton sat with a wrinkled forehead and stared out the window. ‘What is it you’re pondering over like that, little Anton?’ Tora asked. ‘It’s sure strange that all the hairs on our head are counted,’ Anton said. ‘I mean it can’t make any difference how many hairs there are on our head.’ ‘It’s a kind of metaphor,’ Marinus explained. ‘It means that all our sinful deeds and thoughts are written down so we can be judged on judgment day.’ ‘It’s still something strange,’ Anton said. ‘Why is hairs on our heads written there if it means something else?’ ‘Oh, you know, a fella never says things so straight out,’ Marinus said.

Evening closed in, and the light was lit. They sat in a warm cluster in the little living room. The children had returned to the nest from the hard world outside, and Marinus was sitting in his Sunday clothes, which were a little too big, and resembled a patriarch. He asked the children how they were doing where they were serving. Niels complained a bit about his master, who was by nature somewhat hot-tempered. ‘But he’s still your master, and you do wrong to challenge him,’ Marinus said. ‘There’s no harm in a fella learning to obey while he’s young.’

Olga had been to a summer dance at the inn in a neighboring parish. She recounted that some of the fellows had had too much to drink and came to blows. ‘It’s terrible that people can’t keep the peace and be tolerant,’ Marinus said. ‘And I’ll tell you this: a decent girl has to be very particular when she’s out at a dance. There’s always people who have something to find fault with in her behavior. You children have to remember that’s always been a good rule for little people’s children: behave well, then there’ll be few questions.’ ‘You practically talk like a regular minister,’ Olga said. Marinus laughed: ‘Yeah, if the beard counted, the billy goat could preach.’

The next day Marinus and Tora moved their furniture down into town. The new man was going to move in. Kresten Bossen had a long way to drive down to the fjord from his farm inland, and the time was drawn out. Marinus had been on the cliff many times before he saw the pram approach with Kresten Bossen’s furniture. It was hauled across the fjord by a motor boat, which
the man had rented from a fisherman to the north. The sun was setting and the sky was spotted with light mother-of-pearl clouds. In Alslev the church bell rang. Kresten Bossen was standing in the bow with his wife and three children.

“That’s a fine welcome we’re getting to our new home,” he said. “It’s odd, but it seems to me as if we were sailing across a big ocean to a strange land,” his wife said. “We don’t know anybody here.” “We’ll also find friends in the Lord there,” Kresten Bossen said. The pram glided slowly through the mirror-smooth water in toward land.

Marinus had stolen into the stable. He wanted to say the last goodbye to his animals before the new man came. “You’ll have a good home,” he said and petted the horses. “He’s a good person and wishes you well. But I’ll miss you two little nags.” “The wife’s all right too,” he said to the cows, who were sniffing his coat sleeves. “There won’t be any change for you, little boss.” He stood for a moment outside the farm and stared out across the land he’d cultivated for twenty years. He knew every hillock, every ditch, every hollow in the terrain, every place where the chalk appeared under the sod. He was more familiar with it than with his wife, his children, and his own mind. Then he hitched up and drove down to the fjord to help the new man carry the furniture into the house.

Lars Seldomglad was the first to bid Marinus and his family welcome to their new home. He went inside as if he’d been their close friend all his days, and inspected how they’d arranged things, while he steadily chewed his chewing tobacco. “Yeah, you see, now you’re one of us,” he said and smiled good-naturedly. “And we’ll surely live together like good neighbors. I mean, we day laborers are accustomed to seeing to it that we don’t poach on each other’s preserves.” And Lars explained that when the big farmers offered a day-wage that was much too low, the day laborers agreed not to work for that man.

“Don’t fear, Lars Seldomglad, Marinus will stand together with the rest of you,” Tora said. “I mean, we’ve been little people ourselves all our days.” “There are two kinds of little people,” Lars Seldomglad said and smiled. “There are those
who eat their bread dry and those who get meat on top of it. It makes a difference all the same. Next to us day laborers, you’ve been big folks.”

The other day laborers held back a bit, as if they first wanted to take a look at the strangers. They knew Marinus and his wife and had often talked with them. But now it remained to be seen whether there was some arrogance in them because they’d had property and land. But already the first day Tora called at Line Seldomglad’s and borrowed a cup of salt. Line was an enormously fat woman, with a black face as if she’d been standing over a smoking stove for days. A couple of gray wisps of hair hung down in her face, but her eyes were lively and cheerful.

“Well look at what the wind blew in,” she said. “Please, come in the living room.” The living room was dirty as if it had never been cleaned, but the window sills were full of plants in bloom. Line brushed a kitten down from a chair and offered Tora a seat. “But no, as far as I’m concerned I can talk to you in the kitchen,” Tora said. “I’m no lady with three chimneys on my farmhouse.” “You people sure did have land, while the rest of us only worked for others all our days,” Line said and looked at her out of the corner of her eyes. “And now we’ve got no other land than what’s waiting for us in the cemetery,” Tora laughed. “Do I really look so stuck up?”

Soon the two women were talking to each other like old acquaintances. Konrad, her son, came home from the fjord. He was a hired hand with a fisherman, who had his house by the fjord west of the cliff. Line got busy making him food. He was a broad-shouldered, handsome young fellow with a lock of hair down on his forehead. After they’d eaten, he got up, briefly said thanks for the meal and had to go. “Where are you going?” his mother asked. “Oh, I hardly know myself,” Konrad said. “It’s too warm to sit inside on such an evening.” “But it’s September, and it feels cool,” Line said. “But I mean, a body knows what kind of warmth you care about. It’s the kind you get in the girls’ arms, little Konrad.” Konrad left without answering.

And now Line, half-whispering, told how things stood with Konrad. He was a handsome fellow, and the girls couldn’t resist
him. Her eyes beamed with secret pride, while she reported that he probably had trysts with the grocer's Meta. She was a rich girl, and only over the grocer's dead body would the two become a couple. But, you know, Konrad might be lucky and get her in a family way.

It was a warm September evening, and in the dusk you could hear the din of children playing. The foliage in the small gardens was fading. A couple of young girls drifted by arm in arm. Pastor Gamst promenaded by on his evening walk. He stood for a moment and talked with the day laborer Jens Horse, who was sitting on the bench outside his house smoking a pipe. His wife, Dagmar, was standing in the doorway with her hands under her apron and listening while the two men talked about the weather prospects for the next day. The pastor walked on. He had business with the teacher Ulriksen.

Ulriksen was already sitting with his evening toddy and his solitaire. He was a heavy, red-blazed man with a wreath of gray hair on his head. He invited the pastor into the living room and poured him a rum toddy.

"These are the hymn numbers for Sunday," Gamst said. "I felt like taking a walk—that's why I'm bringing them myself. We'll begin with: 'Teach Me, Oh Woods, to Wither Gladly.' That's a fitting introduction to the year's harvest thanksgiving sermon."

The teacher laughed and lit his pipe with a taper which he held over the hanging lamp. "A missionary came to me a while back and explained that the district was certainly ripe for revival now," Gamst said. "He thought that God had sent the crop failure to shake up the congregation. I threw him out."

The teacher growled and violently sucked the pipe. He was an old Grundtvigian and couldn't stand the Inner Mission. "But still—this hymn on this occasion," he said. "Don't you think it would be best, if I read your harvest thanksgiving sermon through, Pastor Gamst."

"That's not necessary," the clergyman said. "I'll quickly explain the content to you. My starting point is the account in the Old Testament of the rainbow God put in heaven as a sign that
night and day shall not deviate. It expresses symbolically that providence does not intervene in the events. Nature goes its way—good or evil, they’re only simple natural phenomena, which can’t affect our attitude to the almighty, and which don’t teach us anything about the almighty’s relationship to us. Our Lord wound up the clock, set the mechanism in motion, and doesn’t care about the rest."

“But is that point of view Christian?” the teacher asked and ran his hand through his shock of hair.

Pastor Gamst stared at a dazed moth that whirred about the kerosene lamp.

“What is Christian?” he said. “In this country with its couple of million people every person has his private religion. We don’t know anything about God, we have only an inkling of him as an enormous first cause, and this is modern civilization’s big question: what use is God? He doesn’t enter into our lives. For the enlightened person life no longer shapes up as a struggle between the good and the evil principle. Basically Our Lord has become merely a manner of speaking. God has become a symbol, and when a God isn’t an enormous reality, he no longer exists.”

“Now just listen, Pastor Gamst,” the teacher said. “This isn’t the first time you’re saying these words to me. But precisely the doubt shows of course the reality of religion. And the harmony, the beautiful agreement in nature must after all for us religiously thinking people. . . .”

The clergyman interrupted him. He got up and nervously trudged up and down.

“The harmony in nature!” he said. “The suitability of life certainly. What shall I say when I see that all the woods are teeming! Is nature anything but a single large battlefield, where one animal inflicts the most terrible suffering on the other. Do you think the moose that’s ripped to pieces alive by a pack of wolves praises the fitness of nature? Or the larva that, paralyzed, is eaten alive by the ichneumon fly? Nature is a big bloodbath, an enormous mutual gluttony, a world of incomprehensible horror and hideousness.”
“But of course we may rely on a plan in the cosmos,” the teacher said. “Don’t you see the beauty in being able wholly to give one’s confidence to God as a child relies on his father? We aren’t in a position to judge his works, and it’s not demanded of us either. We can only fill ourselves with the spirit of filial piety.”

“You regard Our Lord as created in your own image, teacher Ulriksen,” the clergyman said with a smile. “Our Lord is an old gray-haired teacher, who sits in his heaven, on his chair, and humanely tries to lead the children on the right path. You Grundtvigians have shaped your own well-being into a deity, a father of the universe in heaven, a master on high:

While thus seated under a rustic mulberry tree, wisely and kindly, behind the stern deacon’s glasses, he smiled, from everywhere folks and cattle drawing near I see, as outside the garden, a rural throng, is filed.

So out to the people he went. Each poured out to him his troubles. For old Karen’s fever he was able to pluck a little sage, little Jens’ finger he wrapped in a poultice, and a new remedy for Per Hansen’s heifer’s illness to assuage.

I don’t know what Christianity is. I’m a clergyman, but religion fills me with loathing. It reminds me of nails that have been clipped off, of venom and pus from a swollen finger.”

The tall, thin man almost ran up and down the floor while he kept talking out of breath. His face was pale, and he heatedly gesticulated with his arms.

“I was struck myself,” he said. “My child died, my wife is incurably insane and will never come out of the institution. If it had been one of my flock to whom this had happened, I would have said: the Christian life is full of suffering, take your cross upon yourself, lay your sorrows and pains on the Lord. You know, I’m paid a fixed salary and given an official residence to speak that way. But what helped me in that critical time was that old heathen fatalism. I said to myself: that’s life. It’s not worse
for you than for the others. It’s that old sound folk belief: that’s just the way it has to be. If I’d believed that it was God’s will, I would’ve gone mad. It wasn’t God’s will—it was life’s incomprehensible and blind cruelty.”

“Now listen, Pastor Gamst,” the teacher said. “You’re edgy, and your nerves need rest. You should take a vacation.”

“It’s all of humanity that needs a vacation, Ulriksen,” the clergyman said with a sad smile. “We need a vacation from our own ego. Nature is nothing but primitive cruelty, but our brain is the finest marvel that’s ever been seen. Our brain, or soul, if you will, is too finely developed. A hen suffers nothing. It walks in the chicken yard and isn’t plagued by notions that it will end up in the soup pot. It doesn’t have an inkling about the folly of its own existence. But our mental faculties are so developed that we understand the horror of our fate. What is God but an attempt to fabricate ourselves away from the bestiality of our existence? We invent a meaning in life that doesn’t exist.”

Ulriksen soberly lit his pipe, which had gone out. Then he got up, took the clergyman by the arm and gently seated him in a chair.

“Now let me say something too,” he said. “It’s a good old custom that when the clergyman has spoken, the deacon has the word. Perhaps I do see God as a nice, old village teacher, who maintains order among his children. But isn’t it precisely the point that I’m supposed to see God that way? I always have the sense that God is sitting and keeping an eye on me. When I let myself get carried away, he disapprovingly shakes his head, just as I do when one of the children has done a sum incorrectly. In any case it helps me keep myself under control. And all of humanity needs to be kept in check. We constantly need to find out how our own inner good nature requires us to act. That’s why we have to have a God. We have to rely on what is humane in ourselves.”

The minister sat and stared ahead, and teacher Ulriksen offered him a cigar. He lit it and absentmindedly followed the smoke. Ulriksen took a gulp of his toddy and chatted on good-naturedly and reassuringly.
“I can’t stand the Inner Mission, Pastor Gamst,” he said. Because it jabbers away too much about suffering and self-denial and about life after death. We live here on earth today, and we have to take life on earth as it is now. It may well be that we can’t be satisfied with the conditions, but we’re just not going to get them any differently. Let’s see the bright sides, life’s strength and vigor. You’re a person sick at heart and edgy, and you take life too hard. My God, if it’s meaningless, then let’s try to bring whatever meaning into it we can. Let’s ourselves develop all the humanity we can, and let’s give others a chance to be human beings. Life is big and vigorous—one has to take it at arm’s length, Pastor Gamst, and make the best of it.”

“That depends in the best case on the strength of the arms,” the minister smiled.

“On the courage to face life, on the will to live,” the teacher said ardently. “We had an old minister in the parish before you. One time he gave a sermon in the garrison to the dragoons. He said something like: we’ll all meet in heaven, but we bloody damn well better do something to get there. Maybe that wasn’t Christianity according to Luther’s catechism, but it was sound, positive religion. Let’s use our intellect, folks—that’s why we have it.”

“Yes, yes,” the minister said. “Of course that’s one point of view. But it doesn’t solve any riddles for me.”

Pastor Gamst got up and said goodbye. The teacher accompanied him to the door and stood and listened for his footsteps in the dark September evening. The sky was bright with stars. The houses and farms of the village could be made out in the dark like big, sleeping animals crouching in the night. He stood and felt good in the warm darkness. There was a scent of apples and cool moistness from the gardens, and the teacher felt a peculiarly luxuriant well-being, as if he organically belonged together with all of sleeping nature. He thought it was good to be a tree and good to be a human being.
The weather was turning colder. All around on the farms the threshing work was making a din, the harvest was in the barn. But it was a pitiful harvest. Most of the produce was worthless, and there was a prospect that the cattle would starve in the winter. And it certainly wasn’t just the animals that were hit hard. The farmers reduced the day-wage. There was no use grousing; they always had an answer ready to hand. When the crops failed, the farmer had no money to pay with.

Boel-Erik had bought a boat and a couple of nets and fished in the fjord. But it was as if the severe heat had destroyed the fishing. There didn’t turn out to be much to earn fishing, but it did put food on the table. Marinus got a little work with Mads Lund. It was poorly paid, but you had to take what you could get. Black Anders and Jens Horse had gotten work cutting wood on an estate forest somewhat inland. It was piecework, and they bicycled to work long before daybreak and didn’t return until after dark. You really had to slog away to maintain a decent day-wage on the estate.

Marinus worked together with Bregentved. They loaded peat and drove it back from the bog. But once in a while they took a rest and sat down on a hillock and chatted. Bregentved was talkative, his mouth never stopped, and Marinus had to admit that he wasn’t stupid even if you probably could have expected of a school teacher’s son that he’d have become more than a common day laborer.

“Well, a fella could have been a minister or school teacher,” Bregentved explained. “But it’s the womenfolk who are to blame that a fella didn’t amount to anything. I’ve never been able to let them alone.” “Surely it must be your own fault and not the womenfolk’s,” Marinus offered. “Well, the women didn’t give me much peace either,” Bregentved said. “But maybe now it’ll soon all be over. Even the best rooster gets worn out.” “You’re still a young man, all right,” Marinus consoled
him. "You’re certainly not more than forty."

“Forty-one,” Bregentved said. “But in these matters it’s not age that counts. I’ll tell you, fertility sits in your back, in what’s called the marrow, and when a fella has been with womenfolk ten thousand times, it’s used up. Then we’re nothing.” “Is that the way it is?” Marinus asked in astonishment. “Yeah, that’s the way it is,” Bregentved assured him. “Surely you’ve also noticed that some men are finished when they’re young, and others can keep sleeping with women right up into old age.” And Marinus conceded that he sure had noticed that, but he hadn’t known what it was due to.

Bregentved had a foul mouth, and Marinus didn’t really like that. He was a clean-living man. But when Bregentved talked about the farmers, it happened that Marinus had to admit he was right. It was already into October, and rain and fog set in, clammy, gray, and dreary weather. Marinus and Bregentved were working together with perhaps four or five women and young lads in Mads Lund’s potato field. It was depressing work. You got a sore back and knees from lying on the wet ground and loosening the potatoes. Marinus couldn’t get warm again when he got into bed in the evening.

“Now look,” Bregentved said. “It’s going to be a poor potato harvest this year, the farmers are telling us that every day: the potatoes are so small and pitiful it can hardly pay to dig them up. But they get them out of the ground anyway, and they don’t pay us a fortune in day-wages. And when they’re sold, the prices are high because the potato harvest failed. They’re making more than they usually do. They’ll certainly know how to get the money where it’s supposed to be. It’s our own fault. We don’t know anything about making calculations.”

When Lund came out into the field, Bregentved said to him point blank: “You know how to figure it out,” he said. “You get us here to do your dirty work for no money. In the meantime you yourself can lie at home on the sofa reading the newspaper. You’re the one who’s making a profit on it. I mean, you people are cunning, that’s what you people are.” The farmer laughed good-naturedly: “Yeah, you do jabber away, you windbag,” he
said. "But if we farmers didn’t provide you with a living, what would become of you people? You should be happy that we know how to run our farms, otherwise you wouldn’t get any food on the table. It’s the Danish farmer who carries society." "Yeah, that’s what you people think," Bregentved said. "But there are those who say the whole thing would work much better without you people."

"That’s the way to treat them, those big farmers," Bregentved said after the farmer had walked on. "We have to tell them what we think of them. It’s the only way we can get them to respect us. But in any event, this is the last year I’m going to be a day laborer."

And Bregentved confided his future plans to Marinus. He hadn’t intended to work himself to death for a paltry wage all his days. Bregentved wanted to do business and earn money. He sat on his knees on the wet ground in the drizzling rain and animatedly explained that that was the way to prosperity and honor. He’d begin with poultry and piglets and end up with horses and real estate. That was Bregentved’s agenda, and the crucial thing was just to get some money put aside to begin with.

The women also went to work when the potatoes had to be dug up from the soil. It was the first time Tora took part in this kind of thing, and Marinus would gladly have spared her. But that just wouldn’t do. People would think that she considered herself too good to work, and she’d be the talk of the town. Tora and the oldest of the children dug up potatoes at Anders Toft’s. All of them, men, women, and children, came home together sopping wet and exhausted when it got too dark to work. Then they ate a piece of bread and a bit of sausage. The women were too worn out to cook.

Old Dorre usually came wobbling in to Tora’s apartment when the workday was over. She was gaunt like an old bird and half-blind from age. "It’s nice you people can find something to do," she said. "As soon as you can’t do that anymore, you’re not long for this world. Are the potatoes going to be good this year?" Tora said the potatoes had been damaged by the drought and there weren’t many of them. "They say there was a time
when they didn’t know about potatoes,” Dorre said. “How did poor folks get food back then? It’s potatoes that’s put food on the table for us as long as I can remember. Our Lord has arranged it in his wisdom in such a way that the potato can grow where no other vegetable can thrive.”

Now and then Marinus had taken a basket of potatoes home from the field, and Dorre and her son were invited to eat. The old woman chatted without stop while she ate the steaming hot potatoes from the bowl; her son sat sluggishly stuffing himself, but Dorre kept an eye on him so he’d show proper manners. “Can you blow your nose, little Nikolaj,” she said. “He’s such a swine, the rascal, and he doesn’t want to do anything. It’s not easy to have children, you know that as well as I do, Tora. A body has her troubles giving them a decent upbringing.”

 Winter was approaching. There was no work on the farms, the day laborers spent their time at home, and it was hard for them to kill time. The small gardens were dug, the roofs and walls made tight and repaired for the cold, and the wood was chopped and the peat stacked. But soon there was nothing more to do at home, and the men ran into one another in one another’s houses every day.

Black Anders went hunting, and now and then he gave away a duck or a hare to the others. “Now where did you shoot that rabbit?” Lars Seldomglad asked. “It’s best if you don’t ask too much, because what you don’t know can’t hurt you,” Black Anders said with a grin. “A fella takes his lunch where he can find it. We don’t get anything for nothing in this earthly life.” Konrad had a couple of cod traps in the fjord, and they yielded a bit of codling and blenny. “They’re edible, aren’t they, the small fry,” Konrad said when he put a package of fish on one of the kitchen tables in the day laborer houses.

The days got shorter, and the nights were stormy. The wind tore at the straw roofs and rattled the doors and shutters. Karlsen held meetings in Martin Thomsen’s parlor, and once in a while one of the day laborers went there. They sat down modestly in the back of the parlor and listened to the missionary’s preaching. “Things are heating up,” Lars Seldomglad said. “We’ll all end
up in hell if that guy has his way.” “Oh, stop running to the meetings; I don’t respect them with all their preaching,” Tora said. She didn’t go to the meetings. But at night, when the wind howled around the house corners and tore at the trees and bushes, Boel-Erik’s wife, Inger, was restless in her bed. She got up and lit the lamp and sat down at the table with her hand under her cheek. “Now why are you up again?” her husband asked. “I don’t have the peace and quiet to sleep,” Inger said and didn’t turn her pale face toward him. “It’s terrible the way it’s blowing—I just hope it doesn’t rip the roof in pieces.” “You should keep away from the meetings,” Boel-Erik said. “You women- folk just get cracked in the head with all that nonsense.”

Marinus had gotten a little cash when he had to give up his farm; he’d managed to pay his grocery bill. But now there was no work, and he had to have credit again. He had a big family to feed: he had six children in the house and in addition those who were out working. Marinus humbly appeared in Skifter’s shop and asked to talk to him. He went into the office and Meta took care of the shop for the time being. “Yeah, it’s an awkward business, little Marinus,” Skifter said. “You know, before, a fella could entrust the merchandise to you, but now this is something else. Before you had property, but now you’ve got to live by your labor. It’s not going to be any big amount of credit that I can give you. Because how are you going to manage to pay it.” “I’ll surely get work again, and I’m not afraid of work.” “No, but even if you get work, I mean, I’ll be left standing without any security,” Skifter said and shook his head anxiously. “I know you’re a decent man, but what you can’t pay you can’t pay, and I’m obliged to look carefully where I’m going. I have to fulfill my own obligations.”

The grocer felt sorry for Marinus, who had many to feed and was a hard-working man. “But you know there is a way out for you,” he said. You do have the right to go to the assistance fund. If there’s anyone who deserves support, it’s got to be you.” “Assistance fund,” Marinus said and stared at him. “You want to send me and my family to the assistance fund. No, that will never happen.” Skifter tried to explain to him that there was no
shame in accepting money from the assistance fund. But Marinus was adamant. “There’s never been anyone in my family who accepted poor-law assistance,” he said. “And you people can call it assistance fund as much as you want, it still comes from the township treasury—I know that. No one’s going to shout pauper after me. I wouldn’t have expected that from you, grocer—that I’d hear that kind of nonsense from you. I’d rather starve than accept assistance from the township.”

Marinus was angry in earnest, and it didn’t get better when Tora heard it. “I’ll tell you this, Marinus,” she burst out indignantly. “I don’t want you asking anybody for help. It’d be better for us to live the whole winter on potatoes and beets than to have that disgrace hanging over us.” “I mean I said to Skifter: I’d never have expected that from you, grocer,” Marinus replied. “I’m pretty sure he understood he can’t give us that kind of stuff. Just let him keep his goods and his wares. There’s nobody in our family who’s accepted money from the township treasury.”

Every morning when they got up in the day laborer houses, they looked up at the sky to see whether there was a sign of snowy weather. Snow meant work—the roads had to be cleared and made passable. If the sky was overcast in the evening, Lars Seldomglad would say to his wife: “I can’t tell if there’s a change in the weather. The wind has also shifted. A fella will also soon need to get some exercise for his body.” But no snow came. Later in December there was frost, and the fjord froze over. As soon as the ice could support them, the day laborers went out on the ice with eel forks and caught eel for food. The children went along and followed the chase. It meant good rich food to go with the dry diet. Eel was a fish worth sinking your teeth into when you didn’t have pork. The men seemed like small points on the frozen-over fjord broads. Now and then they shouted to one another and their voices were heard far off across the white, tranquil fjord.

From the hills you looked across the land which lay black and forbidding in the frost with low-lying farms and poor tumble-down smallholdings. On the horizon you saw the destitute, black heath and inland the churches seemed like pieces of
chalk. The sky was low and heavy clouds sailed over your head. When Marinus came from the fjord, he looked up toward his old farm and thought about his stable. The six cows that had been his were standing there chewing their cud. The two little long-haired horses were standing there feeling cosy and warm. His heart was filled with a strange yearning, and for a moment it was as if his faithful, patient animals meant more to him than his wife and children. He’d been a poor man all his days, but he’d owned a stable full of secure and munching animals. Marinus had lost that.

One night Marinus was out with Boel-Erik, Lars Seldom-glad, Black Anders, and Jens Horse to spear eel by torchlight. They chopped holes in the ice and lit bonfires and stood by the fire with the darkness like a surrounding wall. The catch was good, and they were in good spirits. Black Anders took a schnapps bottle from his pocket and called to the others: “Come here, boys, and get yourselves a drink.” They sat down on the sacks they’d brought along, and took turns drinking out of the bottle. The starry sky twinkled above them. “I sold two hares yesterday,” Black Anders said. “If we can’t make a living by our work, we can certainly obtain food ourselves. I have my gun and my eel spear—nobody can take them away from me.” The shadows from the bonfire danced across Black Anders’ face. He resembled an Indian who sat by the campfire and drank firewater with his tribe.

Out over the fjord broads a sea bird screamed. It sounded oddly ominous in the dark. “There was a fisherman who drowned when I was a boy,” Black Anders said and instinctively muffled his voice. “They say he screamed like an animal when he went down. The others couldn’t save him—the current was too strong.” He didn’t say any more, but the others understood that he believed it was a ghost that was screaming. “Many strange things happen,” Jens Horse said. And seized by the mystical atmosphere here in the midst of the fjord’s ice by the blazing bonfire, he began to tell about a man who moved boundary markers whom he’d once heard as a young farmhand when he was serving on a farm inland. “He screamed . . . yeah, you
people can’t imagine how he screamed. I ran till the sweat poured down me, back then when I got home.”

And now they all knew of some story to tell, about hanged men who hadn’t found peace in the shelter of the grave, about murdered children who’d lain and cried in the dark nights. The darkness surrounding them became denser as it were, but they sat cozily and securely in the glow of the fire. Marinus told how there’d been a witch in the parish back when he was a boy. She’d put a spell on several people, whose names he remembered, and she couldn’t lose her life until they put a brazier with fire under her bed. And one evening a big black dog had sat on her grave in the cemetery. It was presumably the evil one himself who’d fetched her soul.

“Of course a fella hardly knows what he should believe about witches and trolls,” Lars Seldomglad said. “The old people claimed, you know, that they had tremendous power. And if a fella stands on Midsummer’s Eve by Lystrup church with sod over his head, he can see the witches flying to the party with the devil. I had an old uncle who tried it and he became a ninny afterward. No, if there’s anything to it, it’s probably smartest for us to keep away from it.”

The others had to agree with him: we humans don’t know much about what moves in the dark. “Once I saw an omen,” Black Anders said. “It was one night I was out hunting. I saw a farm burning, but which one it was, you people won’t get me to mention. Flames were rising from the dwelling house. Surely another fire will take place where someone burns inside. Surely that’s going to be true.”

There was a little pause and then Jens Horse said: “But the stuff these missionaries run around with, I’m really not going to believe that.” “No, I wouldn’t trust them an inch,” Lars Seldomglad said. “They chatter away for their own food bag. They get their good wage and payment from the Mission. They’re clever at taking in money by begging, those fellows.” “But they can butter up the womenfolk,” Boel-Erik said. “I think they’ll soon drive Inger out of her senses.”

The bottle went around once again and was empty. They sat
for a while yet and felt the warmth while the fire blazed merrily on the ice. "Now folks on land are lying and sleeping in their beds," Lars Seldomglad said. "It's not always easy to get food for a meal. No, a fella should've been a pastor or a missionary—then he'd have gotten his the sure way and could preach to the rest of us."

The bonfires were burning down, and they stood for a bit by the eel holes. Then they agreed to go home. They walked across the ice, which sang under their feet, and went onto the bare, frozen ground. They walked close together in the dark. They reached the village and stopped for a moment to talk, each with his spear and sack over his shoulder, as if they were having a hard time separating. They were still a little hot from the schnapps.

"Yeah, yeah, Marinus," Lars Seldomglad said. "So you've been out scraping a living together with the rest of us." "I've done that before today," Marinus said. "All the same, we stick together," Lars Seldomglad said. "The others have theirs, and we surely have ours. You've got a capable wife—I'll say that for you."

There was a meaning in the words which Marinus grasped. He'd been weighed and approved. He went into his living room and quietly took his clothes off. The sound of people breathing in their sleep could be heard from every corner. His wife and offspring were lying there sleeping their good, sound sleep, and he'd been out to get food for them in the black night. His heart was full of warmth, as if he were still standing and warming himself up in the glow of a bonfire.
It was tough getting money for the house rent, and Marinus had to ask for an extension from the owner, a farmer who lived outside of town. The man was easy to get along with, he was glad to give Marinus an extension, and he could also get a chance to do work on the farm for money, even though the day-wage the man was offering was very low. But they had a roof over their heads, and they got food for the many mouths.

“What can a body be lacking when she has bread and potatoes and a bit of fish once in a while,” Tora said. “You don’t need coffee, it’s a bad habit, and you can just as well drink burned rye. It’s not healthy to stuff yourself too much.”

And Tora told about a farm she’d served at back when she was young. There were three old guys who owned the farm. One drank and was never sober. Most of the time he lay in bed with the schnapps bottle. The second one smoked tobacco from morning till evening, and his pipe was never out of his mouth. And the third one stuffed himself—it was totally dreadful. Tora told about all the rich foods he could gobble down, and the children stared at her hungrily. But it ended disastrously: finally his legs couldn’t carry him, and he lay in bed and kept stuffing himself. He was such a roly-poly you couldn’t imagine it at all. When he was to have new clothes sewn, two men had to measure him because one couldn’t reach around him. And when he died, they had to tear down a piece of the wall to get the coffin out, and they almost couldn’t manage to haul him to the grave.

“But who took care of the farm?” Anton asked.

“Who took care of the farm,” Tora repeated. “Naturally the rest of us did. They had money enough and could keep as many servants as was needed. We were just happy they didn’t interfere with anything. But I think he, the one who stuffed himself, could eat just as much as all of us here put together.”

Tora looked down the length of the white-scoured table. There sat her children, white-haired and healthy in body and
soul. It was her business to maintain their health, and bring them up, and that took some doing when she didn’t have any money to buy anything with. She lay awake many hours at night pondering what to give them to eat. There were beets. They didn’t cost anything. But if you ate too many beets, you got a hanging belly like a cow. That wasn’t food for humans.

Line Seldomglad came to visit a couple of times a day, but she wouldn’t drink coffee made from roasted rye. “Why don’t you people go to the assistance fund?” she said. “It must be because you can’t forget, after all, that you had your own farm.” “We’ll manage as long as we can,” Tora said. “I’ve also heard that rye coffee is much healthier.” “Yeah, you do talk nonsense,” Line grumbled. “But you better watch out that the children get enough to eat. And when we day laborer folks can’t get work, surely we must have a right to look for assistance. And it’s certainly not poor-law assistance we get.” Line was getting offended by Tora’s considering herself better than other people. Boel-Erik, Povl Bøgh, and Jens Horse took the assistance they could get. Black Anders didn’t, but he engaged in poaching, and one fine day he’d surely be caught and locked up.

Tora chatted away and tried to mollify her. “Some day it’ll probably also come to that, dear Line,” she said. “It’s not because of arrogance, but I can’t stand begging the farmers for anything. It’s the bigwigs that sit in the parish council and the assistance fund, and the rest of us don’t have any say.”

One day teacher Ulriksen came. Marinus was sitting in the living room reading an old almanac he’d found in the attic. The moment he saw the teacher, he thought that now one of his children had given grounds for complaint. Ulriksen was smartly dressed. He had a big, wide tie tied in a dapper bow knot beneath his turned-down collar, and the vest was of velvet with little flower bouquets. “How do you do, Marinus,” he said. “I have to have a word with you and your wife. You people aren’t given to going to church, but perhaps you’ve been converted by the missionary from Færgeby.” Marinus assured him that they still stuck to what they had learned as children, and Tora came in and greeted the teacher.
“Well,” Ulriksen said and leaned back in the armchair with his fingers in his armhole. “It’s not religion I came to chat about. It’s about Søren.”

“Oh dear me, there’s nothing wrong with him is there?” Marinus asked. “I mean I thought the lad was behaving himself the way he should. He’s so quiet by nature.”

“Good God, Marinus Jensen, why are you making a fuss?” Ulriksen said. “You have the right to vote and live in a free country, and your word counts as much as that of the lord of the manor who drives in a carriage and four. Why do you get a shock as if you’re going to ride the wooden horse merely because a village deacon utters a word to you? Discard those little-man ways, man!”

“All right, all right,” Marinus stammered. “I was just scared the boy had done something wrong. I mean, a fella would prefer his kids to behave themselves.”

“He didn’t do anything wrong—just the opposite. You have nice and quick-witted children, Marinus Jensen,” Ulriksen said. “Now to be sure I think it’s Tora the children have their abilities from, but let’s not talk about that. Søren’s got a head for books, and soon I won’t be able to teach him anything more in school. He laps it up like a sucking calf, and I’ve talked to Pastor Gamst about him. We’re agreed that he should stay in school.”

“But how in the world would that be able to happen?” Marinus said, overwhelmed. “We don’t have the money to spend on his education. No, if he could learn a trade, we’d be happy to.”

“We’ll surely find the money,” Ulriksen said. “The question is whether you people can afford to have him at home for at least another half-year. In that case Pastor Gamst and I want to give him the lessons required for him to go to secondary school.”

“To secondary school!” Marinus repeated and was on the verge of believing he was dreaming. His son was to go to a school that taught Latin and be a man with a university education. It was a great moment.

“Now make sure you don’t turn the lad’s head,” Ulriksen said. “He’s not to get the impression that there’s something great about him. Because there isn’t either—he’s just a quick
learner. But a fella has to watch out for the folks who go to university. They have to learn to understand that they’re not to be masters, but servants. And never let him forget where he comes from.”

Marinus didn’t get to read his old almanac any more. Søren was going to be a man with a university education. “What do you say about that, Tora?” he said. “We didn’t think about that back then when you brought him into the world. But, I mean, a fella has seen it happen before that a poor boy became a clergyman or deacon. We also saw, didn’t we, a school teacher as minister to the king. A fella can never know how far Søren can go.” “It hardly seems totally right to me to make distinctions between our children,” Tora said. “It seems to me the others can be just as good as Søren.”

Marinus didn’t understand it. In adversity Tora was all smiles and fun, but when good fortune finally knocked on the door, she got up on her hind legs like an unruly horse. Maybe she was afraid the boy would slip away from them. “I believe the boy will never look down at his parents,” he said cautiously. “How on earth would he ever manage to do that,” Tora said dismissively. “There’s no one who can look down on us if we don’t permit them to. We’re as good as other folks on earth in every way.”

Marinus shouldn’t have said any more, because when Tora was in that mood, she was a tough customer. It occurred to him that he’d promised to repair a wash tub for her, and he stole out to the mudroom. The children came home from school. And now Line Seldomglad and Inger came and had to know what the teacher had been there for. “Oh, it was just Søren he was talking about,” Tora said. “He thinks Søren should go on in school.” “Oh, whatever are you saying,” Line burst out and clapped her hands. “If Ulriksen wants him to be in school, then he’s also the man to come up with the money.” “Then maybe he’ll become a clergyman,” Inger said. “It may be that some day you’ll get to see him in the pulpit here in the church.” “Oh fiddlesticks,” Tora said. “It’s not at all certain Ulriksen thinks he should go that far.”
But Line Seldomglad had great confidence in Ulriksen. He was a man you could trust in every way. “He’s given our children a good education, and he’s respected by both clergymen and bishops,” Line said. “Our Konrad always praised him back when he was a boy. And he doesn’t make any distinctions. Whether they’re a farmer’s children or day laborer kids, it’s all the same to him.” And Line began to tell about how gifted Konrad had been as a boy. Her black, wrinkled face gleamed with warm maternal joy. “I won’t say more than I know,” she said and roguishly winked with one eye. “But I think the girls want to be nice to him. If he’s smart, he’ll stick to the grocer’s Meta. She’s got money, and whoever gets her, will become a well-to-do man. I can talk openly to you people—you don’t go running around with gossip.”

Christmas drew near. Slaughtering and baking took place on the farms, and the farmers’ wives were in Færgeby to shop. Among the day laborers no great preparations were made. Here in the middle of winter money was tight, and there was much to spend it on. But the evening before Christmas eve Marinus had visitors. It was Mads Lund’s wife and sister-in-law, who drove there and stopped in front of their door. A farm hand helped them take a heavy basket from the wagon and hauled it into the living room.

“Tora, Tora, you have to come, there are important visitors here!” Marinus shouted, and Tora hurried into the living room to see what was going on. The two women greeted her with many nods and little smiles. Their faces were cheerful and festive. You could see they were really out to do well.

“Hello, Tora,” the one said. “We’ve come like this . . .”
“. . . turning up at your door and hardly even knocking on it,” the other continued. “But we’ve been slaughtering, and so we thought . . . .”
“. . . that after all you folks have many children and no meat dishes to choose from,” the first one interrupted. “We’ve taken some things along, and truly you’re welcome to them.”

They began to unpack the contents of the basket, but now Tora came to. She was standing with her hands at her side, and
her dark eyebrows were angrily wrinkled. Marinus realized that a storm and tempest were now imminent.

"You're not going to unpack your things for us," Tora said. "We didn't send for anything, and we don't want anything."

"What are you saying, you don't want . . ."

". . . you don't want anything? the women shrilled as a chorus.

"No, we're not going to take any charity from people a body barely knows," Tora said. "We've never begged anyone for alms. We'll manage with the little we have."

"But now at Christmastime surely one has to . . ." one of the women said short of breath, and the other immediately took the word out of her mouth, " . . . now at Christmastime we have to be helpful to one another. We have to think of those who don't have so much."

"It'd be better if you people thought about that the rest of the year," Tora said. "Otherwise you farmers boggle at paying a day-wage so ordinary people can exist. If you wished us well, you'd surely pay us a wage so we could exist too. But I'd rather starve at Christmas than owe anything."

The women exchanged indignant and offended looks. Then with hands trembling they packed up the gifts in the basket again. Marinus noticed there was pork and sugar and coffee, and he thought to himself that now Tora was more arrogant than was seemly. If you were poor, you could surely accept a friendly hand from good neighbors. Back then when he himself had land, he hadn't been afraid of giving poor folks theirs. The basket was packed and the farm hand, who'd been standing by the horses, was called in and hauled it out. The two sisters left the living room strutting without saying goodbye.

"But Tora, little Tora, why are you making a fuss?" Marinus said. "They came with good intentions and then you insult them crudely."

"Oh, I don't respect them," Tora said, annoyed. "Why don't they pay you a decent wage for your labor, these big rich people. I'd rather choke than take their food in my mouth. But no doubt it's crazy because now you're probably not going to get any
more work with Mads Lund. Probably there's nothing for us to do but go to a city. A body can get work there, and I'm not afraid of going around and washing for folks if it has to be. I want to be left in peace in my own living room, I want to live by my own labor and not on donations."

A half-hour later Line Seldomglad came rushing over. "But you must be totally nuts, Tora," she said. "You throw people out the door when they drive over with Christmas provisions for you." "It depends on who it is," Tora said. "I don't like those stuck-up women. Back then when Marinus asked the husband for help, there was no help to be found. All right, that'll be fine now too." "They brought me what you were supposed to have gotten," Line said. "And I truly didn't say no. I curtseyed and bobbed to them as if they were two wives of the lord of the manor. So what, I don't care where it comes from as long as it comes. I'll accept their gifts and laugh at them when they're out the door. Now I'll share with you what I got."

But Tora stuck to her guns. She said no—she wasn't going to share in the charitable donations. "You're a nincompoop," Line said. "Do you people want to sit there and eat dry bread and porridge for Christmas?" That's precisely what Tora wanted. But it didn't stay that way. The next morning she met the teacher when she was at the baker for rye bread.

"A fella hears practically nothing but gossip about you, Tora," Ulriksen said. "You said no to meat from Mads Lund." That's right, Tora had to admit it was true. "Hmm," Ulriksen muttered. "You've got guts, Tora. Teach the children to be just as straight-backed. Not until you little people learn to stiffen up will you make anything of yourselves. But are you also going to say no to a Christmas present from me?" "I respect you, Ulriksen," Tora said, embarrassed. "You wish us well and don't look down on us." Ulriksen took out his wallet and handed Tora ten crowns. She stared at the bill. They hadn't had that much money in the house in a long, long time. "Now take it, Tora, and merry Christmas," Ulriksen said gently. "Teach the children to stiffen their backs. That's what'll help—if anything can help."

Tora rushed to the grocer and shopped. It was late to be
baking, but surely something could still be managed. Marinus went to church alone with the children—Tora had no time. She stood, flushed red, over the stove and made Christmas dinner and suddenly thought of old Dorre and Nikolaj. She went over to their side of the house and invited them to eat. “Thank you ever so much,” Dorre said. “A body gets so befuddled she can’t cope with anything any more. I don’t have the strength to go to church either. But really I sure have heard enough sermons in my day. Nikolaj will probably take his violin along.”

They had porridge and bacon omelet, and afterwards it came out that Tora had gotten some time to bake sweet biscuits and peppermints. Marinus had fetched a spruce from the hedge behind the house, and now it was decorated with flags and colored lights. The children looked at it in amazement. But Anton wanted to know why people decorated a tree with lights at Christmas and put it in the living room.

“It’s because Our Lord was born to us at Christmas,” said Marinus, who was sitting with the two littlest ones, Sofie and Laurids, on his lap. “We didn’t practice it when I was a boy, but it’s a fine custom. We should be happy, just like the tree is beaming now, because a merciful savior was born to us. Take him with you, dear children, wherever you go in the world.”

Marinus had gotten into a solemn mood and suggested that they sing a Christmas hymn. The clear children’s voices sang “A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem,” and old Dorre hummed in her high old woman’s voice. She couldn’t really remember the words, but in any case she still recalled the melody. Afterward they drank coffee. “It sure tastes better than the slush that can be brewed from rye,” Marinus said and laughed. “A fella can notice how a cup of coffee like this feels good all the way up in your head. Folks who’ve been to university also often become completely addicted to drinking coffee. That’s what a deacon once told me. You have to be sure to drink coffee in moderation, Søren, when you have to learn Latin some day.”

Nikolaj took his violin out of its case. His little rat face was crafty, and he clasped the violin with his thin monkey paws. He began to play. It sounded like a cat whining, like an animal wail-
ing in the pains of childbirth. It howled like the wind over a grave at night; you sensed all the night’s horror in the little idiot’s playing. And nevertheless it was as if a poor, little gentle tune was on the verge of fighting its way out. Nikolaj’s eyes were widely dilated and he breathed heavily from the exertion. And innermost in the dark discordant noise that rose from his violin you sensed the chirping of a bird or the murmuring of a spring. But the tune wouldn’t quite come forward—it was choked by a couple of cat’s meows, and Nikolaj put the violin down with a grin.

“He’s clever at playing, Nikolaj is,” Dorre said and nodded with her wrinkled old face. “He’s clever at playing, but he’s no good at doing anything, and I can’t cope with it any more.”

Dorre was really going senile, and she believed that the house she now lived in was the same one she’d had in her young days.

“I can’t cope with taking care of the farm,” she said. “A body gets old and can’t get up in the morning and milk. After all, a body will soon be laid in her grave all right. I’ll be obliged to sell the farm, but you folks are welcome to keep living here—I’ll arrange that with the new man.”

“Thank you, old Dorre,” Tora said gently.

“Once in a while a body wakes up at night and I think I’m lying in my grave,” and her voice was rasping, as if it really came from the depths of the grave. “That’s probably the way it is: a body lies in the dark and wakes up once in a while and thinks about when she was young. If I could just take Nikolaj along, because how will things go with him if I can’t take care of him.”

“Then I’ll get married,” Nikolaj said and laughed long and in an idiotic way. “There are many girls who’d like to have me—they themselves say it, too.”

“Oh dear Jesus,” Dorre sighed. “May dear Jesus preserve you, you poor miserable creature.” And now Dorre told how it had happened that Nikolaj had become the way he was. Back then when Dorre was pregnant with him, a neighbor with the evil eye put a spell on her. He was a man no farmer wanted to have
in his stable. If he slipped in all the same, there’d definitely be sickness among the cattle. He couldn’t stand Dorre, and one day he’d come into the living room and set his eyes on her. It was back then when she was pregnant with Nikolaj. “I immediately went to the smart woman in Vindblæs,” Dorre said. “But it was too late. He’d put a spell on the child in my body. And now he’s burning in hell’s flames for all the evil he committed.”

The children were tired, and Tora put the youngest ones to bed. Anton and Søren had their bed in the other room on the bench that could be used for sleeping. They’d gotten a couple of candle ends from the Christmas tree and Tora gave them permission to light them on the window sill. They could lie and watch the clear little flame that cast its glow on the windowpane’s jungle of ice crystals.

“What enjoyment did the sorcerer get out of putting a spell on Nikolaj?” Anton asked softly. “I don’t know,” Søren said. “He was probably furious with her.” “But then what about the cattle?” Anton asked. “They hadn’t done anything to him.” “I don’t know about that,” Søren replied. “But now he’s burning in hell’s fire.” And the boys stared at the frostwork on the windowpane and thought the odd figures reminded them of devils and ghosts and witches.
The frost kept biting. The Pious gathered at Christmas for meetings, now at the grocer’s and now at Martin Thomsen’s. But there was no great progress for the good cause. Boel-Erik’s Inger was practically the only one who’d been awakened, and there was a ways yet before she was saved, as far as Karlsen could judge. But one day he got a letter from grocer Skifter asking whether he’d visit the grocer before he went to the meeting in Alslev. There was a matter Skifter wanted to talk to him about.

The missionary lived in a little backyard apartment in Færgeby with his wife and their two children Samuel and Johanne. Next door a butcher had his slaughterhouse and there was an acrid smell of raw meat and blood in their living room. Karlsen read the letter and said to his wife:

“I’ll be obliged to go to Alslev a bit earlier. Skifter’s a brother in the Lord, and he’s asking me for advice and aid. He has that daughter Meta—I’m sure she causes him lots of worries.”

Mrs. Karlsen was settling her household accounts and answered absentmindedly:

“You’ll surely be obliged to do that. We used two pounds of coffee this week. It’s annoying that the coffee always has to be so strong. We truly can’t afford it, Karlsen. And Samuel has to have new boots.”

The missionary’s face turned cross and, tired, he stroked his forehead.

“Kristine, Kristine, if you’d just learn to lay your earthly cares on the Lord,” he said. “Can you remember, when we were at our wits’ end about a new coat for Johanne. Back then the cheesemonger Olsen’s wife came and gave us a gift of a superb cloak her own daughter had outgrown. But it’s as if you don’t want to learn any lesson from the signs you get.”

“Yes I do,” Mrs. Karlsen said submissively. “But it surely
seems to me we could hold back on the coffee and it costs a lot to bake now. Surely we could also hold the two little bible meetings here at home without their having to have coffee each time."

Weary, Karlsen sighed. When Kristine went into finances, she was full of complaints. But apart from that, she was, after all, a believing, pious person, and naturally it was hard with finances. Of course, you didn’t have a clergyman’s stipend, and it cost money to have children. Now where were you supposed to get the money for Samuel’s boots?

Karlsen put the thoughts out of mind and sat down to write to grocer Skifter. And three days later he bicycled to Alslev to talk with the grocer and afterward to hold a little meeting of the Pious in Martin Thomsen’s parlor. Meta had just finished setting the table when the missionary rode up in front of the general store on his bicycle. He unfastened the oilcloth bags on the luggage carrier—those were the tracts that were to be sold after the meeting.

"Father, Karlsen’s here," Meta shouted, and Skifter went out to receive the guest. He was in shirt-sleeves and his goat-face looked unusually worried.

"I was almost quite afraid something had prevented you from coming," he said. “But thanks for coming."

"I got a flat tire and had to patch it," Karlsen said. “I’ve noticed that when I ride out in the Lord’s service, it often happens that I get a flat tire. A fella can of course have his own thoughts about that when it happens too often. This time it looked as though somebody had dropped a bottle on the road and neglected to pick up the pieces. But why did he drop the bottle precisely now in front of my wheel? A fella can surely have his own thoughts about it."

They walked through the shop where buckets and kitchen utensils swung under the ceiling. Above the door into the grocer’s office hung a sign with the inscription: No cursing or swearing please. Karlsen made a comment about the fact that it surely hadn’t been there before, and Skifter explained that it had been put up very recently.

"I won’t have people standing and cursing and scoffing in
the shop,” he said. “I don’t know what makes them do it, but for me it looks as though evil in the world is gaining greater power every day.”

In the living room Karlsen unfastened the safety pins from his coat tails and sank down on the green chaise longue with a satisfied little sigh. The living room was as usual, cozy and familiar. Above the door hung embroidered scriptural passages, on the walls were pictures of the Lord’s great warriors in the Inner Mission, and on the desk stood a photograph of himself. The spicy smell from the shop mixed sweetly with the roasting odor from the kitchen. Karlsen sniffed and guessed roast duck.

“I better talk about it immediately,” Skifter said. “It’s Meta who’s causing me worry. See, for many years, you know, she’s been just as a child should be, good-natured and strong in her belief in her savior. But in the past half-year it’s as if the tempter has gotten hold of her. In the past months I haven’t even been able to get her to the meetings, and now she’s taken it into her head that she wants have a job in the city.”

“I mean, there are also good, believing people in the cities,” Karlsen said.

“I’d never deny that,” Skifter replied. “But of course I’m a widower and I think it’s Meta’s duty to stay at home where I need her. And I’m afraid that if she goes to the city, it’s not for goodness’s sake. The spirit of arrogance and obstinacy has gotten into her. And I’ve always tried to raise her in the good faith. I had hoped she’d surely find the good way.”

“Meta’s about twenty years old,” Karlsen said, cogitating. “That’s the age at which the tempter sets his traps—we know that of course from our own youth. We must never forget one thing: most of us have to go through the desert of doubt before we come to the palm grove of faith. Maybe that’s the way things are with your daughter Meta.”

“I was wondering whether you couldn’t have a word with her,” Skifter said. “After we’ve eaten, I’ll go into the office and leave you alone with her. Perhaps you could find the words that might bear fruit.”

Meta came into the living room. It was indeed roast duck,
Karlsen confirmed with a quick look. He had indeed really become hungry. Skifter said grace while Meta stood behind them with downcast eyes.

"That was really a good fat duck," the missionary said. "Are those your own trimmings?"

"Yes they are," the grocer said in the meek tone he always had. It sounded as if he were repenting of dark sins and aberrations.

After much urging Karlsen took another piece, and Meta brought apple cake. She had plump, firm arms, and the missionary's eye took on a warm radiance. Alas, if such a beautiful young woman should go the way of perdition and be swallowed up by the world. No, she ought to sparkle like a rose in the Lord's garden.

"Won't you say after-dinner grace?" Skifter asked, and Karlsen prayed:

For these gifts we give thanks and praise,  
proclaiming your glory always.  
Jesus grants strength to turn away  
from sin and lust both night and day.

"It seems to me I've scarcely ever heard that one before," Skifter said.

"That's certainly likely," the missionary said. "It's a little grace I did myself. The friends in Færgeby like it no end, and it's used in many believing homes. If you're fond of it, with all my heart I'll be happy to write it down for you."

At that moment Meta came in, and Skifter got up with a remark to the effect that he definitely had to go out and tidy up a bit in the shop.

"Yes, thank you for the meal, Meta," Karlsen said after the door had closed behind her father. "You're truly a clever girl in the kitchen. But you know what's written about Martha and Mary: one thing is needful. And I'd be happier to see you at the meeting this evening than for your meal. Little Meta, don't you think you could give your heart to Jesus?"
“Were you sent out to woo for him?” Meta shot back saucily. She herself was embarrassed by her own sauciness and, self-conscious, she stared down at the floor. But Karlsen gently and fatherly took her hand.

“Yes, little Meta, that’s what I am,” he said in a heartfelt way. “I come from the heavenly bridegroom to woo you, Meta, and ask whether you’ll be his bride now and in all eternity. He yearns for you with a love that outshines earthly love as the sun outshines a peat ember—Meta, give your heart to Jesus!”

Meta stood there rigid and mute, and Karlsen went over close to her and looked her in the eyes.

“You’re wearing a gold heart there on your breast,” he said and touched the medallion. “Look, you can put a man’s picture in the heart, but you can also put your savior’s. He descended to earth and died on his cross for you—is it asking too much for you to carry his picture in your heart? Meta, give your heart to Jesus so that some day you’ll be united with him in the glow of eternity’s rays of light.”

“No,” Meta said quickly and looked up—Karlsen tried again to get hold of her hand, but she held both hands behind her back. Karlsen looked at her for a moment somberly. “Think about your eternal salvation, Meta,” he said. “We’ve heard plenty about the eternal fire where there’s groaning and gnashing of teeth. If you don’t turn toward mercy and salvation, that’ll be the path you’ll come to walk. But perhaps lechery and sin have got a grip on you, Meta? Do you have impure thoughts in your mind?”

Meta didn’t answer. She tore loose from him and quickly went out into the kitchen. Karlsen angrily furrowed his brow. He was a bit short of breath and still noticed the warm girl scent that rose from Meta’s clothes. He went into the office where Skifter was waiting.

“Well, Skifter,” he said with a sigh. “We certainly can’t get around the fact that evil has got a grip on her. It would be wrong of me to conceal it from a brother in the Lord. I couldn’t get her to talk, and my message otherwise usually appeals especially well to women.”
“What would you advise me to do?” Skifter asked anxiously.

“We must pray for her,” Karlsen said. “All of us must inter­cede. We know of course what strength lies in prayer. And you must talk to her with fatherly authority and get her to understand that it’s her eternal redemption and salvation that are, after all, at stake . . . what do such a pair of boots cost?”

Karlsen had caught sight of about a dozen pairs of boots higgledy-piggledy in a corner of the room.

“Oh, those are a few I couldn’t manage to sell,” Skifter said. “They’re too old-fashioned for the young fellows. I don’t want to deal in footwear any more—I just lose money on it. But what am I going to do to prevent her from going to the city?”

“You know, you can’t straight out forbid her to go,” the mis­sionary said. “But you can make sure that she lives in a home with pious people . . . . It just occurred to me that Kristine dropped a hint to the effect that Samuel needed new boots. So what might the price be for such a pair?”

“If you need them, you’re welcome to take a pair,” Skifter said. “I’m not going to get a reasonable price for them anyway. You can see for yourself whether there’s a pair that fits your boy.”

Karlsen eagerly examined the pile. They were good boots, even though they were a little old-fashioned in style. He found a pair.

“But you must accept my thanks all the same,” he said. “I’m certain he can use these here. But now we have to hurry if we’re going to come in time for the meeting. You can be assured Kristine will be pleased when I come home with the boots for Samuel,” he added in high spirits.

From the window Meta saw the men walking up the road to Martin Thomsen’s farm. Quickly she finished washing up and sat down by the window to sew. But there was an odd unrest about her. She kept going out to the kitchen. Finally there was a cautious knock on the door. A fellow was standing outside. It was Lars Seldomglad’s Konrad. “Come on in,” Meta said.

“What did the missionary say?” Konrad asked. “Oh nothing but some nonsense,” Meta said. “I couldn’t possibly think less
of him. Do you want coffee, Konrad?” “No, I want a kiss,” the fellow said and took her around her waist. “Yeah, that’s what you probably want from all the girls,” Meta said moodily. “I don’t care about them,” Konrad said. There was a little pause, then Meta said:

“I’ll gladly give my heart to you.”

It sounded odd and artificial, and Meta turned blushing red over the fact that she could get herself to say such a thing that sounded as if it were from a book. It was good it was so dark in the kitchen that they couldn’t see each other. But Konrad cautiously and tenderly embraced her and drew her to himself, while he awkwardly fingered the little gold heart on her breast. Meta took him in her arms and pulled him along. “Let’s go to my room,” she said.

Meta had the coffee ready when Skifter and Karlsen came from the meeting. The missionary was a little hoarse, and there was an ecstatic gleam in his eyes.

“It was a beautiful little meeting,” he said. “I think I got a chance to speak to their souls . . . and tracts were sold for three crowns. But you should know, Meta, that all of us are going to intercede for you and keep knocking at the door to your heart until you let Jesus in.”

“Hmm.” Meta said indifferently.

“It will be a joyous day for the Lord’s friends in Alslev when you find the right path,” Karlsen said. “And now it’s surely the hour, dear friends . . .”

“There was just one more single little thing I wanted to consult with you about,” Skifter said hesitantly. “But you’re free to go to bed, little Meta.”

Meta took the cups out and said good night. Skifter sat for a bit and stared into the hanging lamp’s dimmed light, while the missionary waited for him to lighten his soul.

“I mean, we talked about it before,” Skifter said hesitantly. “But I can’t completely get rid of my scruples. Some time ago I read a piece in the Mission Tidings about the schnapps-devil. And in a way, of course, I’ve got the schnapps-devil living in my house. I can’t really stand selling liquor. After all, this way I
become accomplice to the works of the devil. Don’t you think I should stop that business?"

“Naturally there is much that speaks in favor, Skifter,” the missionary said thoughtfully. “A fella surely understands that as a child of God you’re not keen on that business. But there’s a lot that can be said for and against, and in any case you should think carefully before you make up your mind. Even if you don’t sell liquor, of course people can buy it at the inn.”

“Yes, of course I can’t ever prevent that,” the grocer conceded.

“There you are,” the missionary said. “Of course we both know how sin and fornication are rife wherever there’s an inn. What’s the point of taking the lesser temptation away from the weak souls if we let the big ones remain? If they can’t get schnapps at your store, they’ll just go to the inn, and the last is worse than the first, as it is written. No, that’s surely not the path we should take, and the rest of God’s children certainly also agree with me about that.”

“All the same, it gives me doubts and scruples,” Skifter said.

“If you don’t sell liquor, you have to assume that a new grocer will set up in business,” Karlsen said. And if he carries schnapps and beer, the world’s children will go to him. Now you’re a well-to-do man and can manage with less business, but we also have to look at what effect it will have. You can exhort, and you can refuse to sell beverages on credit. Even if you sell liquor, you can certainly combat the schnapps-devil. Yes indeed, I’m on the verge of thinking it’s better for a pious man to sell schnapps than for it to be handed over to a man who doesn’t feel any responsibility. And surely that’s the way all the brothers and sisters look at it.”

“Are you sure of that” Skifter asked.

“I’m sure,” the missionary nodded. “No one doubts that you’re a good and believing man in this matter, and we know that the day we get the inn closed down, you’ll stop selling strong stuff. And if there’s anyone who carps about it, meet them with head erect and a frank look and let them come forward with their accusation to the congregation. A fella should never
pay any heed to those who carp, because frankness is the salt, and wherewith shall it be salted if the salt have lost his savour?"

"You know I don’t make any profit on that trade either," Skifter said.

"No, of course, we all know that, all of us believers," Karlsen said. "What you take in on the sale of liquor, you pass on to the cause of the kingdom of God. That makes a difference. You hitch the schnapps devil to the plow that is to plow the Lord’s field. No, truly you needn’t have scruples."

Karlsen took out the safety pins and tucked up his coat tails. Then, humming softly, he wheeled out along the highway made bumpy by frost. Again he’d spent a day in the Lord’s work, and he had the new boots for Samuel on the handlebars. He looked forward to giving Kristine the package and letting her open it. Once again it had turned out that the Lord gives food to the poorest sparrow and does not forget the least of his servants.
There'd been an unusually hard frost for a month, and finally it began to snow. A howling snowstorm came for two days when the whole town was covered with drifts. It was only barely that people on the farms were able to fight their way out into the stables and give the cattle fodder. It was an expedition to reach the grocer for flour or kerosene, and when the snowstorm was over, the town lay there and was one big snowdrift. The snow reached up to the housetops, and in the clear tranquil air you could hear the merry sound of snow shovellers shovelling the snow aside and shouting to one another.

Now the snow had to be shoveled—an order came from the overseer of snow removal and the day laborers marched out. For a long time none of them had had regular work—only now and again a few days’ work on the farms. They became frisky as boys as they walked out through the drifts with the shovels on their shoulders to get cracking. “It’ll be good to get the lazy sweat out of your system,” Lars Seldomglad said. “I really don’t understand what’s written in the scriptures about work being a curse. It seems to me the worst thing is not doing anything. Then a fella begins to cogitate and gets totally stupid.” They worked in troops to clear the roads and dig through the worst drifts. It was agreeable work—they didn’t set about it any harder than would keep them warm.

Once in a while they rested and stood in clusters and chatted, while their breath rose white from their mouths and nostrils. “Now the worst is over,” Jens Horse said. “Now spring is coming, which always means work. I have a promise of work in a gravel pit as soon as the ground has thawed.” The others told about their prospects. Bregentved wanted to go out and deal in fish. “It’s business a fella can earn big money at,” he said. “It’s never happened that anybody became well-off by his labor.” The others nodded. Truer words were never spoken. Work provided only a living, and the trouble was there was too little work.
"A fella should get serious about moving to another district," Boel-Erik said. "There are places where the day-wage is twice as high. And the missionary is soon going to turn the wife into a fool."

After the long idleness, after the darkness of winter, work acted like an intoxication. They spoke loudly and laughed at everything and nothing. It was as if they'd drunk schnapps to excess. "This here really makes the blood circulate," Black Anders said. "There should be a snowstorm once a week all winter long—then it would be a good country to be in." Even old Povl Bøgh was in a good mood. "I say, it's good to do some work," he shouted. "In any case, that's what keeps the mechanism going. A fella sits in the winter by the tiled stove and rusts away."

All the idle people from the farms were out shoveling snow, and when two crews met, it might happen that they came to blows in the snow. They pelted one another with whole shovelfuls or packed the snowballs hard and let them whiz by their ears. Even the hands from the farms needed to get some exercise—the idleness sat deep in their bones. In the midst of all this Konrad quarreled with a fellow from the city who'd mentioned something about Meta. "You'll keep your mouth shut about her," Konrad said angrily. "I'll decide for myself what I say and don't say," the fellow replied. "You won't be the last fellow she opens the window for either." Konrad tore at him, and they tumbled about in the snow. A red stain spread in the whiteness. Konrad had bloodied the fellow's nose.

"He's hot-tempered, that Konrad is," Lars Seldomglad said and nudged Marinus in the side. "Don't mention it to anybody, but that's surely right: she does let him in. I'd like to see the grocer's face when he gets her in the family way. Uh huh, Konrad's always been clever at getting his way with the girls. He sure knows what he's doing, that guy."

It took time to get the roads cleaned up, and in the meantime Tora had taken it upon herself to look after Povl Bøgh's wife Louise. She was sick in bed and couldn't take care of herself. Tora went over to her in the morning and took care of keeping her clean and later took food over to her. Their only son William
was consumptive and at a sanatorium. Louise lay there aged and withered in bed, her skin was like wax, and the air was stuffy in the bedroom.

“I can neither live nor die,” Louise complained. “Now I’ve been laid up for three years, and I’ll surely never get out of my room in my lifetime. Every year I think, if you can just live till the spring, but when spring comes, I’m doing just as poorly. Be happy, Tora, that you’ve got your health.”

“You know, everybody has their problems,” Tora comforted her. “And misfortune can strike a body any day of the week. I’m far from strong—don’t believe it. I definitely won’t get to be very old.”

Tora was standing there bursting with health and zest for life and trying to look as though all sicknesses were gnawing at her inside. Everybody knew that sick people got into a bad mood if they encountered vigor that was too flourishing, and Tora tried to make herself weak. She began telling about odd feelings she had in her body, about arthritis and shivers, which tore and pulled at her limbs, about the many childbirths which had almost destroyed her. Oh, things were just crummy with Tora.

But the sick woman began to laugh. “Yeah, things are certainly awful for you,” she said. “You look as though you’re on the way to the pastor to commission your funeral sermon. But don’t mock sickness because you don’t know what it is. I have cancer, though they want to hide it from me, and I’ll never get up. But what plagues me isn’t death, it’s life. None of the rest of you can understand that.”

Louise was silent and stared ahead, and Tora felt uncomfortable. “What do you mean by that, Louise?” she asked. “I mean it’s likely that death is dark,” the sick woman said. “We have to go through that, and nobody escapes it. But life—isn’t that worse? Isn’t good, which we talk about, just something we imagine?”

Cilius was out shoveling snow, but he’d taken precautions and put a bottle of schnapps in his pocket to withstand the cold. His red face blazed like a fire, and he put the bottle to his mouth when he took a rest. “Hey, boys!” Cilius shouted. “Wanna have
a sip—you’re welcome to it.” Black Anders took a decent slug from the bottle. “In half a year I’ll be a day laborer like the rest of you,” Cilius proclaimed. “I’ve done what I could to stay on the farm. Now I’ll sell my last cow, and then they can take the farm and the old hag. Cilius is going on the road where he came from.”

And now the rumor that had made the rounds at the inn and the grocer’s counter was confirmed—Cilius had indeed sold the last of his livestock and his stable was almost empty. The others stared at him, but in their heart of hearts they admired him. He was a brave man, Cilius, who had no respect for law or the authorities. “That’ll never work out, Cilius,” Povl Bøgh said reflectively. “They’ll arrest you because you sold your livestock from the farm.” “They’re not going to arrest anybody,” Cilius said arrogantly. “I didn’t have any fodder for the cattle, and are the wretched animals supposed to die of starvation? I’m man enough to answer for what I’ve done. They’ll never arrest me. I beat a man till he was a cripple, and I can do it all over again.”

Cilius proudly looked round about, and now he had an idea. Cilius would hold a party, a New Year’s party, and the day laborers would join in. “You’ll come and visit me,” Cilius said. “You’ll get as much pork as you can stuff yourselves with. I’ll slaughter my last pig. You’ll also get schnapps—I don’t do things by halves. After all, I’m still a farmer and I can invite folks to a party; come one and all and bring the womenfolk along.” The others hesitated a bit—they didn’t know whether the invitation was meant seriously. Finally Lars Seldomglad said: “Thanks, I don’t mind if I do, Cilius, I’m not one of those who say no.” And Cilius was serious after all, because he insisted that they come one and all, and the day and hour were set.

On the way home Marinus was a little uneasy, and he asked Lars Seldomglad, who was tramping through the snow next to him: “What do you think of Cilius’s invitation—don’t you think we can get into trouble?” “What else can we do,” Lars Seldomglad said. “What business is it of ours how Cilius carries on with his stuff. He’s his own man, and he’s invited folks to a party, and nobody can do anything to us for it. We don’t have any duty
to look for where he gets his meat from.” “But surely he’s got scarcely any right to slaughter a pig,” Marinus said. “A fella can have trouble enough watching out what he himself has a right to do,” Lars grinned. “I don’t butt into other people’s affairs. If Black Anders brings a hare, I don’t have any duty to know whose field it was shot on. I eat it with a good appetite. You better make sure you smarten up, little Marinus. Stolen food also fills up an empty stomach—you better believe it.”

They didn’t all show up at Cilius’s party. Povl Bøgh wanted to stay with his sick wife, and Jens Horse sat up with a cow on one of the farms. Of the women it was only Line Seldomglad who accepted the invitation. Inger declined, and Tora wasn’t at ease about leaving the children. The little ones could become frightened or come to grief with candles and fires. Marinus, Boel-Erik, Black Anders, and Lars Seldomglad and wife marched across the white fields in a body. Cilius welcomed them in the entrance-hall in a festive mood and elegantly shaved and led them in. All of them greeted the old man, who was lying with his wax-yellow hands folded on the striped eiderdown cover.

“How are things, Old-Jep,” Marinus asked. The old man blinked one eye and moved his eyes slantwise: “Oh, sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” he whispered strenuously. “That means he’s doing poorly,” Cilius explained. “He can’t easily endure the severe cold, he can’t keep warm.” “It’s strange he can keep living,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Of course, he can’t get away from here,” Cilius said, as if he were making an excuse on the old man’s behalf. “But he’s lying there and isn’t causing the slightest harm. And he’s really gifted. There’s many another who’d be satisfied with his brains. But please, sit down, folks, please.”

Line went out into the kitchen to give Frederikke a helping hand, and soon all the guests were seated around the table with Cilius at the head of the table. The table was covered with a white table cloth over the usual oilcloth. Frederikke finished preparing the food and carried it in. It was a tremendous rib roast, garlanded with mettwurst and large bowls of red cabbages and potatoes. “Those sure are something all right,” Black An-
ders said admiringly. “Now let me see you people dig in, folks,” Cilius said. “Let’s eat as long as we have something.” He poured schnapps into the glasses and the drinks went down smoothly.

There was silence at the table while they ate. The men loaded huge dumplings onto their plates and heaped them with rich sauce. The fat was dripping from the corners of their mouths, and the plates were emptied and filled again. The schnapps bottle constantly went round, and when it was empty, Cilius fetched a new one. “Eat, folks, eat,” Cilius said. “You better be sure they get something, Frederikke. But maybe you people ate sandwiches before you left home? But it can’t ever hurt to eat a piece of sausage.”

Line Seldomglad’s round face shined, and she piled up more and more on her plate. The rest of them also helped themselves to whopping amounts. They were accustomed to roast pork and salty herring in flower sauce; this here was a feast, fresh meat. “Oh, I’ll be damned,” Boel-Erik said. “It’s as if a fella couldn’t get enough to eat.” “Then stuff yourself,” Cilius said. “There’s more where that came from. Whatever we stuff ourselves with they can’t take from us. Show me that you can eat, boys.” “I think I’m going to burst,” Line groaned. “But I can’t stop.” The rest of them laughed, and Frederikke pressed them to take more on their plates.

Cilius got up and unbuttoned his vest. The guests threw off their jackets. It was boiling hot in the living room, and the beads of sweat formed on everyone’s face. Now they were eating slowly and steadily, as if it were heavy labor they were up to. Frederikke brought the next course—it was black pudding with syrup. “You have to forgive me, little Frederikke, but I can’t eat any more,” Line complained. “I haven’t been this swollen since I was pregnant with Konrad.” But the men could. They helped themselves good and plenty to the shiny black pudding. Frederikke was feeding the old man in bed, and Cilius got up flushed and took the schnapps bottle and a spoon.

“Come on, the old man also has to feel we’re having a party,” he said. “Open wide, Grandpa. It’s something that’ll do
you good.” The old man blinked like a sleepy old bird and
opened his toothless mouth wide. Cilius cautiously poured the
schnapps in him. “It’s something that scratches,” he said, and,
satisfied, the old man smacked his lips and tried to smile. “Oh,
sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” he mumbled and blinked intimate­ly to Cilius.

“And now we’ll have coffee laced with schnapps and a game
of cards,” Cilius said and found a dirty deck of cards in the table
drawer. The women cleared the table and went out to make cof­
fee. Cilius pulled a handful of small change from his pocket and
began to deal the cards. “How high are we going?” Marinus
asked and looked at the coins. “You folks can have it any way
you want,” Cilius declared. “I’ve played for a hundred crowns,
but I can also play for peppernut cookies.”

They’d gotten their short pipes lit and the women brought in
the coffee. “I’ve played for big money,” Cilius said. “I’ve been
there when it was a matter of life and death. We had a piece of
a horseshoe in our pockets because a fella never knew when he’d
get into a fight. We never thought of money as anything.”
“Yeah, you sure have had some experiences, Cilius,” Marinus
said. “I beat a man till he was a cripple and he never got over
it,” Cilius said. “But now for the cards, boys, and we can cer­
tainly play for small change if that’s your druthers.”

They began to play. Black Anders threw the cards on the
table with a colossal smack, whereas Marinus played cautious­ly—this was truly no tomfoolery. Cilius slammed trumps on the
table with violent gestures, he cursed when he lost, and was full
of good advice and guidance when the game went against the
others. Boel-Erik sat and watched; he didn’t care much about
playing cards. It was Lars Seldomglad who was winning. He sat
completely quietly and played his cards unobtrusively, but every
other hand he scraped up the winnings with a sly grin.

“This table has seen a lot of card playing,” Cilius said. “Old­
Jep brought it along here to the farm, and he gambled his farm
away at it. He had six cows—he gambled them away.” Cilius
turned toward the bed. “I say, you were a bad fellow about
playing cards in your young days, isn’t that true, grandpa?”
Now Cilius had a run of luck, he drummed on the table and hummed little snatches of ballads. “If you can beat the knave and the geezer and the guardsman, then let’s see your pennies,” Cilius said. “It comes and it goes,” Marinus said. “And it ends the way it has to. A fella wins what he’s supposed to win.” “And takes what he can win,” Lars Seldomglad added. “Spade,” Black Anders announced. — “Yeah, be my guest, as the deacon said when the clergyman kissed his wife,” Lars Seldomglad replied. Marinus flipped through his cards again and said pass.

There was a wailing from the bed, and all five turned. The old man was lying with his head half out of the bed and gesticulating animatedly with his healthy arm. “Oh, sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” he moaned.

Cilius flung his cards and jumped over to the bed. “Are you sick, gramps,” he asked anxiously. “Oh, sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” the old man hissed like an ill-tempered cat.

“I think there’s something or other he wants,” Black Anders said, and the old man extended his shaking hand out toward the table. Cilius took the schnapps bottle and held it out to him. “Is that what you want, Jep?” he asked. You’re awfully welcome to it.”

“Oh, sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” the old man wailed, and it was clear that it wasn’t the schnapps. A thought occurred to Cilius. He took Marinus’s cards and flipped through them. “You should have trumped, that’s what he’s saying,” he said. “Sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” Old-Jep grumbled and pulled back his hand.

“My God, you never spoke a truer word,” Marinus said. “A fella sits and ponders it. But a fella can see he’s talented, if only he hadn’t become so decrepit.” “We have to play it over again,” Cilius said. “I really hardly think so . . . ” Black Anders objected, but Cilius didn’t let him get a word in. “Old-Jep gambled his farm here at this table,” he said. “So he surely has to be allowed to determine for posterity how the game will be played. Now we can’t be unreasonable.”

The game was played over and Marinus won. Marinus turned toward the bed: “Well, lemme say thanks for the help,
Old-Jep.” Line Seldomglad was tired and wanted to go home. “We have to get up early tomorrow,” she said. “To hell with that,” Cilius said. “We can sleep when we’re six feet under.” But Line was stubborn, and the men got up.

It was a moonlit night, and the snow-white land was almost unrecognizable. Here from the hill the fjord and land merged, and the houses could barely be glimpsed in the snow; it was as if they were walking in a peculiar and strange world. But Marinus noticed there was a light on in the stable that had been his. He gave a start as it were. Had something happened to one of the animals? But it was, after all, no longer any of his business. He wasn’t responsible for their well-being. “There’s going to be a hard freeze as far as I can tell,” he said. And they began talking about the prospects of more snow.

Tora had gone to bed and had little Laurids lying in her arms. “Did you folks get a good feeding?” she asked. “There was plenty in every way,” Marinus said. “And afterward we played cards. It was terrible what a run of bad luck I had. I lost a whole rye bread.” “Could you lift the boy over into his bed?” Tora asked.

Marinus took the little blond sleeping boy in his arms. “Have you fallen asleep, you little rascal,” he said. “A fella gambled away a whole rye bread. That’s really just crazy . . . .”
At night the frost laid brittle ice over all the puddles, and for days in a row the sun was hidden behind heavy, moist clouds. A raw vapor of topsoil and peat-smoke rose over the town’s farms and houses, the soil was about to awaken, a damp mood was coming into the air. The snow still lay in dirty drifts, but the melt-water in the bog reflected a glimpse of a spring-blue sky, and the first shoots appeared above the topsoil.

The cattle were standing heavy and drowsy in the stable munching on beets and concentrated feed, but when the stable door was thrown open, they turned their heads toward the light and lowed yearningly. It was the same with the people. The farmhands round about from the farms had an easy time coming to blows over the girls when they were at a dance. The girls stuck together in small knots, frightened by the wildness. It was about to be spring, even though the east wind was still bone-chilling.

Marinus had had steady work since Christmas; he was well-liked and had been his own man. As a rule there was something for him to do, now on one farm and now on another. But the day-wage was low, and they all had to have food. Then there were also worries about clothing for the children. What they had was almost worn out. Tora was constantly talking about moving to the city. She could take on cleaning, indeed anything in the world, and Marinus wasn’t the man to be afraid to get cracking either. But it cost money to move and rent a new house.

The others also struggled through. None amassed abundance. In the afternoons the women sat with needle and thread and mended clothing because there was no money to buy new clothing. But now spring and summer came. It held out new hopes of earnings and good day-wages. That’s what they hoped every year when the sun appeared again in the sky—all the old disappointments were forgotten. And some began to make their plans into reality. Boel-Erik bought a piece of heath which he
got for a small down payment. He wanted to break it up and build himself a homestead. Bregentved got himself an old spavined horse and a wagon and began dealing in fish. And old Dorre found a limewashing brush and began to whitewash the house. She was planning on getting it sold by the spring, she said, and it should preferably look decent when buyers came to look at the property. “But I’ll arrange it so you can keep living here,” she said. “I won’t chase you out of your rooms. It’s just that I can’t cope with it any more.” She managed to make a couple of white stripes on the moldy wall, and then she got tired and forgot her plans for a while.

Boel-Erik had bought fourteen acres of heath from a farmer in the southern part of the parish. He’d arranged it so that he could rent horses cheap and get a few acres of land plowed up. He also had hopes of being able to get a loan on the land as soon as it had more or less come into production. Then he’d move out to his own land and build his own house. Inger was going to have a child. Boel-Erik’s heavy, bony face turned lively when he talked about it.

“I couldn’t understand how the missionary got such power over her because I mean otherwise she always had her head on straight,” he said. “You know, she went around pining away and got scruples, and a fella never knows with womenfolk. They’re not as bright as the rest of us, and it’s easy for them to turn into idiots. But now she’s revealed it, she’s in the family way, and so it does all just make sense. I mean, we know how womenfolk are when that kind of thing is right around the corner.”

“Oh, stop your nonsense,” Inger snarled. “I’m getting sick and tired of listening to you. A body should never have married a nitwit like you.” Boel-Erik just patted her clumsily on the shoulder with his huge hand. “I don’t pay any heed to what you say, little Inger,” he said good-naturedly. “That’s just as it should be. But you better stop running to meetings while you’re in that condition.”

Boel-Erik was a drudge, and when he came home from work on the farms, he bicycled out to his moorland with spade and pick on his shoulder. There he went about ditching and digging
till he could no longer see his hand in front of his face. Lars Seldomglad asked him what could grow on the land. But Boel-Erik didn’t understand disguised malicious remarks; he explained at length that the thing didn’t exist that couldn’t grow if a fella just got the soil prepared properly. And work wouldn’t be the sticking point: Boel-Erik had gotten gigantic strength since he’d found out that Inger had gotten in the family way.

The herring entered the fjord, and Bregentved bought from the fishermen and drove inland in his wagon. But the bad part of it was that when he jolted along the long moor roads he couldn’t get any use out of his gift of gab. He missed having company, and one day he asked Marinus whether he couldn’t have Søren or Anton as helpers when they weren’t in school. Søren was out of the question. During all of his free time he sat at the head of the table with both hands over his ears and got knowledge out of books. It’d now been decided that in the summer he’d go to high school in Færgeby. “No, you can’t have Søren to assist you,” Marinus said. “Ulriksen would resent me for that. I mean he wants him kept in school.”

But nothing stood in the way of Anton’s being able to assist Bregentved. “You can get your wage in fish,” Bregentved said. “I mean, we ourselves have to eat what we can’t get sold.” Anton had no objection to that. He wasn’t free of pride that spring when they ate herring or flounder at Marinus’s table. He’d been man enough to provide food for the house.

Early in the morning they drove to the little fishing village where the fishermen came in after they’d emptied their nets. Bregentved wasn’t bad at doing business. He got the fish cheap and he knew how to make the farmers pay. He had a gift for talking up his merchandise. “That’s the whole secret in business,” Anton found out. “A fella has to buy cheap and press his own price up as high as he can. If people aren’t allowed to pay, they won’t think these are decent things. And I have a lot of money coming to me from the farmers—they always gave me lousy pay for my labor.”

They drove along the sandy roads out to the isolated farms and here Bregentved sold his fish. The mouth on him went like
a mill, and he was never at a loss for an answer. If someone complained that the herring were too small, Bregentved promptly explained that herring were just like eggs. There were some that were big and others that were small, but all the same an egg was still an egg and a herring kept on being a herring. And if there was a smallholder’s wife who thought the herring was somewhat red-faced, Bregentved was the man to discuss the color. “My god, little woman, that’s nothing to care about if the fish is otherwise fresh,” he said. “If I have to run to Færgeby and back again, it can also happen that the blood rises to my head. And think of the herring who’ve run around in the net all night. No, we truly have to forgive them if they take on color.”

They drove out in the raw and chilly mornings, and Anton sat next to Bregentved in the wagon seat and froze in his thin jacket. The horse was old and had difficulty walking, and they proceeded slowly. But Bregentved shortened the time with his gift of gab. “Now take a look at this kind of horse,” he said and flicked the nag lightly with the whip. “It does what a fella demands of it and doesn’t ask much in return. I once heard a story about a man who could bewitch his horse into a womanfolk at night and back to a horse again in the day. He was fortunate, that man was. He was free of all that baying you get with a womanfolk, and had the comforts all the same.” “I wonder if something like that can be?” Anton asked with interest. “No, it’s only a story,” Bregentved said. “But it makes sense. “I’ll never get married if I don’t find somebody who looks good and is mute.”

People started on their spring plowing, and Andres was also rooting around in the soil on his cliff. Of course, most of his land was outlying field and grass, but some grain was certainly supposed to be planted. A man came by along the field lane where he was plowing. Andres stopped and looked at him. It was a man in city clothing and with large horn-rimmed glasses. His face was sun-burned with sharp, agitated features.

“I suppose people are allowed to walk around here?” he shouted in passing.

“Of course,” he answered. “I don’t forbid anybody to go
about on my fields. Maybe you have business with somebody here on the cliff?” The man explained that he didn’t. He just wanted to see the view across the fjord, and with a nod he walked on, and Andres said giddyap to his horses.

But all the same it was odd, Andres thought. What did a man from town, a well-to-do man, want out here at this time of the year? After all, it wasn’t summer, when a fella knew that city folks went on excursions. Andres had had experiences in his life, and he didn’t trust people too much. He stopped and with his eyes followed the man, who’d reached all the way out to the extreme end of the cliff and evidently was of a mind to climb down.

He hurried after the stranger and reached him when he had only his head above the edge of the cliff. “I just wanted to warn you,” he said short of breath. “It’s plenty dangerous to crawl down here, and there’s a path down to the shore just over there. Well, it’s for your own sake, fella, because I certainly wouldn’t want you to lose your life on my land.” “I’ve crawled on cliffs that were worse,” the man said and his head disappeared. Andres lay down on his stomach and looked down. It seemed that the stranger was right. He clambered down the cliff, stopped here and there, scraped a little of the chalk loose with his knife and put it, as far as Andres could see, in a box.

“But dear Savior what’s that crazy person up to?” Andres mumbled. There’s got to be something to it since he’s going to take it home with him.” He didn’t give a thought to the horses, but hurried down the path to the fjord. He was standing there ready when the stranger had ended his descent.

“I got a fright that it might end disastrously after all,” Andres said. “The cliff might easily get a mind to collapse, and you could get hurt. What is it you’re going around and investigating if a fella might be so free as to ask?”

And now it came to light that the stranger was a learned man, a geologist, as it’s called. He’d taken it into his head to investigate the cliff, what kinds of materials it was made up of, and Andres learned that the job of the people who were called geologists was to investigate all the kinds of soil that existed in
the country. The man had the gift of gab, and when Andres cautiously interrogated him as to what his name was, it turned out that he bore the name Høpner.

"Then maybe you're related to the old grocer Høpner in Færgeby?" Andres asked, and it was Høpner—the grocer was his father. "Really," Andres said. "Yes, by god, I mean the old man died many years ago. It's odd to think that his son is going and rooting around in the ground as a geologist. I can't imagine what he'd have thought about that." "Don't you need to plow any more today?" Høpner asked. "Oh, there's no hurry, if I can be of any help to you," Andres said. "Out here in the country we do like to be of use to one another."

Andres would have liked more precise information about why all the soil had to be investigated, but the stranger was somewhat dour by nature. "Is there an inn here?" he asked. "I'll probably be forced to stay the night here. I'll also probably have to look a bit at the conditions at the bottom of the fjord." "Sure, there's an inn, but maybe it's not for folks who're used to luxuries." "I'm used to adapting to the situation," Høpner said. "Is it expensive?" No, Andres felt the innkeeper was not one of those who made unreasonable demands.

The next day Andres was on an errand at the grocer. It was later in the afternoon and there were a lot of people in the shop. "Somebody sure stayed at the inn last night," Andres said. Yes, somebody did; the rest of them had heard all about it. He was a learned man, it was called a geologist, and this morning he'd hired one of the fishermen to row him out on the fjord, and there he'd stuck a pole in the water to check whether there was clay or sand at the bottom of the fjord. "You know he really is the son of old Høpner who went bankrupt," Andres said. "And he doesn't have money, because he wanted to know if a room at the inn was cheap. Otherwise I was afraid he was up to something. A fella can never be too careful when he has dealings with city folk. But this guy here really didn't have any money."

In the morning the milk wagons rolled up in front of the dairy and the milk cans were unloaded. From the school there was a sound of a chorus of children's voices reading their lessons.
aloud. Carts rolled through the village, plow teams were being ridden in the field, the days rolled on. But Povl Bøgh’s Louise got worse, and it seemed as if she were on the verge of dying. Karlsen came on his bicycle from Færgeby and prepared her to stand before her judge. Gamst also came one day and sat down next to the sick woman, who was lying sallow and emaciated on the wide conjugal bed.

“I mean you don’t look so bad, Louise Bøgh,” the minister said. “No one knows what’s been decided, but perhaps you have many years left to live.” The sick woman didn’t reply; she breathed wheezing breaths. “It’s cancer,” she said. “Our Lord commands even the worst diseases,” the minister said and was surprised at how firm and authoritative his voice sounded. The woman was silent, and the minister continued, hesitating a bit. “And even if you do have to depart, you have of course lived life. You’ve had a beautiful and harmonious existence, and with confidence you can look forward to what awaits you. As the hymn says: Lovely is the earth, beautiful is the soul’s pilgrimage. Even a life in modest circumstances can be like a pilgrimage.”

He sat and thought that it sounded beautiful, and that that was basically the way he preferred to believe. A Goethe-harmony in life, a firm confidence in life’s luxuriance was most valuable of all. But suddenly he noticed the sick woman’s eyes on him. They were no longer dull, but shone with a peculiar fire.

“You yourself don’t mean what you’re saying, Pastor Gamst,” Louise said. “What kind of life is it I’ve led? We’re put in it and we ourselves don’t decide the way it’s going to be. It’s like the mouse in the mousetrap. I’ve been lying here sick and wretched and wishing I could fling myself out into all the world’s filth. My husband has been a harmless sop all his days. Our son was eaten up by tuberculosis. Is that a pilgrimage? I’ve been lying here and wishing I had the body to fling myself out into fornication. Is that a pilgrimage? I’ve never had body or mind for it, but it’s what I wished for if I myself were allowed to decide it. I’ll lie in my grave and wail because I had things the way I had them. Is that a beautiful life to struggle with poverty and your own nature?”
“I’ve been chaste my whole life,” Louise said after a pause. “But I’ve always desired to be lewd, I just never dared to. But you’re not going to sit here next to my bed and lie. It’s a lousy, little existence, where we aren’t allowed to do what by our nature we want to, and I can see in you that you yourself know that.”

Pastor Gamst took his handkerchief and dried his sweaty hands. “Now if I were a Christian, I’d say: agony of the soul is present here,” he thought. “The devil himself is in the picture here. I’d make a racket and cast spells till the devil cleared out. But I don’t do it, I just find the dying old woman unappetizing.”

“I have no confidence in you, Pastor Gamst,” the sick woman moaned. “I trust the Missionary more. He knows what we humans are like. A well of wickedness and fornication. Nothing good exists in the world, and he knows it because he himself has the wickedness in him—I see that because I’m going to die.” “You’re delirious,” the minister said, uneasy. “I’ve never been honest in my days before now,” Louise said. “I’ve never done or said anything but what others said I should. But I’ve had it in me, and it’s still sitting there. It’s the devil.”

The minister got up and said goodbye. He felt uncomfortable. But a few days later he heard that Louise was getting better again. That tenacious, ruthless life wouldn’t let go of her yet.

The weather became warmer, and suddenly they were in the middle of spring. The bushes in the gardens began turning green from day to day, and old folks stole outdoors and warmed themselves up a bit in the afternoon sun. Though Tora had turned away Mads Lund’s women when they brought good gifts, Marinus had nevertheless gotten work on the farm. “You see,” Marinus said. “He’s not the man to bear a grudge, and you acted too vehemently, in my opinion.” “Oh, he’s benefiting nicely from your work,” Tora said sullenly. “I don’t respect those womenfolk—there’s no honesty in them and there’s none in him either.” “A fella never knows where he is with you,” Marinus said. “Sometimes you’re as hard as flint, and sometimes you’re as soft as whey. But I’m a stupid man and I don’t understand about womenfolk.”
The farmer was going to take a horse to the spring fair in Færgeby, and Marinus had to go along to help him with the animal. "So a fella's going to market again," Marinus said. "Surely I can take Anton along. Søren has to mind his books—he can't waste his time on this kind of tomfoolery." Anton came along and stood together with his father in the bright sunshine among the flapping flags and held on to the horse.

Life was all around them. Horses were put to the trot, and dealers in white smocks knowledgeably inspected the big animals, groomed to a shine. Above shouts and noise you heard the shrilling of the merry-go-round and the barkers' hoarse bellowing far off. Once in a while a horse neighed or a dull rumbling rose from the corner where the big animals were standing. Whenever a dealer came by and cast a glance at the horse, a gleam flashed in Marinus's eyes. Now if it'd been his own animal, he'd have extolled it and explained how good a horse it was in all respects. But it wasn't his business to sell the horse; he was just supposed to hold on to it till Mads Lund found a buyer.

Marinus had to trot the colt five times, but finally a dealer took the plunge. "That wasn't such a bad deal," the farmer said with satisfaction. Now you'll also get a penny for your trouble. Here's money for food, go get yourself and your boy a bite to eat and enjoy yourselves as best you can." The farmer stuck a two-crown coin in Marinus's hand and went to seal the deal with a drink with the dealer in one of the tents on the grounds.

Marinus and Anton took a walk among the booths, but Marinus thought it was now time for them to get something to eat. They found a place outside the fairgrounds where they could sit in peace with their box lunch. "There are really a lot of people gathered here," Marinus said. "All the performers and actors probably earn a ton of money, but it doesn't do them much good according to what I hear tell because they booze it all away."

Anton wanted to know whether that was a real cannibal that was displayed in one of the tents. Marinus didn't think so. If he were dangerous, the authorities would doubtless forbid them to travel around with him. After all, he could escape. But many times Marinus had seen bears that people hauled around on the
highways. They had a ring in their noses just like a bull. If he was a real cannibal, he was probably one they’d captured and tamed so that honest folks didn’t run the risk of being eaten.

All the same, Anton was now determined that he wanted to go in and see the ferocious cannibal and he also wanted to go on a merry-go-round. But he’d noticed a tent where there was a sign “The Ambulatory Room of Mirrors,” and wondered what that could possibly be. Marinus thought that a room of mirrors was probably a room where you could see yourself in strange mirrors, and a fella was familiar with the word ambulatory from ambulance. “It’s the wagon they drive sick people to the hospital in, and I don’t hardly reckon you should go in that tent, little Anton. You came along to have fun, and there’s plenty of time for a fella to get to see sickness.”

But Anton also wanted to see the ambulatory room of mirrors, he had all his savings in his pocket, and they had to be spent. They sauntered back onto the fairgrounds, and suddenly a man tapped Marinus on the shoulder. “Old war buddy,” he said, and Marinus heartily shook hands with him. They’d served together many years earlier. The man was named Thomas Kusk and he’d married into a small farm on the other side of the fjord. And now there was nothing else for it—Thomas Kusk and Marinus would have to drink coffee laced with schnapps in each other’s company.

“Now you can enjoy yourself here on the fairgrounds,” Marinus said to his son. “When you’ve seen what you want to see, you can go stand by the entrance to the grounds and I’ll come get you.” And Anton scurried off.

The two fellow soldiers went into the inn and got a couple of coffees laced with schnapps. Thomas Kusk had sold a heifer and was a little bit boozed up, and he invited Marinus to dinner. “You had to give up your farm,” he said. “Why didn’t you come to me? I could have extended you a hand. Us old war buddies have to stick together. And now we’re going to have a bite and a drink.” It turned into many drinks, and when they parted at eight o’clock, Marinus wasn’t far from being boozed up.

People had left the fair and there were many people on the
street—Marinus was uneasy. He’d let Anton trudge about alone for many hours. But he immediately caught sight of him at the entrance to the grounds and slackened his pace. Now the point was to straighten himself up so the boy wouldn’t notice anything. “Well, little Anton, now you can say you’ve been to the fair,” he said. “Now can you remember to tell the others everything you saw?” Of course, Anton thought he surely could. But there hadn’t been any sick people in the ambulatory room of mirrors. And he’d bought ginger bread to take home.

“You really are a good little boy,” Marinus said and patted him on the head. “Because we do know that we always have to think of pleasing others.”

A couple of drunken fellows came staggering toward them, and Anton said they’d probably had more than they could take. “Yeah, there are some folks who can never strike a mean,” Marinus said. “There you can see, Anton, how hideous it looks. Just make sure you remember that all your days and leave the bottle alone.”

Suddenly Marinus was seized by pedagogical zeal. When you had children, it was your duty to exhort and instruct them about what drunkenness leads to. “Once you’ve become a drunkard, little Anton, no true word will ever again come out of your mouth,” he said. “And he who’ll lie, will also steal. And if a fella steals, he’ll end up in prison. Watch out that you never drink schnapps.”

A drunken man had stopped in front of them during Marinus’s speech. He stood big and his head drooped bent like a bull wanting to gore. “A fella shouldn’t drink schnapps,” he said threateningly. “What kind of nonsense is that you want to make us believe?”

At first Marinus became outraged. Was the world really so out of joint that you couldn’t speak a word of warning to your own flesh and blood? Was it perhaps not your duty to give your children a proper upbringing? Then rage rose up in him. There were limits to what Marinus intended to put up with. Marinus showed off and said with dignity:

“I wasn’t talking to you, you lout. Don’t you think you
should go home to the stable and get your yoke put on?”

The man raised his arm to hit him, but lost his balance, and Anton took hold of Marinus’s jacket and pulled him aside. “Now I’ll teach him,” Marinus said and swelled up with the fighting spirit. “I’ll give this tramp the thrashing he needs.” But Anton clung to his father, and Marinus understood that the boy was afraid. “Well, then let him run,” he said. “But I can tell you this, Anton, I’ve been there when blood flowed. I’m not scared of any person on this earth. I stick to the words of the scripture: With an “Our Father” in your sight, you shall not be trembling.”

Anton didn’t let go of his father and they reached the merchant’s house where the farmer had unhitched the horse. Lund hadn’t arrived, and for a couple of hours they had to walk around the farmyard and wait. Anton didn’t get bored. There were many vehicles to look at, and they went into the stable and looked knowledgeably at the horses. It was dark when the man finally came. He was unsteady on his legs, and Marinus, who’d now gotten over his, realized that the drink to seal the deal had been drunk right to the last drop.

“So let’s get it hitched up,” Lund said. “It’s best if you take the reins, Marinus, I don’t see so well in the dark. I have a package of eel for the womenfolk—that’s their favorite dish. We can’t forget that whatever we do. We can put it at the bottom of the governess-cart.”

The wagon lumbered out into the dark evening. Mads Lund sat with a cigar stump in his mouth and chatted away with Marinus about all the stories the dealer had told. Wagons rumbled in front and behind and bicycles streaked past. It was as if the whole world had been to the fair in Færgeby, it seemed to Anton. The farmer had soon become tired and was dozing when a wagon came thundering from behind. It was plain that the driver was dead drunk. He stood up in the wagon with the whip in his hand and hooted like a madman. The wagon tore by a fingerbreadth from the governess-cart, which Marinus had driven all the way to the side. But now Lund’s horse bolted. Marinus couldn’t hold it, and the governess-cart rumbled like thunder and lightning along the road.
“Out on to the field!” shouted the farmer, who’d awakened from his doze. “There aren’t any ditches, force it out on to the field, Marinus.” Marinus succeeded in getting the horse onto the soft earth, but the wagon crashed against a harrow, which was standing in the field, and overturned. Marinus didn’t let go of the reins and was immediately on his feet.

“Anton! Mads Lund! Where are you? Are you hurt?” he shouted out into the dark.

Anton popped up beside him and hadn’t been injured. “Mads Lund! Make a sound so we can know where you are,” Marinus shouted. And now the farmer’s voice could be heard, plaintive and unrecognizable:

“Oh, I’ve been knocked to an awful pulp. My body’s burst on me and I’m lying here and shattered my bowels. They’re hanging all the way out of my stomach.”

With his hands shaking, Marinus found matches, but the wagon lights had been smashed to bits. “Boys, you have to come help me, my stomach has split open on me and I can’t get the bowels stuffed back in” Mads Lund’s voice could be heard wailing. Marinus ran in across the field after the voice. The darkness stood like a wall around him. He was about to fall over the farmer and bent over him and struck a match.

“Oh lord, I’m afraid I’m dying,” Mads Lund wailed. “I burst my body and I’m lying here and shattered my bowels.”

“But good lord, Mads Lund, you’ve gone and lost your mind,” Marinus said and chuckled. Four or five cold slimy eels were crawling on the farmer’s stomach. “Those are some odd bowels you’ve got, and if you want them in your stomach, you’d surely better get them in the frying pan first.” “But Jesus Christ, it’s the damned eels,” the farmer said and got on his feet with difficulty. “I got so scared, so scared. I thought my last hour had come.”

They got the wagon upright and the harness arranged. Fortunately the horse had remained standing. Mads Lund had completely sobered up. “It’s best if I take the reins the rest of the way,” he said. “If I’d been the driver, we wouldn’t have overturned.” Marinus didn’t reply, but he laughed to himself in the
dark. Anton stuck his cold hand in his father’s. He sat and thought about what great luck it was that he’d hidden the ginger bread inside his shirt. Otherwise it could easily have been ruined when the wagon overturned.
Louise Bøgh was constantly getting better, though she'd doubtless never get out of bed in this earthly life. But the women looked in on her almost every day. Tora and Line Seldomglad provided her with food, and Dagmar, Jens Horse's quiet wife, brought bread and pastries whenever she baked. But Magda also came from the hill with a dozen eggs or a piece of pork. “You mustn’t ever reveal to Andres that I’m giving you anything,” she said. “He’ll really get totally nuts if he finds out that anything is getting out of the house, that stingy dog.”

“But surely you’ll soon be the lady of the farm,” Line Seldomglad teased. “Then you’ll be the one who decides.” “Oh, the devil I will,” Magda said. “He promised that for certain. But of course that’s the way they manage to lure us, but afterward they never keep their word. I guess I should be grateful I didn’t get pregnant.” “Well, come on,” Line laughed. “Surely it can’t be so bad to crawl into bed with that old nag, can it? After all, he’s so old he’s no good for anything.” But now Magda unlocked the innermost recesses of her experience. The young ones, maybe it was all right with them, but the old ones, they were unmanageable once they started in on that kind of thing. And Magda told about places where she’d been in service before, and how the men had dealt with her. It wasn’t easy to be a helpless woman given the way menfolk just are. “But if I could just get my wages, though” Magda said sadly.

The women were full of good advice. Magda could surely go to a lawyer and demand the money. There was law and order in the country, and Andres would be sentenced to pay every single penny—that was for sure. But Magda shook her head; she didn’t dare because Andres could easily take it into his head to kill her. “He’s made gold his god—he’s become a mammon worshiper, as they call it,” she said. “It’s disgraceful the way he runs his farm,” Dagmar said. “The rest of us should just get some of all that land he goes and manhandles.” “I don’t think
he’ll give it to anybody,” Magda said. “If he could take it with him to the grave, he’d definitely do it.”

Marinus was now cutting peat in Martin Thomsen’s bog together with Lars Seldomglad and Jens Horse. It was piece-work, and you really had to put your back into it to make a day-wage. The weather had warmed up, but the bog mud felt freezing cold. The worst thing was the flies, which buzzed around them all the time. You could see the town of Alslev from the bog, and behind it was the cliff with its small farms, and when Marinus straightened his back and drew his breath, he could see that Kresten Bossen had gotten the cattle into the pasture.

“It’s dogmeat plain and simple,” Lars Seldomglad said. “I scarcely understand why anyone would buy this peat. But that’s the way it is—we buy it anyway even if nobody else wants it, as long as we can get it on credit. After all, little people have to have something to put in their stove.” “That’s the way it’s always been,” Jens Horse said. “In the old days the day laborers bought the meat of dead cattle. I’ve eaten more horse grease than butter.” “But we’re still alive,” Lars Seldomglad said. “They cheat us, but we also cheat them back if the chance arises.”

The sun sparkled in the black bog water, and it was as if time hadn’t moved. Around the bog there was a bustling of birds which were breeding, a young hare was playing right in front of the men, a grass snake wriggled past and swam out into a bog-hole. A sweet odor of fermentation and decay rose from the bog. Finally Lars Seldomglad looked at the sun and cast a glance at the peat that had been cut. Then he said: “Well, boys, I suppose it’s time to stop. It’s wrong to do too little, but it’s worse to do too much.”

When they came from work, it often happened that they went into the general store and bought beer. They drank it in the shop and heard what had been happening, great and small, in the course of the day. Several geologists had again been out at the cliff. They’d taken chalk samples and drawn maps. “All the same, I’d like to know if there isn’t something behind it,” Andres said. “In any case it’s not so nice to have those kind of people
running around on your property.” “Are you afraid they might trample your seed?” somebody asked. “Or run away with Magda” another added. The men laughed.

But they agreed it was an easy living to go and root around in the ground and investigate what it consisted of. And of course it wasn’t of much use, because you knew ahead of time what could grow in the soil you yourself cultivated. And why did they absolutely have to investigate what the bottom of the fjord was like? After all, not many eel came from that bottom. “It’s tomfoolery,” Lars Seldomglad said. “But no doubt they have to do something for the big money they get paid by the state. Soon there’ll be so many civil servants and scientists, they call them, that a fella won’t be able to spit without hitting them.”

Skifter was standing behind the counter. He didn’t take part much in the conversation—he had serious things to think about. It wasn’t decent the way Meta was behaving. She was out gallivanting at all hours, and Skifter had a suspicion it was Konrad she was running after. A couple of times he’d heard noise from her room at night, and he’d opened the door a little and looked in. But nobody had been there who wasn’t supposed to be. Things presumably hadn’t gotten so bad with Meta that she was letting strangers into her young maiden’s bower.

One evening Marinus had come home from the bog and received a visit from Anders Toft. The farmer sat down in the old armchair and looked around. “By the way, you folks have it nice here,” he said. “You have a capable wife, Marinus. I’ve heard that things were tight for you this winter, and I like the fact that you don’t immediately come running to the parish council and assistance fund, but try to manage on your own. That’s why I also thought of you first when I spotted this here.”

The farmer took a newspaper out of his pocket, spread it out on the table, and pointed to an advertisement. It was the owner of Holle Estate who was seeking immediately a capable and dependable herdsman. Holle Estate was a large farm in the neighboring parish, and Marinus knew the large farmer by sight.

“That’s something for you, Marinus,” Anders Toft said. “I wonder whether I dare take on being a herdsman on a large
farm,” Marinus said anxiously. “I mean, I’ve scarcely had the right training.” “Oh, stuff and nonsense—what kind of training do you need? The only thing that matters is whether a man will do some work and mind his business, and you’ve had your own farm and know how a cow has to be looked after. Tora’s doubtless also good at milking. Now you can keep the newspaper and think it over till the morning, but surely the important thing is to be among the first to apply. In these times there are many people who’d like to have a permanent position.”

“What do you think about this,” Marinus asked after the farmer had left. “It wouldn’t be the worst thing if you could get a permanent job,” Tora felt. Marinus nodded and thought about how it would be to move about in a snug cowbarn. The next morning he got up early and got dressed in his good clothes. A white fog lay over all the hollows; it almost looked as though the village were located in a lake where the houses and farms jutted out. It was a couple of hours’ walk to Holle Estate, and it was eight o’clock when the low wings of the farmstead emerged among the green trees. But it was probably early to ask for an interview with the large farmer. Marinus sat down on the edge of a ditch and thought over what he should say. The large farmer had a reputation for being an awfully hot-tempered man, and the point was on no account to irritate him with an ill-considered word. You had to be humble and modest and not make demands. But on the other hand, of course, you knew that people with a gruff exterior often had a heart of gold.

Finally it was getting late enough that Marinus dared to venture onto the farm. He went into the big farmyard and was already at the door to the main building when a dog with a rattling chain rushed toward him baying hoarsely. Oh, for God’s sake how on earth! Here he’d almost gotten into trouble. If he’d entered by the master’s door, he’d surely never have gotten the job. He quickly spun around and found the way to the door to the mudroom, where a girl was standing and scouring pots.

“I wonder, might the farmer be in?” Marinus asked. The girl looked at him. “I suppose he is,” she said. “But we’re not keeping him hidden here in the kitchen.” “I’d very much like to talk
with him,” Marinus explained. “But I reckon it would be all too pushy to go through the living room door. I’m not very well acquainted with the way things work on a farm like this one here.”

The girl looked a bit at the oldish, worn-out man who was standing so humbly before her in his loose-fitting Sunday best. Her face turned quite friendly, and she asked what he’d be talking with the large farmer about.

“The plan was I was going to apply for that position as herdsman that had been put in the newspaper,” Marinus said. “Nobody’s been hired yet, right?” The girl didn’t think anyone had. Marinus could appreciate it probably wasn’t a job there was a lot of demand for. But he had to speak to the overseer, whom he could probably find in the big beet field behind the yard. “I thank you very much because you wanted to show me the ropes,” Marinus said. “Otherwise I’d really certainly have made a mess of it. It’s been twenty years since I’ve been out looking to serve on a farm.”

In the field behind the farmyard he found the overseer, a stocky young man with an oak stick in his hand. Marinus stated his business. “You can talk with the farmer immediately,” the overseer replied. “He’s the one who’ll make the decision himself. Now we can go to him together.”

The overseer went ahead into the farmyard and through the main entrance. In the spacious entrance-hall he knocked on a door. “Come in,” an authoritative voice shouted. The farmer was sitting at his desk with a thick account book in front of him. He was a powerfully built man, with red-blazed blurred facial features. The lower part of his face merged with his neck, his eyes were bloodshot and protruding. To be sure, Marinus had heard that the man had a reputation for helping himself freely to booze. But so what—after all, he had money and wasn’t accountable to anybody.

“This is a man who’d like the job as herdsman,” the overseer explained. “Where’ve you been previously?” the farmer asked. “I had my own smallholding,” Marinus answered. “But the poor harvest destroyed me. I couldn’t keep it up.” “So what do you know about these things?” the farmer asked. “Can the wife
milk?” Marinus explained that he’d served on large farms in his youth and certainly felt he could take on the position as herdsman. “In any case, I’ll be as conscientious as a person can be. And the wife is good at milking—that’s for sure,” he said.

“And how many children do you people have?” the farmer asked. “We have six at home,” Marinus informed him. The farmer banged the table with his hand as if repelling a cunning attack. “Six children! And I’m supposed to fatten them up with whole milk! No, I never heard the likes of it—over my dead body!” Marinus shrank as it were and was quick to explain that the children didn’t demand whole milk. No, they hadn’t tasted anything but skim milk for a long time. It would never occur to him to make unreasonable demands.

“Yeah, thank you very much, I know that tune,” the large farmer fumed. “In the beginning you people are like axle grease, but it doesn’t take long before you learn to give orders. You have to lie on eiderdown and silk sheets—that’s what you want. But this farm here has to make a profit, and I can’t fatten your children up with whole milk.” “Oh, I wouldn’t ever dream of it,” Marinus said, frightened. “I’ll be satisfied with potatoes and skim milk, and I’ll be the last to complain. If I could just be hired on probation for a couple of months.”

“On probation,” the large farmer flew into a temper. “I’m not going to have the farm converted into an experimental field station, where every bankrupt smallholder can come and flounder about and then run away from the whole thing. No, nobody’s going to bamboozle me. I know you people—you want to lie on eiderdown with silk sheets. This is a farm here and not an orphanage. And why the hell did you people acquire all those children? Don’t you people ever think about who’s going to support them? Go into the kitchen and get yourself a cup of coffee. You can’t have the herdsman position. Goodbye!”

He turned around so the chair pitifully sagged under his heavy body. Marinus turned despondently toward the door. “Wait a second, Madsen,” the farmer commanded, and Marinus, who’d stolen out into the hallway, heard the man’s angry voice. The overseer was presumably getting a dressing-down because
he hadn’t turned him away immediately. He came out blushing a bit.

“No matter what the hell you do, it’s wrong,” he mumbled. “You know, he said himself he wanted to have an older, reliable man. I couldn’t tell by looking at you that you had a nest full of kids.” “Well, a fella gets the ones he’s supposed to have,” Marinus said apologetically, and the overseer led him into the kitchen and gave instructions about the coffee.

It was the girl he’d talked to first who poured the coffee for him. “So did you get the job?” she asked. “No,” Marinus said. “I didn’t get it. But thanks because you were so friendly to me; I can definitely sense that you’re one of those that wish people well.” “You’ll surely get another job soon,” the girl replied and smiled sympathetically at him.

Marinus came home, and Tora didn’t need to do anything more than cast a glance at his face to realize that he hadn’t gotten the position. But Tinus came running toward him and asked eagerly: “So did you become herdsman on the big farm, dad?” “No,” Marinus said. “That position wasn’t for me.” He stood for a moment and looked at the four youngest ones: Vera, Tinus, Sofie, and little Laurids. For the first time in his life a feeling of defiance passed through his mind. “Yeah, yeah,” he thought. “Even if a large farmer won’t begrudge them whole milk, I suppose they’ll manage. In any case, we don’t owe him anything. Things will surely go the way they’re supposed to.”

The same afternoon Andres came to visit. “And how are things with you, Marinus?” he asked. “Are you managing? Can you earn a living for yourself and your family?” Oh yeah, Marinus wasn’t complaining; until now nobody had starved to death. “No, as long we put our trust in him who dresses the lily in all its glory, a way out will turn up,” Andres said piously. “But otherwise the rest of us really can feel sorry for you, and of course I’m also willing to extend a helping hand to you.” Now Marinus realized that Andres’s visit had a purpose, and after much beating around the bush Andres indeed came out with it—that he’d thought that Marinus could work for him for a while.
“A fella hears you’re doing peat bog work, but that work is much too hard for a man your age,” he said. “People believe that I only think of myself, but I also think about other people. I would so earnestly ask whether you couldn’t give me a helping hand with my farm. I’m getting older, and I’ve got only one farm boy to help out.” “I’d be just as glad to work for you as anybody else,” Marinus said. “But I want the same day-wage I can get other places.” Andres’s wily old-man’s face twitched as if he were about to cry. “Oh, God help us, what kind of times are these we live in?” he wailed. “Folks really never do think about anything except demanding and demanding. But nobody gives a thought to the account of their sins, oh dear me.”

But Marinus held his ground. If he was going to work for Andres, he demanded his wage. “I have to earn a living by my labor,” Marinus said. “You know that as well as I do.” Finally they came to terms and the next morning Marinus got cracking on Andres’s farm.
Cilius had gone to market. He’d borrowed Andres’ horses and wagon, although Andres had whined pitifully. First the man sold his own animals, and afterward he came and borrowed his neighbor’s vehicle. A fella knew beforehand that the man would get drunk and drive home like a madman. Andres was on the verge of tears, but he didn’t dare say no. After all, Cilius was such a fool, and you never knew what he was capable of doing if you didn’t bow to his demands.

Cilius drove home late in the evening and he was going fast. He’d been in a brawl with two men in a pub and had given them their comeuppance to last for a long time to come. The sparks leaped from the wheel rim, travelers had to go into the ditch in order not to be run down. Cilius stood up in the wagon with the whip in his hand and yelled at the runaway horses. He thundered into the farmyard; the horses were covered with sweat and foam. Frederikke was standing in the doorway. She’d wrapped herself in a gray shawl as if she were hiding in a corner of the dark.

“Somebody’s sitting and waiting for you,” she said curtly. “Really, is that so,” Cilius said and turned calm and collected. It wasn’t a pleasant visit that awaited him. Now the mortgagees had discovered how he’d dealt with the farm, and maybe he was going to be arrested. “You know, it’s nasty the way you drive the beasts,” Frederikke said. “Presumably a fella hitches horses to a wagon because he’s got to move forward,” Cilius said. “No, I mean, you didn’t come driving here to the farm either,” Frederikke said. “You didn’t have horses hitched up back then when you came here the first time.”

Frederikke went in and Cilius unhitched the horses. When he was done, he stood for a bit and stared up into the bright summer sky. He wished he’d stayed in town and kept drinking. He went into the mudroom and stuck his head into a bucket of water. His eyes were bloodshot and an alcoholic vapor enveloped him. Now was the time of reckoning, and he wasn’t sorry for Frede-
rikke. He'd gone to bed with her and squandered her ancestral home away and so much for her. But it would be tough for Old-Jep to go among strangers.

Finally he entered the living room and took a good look at the guest. He was thin little man with small fidgety eyes and a big woollen scarf around his neck. Cilius knew him well—he was a businessman from Færgeby. His name was Daugård. At that moment it didn’t occur to Cilius that Daugård perhaps didn’t represent the mortgagees. He looked at the real estate agent menacingly and said: “So, you’re the one they sent out to turn me out of house and home.” Terrified, the man looked at him and defended himself with his hands: “No, no, you mustn’t think of me that way,” he said. “I only came to ask if you wanted to sell your farm.”

Old-Jep was lying and dozing in bed; once in a while he turned in his sleep and mumbled his sili vaasikum. Cilius huffed angrily. Well, the man wants to buy the farm and so he’d figured out that it could be gotten for a song. But all the same he hadn’t been sent out by the authorities or mortgagees. Cilius was on top again. A danger had passed. “Get out the schnapps bottle, Frederikke, bring coffee,” he shouted. “A man comes here to do business and you let him sit there without food or drink. Presumably I can still entertain a man here in my living room.”

“Oh no, oh no, I’m not well, I can’t tolerate schnapps in my stomach,” the businessman wailed, but Cilius showed no mercy. He stared at the man silently: was it his intention to insult him in his own house? “Are you too high and mighty to drink coffee laced with schnapps with a lowly man?” he asked. “Oh no, oh no,” the man almost cried. “I’m not in the habit of indulging in liquor, but I don’t want to insult you. So let me have a little coffee with schnapps if you absolutely insist.”

Frederikke brought the coffee, and Cilius poured the schnapps into the cups. He didn’t spare the guest, but poured it out good and fast, and the businessman’s face turned doubly somber and melancholy. “I’m no farmer, I took to the road as a navvy,” Cilius said. “I drink what I feel like and I say my opinion even to the king himself. And I’ll say this to you: if
you’ve come to cheat me out of my farm, you can just turn around and go home again. The guy who can cheat me at a deal hasn’t been born yet.” And now Cilius began to explain how good the farm was, and how much income it yielded its owner. It was totally unbelievable how easily everything could be grown up here on the cliff, and Cilius would think it over twice before he’d let the farm go. He’d never get a better farm in all his days. And the businessman also had to keep in mind that it was the farm the wife had been born on, and, you know, a woman wasn’t going to leave her home gladly.

“It was kind of dry last year,” the businessman said. “But maybe you weren’t aware of it?” “Drought?” Cilius said. “Oh, you know the farmers can’t ever do anything but complain. I don’t know anything about drought except that once in a while I suppose I get dry in my throat, and for that there’s a remedy. Skoal!” “Well, then things aren’t so bad with you,” the businessman said meekly. “It must be all that water in the fjord, yeah, you folks are closer to the moisture out here.” Cilius looked at him sternly to see whether he was mocking. But the businessman looked harmless and trustworthy. He surely wasn’t thinking of calling Cilius’s statement into question.

“So is it you yourself who wants to buy the farm?” Cilius asked, and the businessman explained that he’d come on somebody else’s behalf. He was an elderly man and wouldn’t dare take on running a farm, but he had a buyer if Cilius would sell for a reasonable price. Cilius got all worked up. “A reasonable price,” he said. “What’s going to count as a reasonable price when we’re talking about the wife’s home? And I’d rather let the buildings turn into rubble and the animals starve to death than sell for nothing.” The businessman nodded and agreed with Cilius that you were forced to look to your own advantage. But the man he was acting for was also willing to pay a good and proper price. He was a man who’d been in America for many years and who now wanted to have a farm here on the cliff for the beautiful view across the fjord. What he had to pay for it wasn’t such a big deal, meaning within the bounds of reasonableness.
Yeah, yeah, Cilius nodded and demanded a totally crazy price. “Oh no, oh no,” the businessman moaned in a tearful voice. Cilius became crude and refused to sell at all if the idea was that he was supposed to pay money to get the farm off his hands. “You’re much too rough on me,” the businessman cried. “I’ve never chased anybody off their farm. May God have mercy on us, what kind of person are you, anyway?” “I took to the road and I’ve beaten a man till he was a cripple,” Cilius said. “I’m not as simple-minded as you think. Now I’m going to make us another coffee with schnapps—so let me hear a reasonable offer.”

The old man was breathing heavily in bed, and Frederikke had sneaked in and was sitting wrapped up in the blanket in a corner and listening. It was her inheritance they were bargaining over, but no one asked her what she thought. Frederikke didn’t care either. She’d come to terms with life. She’d let a fellow into her bedroom, and he’d come into her bed. Things had gone completely differently than she’d dreamed. But in spite of everything, she sat there and admired Cilius. He cursed and threatened and wouldn’t sell, even though he should be happy to get rid of the farm without being punished for having stripped it.

“How many cows do you have?” the businessman asked with a quick glance at Cilius. “Cows!” Cilius said. “I don’t have as much as the backside of a cow. I run this here as a grain farm, let me tell you. I don’t want to go and slog away with cattle, and the agricultural consultant said I was right. I was talking to him recently and he said: Cilius, we should be getting away from keeping cows—it means nothing but losses. I’m siding with you, Cilius, you’re a pioneer in that field. That was his honest opinion.”

Cilius couldn’t help being amused by his own stories, and the businessman ventured a smile. But Cilius immediately wrinkled his forehead and put on a stern voice. Cilius had walked the roads and knew all about how people were. When a man came and wanted to buy, although a forced sale loomed on the horizon, then he wanted to buy, and you could demand your price. He poured more schnapps into the cups, and the businessman had to
drink. And Cilius recounted how much work he’d put into the farm, how he’d striven to keep it all together, and Frederikke sat, cold and hostile, in her gray shawl and listened.

“Oh, sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum,” Old-Jep whined in his bed, and Cilius got up, found a spoon, and fed him schnapps. “You also have to think about him,” he said to the businessman. “You’re not the one who’s got the responsibility for such an old bird. Do you want to send him onto the poor-law rolls, maybe?” “Sili vaasikum,” the old man smacked his lips. “There, you can hear for yourself,” Cilius said. “He’s gifted, he understands every word that’s said.” But now the businessman changed his tactic. He yawned a couple of times discretely and dropped a word to the effect that he had a long way home, and that they could perhaps talk again another day. Finally he got up and said goodbye. He stood for a moment at the door and looked anguished; then you heard his steps out of the farmyard.

“Cilius, are you a complete fool—do you want us to be thrown off the farm?” Frederikke said. “Now are womenfolk also going to have to put in their two cents?” Cilius asked. “I’ll sell or I won’t sell, and I’m not going to ask womenfolk about it.” “Yeah, you’re one tough guy,” Frederikke said contemptuously. “There’s nothing you can’t do.” “That’s more than a fella can say about you,” Cilius said spitefully. “What should a fella say about a womanfolk who can’t even have children?” “Children with you” Frederikke shrialled. “I’d drown them as soon as they were born. I thank my Savior because he’s spared me that.” Furious, they stood facing each other, and Cilius looked as if he were going to hit her. But suddenly he turned and ran out the door. He caught up to the real estate agent, grabbed him by the shoulder, and nearly knocked him down. The man gave a frightened roar, but Cilius took him in his arms and carried him back into the farmhouse.

“What kind of way is that to behave?” Cilius said, when they were standing in the living room again. “Somebody would think you’d never dealt in anything but sheep dung. You run away from your own offer?” “I stand by every offer I made,” the businessman said, insulted. “Then the farm’s yours, and you can
have the old hag thrown in. Old-Jep and I can easily manage without her.” The real estate agent sat down and asked for ink and paper. Frederikke dug them up, and the contract note was made out. Cilius had sold his farm. The man left and Cilius sat alone with the schnapps bottle. Now word would get round about what kind of man he was. He’d stripped a farm, sold it lock, stock, and barrel, the cows in the stables and the crops in the field, and he’d gotten away with it. He’d sold the farm and had been flush with money. He was Cilius, who never had bad luck, who’d beaten a man till he was a cripple, and begotten a child with a girl from down south.

Andres had also been to market and sold a colt. He’d gotten a good price for it and had come home sober and well-off. Andres wasn’t the man to squander his money on drink. He was a meek and modest man, Andres was, and if Cilius borrowed his horses, there was nothing whatever to prevent him from walking. He wasn’t going to risk life and limb by riding with that fool of a man. Andres came home about six o’clock and carefully crept around the corner of the house. He had a way of approaching his own house that recalled a fox prowling about a chicken house.

A fashionable gray overcoat and a hat were hanging in the entrance hall, and Andres realized the wind must have blown in a visitor from the city. Maybe it was one of the geologists who’d come back. And maybe it was a drummer who wanted a fella to buy farm machines or a wind wheel. He went into the living room and stopped in astonishment. The visitor was none other than attorney Schjøtt from Faergeby, and now the devil should only take Magda. Here she was holding a meeting with the lawyer, while her master went to market, and they’d likely sat and hatched schemes for how she could get the money she thought she had coming to her.

Attorney Schjøtt was a man in his forties with an unhealthy complexion and protruding teeth, which his burly mustache couldn’t conceal. He had somewhat crooked shoulders and an odd crab-like gait. He got up and approached him sideways with one hand heartily extended to greet him. “Good evening, Andres Johansen,” he said. “I’ve been waiting for you for about an hour.
How was the market—good prices?” “Oh, there was nothing to brag about,” Andres said mistrustfully. “The prices were low.” “You farmers are always complaining,” the attorney said and took mincing steps around him. “You people don’t know what you want for your stuff. Now, for example, what would you ask for your farm?”

Andres didn’t bat an eye, but now he knew what was what. The attorney wanted to deal and was in a hurry, and therefore the important thing was to hold back. “I’m not the least interested in selling,” he said. “It’s a good farm, and of course a fella is attached to the soil he’s put his labor into. I’m not interested in selling my home.” Andres recalled a lecture he’d once heard about the farmer, who was attached to the soil by the strong bonds of the soul. “And where should a fella live?” he added. “You know, even the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests.”

“Listen, now I’m going to tell you something,” the lawyer said and gave his mustache a quick upward twist. “I have a buyer for your property—that’s why I drove out to you right away. He’s a man who wants to do business and can pay, and he’s gotten it into his head that he wants a hobby farm here on the cliff with a view of the water and land. I’m not allowed to mention his name at the moment, but I can sign the contract note on his behalf.” “I mean, he can get so many other prettier farms,” Andres said. “It seems to me it’s asking a lot for me to be turned out of my home.” Andres looked at the lawyer, aggrieved, while he mulled over how much he should demand.

“It’s an awfully good little farm,” Andres said and looked sincerely ingenuous. “And I’ve put a lot of work and toil into it. I’ve slaved terribly hard to make a living.” “They don’t raise much grain on these poor cliffs,” the attorney said. “And the buildings are ramshackle. Name a price, Andres, and let’s talk about it.” Andres named a price and felt totally embarrassed for having piled it on so thick. It was at least five thousand more than the farm could reasonably be worth. The lawyer nodded and right away had pen and paper in his hand. “Let’s write the contract note immediately. The deal’s fine, I’ll buy.”
Andres's face turned sallow. Lord Jesus, had he wound up asking too little for the property? "That’s without crops and livestock," he said hoarsely. "We’ll let you keep those couple of nags and scrawny cows," the lawyer said. "Sign there. The money will come due when the deed is issued. You’ve made a good deal." Andres signed with a trembling hand. He felt very unhappy and almost cheated. Money was something you got hold of by having to twist and turn. Andres had committed many small dirty tricks in his life for the sake of money. Now he got a large sum, many thousands of crowns, in a completely honorable manner, in an honest deal. But it was as if the money had lost its luster. It had been conquered too easily.

"Magda," he called plaintively. "Magda, can you get the port in the cupboard and bring two glasses. I’ve gotten rid of the farm." It sounded as if a calamity had occurred. "Oh well, little Magda, now we’ll have to leave our home," he said and poured the two pathetically little glasses.

They were sitting at the dinner table at Kresten Bossen’s when attorney Schjøtt entered the room. Kresten was working late and the children had to make themselves as useful as possible. Kresten Bossen was sitting with his hands folded and reading a prayer after dinner. Not until he’d finished did he raise his eyes and nod to the lawyer. "There’s a man I don’t know," he said. "Please, come in." "Excuse me for disturbing you at this time of day," the attorney said and mentioned his name. "Can I have a word with you, Bossen." Kresten led him into the parlor, where it smelled a little moldy, but was otherwise fine and spotless and neat. Attorney Schjøtt cast a quick glance at the framed scriptural passages on the wall. The man was in the Inner Mission. Instinctively his facial features turned more solemn, and his voice was urgent and earnest. He explained that one of his clients very much wished to buy the farm, and that he wasn’t all too picky about the price.

"It’s no secret that I’m hard up," Kresten said. "I suppose I didn’t have much money back when I bought the farm, and maybe I should rather have stayed where I was." "So now you have your chance," the lawyer said. "You can call yourself a lucky
man.” “I don’t believe there’s anything called good luck or bad luck,” the smallholder said. “A fatherly providence is at the bottom of it. If you want to buy the farm and pay decently for it, I’ll surely know who I owe a debt of gratitude to.” The lawyer mentioned how much he’d had in mind if the deal could take place immediately. “No, I hardly think so,” Kresten said and shook his head.

Schjøtt pressed him, but now it came to light that Kresten didn’t regard it as honest to sell at that unreasonable price. It must be a foolish person who’d pay so much—he could never get it to be profitable. “Don’t get too upset about it,” the attorney said. “But I don’t want it on my conscience that he’s going to lose his money,” the smallholder said. “A fella’s burden of sin can be heavy enough as it is.” The attorney shook his head: “He’s got plenty of money,” he said. “And if it bothers your conscience to sell for that price, he’s also willing to pay less. We can easily take care of that.” “Oh please don’t,” Kresten said. “But that was hardly the point. If the man has money, a fella can perhaps, I suppose, justify it.” Kresten had become a bit confused. Of course, a fella should be honest in all his dealings, but a man also shouldn’t be forbidden to make a good deal if he knew what he was getting into. “So you’ll sell the property,” Schjøtt said and took out his writing materials. “Everything as is—though, by the way, the crops and livestock you’re free to keep. They’re of no interest to my client.”

The lawyer enjoyed being able to do a favor for a poor man. A gentle goodwill radiated from his face. Here he sat like a little Our Lord and scattered good fortune about and it didn’t cost him a red cent. What did a couple of cows and some barrels of seed mean in an undertaking like this one here. He put on his coat and hat and walked to Alslev. He sat down in the inn’s best room and ordered a rum toddy. For the time being it had gone swimmingly. He’d bought the two farms on the cliff for a fairly reasonable price. If the owners had gotten an inkling of what the land was to be used for, the price would have shot up twice as high.

Finally Daugård came. He sank down on a chair and
groaned. “Oh, dear Jesus, what a horrible person he is,” he said. “He was on the verge of killing me.” “Did you get the contract note?” the attorney asked. “How much?” The real estate agent mentioned the price and Schjøtt nodded, satisfied. “He poured schnapps down me, and he nearly used violence,” the businessman complained. “Don’t ever send me to a person like that again. I won’t be able to get through it ever again.” “If I’d gone myself, it would’ve been ten times worse,” Schjøtt said. “The drunken bandit could easily have found some excuse for refusing to sell. Then we would’ve had to bother with laying our hands on the mortgage deed and forcing him to a court-ordered auction. And Lord knows how high we would have been forced up. You’ve earned your commission, Daugård, and we pulled one on the damned farmers. I’ll send a telegram tomorrow.”
Ida, Kresten Bossen’s wife, couldn’t get it into her head that the farm had been sold. She woke up in the morning and wasn’t sure whether that was right or just something she’d dreamt, and Kresten had to show her the contract note with the lawyer’s name underneath. “Well, can’t he walk away from it?” Ida asked. “No, he can’t get out of it even if he wanted to.” “Then starting today I’ll also believe in miracles,” Ida said, and Kresten looked disapprovingly at her. It didn’t sound good that she’d doubted the Lord’s omnipotence. “We certainly do know that the Lord can make everything happen,” he said. “Yeah, certainly I know that,” Ida said, a bit irritated. “I for one also believe in the miracles we read about in the scriptures, I just didn’t believe they could happen to the rest of us.”

And now it was as if it suddenly dawned on Ida how well situated they’d become. They’d gotten their money back and almost two thousand crowns more; they were well-off people and could buy themselves a better farm. Indeed, not just that, but they’d be able to afford furniture, plush-covered fashionable furniture. That had always been Ida’s dream. While she was figuring out how much that kind of furniture might well cost, Kresten’s face became more and more troubled. “Now you mustn’t go and get haughty, little Ida,” he said. “We can’t have household furnishings above our station in life.” Irritated, Ida replied by counting up who all had plush furniture in their parlor. And many of them were people who weren’t any better off than they were.

“Now I have another thought,” Kresten said hesitantly. “Marinus, who was here before us, is in bad shape. He has all those children, and it’s not easy to go work for other people when somebody has been his own man. It seems to me we could come to an understanding about giving him half of the money we got extra for the farm.” “But have you gone and lost your mind?” Ida asked and looked at him, appalled. “You know, we’re not
situated so we can give away large sums to other people.” “The way I look at it, the stroke of good luck could just as well have been his as mine,” Kresten said meekly. “If he’d stuck around the farm one more season, he’d have been the one to have taken the profit. And he’s a hard-working person.”

Ida was ordinarily a meek wife, but she emitted sparks when she got angry. Her whole body trembled while she was explaining to her husband how foolish his thought was. “Who thinks of us?” she said. “Did people ever come running to give away money to you? I sure haven’t noticed it. No, this is what people are like—they take what they can get, and nobody gets anything for free. You’re the only one who’s a nincompoop.” “According to the words of the scripture, we shall be to one another as brothers,” Kresten said uncertainly. “And if a fella has Jesus in his heart, he should be a good example to the uncircumcised.” “Yeah, well slice me here and slice me there,” Ida snarled. “I’m just asking who does anything for us? Did you ever get anything but exactly what you had a right to?”

Calmly and peacefully Kresten tried explain to her the point of the scripture’s commandment. Seek not your own—you couldn’t get around those words. Ye are the salt, and if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted—that scriptural passage also had a message for the people. Be brethren was plainly written there for everyone who had the ability to read. Ida breathed quickly and was short of breath, while Kresten thoroughly explained his point of view. Then she said: “Now I call that if anything blasphemy.”

“What is it you’re saying?” Kresten asked, aghast. “You call it blasphemy to give another poor creature a hand.” “That’s what I call it and you’ll never talk me out of it in all my born days,” Ida said ferociously. “And I’m convinced that all believing people will side with me.” And Ida explained the way she looked at it. A miracle had occurred—that they were agreed on. But if it had been the Lord’s intention to help Marinus, then the Lord would’ve made a miracle occur while he had the deed to the farm. Of course, the miracle had occurred after Kresten had become owner, and if he gave all the money away, that was chal-
lenging the will of providence. "You can say what you will, but I don't want any complicity in that deed," Ida finished and looked at him defiantly.

"Do you think it's the Lord's will that you should have plush furniture?" Kresten asked, but Ida wouldn't let herself be licked that way. "I don't pretend to know the Lord's will," she said. "I only know that if the Lord had intended the money for Marinus, the deal would've been done in his time. I'm not the one who doubts that the Lord can carry out whatever he wants." Kresten couldn't find any retort. He realized that Ida probably was right. If the Lord had wanted to give Marinus money, he'd certainly have found a way to do it.

"I dare not deny that there's something to what you're saying," Kresten nodded. "But do you think it's totally wrong if I make Marinus a gift of just a hundred crowns? That's a lot of money if a fella doesn't have any, but of course it doesn't change his fate." "If it means so much to you, then just give it to him," Ida replied. "But I'll say this—I want the nice furniture. If we can afford to be benevolent, then we can also adorn our own home." "Yes, yes," Kresten said. "I mean, we haven't gotten the money paid out to us yet. I won't rely on it for real until I see the money on the table."

In the morning Cilius drove the horses and wagon over to Andres. He'd been looking forward to bragging about the deal he'd made. But Andres wasn't home, and he had to put the horses in the stable himself. He looked in the kitchen—there was nobody there either. Then he strolled down into town to meet people. Andres was standing in the general store and shopping. Cilius stepped up to the counter and said: "I'd like you to settle up my account, Skifter, I've sold my farm." "You sold your farm?" the grocer asked, astonished. "I signed the contract note yesterday evening," Cilius said and was silent.

He was enjoying the situation. People looked down on him because he'd come to the parish on foot and didn't hail from among them. They didn't think much of him nor did he think anything of them. It served him right to have to give up the farm and be punished for having stripped it, and they sympathized
with Frederikke because she was married to him. But now came the revenge. People would find out Cilius had guts. He’d taken the liberty of thumbing his nose at the mortgagees and the law, and he’d not only gotten away with it, but had gotten money in his pocket.

“I’ve sold the farm,” he said. “I sold it to Daugård, the real estate agent you people know. He was acting for somebody else, and he had to take the plunge, little fella. It was hard work, but I got him hooked. I got every penny I demanded.” And Cilius mentioned what he’d gotten for his farm. “You’ve whined a lot about your bill, but now you’ll get every penny as soon as I get the purchase price paid out to me. You people have sat and laid in wait for me, but I’ll manage. I’ve always managed both with womenfolk and in money matters.”

Cilius was, as it were, broader across the shoulders than usual. Once again it had been confirmed that fate couldn’t get the best of him. He stood and swelled with strength and arrogance in front of the counter. Andres stared at him. Andres was pale and his hands were trembling. “Oh God have mercy on us,” he said. “If you sold your farm, too, then we’ve both been cheated. Sure, I had my suspicions, but I trust people too much. Little Cilius, we’ve come to grief.”

Andres reported how the lawyer had come slinking to him in the evening and had made an offer for the farm. It was a very reasonable offer, Andres hinted without mentioning the sum, and he hadn’t been able to make himself say no. It was probably to an American, Andres had understood, but what would an American want with two farms? More people had entered the shop, and according to one of them, Kresten Bossen had also sold his farm yesterday. Andres remained silent with his teeth clenched. Now there was no doubt that they’d been the targets of crude dirty tricks.

The men in the shop discussed what in the world the farms might be used for. Farther inland along the fjord there was a chalk works, but it certainly wasn’t doing too well, and it was hardly imaginable that anyone would take it into his head to build another one. Then somebody said: “Well now we sure
know what these geologists here were lying around and rummaging about for on the cliff. They were supposed to be investigating what’s in the ground. They were too smart for you folks after all. If you’d waited to sell, you could have demanded your price.” “Oh, God spare us,” Andres sighed. “But this stuff here can’t be lawful. There has to be law and justice in this country even for the ordinary man.”

Cilius and Andres walked together from the grocer’s. “This drink’s on me,” Andres said as they came by the inn. Cilius looked at him askance. It was unheard of that Andres had offered people anything, and it had been years since he’d set foot in the inn. “This drink’s on me,” Andres repeated. “I’m a temperate man, but the way we’ve been treated here is enough to make a man take to drinking.”

Cilius wasn’t the man to say no to a rare offer and sat down in the taproom and ordered coffee laced with schnapps. “There’s got to be law and justice in this country, little Cilius,” Andres said. “We’ve got to be able to get this deal here voided.” “And then what?” Cilius asked. “If we get it voided, then maybe we’ll be left sitting with the farms and no buyers.” “People have no right to pass themselves off for something other than what they are,” Andres said, furious. “They had their servants on our property to snoop in the ground. We can get them convicted for that. But the lawyers are like thieves and robbers, and a fella should never let them inside. I even offered him port.”

They got more coffee laced with schnapps, Andres paid and wasn’t in the mood to go home. They were both a little drunk. “I came to the parish without a shirt on my back,” Cilius said. “But there’s nobody that can bring me to an early grave, I took to the road in the springtime of my youth. I can drink schnapps like a horse can drink water. But you can’t tolerate any, Andres, you’ll soon be drunk, I can see it in your eyes.”

A small fat businessman was sitting in the taproom. He’d been out buying piglets, and Cilius and Andres were soon keeping him company. “We’ve been cheated by an attorney,” Andres said. “That’s why we came to the inn. Otherwise I don’t drink coffee with schnapps, but today I have to take to the bottle.”
“Do you have piglets to sell?” the pig trader asked. “I’ll never sell anything again,” Andres said. “But you can buy my housekeeper.” “And you can get my wife thrown into the deal,” Cilius added.

They ate and had beer and schnapps to boot. Their faces were boiling red and they spoke in hoarse, boisterous voices. It had gotten about town that the property had been sold and that Andres was sitting at the inn. That was an event. No one had ever seen him drunk. More people arrived on the scene, and soon a crowd was sitting there around the round table in the middle of the taproom. “I think all lawyers wind up in hell,” Andres said. “That’s not correct,” the pig trader said. “Nobody goes to hell. The souls migrate, let me tell you.”

A hush came over the table while the pig trader told about books he’d read. He was from a market town to the north and belonged to a religion called theosophy. And people who belonged to that doctrine believed that the souls migrate from life to life, and now in animals and now in humans. “What you’re saying is surely odd,” Andres said. “But then I’d have to believe that the lawyer had been a fox and in his next earthly life he’ll be a thief.” “You shouldn’t scoff at it,” the pig trader said, and his small eyes were earnest. “If a fella thinks on it, he can easily recall what he was in his last earthly life.” “What were you?” Cilius asked. “I was a sow,” the pig trader said. “I also know the farm to the north where I was in the sty. Yup, you shouldn’t grin, folks, because that’s right. If you look at me, you can really see that I resemble a pig. And I can grunt more lifelike than any living person.”

The rest of them looked at him and it was true: the pig trader did resemble a pig. He grunted and it sounded absolutely like a sow lying in the sty with its piglets at its teats. “In this life here I’ve come up to a higher level, as they call it,” he said. “I’ve become a human being, but I still have a lot of the sow in me. We humans shouldn’t look down on the animals because most of us have ourselves been transformed into animals. And we can wind up there again. Not all souls ascend.” “It seems to me we should stick to what we learned as children,” Andres said. “But
let’s have more coffee with schnapps. I’ve been duped by a lawyer and I can just as well take to drinking.”

Andres made a racket and couldn’t stop constantly returning to the sale of the farms. He was sitting in a circle of men who were willing to agree with him. People knew that lawyers were foxes and nothing good came from them. “Since they’ve tricked me out of my farm, I’d better drink it all up,” Andres said. “I’ll stand you as much schnapps as you want, boys. And I even treated him to port when we signed.” Andres took out his wallet and flung a bill on the table. “May I see your wallet” Cilius asked and reached out for it. “What do you want to see in it?” Andres asked and didn’t let go of it. “I want to see what it looks like,” Cilius said. “There aren’t many people who’ve ever gotten to see it. You’re not exactly prone to taking it out.” The others laughed.

By evening Andres finally came home. You could tell by looking at him that he’d had a lot to drink. “But what kept you?” Magda asked. “Here I’ve been going and waiting for you all day. And I can tell you’ve been drinking.” “I treated nearly the whole parish,” Andres said. “I’ve been cheated, and if that’s the way it is, a fella had better take to drinking. I’ve spent a lot of money, little Magda, lay not up for yourselves treasures where moth and rust doth corrupt. . . .”

But Magda was in no mood to listen to scripture and laments over people’s wiliness. She was hot-tempered. If he could go to the inn and spend a lot of money, then he could surely also pay her her wages. Here she’d been worrying for many hours whether he’d had an accident, while he hadn’t given her a thought. That’s the way a man would treat only his housekeeper and not his wedded wife. “If you can go to the inn and throw the money away for others to scramble for, then surely I can also get my wages,” she said coldly. “But little Magda,” Andres said and tried to put his arm around her waist. “Yeah, Magda here and Magda there,” Magda snarled. “I want my wages. I have a right to them, and you remember what you promised me when you seduced me. You said you’d marry me, and if you don’t want to keep your promise, then you’ll have to pay.”
“It’s not legal to use threats,” Andres said somberly. “And it’s written that the woman shall be a helpmate to the man. You better think about that, Magda, how much you’ve been worth as a helpmate.” But now Magda got angry for real. She stood with her hands akimbo and told Andres what was what: “I’ve been the way I’m supposed to, but how are you?” she said. “You had a large farm, where you should have kept at least a couple of farm hands and maids, but you go and make a mess of it alone as if you’ve got a screw loose. And don’t be telling me what’s lawful because I talked to the lawyer yesterday before you came. He agreed with me—I’m going to get that money, and now I’m going to court, just so you know it.”

Magda rushed out into the kitchen and slammed the door with a bang, while Andres stood mute with indignation. He felt like giving Magda what would serve her right, but she could take it into her head to go to the lawyer about that too and get him punished for assault and battery. He crept out into the kitchen where Magda was standing and lighting the stove. “So, you talked to the lawyer,” he said. “I did,” Magda said. “Did you also tell him that we’d been to bed together?” Andres asked. “No, what business is that of his?” Magda said. “Uh huh, I could imagine you hadn’t told him that, little Magda,” Andres said piously. “Because it’s not legal for a woman to demand money from a man she’s been in bed with.” “Pooh, you think you can pull something on me,” Magda said. “You should think of your soul, Magda,” Andres admonished her. “It’s written: be meek, but you’re like a viper full of venom. You should have peace in your heart and forget about the world’s injustice.” “You can preach to the broomstick because I’m going out now to fetch a bucket of water,” Magda replied and grabbed the water bucket.

Andres became indignant again and he sauntered after Magda to say something cutting to her. He stood behind her as she bent over the well to get a hold of the bucket, and suddenly he was seized by a desperate thought. Now what if she fell down into the deep well! The sweat poured off his forehead, and he gasped for breath. His thin strong hand took hold of her shoulder. Magda let go of the bucket, which crashed against the well
stones. For a moment he was about to force her over the well curb, while she groaned and put up a fight. “Help!” she shrilled. “Murder! Help!”

Marinus came running. He’d been working in the beets just outside the farmyard. “But what’s going on here?” he shouted. Andres quickly let the housekeeper go and stared down into the bottom of the well. Magda stood a few steps away breathing deeply. Neither of them answered. “I thought Magda screamed for help?” Marinus said. “There’s nothing wrong, is there? Surely you didn’t lay a hand on her, did you, Andres.” “I’m not well,” Andres said. “I had too much to drink and I’m not in my right mind.” He stood for a moment with pale, rigid facial expressions and swayed as if he were about to fall. Then he turned and went into the house.

“What’s going on here?” Marinus asked. “Your face is also as white as a sheet. Was he out to get you?” “No, no” Magda said quickly. “He’s just drunk and wanted to hit me. It’s just the lawyer he still can’t get out of his head. Just go back to your work, Marinus, I mean we know the way drunken people are. I just got a little frightened when he fell over me because, you know, Andres is usually in the habit of being harmless. He’s not one of those who use violence.”

Marinus shook his head and went back out to the beets. When married people fight, a fella should keep out of it, he thought, otherwise he himself will get a beating, and, after all, you have to consider Magda and Andres as a kind of married couple. Marinus had these experiences from others’ marriages and not from his own, because between him and Tora there had been nothing but peace and tolerance.

Magda went into the bedroom where Andres had crawled into bed with all his clothes on. She remained standing a little way from the bed and stared at him. “If I’d treated you the way you deserved, I would’ve sent Marinus for the parish sheriff and had you arrested. I’d never imagined you’d straight out kill me.” “I’m sick and you teased me, little Magda,” Andres wailed. “I beg you very sincerely for forgiveness.”

Magda didn’t answer, but looked implacable, and after much
beating around the bush and many words from the scriptures, Andres declared that if it absolutely had to be, then there was, he supposed, nothing for it but to go to the minister to publish the banns. “But then it’s got to be definite,” Magda said harshly. “There’s been enough shilly-shallying and nonsense. Either I want to get married or else I want my wages.” “You can firmly rely on me like the Lord in his heaven,” Andres cried, and Magda understood that Andres really meant it. Now she’d become a wife in her own house.
All around the parish the word was out that the farms on the cliff had been sold for an absurdly high price. It had to be a foolish man who’d buy that way, or else special plans were at the bottom of it, and that was surely the most plausible thing to presume. But all the same several people felt that the lawyer had spoken truthfully when he said it was a man from abroad who wanted to reside on the cliff to have a view of water and land. So it surely had to be an American who came home with his pockets full of money and didn’t know what to do with it.

That’s what Marinus thought. “Now I’m of the opinion that it surely has to be an American,” he said. “Why do you think that?” Lars Seldomglad said. “After all, an American who just wants to live there doesn’t need all those acres of land.” “Oh, the big people do things in a big way,” Marinus said. “And their money is more than we’ve ever seen. They’re also used to open spaces in America, and he wants room so he can move about.”

You couldn’t talk Marinus out of that conviction, and he stuck firmly to it when he went home to Tora. “You’ll see, I’ll turn out to be right,” he said. “But I can definitely say this to you, Tora. I can’t know if it might not be Laurids in America who bought it. You know, I’ve always expected that he’d come home with money in his wallet.” “But Marinus, that’s utter foolishness,” Tora said. “Of course, you’re the only one I’m mentioning it to,” Marinus said. “But it might be just like Laurids to buy the whole cliff. He probably heard that I gave up the farm, and now he wants to show people something else.” “Believe what you want, little Marinus, but for goodness sake don’t tell anyone else,” Tora said. “Because you could risk being made a fool of with all that nonsense.”

But several days later engineers, four men with surveyor’s rods and maps, came back. They began to survey out on the cliffs, and at night they stayed at the inn. People followed them with their eyes, but it was an awkward matter to approach them...
and ask what they had come for. After all, you could run the risk that they’d give you a song and a dance and claim they were scientists and geologists. The engineers ate in the inn’s dining room and afterward sat in the taproom and drank toddies. There was no one who could really get himself to go in there except Bregentved, who’d come home with the fish cart. He strode into the taproom, as if there were nothing going on, and loudly said good evening to the strangers. They answered back in a friendly way. Bregentved sat down in a corner with his beer and listened to the strangers’ conversation. And he understood them to say that big things were involved. A factory was probably going to be built here—cement was going to be produced here.

Bregentved listened while they talked about the conditions at the bottom of the fjord where the clay was to be taken and where they could best place the factory buildings and the wharf. They sat with their maps in front of them and chatted in muffled voices about it. You could see they were young people and they probably weren’t the ones making the decisions, but they knew all about it.

“Yeah, it’s surely pretty big stuff you folks have got in your hands,” he said suddenly and nodded to them appreciatively. “Sure,” one of the engineers said. “Come on, I mean we know all about it,” Bregentved said. “I’m a businessman and I get around. Do you really think you can get such a factory to work?” Of course, the engineers said, but they hadn’t come to build the factory, but to survey in case plans were made for the factory. “Ah hah,” Bregentved said. “It first has to be planned. But surely that’ll mean some work, because you intend to take working people from the district, right?” The engineers couldn’t answer that one, and they politely said no when Bregentved offered them a round. They were busy with their plans.

Bregentved paid his bill and strolled down the road. A crowd of day laborers was standing outside Lars Seldomglad’s house chatting. “I just questioned them about what it is they’re doing,” Bregentved said. “And they want to dig cement out of the cliffs. A cement factory is what they’re going to build.” “I’d always thought cement was something they got in foreign coun-

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tries,” Marinus said. But Bregentved explained that cement was found in the Danish earth and he could name other districts where enormous factories had been erected that produced cement. The men listened. There you go. For centuries the cliff had just been poor farming land that could barely give people a living. But now the right people had arrived, and the cliff turned out to be cement. And everybody knew cement was expensive. You noticed that when you had to buy even a single sack.

“Surely it’ll mean work,” Lars Seldomglad said in a subdued voice. “I mean, because they have to have somebody to dig the cement out.” Nobody answered. But all the men stood there with the feeling something big and momentous was about to happen. How the cement was actually manufactured, they weren’t clear about. Maybe you dug it right out of the cliff and poured it into sacks. Maybe it had to be burned and mixed with other things before it was usable. But whenever a factory came, there’d be work. There’d be work for people and work was bread.

“A fellow can’t possibly know if it’s work we can do,” Black Anders said, and none of the others responded. There were many kinds of work in the world they weren’t familiar with. They were day laborers and accustomed to the laborious drudgery on farms and in fields. There they knew what was what. But work in a factory? Maybe you needed special training for it. “They get some mighty big wages, those folks,” old Povl Boogh said. “So they must surely also have a special skill. We don’t get something for nothing—we know that for sure.” The rest of them agreed with him in their heart of hearts. There probably weren’t any great prospects for them.

“But if they’re going to have a factory, they’ll have to have the foundations dug,” Lars Seldomglad said. “It may well be that it’ll mean work after all in the fall until the frost comes.” The others nodded. There’d be excavating, that was for sure. “I don’t know, boys,” Jens Horse said. “But will things get to the point where the farmers will have to do their own work?” The men laughed. That was a nice thought—if they could become independent of the big farmers and didn’t need to stand with cap
in hand every time work was offered.

It was a calm summer evening and the sweet odor of ripe hay lay over the whole town. During the last few days all of them had been occupied with haymaking, and now the barns and lofts were full. They’d worked out on the farms. They’d taken the toughest jobs and sat at the foot of the table at meals. A band of young farmhands came riding on bicycles down to the fjord to bathe. Several young girls came walking arm in arm with one another. “Yes, look,” Povl Bøgh said. “They’re flying and they’re riding. They don’t know it now, but they’ll certainly learn it.” The others smiled. All of them had memories from their youth of the glittering days when the hay was harvested. “Yeah, they’ll certainly learn it,” Povl Bøgh repeated and bit on a fresh piece of chewing tobacco. “They think it’s just a kiss and playing in the hay . . . but they'll surely find out.”

The men stood and followed the young people with their eyes, and they thought about how it wasn’t so many years since they themselves had been fools when the hay was being harvested. They’d felt it like fire and craziness in their blood, but those days were over. Now they were standing, a little stooped from hard work, but with enormous limbs and muscles like hard wood and knew that life was a struggle for bread.

Boel-Erik came bicycling home and the others told him what they’d heard. “Well,” he said. “So I mean it may be there’ll be work for some of us.” “Yeah, you don’t care, right?” Lars Seldomglad asked. “After all, you’re supposedly a big farmer out in the heath. But for the rest of us little people it’s good news.” Erik didn’t reply, but instead went into his house. He longed to tell Inger how the work was progressing on his moorland. He’d gotten an acre planted with potatoes, and if he only didn’t need to go work, he’d soon get all the land broken up.

“He’s a fool,” Lars Seldomglad said. “He thinks he can have his own farm. And he probably can cultivate the moor, but just wait till he has to build. Then he’ll be badly stretched with mortgages and interest, and then he’ll probably wish he was a day laborer again.” And when they have children, then the expenses will start coming,” Marinus said. “It’s bad enough as long as we
only have ourselves to support.” “You’re not kidding,” Lars Seldomglad said. “If our womenfolk could just give birth to piglets, we’d surely be better off.”

In the afternoon Magda went visiting in town. She had to tell the news. Andres had been to the minister and asked the banns, and Magda was to be a wife in her own house. “And what about your money?” Tora asked. “Aren’t you going to get it?” “When we’re married, of course I can’t demand anything of him,” Magda said. “Then, of course, it’ll all be held jointly.” “I’d rather have the money,” Tora said. “With the money in the savings bank, you could easily find yourself a better husband.” “Oh, Andres isn’t among the worst,” Magda said. “A body just has to have squeezed him hard, and now I’ve done that.”

The other wives agreed with Magda. You knew what you had, but not what you’d get. When she got married to Andres, she was assured of a good living, and when he breathed his last some day, she’d inherit his money. “And if you were able to manage in bed with him before, you can surely do it now too,” Line Seldomglad said. “And where are you folks going to live now that the farm’s been sold?” Magda had already made plans about that. She wanted a house here in town where she could be together with other people, because now she was becoming a lawfully wedded wife and didn’t need to hide from anybody. “Aren’t you going to get a ring?” Line asked. Of course, Magda was going to. She’d had rings lying around that she’d bought. Because it was impossible to approach Andres with that kind of outlay. “So we’re going to have to respect you, Magda,” Line Seldomglad said. “Who would’ve believed that you could get him hitched.”

Andres had been hitched, he’d asked the banns, but he hadn’t done it with a pious disposition. “So it’s really going to happen, Andres,” Pastor Gamst said when Andres revealed his business at the parsonage. “You’re going to enter into matrimony, well, well.” “Truly I’m not doing it gladly, Pastor Gamst,” Andres said. “But I can’t get out of it. If you just could’ve spoken a couple of words to her . . . but no, it’s no use. I’ll give you some good advice: keep away from your housekeeper, Pastor Gamst.”
"Indeed, I truly do, Andres," the minister smiled. "But thanks for the advice. It's good to talk to an experienced man." "I'll tell you how it is with housekeepers," Andres said confidentially. "If a fella doesn't want to go to bed with them, then he can't keep them, and if a fella does go to bed with them, he can't get rid of them. But I suppose that's true only for the ordinary man and not for clergymen."

Magda got engaged, and she also managed to persuade Andres to put a ring on his finger. Magda beamed like a sun and her voice was gentle and friendly. Andres tried to hide the ring when he was together with other people, but people did manage to see it. "So you seem to have been ringed," Cilius teased. "Yeah, I mean that's what happens to bulls when they grow up. How did she get the better of you, Andres? I mean, I'd have thought you could stay free." "Oh, God help me," Andres wailed. "Womenfolk are like water running downhill. It goes where it wants."

The engineers stayed a few days at the inn, but if somebody tried to question them, they didn't give much information. You could understand that they were only sent out to survey and do their calculations. Cilius went out to them one day on the cliff and got into a conversation. "So I mean you folks are sort of surveyors, maybe?" Yeah, they were there to do surveying. "And you can't say anything about what kind of work there'll be for us folks in the area?" No, the man he was talking to didn't know anything about that. But maybe there'd be work. "We're certainly counting on it," Cilius said. "I mean, you folks came here and tricked us out of our farms, and if there's work, we'd surely be the obvious choice for it."

"No, they're foxy," Andres said when Cilius told him about his conversation with the engineers. "They cheated us nasty, and they're not going to give us anything in return." "Oh, you're surely not hard up either. You've doubtless got money in the savings bank." "You don't know anything about that, little Cilius," Andres said. "And you know, it's also written: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." "It's also written that thou shalt not worship the golden calf, Andres," Cilius replied.
“But you kiss it right in the middle of its backside.”

In grocer Skifter’s shop people discussed what such a factory might lead to. Stocky, solid farmers, smallholders from the fringes of the parish, and the day laborers from the town were standing there. Once in a while a wife came for goods and stood a while and listened to what the men were talking about. One thing they all agreed about: money would come to the area if it was for real with the factory. That was good for the working people, for the craftsmen and tradesmen, but whether it was also good for the farmers—that was the question.

“Some trade will be coming to your shop now, Skifter,” Anders Toft said. “More grocers may also come,” Skifter said. “Where there are bread crumbs, the pigeons usually gather quickly. Not everything new is good. But we do have to assume there’s some meaning behind it.” Skifter was not very happy about the new enterprise. Things had gone well the old way.

The smoke rose from the pipes under the shop’s low ceiling. “But a factory like that also attracts much wickedness,” Martin Thomsen said. “There’ll be far more temptations for the youth than there were before.” And many of the older people agreed with him. The youth had loose enough morals to begin with, and if the factory came, there’d be more activity, more dances, more fornication. And when you went to the cities and saw how the women were dressed, and how they put on airs, you didn’t wish for those kinds of fashions in your home parish. Martin Thomsen related that now even women too had begun to smoke cigars. He’d heard about the doctor’s wife in Færgeby that she smoked like a guy.

But the most important point was how things would go with the township’s revenues and expenditures if a factory came. The farmers’ voices became alarmed when they talked about it. More would come in in taxes, that was certain, but what about the expenditures—how big would they become? Working people didn’t have the brains to save and put aside. Even if they earned big money, they spent whatever they got in their hands. And ultimately it was the farmers and the big taxpayers who had to pay for them in their old age. They had no shame—they
wouldn’t hold their own.

When one of the day laborers entered the shop, the conversation about the township treasury stopped. The farmers fell silent, and somebody made a comment about the weather. The grain was benefiting from the heat—it would be a huge harvest this year. The rain had come at the right time and the heat had followed on its heels.

From the cliffs you looked out across the land, which lay there with its yellow fields of ripe grain. You looked across the heath with its small dark spruce estate forests, its bogs and bogholes. The fjord was shiny with delicate patches of seaweed and sand. It was as if the whole world were breathing, taking deep, healthy breaths.
One day a letter came to the three farms on the cliff. The men were summoned to Færgeby; now the deeds were to be signed and the money paid out. Together they drove to town in Andres’ vehicle and were well received at the lawyer’s office. And now they saw whom they had really sold to. Not to a man who wanted a hobby farm or to build a villa with a view, but to a corporation, called Alslev Cement Factory. So there was no longer any doubt. It was for real—they were going to make cement.

They signed and got their money, and the lawyer offered cigars. “Okay, so that matter is taken care of,” he said, and all three of them understood that they were expected to leave. Andres and Kresten Bossen got up, but Cilius calmly remained seated, puffing at his cigar. “Well I suppose we should be heading home, Cilius,” Andres said. “I suppose we should,” Cilius said. “But otherwise this is the crummiest business I’ve ever been party to. Here a fella’s giving up house and home and all his property, and he isn’t even invited to a drink to seal the deal.” The others kept quiet out of embarrassment—Cilius had spoken rudely. But the lawyer took it calmly. “Naturally, gentlemen,” he said. “We’ll go over to the hotel.”

At the hotel the lawyer treated them to lunch and turned out to be a big spender. Beer and schnapps were served with the steak, and Andres and Cilius drank hard. Kresten sat with a glass of water in front of him—he didn’t consume the strong stuff. “You should take what’s good while you’re alive, Kresten,” Cilius said. “You don’t know what’s in store for you when you’re lying on the bier.” But Kresten couldn’t take a joke about serious things. “I certainly know what’s in store for me, but if you knew what’s in store for you, maybe you’d leave these things alone.”

Kresten Bossen didn’t feel at home in this company, and the attorney didn’t either. He stole a glance at the tables where other
people were sitting, and Cilius certainly noticed the lay of the land. "To your health, attorney!" Cilius said and raised his schnapps glass. "Some other day I’ll treat you. I often come to town and we can always drink a coffee laced with schnapps together." "Certainly," the lawyer said with embarrassment. "I also once weeded beets for your father at Sandholt farm," Cilius said. "That was before he went bankrupt. They said about him that he poured water in his milk, but I don’t know anything about it, I never saw it." "Yeah, people, they do chatter," Andres said, smoothing ruffled feathers. "If only we always remembered what’s written: let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." "Then in any case there’d be fewer lawsuits for defamation and spreading groundless charges," attorney Schjøtt said with a dirty look at Cilius. "But what would the poor lawyers live on?" Cilius asked piously.

After the coffee the lawyer excused himself: he had to get back to his work at the office. "Yeah, yeah," Cilius said. "It wasn’t a long drink to seal a deal, but what there was of it was otherwise all right." After the lawyer had left, Andres explained to Cilius that he’d behaved the wrong way in all respects. "You shouldn’t have demanded a drink to seal the deal," Andres said. "And you shouldn’t have mentioned that stuff about his father even if it might happen to be true that he mixed water in his milk." "I don’t think much of an attorney like that," said Cilius, who’d become a bit drunk. "My nose is right in the middle between my eyes just like his. I don’t need to take my hat off to him. I beat a man till he was a cripple, and it could easily happen again if somebody gets too close to me."

Cilius had a loud voice and a broad chest, he had big bills in his wallet and had managed what he had to in the world. "Do I owe anybody anything?" he asked. "Am I in debt to you, Andres? I had no soles on my shoes when I rambled into the town of Alslev. I pulled through, I paid everybody his due, and when I talk to a lawyer, I tell him right to his face whatever I want." Now Andres realized where things would be headed with Cilius before the sun set. With friendly words and admonitions he suc-
ceeded in luring Cilius over to the savings bank and getting him to pay most of the money into a bank book. Andres didn’t think much of Cilius, but the thought that all the money could be lost gave him no peace. Andres himself had his savings bank book in his pocket, but he made sure none of the others got to take a look at it while they were standing at the savings bank counter.

Andres and Kresten Bossen went home, and Cilius went in to get himself just one more coffee laced with schnapps. He felt he could easily find somebody to drive with later in the day, and in any case he’d come home before evening, if Frederikke should ask. “Shouldn’t I take the book along?” Andres asked, anxiously. “The book is doing just fine with me,” Cilius said. “Nothing will happen to it, I’m a reliable man in money matters. You can depend on it.” “Oh dear me,” Andres moaned as he and Kresten rolled out of Færgeby. “That foolish man is sitting there with all that money and there are so many scoundrels there.” “He makes life hard for himself,” Kresten replied. “But we know there’s also salvation for him.” “But the money, dear man, what will become of it?” Andres asked, almost on the verge of tears.

And so now Andres could go home and say that it was in fact true: a cement works and factory would be built. Andres found a pretext to go down into town to tell what he knew. He stood in the shop and reported what had happened in the city, and what was written in the deed. “They got it cheap,” Andres said. “If I’d known what it was going to be used for, I’d never have sold it for that price.”

From the shop the news spread across the parish. Old people shook their heads: the world was out of joint—would they now make cement from the chalk on the cliff? Out in a bog to the east they’d once tried to make schnapps out of peat. It’d cost a lot of money and nothing came of it, and probably the same thing would happen here. No, everything has its purpose, and there’s no use in humans’ wanting to change what’s been laid down once and for all.

The farmers, who had fields up to the cliff, began to calculate. If a factory was going to be built, then maybe the land would rise in value. Workers would come who’d have to have
lots, roads would have to be built and made, and now the point was to take care to earn what could be earned. But the day laborers were the ones most concerned. Because now jobs were coming to the parish, good jobs, permanent jobs, if a fella could just be fortunate enough to get his share of them. If you were lucky, maybe you could get into the chalk pits where the raw material for the cement had to be obtained. People knew that the earth had to be cleared away so they could get at the chalk and hack it loose.

“Yeah, now you’re going to get work, fellows,” Andres said. “This is going to be a big deal, I can understand that. A corporation, they call it, and a factory. Now there’s something to do for whoever’s ready to seize the opportunity.”

People gathered around Andres in the shop and among them were Marinus and Lars Seldomglad. “There’ll be something for you to do, Marinus,” Andres said. “The lawyer said it straight out: now there’ll be life and activity in your parish. I wish both you and the others well.” Ordinarily Andres was an obstinate person, but today he beamed like a sun. He brought good and unusual news, like a kind of benefactor, and it didn’t cost him anything. He could just trot out his knowledge. “I wish you folks well,” he said. “I’ve become too old to get cracking, otherwise I’d enroll myself, because, let me tell you, there’s going to be awfully big daily wages to be earned.”

Marinus came home and Kresten Bossen was sitting there waiting for him. “I went in to withdraw the money on my account for the farm,” he said. “And now I want to ask you earnestly if you’d take this here.” He held out a hundred crown bill. “But, I couldn’t possibly ever accept that,” Marinus said. “I mean, I don’t have the slightest claim to it.” “Nevertheless I want to ask you to accept it,” Kresten said. “I don’t grudge you the money, and I’d gladly have given you more, but I’m a poor man myself.”

Marinus accepted the money with thanks, and so that’s the way Kresten Bossen was: a man with a good disposition who didn’t merely use Christianity to condemn others. “You mean it sincerely,” Marinus said. “If only all the Pious were like you.”
“I’m not without faults,” Kresten Bossen said humbly. “It’s just that for us children of God things are such that we struggle with ourselves every single day to root out original sin from our souls.”

No one had expected that Cilius would’ve come home before every single inn was dark and deserted. But Cilius didn’t come home at all. Two days passed and then Frederikke became scared and went over to Andres’ house. “Cilius still hasn’t come,” she said. “But oh dear me,” Andres said. “Nothing could have happened to him, could it? There are many evil people, and suppose they discovered that he had the savings bank book on him. That man should never have money—he drinks it all up.” And now inquiries were made about Cilius out in the world. Andres and Frederikke went to the parish sheriff, who called on his telephone and found out where Cilius had last been seen. He’d drunk colossally in the taproom in the Færgeby Hotel the first day and had probably slept in the stable at night. He’d withdrawn the money from his savings bank book. But what had become of Cilius afterward remained a mystery. Some people thought he’d traveled by train to another city, and others had seen him in the company of a couple of horse butchers. “Should we have a search done for him?” the parish sheriff asked, but Frederikke didn’t think so. At some point Cilius would doubtless sober up and return home. “But all the money?” Andres said, anxiously. “Oh, so much else has gone, let the money go too,” Frederikke said curtly.

A man had disappeared and there were rumors in every house. Had Cilius been killed and robbed? Or had he run off with the money and left Frederikke in the lurch. You could believe anything with Cilius—he was a stranger in the parish and a coarse fellow. But one fine day Cilius was there again. He didn’t go to his own home, but invited everyone and his uncle to the inn—so he still did have some of the money from the farm left. He got hold of Bregentved, Lars Seldomglad, Black Anders, and Jens Horse and offered them cognac and coffee laced with schnapps at the inn. And when they grilled him, it turned out that he’d gotten around. Cilius had been in Copenhagen.
“How did you get there?” Bregentved asked, impressed. “I can’t say exactly,” Cilius said. “I was in a town and suddenly I woke up on a train. Now I have to say that I’d withdrawn money in the savings bank because a fella doesn’t get anywhere gratis. I was in Copenhagen and I hadn’t been there since I was a soldier. It’s a big city and I met a woman, but you can’t tell that to Frederikke. So the money went and as it was about to run out, I went back to Jutland.” “Boy you’re stupid,” Bregentved said. “I’m not stupid,” Cilius said. “But I bummed around in my youth. Back then I was hit with a paternity claim by a girl down south, and now it may well happen that I’ll be accused by a woman in Copenhagen.”

“So how much do you have left?” Lars Seldomglad asked. “Did you spend all the money on drinks?” Cilius had more or less done that, and he was respected for it. A man can deposit money in the savings bank and hoard it up. You can understand that. It’s stranger that he can fling his money and scatter it to the four winds. “You damn bugger, Cilius,” Bregentved said, and the others agreed. “I can’t take anything with me to the grave except Frederikke, and I’ll be damned if I’m going to lie together with her in a box,” Cilius said. And now he reported on the woman he’d been together with in Copenhagen. She’d been shapely and willing in all respects.

It was about the time the inn closed and they went home. Cilius strolled alone up across the cliff and thundered on his door. Frederikke came and opened up the door. “So, there you are,” she said. “Were you afraid I wouldn’t come back?” he asked. But Frederikke merely mumbled that a bad penny always returns. Then she went to bed.

Cilius took a half-bottle of cognac out of his pocket. He’d bought it in the capital for Old-Jep. He pulled out the cork and poked the old man, who woke up with a grumpy “sili vaasikum.” But when he saw who it was, a friendly gleam came into his eyes. Cilius fetched a spoon and began feeding Old-Jep. He did it calmly and carefully like a mother feeding her sick child. The old man smacked and licked his lips with his thick, fleshy tongue, while mumbling his “sili vaasikum, oh sili vaasikum.”
Bregentved drove around the parish selling fish. He brought along news—about the cliff, which had been sold to a corporation and was going to be made into a cement factory. Bregentved had fully informed himself; he knew who stood behind the whole thing. It was a son of the old grocer Høpner in Færgeby who’d died many many years earlier. He’d been in America and earned big money and now he was going to produce cement. Bregentved did a good business all around on the farms. He got high prices for his codling and gar-fish. People liked to hear what he had to say.

“I remember Høpner well,” Bregentved said. “Both the old one and the young one. I came into the store with my father, back when I was a boy, and we were invited inside their residence once or maybe twice. The young man had probably been an engineer in America. He was by nature wild and got a girl pregnant in Færgeby. I remember it well. But now he’s surely got money to burn.”

Anton was still his helper and he wanted to know how Høpner had gotten rich. They walked next to the wagon while the gaunt horse struggled along a sandy moor road. “Yeah, how does somebody get rich,” Bregentved said. “There are some people who can earn bundles of money, while others can’t find dry bread. The important thing is to be on the ball and figure out where the money is. Maybe he found gold in America, and it may also be he got the money through business.” Anton wasn’t satisfied with the answer, and in the evening he asked Marinus if it was the smart people who got rich and the stupid who were poor.

“I hardly know what to say, little Anton,” Marinus said. “People who have something would like to have us believe it’s intelligence that does it. But sometimes it sure seems to a fella that it’s the scoundrels who go farthest. Now I think things go the way they’re determined. He who rules has his plan for ev-
erything he lets happen. Whatever we do, we mustn’t resist his will, that’s the most important thing in the world, can you remember that, my boy.”

Anton nodded and didn’t ask about anything more. He knew that when there was something you couldn’t understand, it was the Lord’s wisdom that went to sleep for a day. But Anton decided that when he grew up and had been a soldier, he’d go to America just like his uncle Laurids and Høpner and return home a rich man. They said that people who came from America had gold teeth in their mouths, that’s how rich they got abroad. And Anton could easily imagine getting gold teeth instead of the broad white teeth that were now in his mouth.

It was warm in the fall. The fjord glittered, it buzzed with small flies and shiny insects, and the cows lowed because of the thunder. A heavy bank of clouds lay over the land, and the storm began rumbling. The world turned black as night with streaks of white lightning. Afterward the air turned mild and spicy, and you saw the yellow glow of a distant heath fire. The grain was harvested. In their bustle people forgot to talk about the factory that was to be erected on the cliff.

But one fine day it was for real. Høpner put up at the inn with three engineers. The innkeeper was on the verge of tears because how was she supposed to please such bigwigs with food and lodging. But Høpner comforted her. She understood that he’d lived in places that were worse and that as long as she provided good, well-prepared food and kept the rooms decent, nothing more would be expected of her. That same day Høpner visited Andres and explained to him that he had to vacate his farm now.

“Oh dear me,” Andres wailed. “Does a fella have to leave his home now? The foxes have holes, as is written, and the birds of the air have nests, but where am I supposed to get a roof over my head? I’d definitely counted on being able to remain living here in the house for a time yet even if you people took the land from me.” “But you can’t,” Høpner said brusquely. “The workers have to live here in the buildings. A barracks is going to be fitted up here.” “But I’m going to be married and where am I
going to move to?” Andres said. “I don’t know,” Høpner said. “When you sold the farm, of course you had to be prepared to move out. You have to be out within three days, goodbye.”

Høpner tipped his hat and left, and Andres stood there and was at his wits’ end. He hadn’t gotten the livestock sold yet because he couldn’t reach an agreement with the dealer about the price. He was supposed to enter into matrimony and had no house to offer his wife before the Lord. But one thing comforted him: if he didn’t have a house, he also couldn’t be expected to hold a wedding feast. Magda had requested that their wedding be celebrated respectably. Now it wasn’t feasible, and there you had it—nothing was so bad that it wasn’t good for something. Because a wedding feast cost an outrageous lot of money.

Høpner and his engineers strode along the shore with their maps and were the objects of general attention. When the day laborers came from work in the evening, they gathered on the road and talked about what had happened in the course of the day. Andres had to leave his farm and barracks were going to be fitted up. In other words, workers were going to come to the area, though there were otherwise enough people who’d be glad to earn a good day-wage.

“They’re not including us because we’re only used to farm work,” Povl Bøgh said. “I suspected they’d want people with special skills.” “No, that’s not the way it is,” Lars Seldomglad said. “But a contractor comes along who wants the work and he has his own people along.” Cilius came by and he knew all about it. “Navvies are going to come,” he said. “They’ll work circles around you people. You can’t team up with them. I know—I was a navvy in my younger days.”

“Oh, we’ve surely had our share too,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Don’t you think we’ve had to do the dirty work?” “Farm work and navvy work aren’t the same,” Cilius said obstinately. “You people won’t keep up the pace. I hardly know myself if after all the years that have passed I could go into a gang.” But now the men got hot under the collar. Boel-Erik began telling how many bushels of rye he’d hauled on his back. All of them had taken part in hard work. Black Anders had straightened out a horse-
shoe when he was a young farmhand, and he’d pinned the strong
smith from Vornum in a wrestling match. Lars Seldomglad had
stopped a pair of runaway horses and held them even though
they reared and were wild. That’s the kind of folks the day la­
borers were—nobody was going to tell them how to get some
work done. They knew what work was.

“And finally it’s surely the steadiness it all depends on,” Ma­
rinus said. “The important thing is that the work proceed well
and get done. It’s not how much somebody can rush through
sloppily in an hour, but what somebody can manage in a day.”
The rest of them nodded. Marinus had hit the nail on the head.
It was the regular, patient work that was crucial in the long run.
Everybody knew that.

“But if need be, we can surely talk to Høpner,” Cilius said.
“There’s no harm in asking him if we can get work with him.”
“I mean we still barely know him,” Marinus said. “And surely
it’s too pushy to figure . . . .” “He’s surely just a human being,”
Cilius said. “I’ve talked to engineers before. I said my opinion
to the ones that were rooting around on the cliff. We’re the best
candidates to get the work, I said to them. You tricked us out of
our farms. Whether he’s an engineer or a lawyer, doesn’t make
a bit of difference to me. He’s got his head between his shoul­
ders like other people.”

“Yeah, you sure have a big trap,” Povl Bøgh said. “But
there’s more at stake here—our work is at stake. “I don’t have
a big mouth,” Cilius said angrily. “I’ve never been timid, and
now I’ll go over to the inn and get the story. I’ll ask him straight
out if we can count on getting work with him.” The rest of them
didn’t say anything and Cilius left.

The innkeeper didn’t know what to say when Cilius asked to
speak to Høpner. “What do you want to talk to him about?” she
said. “I mean, you can’t just run up to him in his room like
that?” “I suppose he’s nothing but a kind of human being, isn’t
he,” Cilius said. “Or maybe you exhibit him for money like they
do in booths at fairs.” Annoyed, the innkeeper shook her
head—was that a way to talk about the inn’s finest guest? But
she’d known Cilius for many years and knew that he was capable
of forcing his way in on his own if she said no. “Give me a drink,” Cilius said. “And tell Høpner there’s a man who wants to have a word with him.”

Høpner came out into the taproom where there was no one but Cilius. “What’s on your mind?” he asked. “I’ve come to ask if us workers right here can work for you,” Cilius said unassumingly. “Anybody who wants to and can work can have employment with me,” Høpner replied. “You can tell your mates that I pay good wages, but I demand something of my people, and whoever can’t keep up with the pace has to go somewhere else.” Høpner stood there at the same time meek and self-possessed with his hands in his pants pockets and his legs far apart, and Cilius felt he owed it to himself to call to the man’s attention whom he had before him.

“The work hasn’t been invented that I couldn’t be part of,” he said. “I’m a reliable man both with a schnapps bottle and at work. I took to the road in my youth. I’ve been a navvy.” “Took to the road where?” Høpner asked. “Took to the road here in Denmark,” Cilius said. “There isn’t a place I haven’t been. I came to the parish here without soles on my shoes. If I’d gone to America in time, maybe I’d have become a well-to-do man.” Høpner smiled. “Your kind of people don’t save up money,” he said. “Can someone even take to the road in Denmark? I bummed my way in America.” “I wouldn’t ever doubt that,” Cilius said, a bit steamed up. “But that kind of thing shapes up different for the fancy people. It’s easy enough when somebody’s had an education. The rest of us didn’t learn to use anything except our hands.” “Well, you certainly learned to use your mouth, too,” Høpner said curtly. “But you people are welcome to work, no matter how many you are. Goodbye.”

Høpner nodded and left the taproom and Cilius strolled out to the day laborers on the road. “There’s work for us,” he said. “I asked him straight out how things stood. He’s kind of huffy, but a fella gets the point. You people can get work, no matter how many you are, he said, and he’s certainly not the man to go back on his word.” “That’s good news, indeed, Cilius,” Marinus said. And they began to discuss how much Høpner might pay in
day-wages. It would be better than farm work, boy there’d be times coming now. It was just the right time now that the harvest was over.

The rumor went from farm to farm in the area: there’d be work, well-paid work at the cement factory. The farmers shook their heads. Now the workers would surely turn into fools, and it’d be hard to get labor for working the farms. And what was the use of little people getting money—after all, they didn’t watch out for it anyway. Everybody could mention examples of how carelessly little people dealt with legal tender. Whatever they earned was spent on sprees and drink or useless expenditures.

Karlsen came on his bike from Færgeby. His work hadn’t borne fruit yet—the people wouldn’t accept the great tidings. But Karlsen didn’t give up. He patiently rode his bicycle to Alslev once a week, visited the friends, and ate dinner at Skifter’s. He spoke a lot and earnestly to Meta when the opportunity presented itself, but the girl was stubborn. She wouldn’t yield herself up to mercy. “I don’t know what’s going to happen with your daughter,” Karlsen said to the grocer. “The more I talk to her, the more rejecting her attitude becomes. Otherwise I certainly usually know how to give witness to the women.” “She’s restless,” Skifter said. “I’m afraid she’s up to some love affair, and she’s constantly talking about wanting to go to town.” “Maybe I ought to get her a position as a servant,” Karlsen said. “It’s better if she goes to a place where we can keep an eye on her. I’ll see if I can find something.”

But Karlsen also went other places. He rode about the parish on his bicycle. Hither and yon believers sat there and awaited his arrival, sick people hoped for comfort. He came to Louise—things were still the same with her. She lay in bed and could neither live nor die, and Karlsen depicted for her the heavenly glory that awaited when some day she was called home. Sallow, Louise lay there with shining eyes and listened to him. “Thanks for coming, Karlsen,” she said. “You yourself know how it is. You also have it in you, I can sense that.” “Sin reigns and governs in all of us,” Karlsen said. “That’s why it’s so im-
important for us always to be on our guard against the devil’s
machinations and cunning.”

Louise had other visitors—the day-laborer wives gathered at
her bed. Now William, her son, came home from the sanatorium
and went around pale and coughing. “It’s nice for you to have
gotten William home,” Line Seldomglad said. “Oh, there’s no
big deal about that,” Louise said. “I mean, they like to send
them home when they’re about to die.” “But what kinds of
thoughts are those,” Line said. “Just look at yourself—you’re al­
ways chattering away about dying, and still you may live a lot
longer than any of the rest of us.”

And Line told about people she’d known who’d had terrible
diseases and who’d gotten out of bed a couple of months later
and gone dancing. Tora joined in. Things were never as bad as
they were painted, and Louise was still far from being old.
She’d certainly get over her illness. “You people chatter away,”
Louise said. “But I’d never ever care about dying, if I’d just
lived. But it’s been a sorry life. And both William and I have to

Olga came home on Sunday and visited Louise together with
her mother. “So are there any menfolk where you’re working?”
Louise asked. “Sure, there are some,” Olga said and blushed a
little. It was hard to talk to a sick old woman about that kind of
thing. “Back when I was young, I kept them at arm’s length,”
Louise said. “But what pleasure does a body have from it now?
I mean I definitely know what’s what. There are two kinds of
menfolk: those that want to have sex with the girls and those that
want to mount them, and the second are the worst—just so you
remember it, Olga.” And Louise recounted what she’d heard and
seen, back when she was young and out serving on farms, and
Olga’s cheeks blushed even more. Louise had known farmhands
who knew how to seduce the girls and others who were wild as
bulls. Her face took on a little color while she was recounting.
Then William came in and Louise fell silent.

Andres had found himself a place to live, an old dilapidated
farm-pensioner’s house a little outside of town which he rented
for almost nothing. He and Magda were quietly married. There
was no big wedding feast as Magda had imagined. She explained to the other wives that Andres was right after all. They couldn’t have any guests in that itsy-bitsy house. And finally they had, after all, when you got right down to it, been married for many years; no, there was really no reason for a feast. Magda was gentle and dignified like a newly wedded wife. Now there was no more nonsense about how Andres behaved both in the living room and in a bed. Magda sat with her lips pursed like a chicken rump and in a dignified way said her piece in the company of the married women.

“You’re surely going to spend some money now?” Line Seldomglad asked. “Now you can surely whip Andres into shape.” “I don’t think he has anything,” Magda said guardedly. “And even if he did, a body needn’t begin tossing her money about right away. I want a new coat before Christmas, and I told him that, and I’ll stand by that, but otherwise I don’t need anything. The women came and looked over Andres and Magda’s new home and were treated to coffee and homemade layer cake. But they didn’t find out anything about Andres’ money. Magda had become a different person: she certainly intended to watch her mouth after she’d entered into matrimony.

Then they chatted about the grocer’s Meta who was going to town and into domestic service. It was probably the missionary who’d gotten it for her. “I’m sure she’s a little wild too,” Magda said. “It’s our Konrad,” Line Seldomglad said. “But their sending her away can’t help any because he’ll just follow her. When that lad wants a girl, it’s no use for a missionary to stand in the way. He’s always been able to get his way starting from when he was just a wee one.” But mostly the talk was about work when the wives got together. Their voices became cautious when they talked about what work might turn up now. Fall was approaching, and again winter was at hand. If there could just be permanent work for the men till about Christmas, no person could ask for more.
The work came like a storm over the parish. Andres’ farmhouse was converted into a barracks. Høpner took on all the people who reported—it had to happen fast. In about a week the navvies were coming, and accommodations had to be found, bunks where they could lie, and places where they could eat their food. Carpenters came from Færgeby, and Høpner himself supervised the work. Partitions were torn down and new ones put up. There wasn’t much left of the farmhouse the way it had looked before. And now it turned out that Høpner was man enough to use his own hands. “Give me the ax,” he said, when rough-hewing of a beam wasn’t going fast enough for him. And he chopped away till the chips were all around him.

To a man the day laborers were all at work. In addition, Kresten Bossen and Andres were there. Yes, that’s the way it was: Andres, who’d sold his farm at a large profit and had money in the savings bank, was working together with the rest of them. Once in a while he took a little break and complained about the way his house had been treated. “Oh Lord Jesus, couldn’t they just live in it the way it was,” Andres cried. “It’s being totally destroyed. This’ll never again be a place for human beings.” “But you’ve got your pennies in your account,” Lars Seldomglad said. “And you earn a day-wage by taking part in demolishing it,” Andres sighed. He took it to heart that the good buildings would go to waste.

There was a cloud of plaster dust in all the rooms from the walls that had fallen down and the partitions, and wagons with beams and boards came creaking up the hill. People from town gathered in small clusters outside the farmhouse and followed the progress of the work. Now and then getting a wagon unloaded didn’t happen fast enough, and Høpner waved to the spectators to give a hand. They obeyed. Farmhands and farmers hauled the timber into place and were immediately caught up in the whole thing. They stayed in the building discussing how it
should be fitted up.

“He’s quite a guy,” Marinus said. “They certainly never worked this way in Alslev parish. A fella can definitely tell that he’s been in America. They build big houses there in a week.” But Cilius spat out some of his chewing tobacco swaggeringly and instructed the rest of them that people did work that way in Denmark too. And Cilius knew all about it. He’d been involved in building railroads and bridges and constructing breakwaters. A man from America wasn’t going to teach him anything. It was quitting time, but it didn’t look as though the work was going to stop. “By the way, it might be good to start heading home,” Cilius said, and Høpner spun around on his heels. “You were the one who took to the road?” he asked. “You sure get tired fast. We’ll keep working as long as we can see. You get paid overtime.” And the work went on in the twilight. The men were dead tired when they went home. But oddly they were in high spirits. They’d had heavy work on the farms and knew what a long workday was. But here they were working in concert. They tore down an old rat’s nest of a farmhouse and something new and big was going to be built. “I’ll be damned,” Marinus said. “He’s quite a guy.”

The rest of them conceded that Høpner was a rare man. He swore, using strange foreign swear-words, and if something went wrong, he could get so mad that you thought he was going to hit somebody. But he himself took a hand in the work if things didn’t go the way he wanted, and he’d pay for the work he got. He was a man worth respecting. In a week Andres’ farmstead was redone. There were large rooms where many people could live. There were built-in bunks along all the walls, and tables and benches in the middle of the floor, and a gigantic stove was put up in the kitchen. Høpner paid wages for work and paid well. None of the day laborers had ever before gotten so much money for a week’s toil. They chipped in for schnapps and sat and drank in the room that previously had been the farmhouse’s parlor.

“We’ll have good times now,” Lars Seldomglad said. “When a man like that makes the decisions, we ordinary people
also get a chance to live. I’ve never taken home such a weekly wage.” But Cilius had. He told about how much a navvy could earn when he was on piecework and was included in a good gang. It wasn’t to be sneezed at. It was half-dark in the room and the schnapps bottle went from hand to hand. “You know, a lot of things have happened in an old farmhouse like this,” Povl Bøgh said. “Nobody would’ve thought it’d be done over like this.” And now Andres recounted that his father’s brother had hanged himself here in the parlor. He’d always been melancholy, and in the end things had gotten so hard for him that he’d taken his own life. There were deep shadows in the corners of the room. “He didn’t get any peace in his grave,” Andres said. “At midnight we could hear him creep around in here. But he never hurt anybody. They say he was a harmless old man.”

They stared into the dark. Now people would be moving in who probably wouldn’t even notice that the dead man was moving about in the room. “We really mustn’t believe that kind of thing,” said Kresten Bossen, who didn’t drink, but had remained sitting a little with the others. “We know there’s a will that controls everything in the world.” “Don’t you believe people can be condemned to come back as ghosts?” Povl Bøgh asked. “I believe only in my Lord and Savior,” Kresten Bossen said. “And if we just stick to that, we have nothing to fear.”

They spoke in low voices, as if the dead man were in the room and could hear their words. Povl Bøgh told about a man he’d known in his childhood: one evening he’d gotten lost in the fog and nearly fallen into the hands of the subterranean who lived in the cliff. Povl himself had seen him show the scratches and wounds he’d gotten while fighting with the monster. But now there were others who felt that he’d been drunk and fallen down on a thornbush. Bregentved nodded: that was probably the real story. Everything had its natural explanation, and ghosts didn’t exist. “Many was the night I heard him in here,” Andres said gently, and the rest of them agreed with him. There was no use denying what a person heard with his own ears.

From the windows they looked out across the fjord, which was white like mother of pearl and luminous among the dark
hills. A fishing boat was on the way home and its motor echoed against the cliffs and the woods of the north coast. “We’re having our food late in the evening,” Lars Seldomglad said. “When we’ve got schnapps, we don’t need food,” Cilius said. “You folks will find that out soon enough. Guys will be coming here who can drink all of you into the floor.” “They say the navvies put chewing tobacco flavoring in their schnapps to make it stronger,” Lars Seldomglad said. But that wasn’t true. Cilius didn’t know anything about that. But they could drink, till the schnapps ran out of their ears.

They went home long after it had turned dark. Their heads were a little hot from the schnapps, and when Marinus went into his kitchen, he flung his day’s wages on the kitchen table. “Goodness gracious,” Tora said. “What a pile of money.” “There’s more where that came from,” Marinus said. “We’ll work for Høpner again, and he’s a man who doesn’t begrudge others a good day’s wage.” Tora looked in astonishment at the money. It was almost twice as much as Marinus used to earn with the farmers. “And I’ll tell you the news,” Marinus said exuberantly. “Neither you nor the children have to do potatoes this year. Let the farmers pick up their own potatoes. And you don’t have to pull beets either.”

It was almost too good to be true and Tora was on the verge of asking him to tone down his nonsense. But the money was lying there, and if the husband earned so much, the wife and children didn’t need to go do day labor. “If I keep earning like this, I’ll be a well-off man,” Marinus said proudly. “Then there’ll never be any difficulty keeping Søren in school.” “Oh, you do talk nonsense,” Tora said. “I don’t have any respect for all that reading.”

Marinus was astonished. They had a son who was going to secondary school in Færgeby. He rode there every day on a bicycle teacher Ulriksen had given him as a gift. Day by day he progressed in learning and knowledge, but Tora didn’t have any respect for it.

The barracks were finished, and the workers began to pour in. They came individually or in groups, big red-headed fellows
with huge limbs. At their head was a contractor, they called him. They moved into Andres’ farmhouse with their bundles and packages. There was life at the inn, and what Cilius had said turned out to be true—these were folks who knew how to quench a thirst. People looked at them anxiously when they walked by on the road. You never knew what they could take it into their heads to do when they were wild and woozy from schnapps. They doubtless ran after womenfolk, and the important thing was to padlock and bolt the door.

One day Anton came scurrying home and said that the factory had just come on a boat. “What do you mean by that, lad?” Marinus asked. “They can’t really come with a whole factory sailing on a boat.” But Anton animatedly stuck to his guns. The factory had come sailing on a big tub and was lying below the cliff in the fjord, and now he supposed it would be set on land. Marinus stuck on his wooden shoes and hurried out to the cliff. Many people were already out there. A strange ship was lying in the fjord, and it wasn’t the factory, but a dredger, which was meant to make the fjord deeper so big ships could enter to pick up cement. Cilius stood in the middle of the group and explained how it functioned.

Now Cilius, too, had moved from his farm. The idea was for the engineers to live here. Artisans from Færgeby had started to fix up the rooms so fancy folks wouldn’t regret being there, and Cilius had rented part of a fisherman’s house west of the cliff. The next day the first crew went to work. The foundation for the factory had to be dug and a breakwater had to be laid in the fjord.

Old folks came doddering out to the cliff on the clear September days and stared with their hands over their eyes down on the workers who were digging and hauling earth. Roars and shouted orders resounded down below from the shore, and the men flung off their coats and vests and their naked torsos were shiny with sweat. Oh, good gracious! They wheeled barrowfuls of earth and chalk, and there were rows of men one after the other. Out in the fjord the dredger was at work with its huge buckets, and barges hauled mud and clay onto land. It would be used as filling. The old people shook their heads. It had been a
good and proper parish, but now it was being filled with unrest and noise. That’s the way it was. The world went back by a hand’s breadth for every year you came closer to the grave. And with their odd moldy beards, which reminded you of mildew, and milky half-blind eyes, the old farmers crept back home to the corner of the room where the stove stood.

The weather got colder—clear September days with hoarfrost in the morning. The harvest was in the barn on the farms in the area, and the farmers began to think about the fall plowing. In the dark nights the eel got caught in the traps in the fjord. You could hear the fishermen’s calls and oar-strokes in the autumn mornings when the sky stood over the earth like a tremendous crystal-clear dome. By the cliff the work proceeded at a violent pace. All the day laborers were involved and they soon fell into the jaunty, crude tone. They swore and cursed at the drop of a hat. You were a man in the line with a wheelbarrow in front of you and you had to keep up. When they got home in the evening they fell asleep almost immediately and slept heavily till they tumbled out of bed again at 5 o’clock in morning.

The navvies’ faces were copper-brown from the sun and schnapps. Their muscles lay like ropes across their backs and shoulders. They came from everywhere and didn’t belong anywhere. They were labor’s mercenaries who traveled from place to place. But when you got to know them, they weren’t as bad as their reputation. Cilius had immediately become terribly intimate friends with them. He slaved away like a little shaggy horse, and it was almost as if he’d become young again. That was the life for him—to wheel heavy wheelbarrows full of dirt along a plank as first man in line, as the one who determined how fast they’d go. At quitting time he went to the inn with the navvies or sat with them in their barracks. They played cards and the schnapps bottles went round and round. Above the long table shone a huge lamp with a big green shade and swung a little in the draft from the open door.

The other day laborers were at first a little reserved. They were quiet people, and only rarely did they go to the inn. They lived their own lives, they belonged to the parish, and the nav-
vies were strangers. "A fella scarcely understands how they can get money to drink that way," Lars Seldomglad said. "Surely they must have family some place or other where they hail from." "Oh, come on, we understand the way they are," Line said. "We know Cilius. He’s of that kind, and he’s never taken Frederikke into consideration." No, they were peculiar people, and they spoke languages from all over the world. Some were from the west, and others lived on the islands. There were also a couple of Swedes among them.

Where the sheep are, the shepherd ought to be too. Missionary Karlsen, Færgeby, hadn’t been making progress on behalf of the kingdom of God in Alslev parish. But now new people had come, sinners, who had a need for a redeeming word. Karlsen decided to try a new campaign; he made arrangements for a meeting. It was to be held in Martin Thomsen’s parlor, and Karlsen spent a morning posting announcements on the telephone poles. Afterwards he went down to the cliff to be there and hand out handbills just as the crew was leaving work. He stood at the edge of the hill and stared down into an anthill of working people. Then he began to crawl down the steep path, but when he was halfway down, he lost his foothold and rolled down the hill in a cloud of chalk dust. He was dazed, and the crew came running over. But before they reached him, he’d gotten up and brushed the dust off his clothes. A crowd had gathered around him.

“Friends and brothers,” he said a little out of breath. “I come from the Lord . . .” “Yeah, you sure did, almost came flying,” somebody interrupted. “It’s easy enough to fly down, but can you also fly up?” “Don’t scoff,” Karlsen said, embittered. “I bring the blissful tidings to sinners that nobody is so insignificant that he can’t receive mercy and peace of mind.” “You surely hit your head, fella,” a voice said. “You’re welcome to get work, and you can easily get it. There’s also a wheelbarrow for you to wheel.”

The others laughed and a couple of the navvies grabbed hold of Karlsen and pulled the bewildered man over to a fully loaded wheelbarrow. “Come on, go to it.” “I came just to have a word
with you people, not to work here,” Karlsen said. A truculent red-flushed navvy, Jakob was his name, grabbed the missionary by the neck and lifted him off the ground. “Now you go to it,” he said. “Are you afraid to do some work? Or would you rather buy your way out. That’ll cost you three bottles of schnapps.” “Let me go, man,” Karlsen commanded. “Don’t ‘man’ me,” Jakob said. “Now let’s see what you’re good for behind a wheelbarrow.”

Work came to a complete stop and a circle of guffawing, brutal-looking men were standing around the missionary. It was anybody’s guess what they might take into their heads to do. He made a quick decision—he’d show them that he didn’t have contempt for physical labor and that this wasn’t the first time he’d pushed a wheelbarrow. He grabbed hold of the wheelbarrow and just then the foreman came running over. “What kind of charade is this supposed to be?” he asked. “I came to invite them to a meeting,” Karlsen said. “What are you standing here at our jobsite for and playing a clown,” the foreman said. “We don’t hold meetings in the middle of work time. You’ve got to get out of here.”

Karlsen had no choice but to go. He didn’t manage to deliver his invitations and none of the workers from the cliff came to the revival meeting in the evening. After the meeting Karlsen accompanied Skifter home. Skifter had gotten a housekeeper after Meta had taken a position as a domestic servant. Now he was also thinking of looking for a sales clerk in the shop since, after all, there’d be more business now that the factory was coming. Things had already been progressing nicely, and Skifter’s facial expression was a little less worried than it usually was. “Yes, they’re terrible people,” he said when the missionary recounted what had happened to him at the cliff that day. “It’ll end with them tearing down the whole town. They drink and they go binging.” Karlsen remarked meekly that it was of course precisely for sinners that salvation was prepared.

“And now about your daughter Meta,” he said. “Now then, I can tell you that carpenter Jespersen and his wife are very satisfied with her work. I spoke with Mrs. Jespersen, and she
praises her as a clever and reliable girl. But she won’t go to the meetings. I’ve visited her many times in her room to speak to her, but she won’t surrender. Do you think it’s something serious with that fellow Konrad people talk about?” No, Skifter didn’t think so. Young girls were often difficult, but Meta had a good disposition. And it was unimaginable that she’d seriously commit herself to a fellow like Konrad.

“No, that’s what I thought, too,” Karlsen said. I’m very anxious about Meta’s salvation. It’s as if I’m struggling with the evil forces over her. But I won’t let her go, be assured of that.”

Karlsen bicycled home, and though the day had brought such an insignificant result, he was in excellent spirits. It pleased him that Skifter didn’t feel there was anything serious between Meta and Konrad. Then he happened to think about his own family and he turned serious. There’d again been trouble with Samuel in school, and Kristine complained that Johanne had again talked back to her. And now when he came home, he knew his wife would greet him with a new lament. There was so much that went wrong for her. She had a tendency to melancholy, and the missionary happened to think about the cheerful little dimples in Meta’s round cheeks.
Anton came running over to Marinus, and his father had scarcely seen the boy before he realized that something was wrong. He put down the wheelbarrow and, frightened, asked: “Why did you run here, little Anton?” Anton explained in a weeping voice that Vera had fallen down from a gymnastic apparatus in school and Marinus had to come home. Marinus hurried over to the foreman and told him what had happened. Then he ran with Anton in hand up the cliff and to his home. He dashed into the bedroom, and there lay Vera pale and unconscious, while the doctor from Færgeby was standing, bent over her.

“But what in the world,” Marinus wailed. “What happened?” “Vera fell down,” Tora said in a flat voice. “But how could that happen?” Marinus said. “She must not have been holding on tight like she should have when she was climbing up,” Tora said unfeelingly. “Ulriksen brought her himself, and he’d telephoned for the doctor.” Marinus was silent and stared down at the pale little face, which was wholly lifeless. He had a feeling that it was just a nasty dream. And now he caught sight of teacher Ulriksen, who was standing silent and somber in a corner of the room.

The doctor got up from the bed and shook his head. “Something in her back is broken,” he said. “She’s going to die in a few hours. The only consolation is that she’s not suffering at all, and that she won’t regain consciousness.” “But can’t she be operated on?” Marinus asked helplessly. The doctor shook his head—there was nothing he could do.

The doctor drove off and Ulriksen explained in a whisper how it had come to pass. Vera had crawled up on a wall bar, but some way or other she’d lost her grip and fallen down backward. Ulriksen explained the whole thing at length and couldn’t stop, as it were, until Tora said: “But we certainly know it wasn’t your fault, Ulriksen. There’s nobody who takes such care of the children like you.” “Thanks for saying that,” Ulriksen said, re-
lieved. "It wears on a fella when something like this can happen." UlrikSEN was unrecognizable. His gruffness had totally disappeared and he was as humble as if he were standing before his judge.

Vera died later in the afternoon and the children quietly crept in and looked at their dead sister. Their faces were rigid with earnestness. It was strange to think that they'd gone to school with Vera that morning and now she was lying there dead and cold. A one-legged doll which had been hers was still lying on the windowsill. It lay there so poor and destitute as if it knew that now Vera was dead. Old Dorre came and offered to take the children in to her house. They could stay at her house tonight and Nikolaj would play for them.

"Little Tora," Marinus said helplessly, when they were left sitting alone. "You have to remember we still have many children." "What help is that" Tora said. "You know, a child isn’t like a cup a body has lost. It doesn’t matter as long as a body has another one to drink from. I wish somebody were to blame."

"But what do you mean?" Marinus said. "That would make it easier to bear," Tora said.

Line Seldomglad and Dagmar Horse came in and offered comfort in moaning voices. But Tora had surely consoled so many people that she knew how little consolation was worth. The women told about sad deaths, about mothers who’d lost their only child, and about children who’d been born with a physical or mental defect. "But how does that help me," Tora said. "Vera was healthy and well, and she was the one who was closest to me of all my children." "A body always thinks that of the one who’s gone," Line Seldomglad said. "But take comfort, Tora, your little girl has it good where she is now."

News of the death got around and Karlsen knocked on their door. He was in town and wanted to see whether he couldn’t speak to Tora’s better self at this moment. Dagmar and Line Seldomglad got up and left as soon as he came. They ran into Pastor Gamst in the doorway. "Are the parents broken-hearted?" the minister asked softly. "It’s worse for Tora," Line said. "Marinus went to Dorre’s to keep the children under control."
But it’s taken a toll on Tora.” The minister stepped into the living room and was standing inside the door when he saw Karl sen. The missionary was standing in front of Tora and speaking to her earnestly. “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” he said. “Those are our Lord Jesus Christ’s words. You should be happy that your child has been called home to the Lord. Think about what sin and grief the little girl has been spared here in the vale of tears. Now she’s kept her pure child’s mind intact.”

The minister cleared his throat and stepped closer. “How do you do, Tora, how do you do, missionary Karlsen,” he said. “I heard about the great grief that has befallen you. That kind of thing is hard to accept, but we must remember that we humans cannot fathom the innermost core of existence. We don’t know why the little girl had to be called away so abruptly, but we must trust that Our Lord intends something by it.”

As always, the minister had a feeling that his words sounded artificial and insincere. He fell silent and Karlsen got cracking. The minister’s presence gave his voice additional firmness and authority. “You must remember that the Lord sends us trials for our own sake. Not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from his will. If your child has died, you must turn inward and ask: have I offended Jesus in my heart, or is it a trial he’s now sending me? And you’ve been hard and closed your heart to Jesus’s voice. Can’t you imagine that that’s why the Lord has taken your child from you?”

Tora sat huddled up with one hand under her cheek, and the minister went over to her and put his hand on her shoulder: “God is goodness,” he said. “If he’s taken the little one to himself, it’s surely because he wanted to spare you grief and disappointment. Who knows what Vera’s fate would’ve turned out to be here on earth?” “Search your heart, Tora, and acknowledge your own sinfulness,” Karlsen said and came a step closer. “It’s easy to sprinkle sugar, but it’s salt that cleanses. You’ve been like a vessel full of lewdness and sin, and now the Lord has touched you with his finger in order that you’ll repent and forsake the devil and the world.” Tora got up: “I don’t respect what you’re saying,” she said. “I’ve done nothing wicked, and why should Our
Lord test me? Surely he must know beforehand how I am."
"You’re right, Tora," the minister said. "I don’t respect you
either," Tora said angrily. "If Our Lord took Vera to spare me,
then why does he let robbers and murderers live who only do
harm to others? No, I don’t respect what you two say. That’s
your bread and butter, and you two can’t tell me anything that
can help me now." Karlsen was going to answer, but Tora went
over to the door and opened it wide. She was pale and the min­
ister and the missionary looked at each other waveringly. Then
they left. "We’ll pray for you, Tora," Karlsen said as he walked
past her.

Marinus had come in and witnessed how Tora had shown the
strangers out. "But what in the world, Tora, you showed the
minister and the missionary the door?" he said, frightened.
"Yeah," Tora said curtly. "I can’t stand their nonsense." "But
still, they’re the ones who’re supposed to give comfort when
misfortune befalls somebody," Marinus said. "Oh, I don’t re­
spect it," Tora said. "What does Our Lord have to do with Vera
having died? If he did, I’d never believe in him. He doesn’t put
children in the world to call them back from here before they’ve
lived their lives. I don’t think anything of all that preaching."
Marinus didn’t dare contradict her, though of course he surely
could have recounted to her a bit from what he’d learned as a
child.

Tora went over to the window and took the little rumpled
doll that had been Vera’s. She put it down in the bureau drawer
where she kept her own things. Then she went into the bedroom
and sat down next to her dead child.

The minister and the missionary walked together along the
road. For the first time Pastor Gamst felt a certain sympathy for
the missionary. "Her nerves were all in a tangle," he said. "Oth­
erwise she’s an excellent woman. Perhaps we also ought to have
let her calm down a little." "It’s not calm one should be aiming
for when we’re supposed to be winning souls for Jesus," Karlsen
said. "On the contrary, it’s unrest. Precisely now, in the mo­
ment of grief and despair, I’d expected that her mind would be
open. But she’s intransigent and stubborn, even if outwardly
she's a capable woman.”

"Is it really your opinion in your hearts of hearts that a child’s death can be sent as a punishment?" the minister asked. "Yes," Karlsen said. "And I can prove it by the clear words of the scriptures." "That’s a horrible thought," the minister said. "I can’t imagine such a barbaric God." "That’s because you don’t know enough about evil," Karlsen said. "Not until you understand from your own experience what sin is, can you understand what salvation means. You have to have seen Satan before you know the Lord’s countenance and peace.” Pastor Gamst didn’t respond, but cast a glance at the missionary’s plump face with its small and, as it were, greasy features. The man didn’t look as though he knew anything about sin’s smoldering passion. But in spite of everything, Karlsen appeared to him less repellant than before. "Goodbye, missionary Karlsen," he said. "Drop in if some day your path takes you by the parsonage. Even if we have different points of view, we can still converse.” And after they had parted, the minister thought: "In spite of everything, the slovenly missionary is a more honest person than I am. He believes a purpose lies behind the child’s death. I pretend as if I believe that, but in reality I believe only in the barbarity and meaninglessness of existence. His god is a Moloch, but I’m a minister and have no god.”

Vera was buried, and before the coffin was closed, the neighbors had been in to look at her for the last time. She lay white and fragile in her clean, white clothes, and the women began to cry. But they agreed that Vera had it good where she was now, and was spared life’s strife and toil.

There was a fight at the inn and blood flowed. Cilius was in on it and was knocked to the floor. He got up on his feet again and hit out in all directions. He’d gotten cuts to the forehead and looked murderous. Two of the navvies were against him and one was on his side and it took a while till courageous people came and got the rowdies separated from one another. Cilius stood in the middle of the floor teetering and praising his own and his companion’s courage.

"They thought they could whip us," he said. "But they tan-
gled with the wrong folks. It was Jakob and the Swede. But in spite of everything, me and Iver were too strong for 'em. I was a navvy myself and in my youth I beat a man till he was a cripple. But I'll give 'em this: they fought like good men.”

That's the way Cilius was. He could give credit to his adversary, but a friend is always a friend. Iver was a broad-shouldered islander with huge fists. “You’re my friend,” Cilius said and put his arm around his neck. “We fought together for an honorable cause. They’d come to the right guys, a lot of blood’s flowed wherever I came on the scene, and I’m not scared of either Germans or Swedes. I’m only afraid of Finns because they use knives.” Cilius got the blood washed off in the inn yard and once more called Iver his good friend.

They stumbled out of the inn and Cilius swore that Iver had to go home with him. If he went up to the barracks alone, it might happen that the other two would give him a beating. Iver willingly went along. Frederikke had gone to bed, but Cilius roused her out. “We want a bite to eat,” he said. “We broke the other guys’ heads. They’re not going to be coming back for more soon.” Frederikke heard that they fought for dear life, but what they’d been fighting about had slipped Cilius’s memory. She got up and while she was making sandwiches, Iver heard about what a whiz Old-Jep was. “He gambled away all his property playing cards,” Cilius explained. “He’s so gifted, so gifted. He understands every single word a fella says to him, and if he could just talk, you better believe that he could tell some stories. Isn’t that right, grandpa.” And Old-Jep opened his drowsy eyes and mumbled “Sili vaasikum.”

Frederikke brought in a plate of open sandwiches and coffee, and now it turned out that Iver was an affable man. He greeted her politely and declared it had made no sense that she had to be roused out of her snug bed in the middle of the night. “Oh, I mean that’s what a fella has a womanfolk for,” Cilius said. “And Frederikke isn’t good for anything else, she can’t have children.” “That could certainly also be your own fault,” Iver smiled. “No, I got a girl pregnant down south,” Cilius said. “There’s nothing wrong with those parts. But now go ahead and take some food,
Iver smiled to Frederikke as if he wanted to say that you shouldn’t take Cilius seriously—he was a joker whose words shouldn’t be taken so literally. Iver was still young, with light hair and shining white teeth. And when he looked at her, Frederikke, as it were, held her head higher, what was worn-out and tired in her features disappeared, and you saw that Frederikke had once been a pretty young girl, and that she’d still retained something of her beauty. While Cilius was telling about his youthful exploits in barracks and at inns, a covert little game was being played between Iver and Frederikke.

A few days later Iver came to visit in the evening. “Cilius isn’t home,” Frederikke said and blushed. No, Iver knew that all right. Cilius was sitting in the barracks playing cards and Iver had just accidentally been passing by and felt like just saying hello to Frederikke. And Iver began telling about his life. He’d made a trip to America, and he’d traveled there because he’d been betrayed by a girl. She’d promised to stick with him, but when a rich suitor came along, she took him. “That was disgraceful of her,” Frederikke said, indignant. “You’d never have done that,” Iver said. “Cilius told me that you took him although he came walking to your farm as a homeless man. But otherwise women are not to be trusted—I’ve learned that.”

Iver became melancholy while telling about the love sorrows of his youth, and when he put his hand on Frederikke’s, she didn’t withdraw hers. Iver moved a little closer to put his arm around her. “Surely it hasn’t always been easy for you either,” he said. “No, of course, things don’t always go the way a body has planned,” Frederikke said. “Cilius isn’t the man I thought he’d be.” “You’re much too good to him,” Iver said. “He treats you like no decent husband would treat his wife. You don’t owe him any consideration.”

Frederikke nestled against him and he kissed her. A hot delight passed through her. For many years she’d regarded her life as over with. She’d committed an act of stupidity and paid the penalty for it. And now a man came who understood how she was and that she deserved better. She lay tranquil and pliant in
his arms. But suddenly they both started up. Old-Jep had woken up from his dozing and turned his head toward them. His face was dark-red, as if he were about to have apoplexy, and he hissed savagely: “Sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum.” It sounded like a curse.

“Oh, don’t mind the old man, I mean he can’t say anything,” Frederikke said, but all the same Iver looked a bit uneasily over towards Old-Jep. “I don’t like the way he’s lying and glaring,” he said. “He sides with Cilius, I’ll tell you, they’re two of a kind,” Frederikke said. “But what he doesn’t know can’t hurt him. Really, we can also go in the bedroom.”

That’s the way it began with Iver and Frederikke. The other people in the house had doubtless seen that Frederikke was having a visitor, but they’d surely refrain from saying anything to Cilius because, after all, you knew how he was. But otherwise the gossip went on when the women got together. It was wrong for a woman to forget her vow before the altar and let herself be seduced, but otherwise all the women felt what was now happening served Cilius right. He’d treated Frederikke worse than somebody treats an animal and squandered her property on drink and card playing. He’d made his bed and now he could lie in it, and there was much that spoke in Frederikke’s defense. “But all the same she’s a married woman and she should consider herself too good,” Line Seldomglad said, and Dagmar Horse felt the same way. “No,” Tora said. “We womenfolk also have to have rights. If he doesn’t behave himself, she’s free to go to somebody else.”

Frederikke was thriving—she blushed like a young girl every time someone talked to her. Everyone could see how things stood with her. In the middle of the day she stole out to the cliff and stood up on the edge and looked down where the men were working. The navvies and day laborers there were digging the foundation and hauling earth. And she saw Iver in the line of laboring, bowed men and her heart beat for joy. He was there at work and in the evening she’d meet him. The outbuildings on Cilius’s farm were still standing and they met in the hayloft after Iver had knocked off and eaten.
The work was proceeding. So much of the foundation had now been dug that you could see how big the factory would be. A piece of land had grown out into the fjord, and people on barges were ramming poles in with a pile-driver. The wharf was going to be here where ships would go alongside and load cement.

The weather turned cold and the jamb stoves in the barracks were red hot. The time was drawing near when the work had to stop for the winter. When the frost came, the earthwork couldn’t proceed.
One day Mads Lund drove to Fæergeby to talk to attorney Schjøtt. The lawyer took crab-like steps toward him, friendly and smiling, while he rubbed his bony hands. He led the large farmer into his private office and offered him a cigar, and then Mads Lund’s business came to light. He and the other farmers had some meadow lots right by the cliff, and if the intention was to employ many workers in the factory, those pieces of land could certainly be divided into building lots.

“Well,” the lawyer said pensively. “In any case it’s an idea. Anyhow it would be smart to have a firm development plan and an agreement among the interested parties so that one doesn’t wind up selling too cheaply. You can just as well take the increase in value on the lots yourselves.” “That’s also what we’re thinking,” the farmer said. “But whether the plan can be carried out depends on Høpner,” Schjøtt said and gave an energetic little knock on the table. “If he builds workers’ houses, there’ll be nothing for other people to do. But if you people wish, I’ll make inquiries of the man.” “What’s that supposed to mean?” Mads Lund asked. “I’m a simple man and don’t understand lawyer-Latin. I’ll find out the lay of the land,” Schjøtt said. “I have an excellent relationship with the engineer.” “We just thought it was absurd for people from outside the parish to run off with the profit,” the farmer said. “Naturally,” the lawyer conceded. “Every man for himself.”

Høpner didn’t live in Cilius’s farmhouse, but had kept his room at the inn. The next day the lawyer drove to Alslev and was shown into the little room where Høpner took his meals. It took a little while before the engineer arrived and the lawyer refreshed himself with a glass of port with angostura bitters. “How do you do, counsel,” Høpner said coolly and closed the door behind him with an energetic slam. “What can I do for you?” “Perhaps I might request an interview with you, engineer Høpner,” Schjøtt said and he himself heard that his voice was a trifle
too servile. Høpner nodded with a facial expression as if he weren’t amused to hear what the lawyer had to say, and Schjøtt explained his business. Høpner wrinkled his forehead energetically and was immediately quite attentive.

One of the young engineers was sent for who brought a map of the factory’s foundation and the immediate surroundings, and the lawyer indicated with a pencil where the lots in question were situated. “But perhaps you’re intending to build yourself?” he asked cautiously. Høpner shook his head. “That’s not my job,” he said. “I’m going to manufacture cement. But I’d find it fair for the factory to take its share of the increase in the land value.” “Of course,” the lawyer said quickly. “The natural thing would be to form a consortium which you’d enter as a passive partner. We just have to be clear about whether you want to build workers’ houses.”

Høpner got up and paced the floor in the little room. “For the time being I’m getting a factory up and running,” he said. “In the next round this problem will arise: how am I going to operate it? For the moment things are fine with the workers. I’m a kind of messiah from the U.S.A. I pay higher wages than the farmers; I stand for a stage in the development from primitive farm work to modern industry. But in a few years everything will look different. The workers will organize themselves. They’ll feel like exploited wage slaves and an antagonism will arise between their interests and the factory’s. I’ve studied the social conditions in this country—and take notice of the smallholders.” “Certainly,” the lawyer said, a little disoriented.

“In reality there’s no social class that’s worse off than agriculture’s smallholders,” Høpner continued. “Their properties are overcapitalized, their interest expenditures quite inordinate. They have to slave away their twelve-fourteen hours a day and have to grossly exploit their wives’ and children’s labor. And in spite of everything the smallholders are satisfied. Why? Because they’ve been made to believe that they own something. They’re sitting on their own land, though Lord knows where it is. Get a man to believe that he’s working for himself, and you can get him to slave away twice as hard. That’s modern indus-
trial psychology."

The attorney nodded thoughtfully. He understood that Høpner was riding his hobbyhorse. The engineer went on: “We can’t give the worker a feeling that he has a share in the factory. Even if one hands over to him a share of the profit, that wouldn’t produce an effect that was sufficiently graphic. But give him his own house or home, bind him to a patch of land, and he immediately becomes a socially conservative citizen. He becomes interested in stable conditions. I accept your project. We don’t have the slightest wish to build workers’ houses ourselves. But don’t do it too cheaply. People are like that—they don’t care for anything they get too easily. Divide the lots, build roads, and demand a price. But an arrangement must be made with the factory about the economic aspect. It’s fair for us to get an appropriate percentage.” “Of course,” Schjøtt said. “Officially, we have nothing to do with your land speculation,” the engineer said. “And you can’t expect capital from me. We have enough to use the money on.”

Attorney Schjøtt had rendered Høpner important services. He’d been his agent and bought the cliff for him. Schjøtt had in an unobtrusive way expected that his competence would be appreciated. If the intention was to form a cement corporation, it was presumably not unreasonable for him to be included on the board. He ventured a question: “And how are things going otherwise with your enterprise, engineer Høpner?” he said. “Thanks, it’s progressing,” Høpner said. “We’re digging the foundations and building the wharf, and in the spring I’ll begin erecting the factory.” “You’re not working, if I may say so, with local capital?” “Ha-ha,” Høpner laughed. “Do you think Færgeby’s pennies would suffice here? But if you people can earn a penny in land speculation, you’re welcome to it.”

Schjøtt turned a little red at the temples. It wasn’t the first time the engineer had given him to understand that this game was too big for a little provincial town attorney. He coolly took his leave and let the car drive into Lund’s farmyard. The farmer came out and met him. “I succeeded in reaching an agreement with Høpner,” the lawyer said. “We have to give him a share in
the enterprise—then it’ll go smoothly. If you look in on me one of these days with the other interested parties, we can set up a corporation immediately.” The lawyer rubbed his gaunt hands and took crab-like steps into the farmhouse’s elegant living room, where pieces of mahogany furniture stood in a row. It smelt moldy, like in a room that was never used, and Mads Lund’s wife brought in a tray with glasses and port, with her sister hard on her heels. “That was good news,” Mads Lund said animatedly. “A fella can surely need to earn something on the side in these times.” “And it’s nice to provide other people with house . . . yes, house and home,” his women said in a chorus.

Now fall was about to begin for real. The leaves fell from the trees and a whiz of migratory birds flew over the area. People huddled around the oven and the evenings began to get long. Up in the barracks the whole crew sat around and shivered—the big rooms were not easy to warm up. But the work wasn’t going to stop until the frost penetrated the ground. They went to the inn more than they had before. At night travelers met them in droves when they came home from the pubs in Færgeby. They sang and howled and honest people got out of their way. You were in danger of life and limb when you encountered a crowd of drunken navvies.

But one person didn’t go to the inn. That was Iver, who was having his dalliance with Frederikke. He came home late almost every evening and by now everyone realized what was going on between him and Cilius’s wedded wife. When Iver got back to the barracks, the others greeted him with coarse jesting. But Iver gave as good as he got. What business was it of theirs which women he slept with? That’s just the way it was—when the women wished a fella well, those who couldn’t get a womanfolk were envious of him.

Jakob had the bunk next to Iver’s, and he gave a lot of good advice. He’d been around a long time and knew how love as a rule ended. “Now watch out, Iver, it can easily happen that she’ll get pregnant,” he said. “Then you’ll be saddled with a kid for many years.” “She can’t get pregnant, she can’t have children,” Iver said softly. “How do you know that?” Jakob asked,
and Iver explained that he had it from Cilius’s own mouth. “You goat,” Jakob laughed. “That’s why you seduced her. You’re smarter than you look. It’s the kids that destroy us. I had three I had to pay for in my day.”

Lashing rain showers passed over the fjord, but now it was time for the potatoes to be harvested. Word came to the day laborers asking whether the wives and children wanted work. Actually, the womenfolk had imagined they’d be free of it this year. But no one knew how the winter would be and when work on the factory would begin again in the spring. It was good to have a nest egg, and in spite of everything the women got cracking. From the cliff you could catch a glimpse of them like black spots in the fields. They crawled on their knees from morning till evening and gathered potatoes from the soil. They staggered home with aching backs and sore limbs and got cracking again early the next morning. And their children worked at their sides. Even the smallest ones got going on it. The little ones were pale and shivered from the cold when they got home, and their mothers had to warm the tiles and put them in the bed so they could get some warmth in their bodies.

The navvies had now become known in the area and people saw they weren’t as bad as they looked. They were a kind of human being after all. No women had been raped and they hadn’t set fire to the farms. They played cards and drank schnapps, and if they had had too much to drink, they quarreled over cards and fought. People began to distinguish them from one another and find out what their names were. They visited people once in a while. Not the farmers or the higher-class people like the minister, dairyman, and teacher, but smallholders and day laborers. One of them, who was named Thomas Trilling and came from the west, was a sober-minded, rough-haired fellow. He got engaged to Black Anders’ daughter Matilde. She was a pretty, black-eyed girl, but a bit crooked in one hip. Thomas had honest intentions with the girl. They went to Færgeby and bought rings.

“It’s strange that she’d dare take him,” Line Seldomglad said. “When a body thinks about how things have gone with Frederikke, who also got married to a navvy.” “Oh, so what,”
Tora felt. “Just because one horse bites doesn’t mean they all do. And Frederikke has found herself a comfort.” “Matilde has always given our Konrad lingering looks,” Line Seldomglad said. “But I’d really hate it if he took a sweetheart who was lame. And he certainly has something else in sight, that fellow. He’s got to go to Færgeby every other day. It’s the grocer’s Meta he’s visiting.” “Surely nothing’s happened with Meta yet,” Tora teased. “No, but it certainly will,” Line said confidently. “Konrad’s always gotten his way. That’s the way it’s been almost right from when he was lying in the cradle.”

Cilius wasn’t the only one who’d made a habit of visiting the navvies in the barracks. Practically all the day laborers went there and killed time. The out-of-town fellows could tell about odd adventures and wild ventures. The fire raged in the jamb stove, and once in a while the navvies thought up strange high jinx. They sent for the musician Frands, who brought his violin. They danced with one another to his music, and afterward they poured him so full of schnapps that his head was in a whirl.

A couple of times missionary Karlsen appeared in the barracks with his pockets full of tracts. He was allowed to show The Mirror of the Human Heart and explain that that’s what the sinful human being was like on the inside. But the next time the navvies were frisky and drunk, and a couple of them hit upon playing blanket toss with Karlsen. He was hurled toward the ceiling till he was sick and dizzy, and afterward he was eased out the door. Karlsen took the disgrace humbly. He’d turned quieter of late, and he didn’t explain so often to the grocer how things stood with the prospects for Meta’s salvation. Probably it would be a long time before Meta found peace in her soul.

It happened that the missionary visited Pastor Gamst. He was received in a friendly way and sat in a comfortable easy chair in the study and discussed religion with a clergyman. His work in the area wasn’t making progress, but it would be compensation if he could win the minister for the Lord’s cause. He spoke earnestly from the depth of his heart to the minister, and this much he understood—that the minister was a doubter and a desperately godless man. “I’m just a simple missionary and I
have neither a degree nor much training,” Karlsen said. “But this I know—that if one doesn’t give oneself completely to the Lord, there’s no way out. The Lord demands all or nothing.” “Did you read that?” the minister asked. “No, I experienced it,” Karlsen said. “I’ve had much to struggle with inside me. I came to Jesus as a desperate, impure human being and placed my whole existence in his hands.”

Pastor Gamst paced the floor in his study and spoke of the meaninglessness of life. “Life is a rat trap,” he said and stopped in front of the missionary. “It has an effect on me like a diabolical joke. What is the whole thing but instincts? Self-preservation instinct and sex drive! And where is God hiding—I stare out looking for him day and night, but I can’t catch sight even of his coat tail.” They remained sitting and talked long into the night, and it had gotten so late that the missionary accepted the offer to sleep on the sofa in the minister’s study. Before he fell asleep, he fervently prayed that the seed he’d sown might sprout and grow.

It was cold in the hayloft, and Frederikke got visits from Iver in her bedroom. There was no great danger that Cilius would discover them. He was out every evening and came home late, and the neighbors would surely refrain from betraying anything. You never knew how he’d take it and maybe he’d become violent. The neighbor women were agreed that it would probably end with that wild man killing Frederikke.

Old-Jep had deteriorated. If Iver was there, the old man lay there quietly. But when he awoke from his dozing and caught sight of Frederikke’s lover, his pale eyes gave a glowering look. He growled hollowly, as if invective and curses were boiling in him, but Old-Jep couldn’t breathe. He hissed his sili vaasikum, and neither Iver nor Frederikke looked after him. They hardly even took into account that he was in the room.

One evening when Iver came, Frederikke greeted him with tears. And now it turned out she’d been to the midwife and had been examined. Frederikke was with child. “What are you saying?” Iver said and stared her up and down. “I’m with child,” Frederikke moaned. “The midwife could tell by looking at me.
I'd been so anxious about it the last few months and now I wanted to know for sure.” “And she said it with absolute certainty?” Iver asked. “There’s no doubt about how things stand,” Frederikke whispered.

Iver was now no longer the melancholy fellow who’d suffered disappointments in life and been betrayed by a girl. His face was hard and had an evil expression, and he blinked nervously as if looking for a way out. “I mean you’re barren and can’t have children,” he said. “You’re just claiming you’re pregnant so I’ll have you to lug around.” “Even if I can’t have children with Cilius, surely I can have children with you,” Frederikke said. “I never said I couldn’t get pregnant.” “But Cilius said you couldn’t get pregnant,” Iver said. “Then there’s nothing else to do but call him to account because he tricked you,” Frederikke snapped at him.

Frederikke had experienced a new youth and now suddenly she sat there and became old once again. All the sweet words had wafted away and turned out to be hot air and deception. There was nothing more for Frederikke to experience. What would come now was the old business all over again, bitterness, malice, and resentment. She knew that just as certainly as if the words that were to be said had already been said. “Then there’s presumably nothing else to do but for us to go to another district together where I can bear you your child,” she said and felt like throwing herself on the floor and kicking and laughing.

But now Iver had come to a conclusion in his deliberations. He was a man who’d been in a scrape before and knew there’s always a way out. “First you have to answer me one thing, Frederikke,” he said gently. “Have you had nothing at all to do with Cilius during the time we’ve known each other?” “You know I surely can’t deny him his right if he’s my husband,” Frederikke said. “But I mean you do know that I’ve never been able to get pregnant by him.” “I don’t know anything about that,” Iver said. “But you hid from me that you were having intercourse with your husband.” Frederikke shook her head, but Iver continued. “I no longer trust any girl in the world. Now you’ve betrayed me, too, even though I was depending on you.
But that’s the way all of you are—there’s no difference.”

Iver shook his head and looked sad, but his eyes were hard as flint. “So you refuse to acknowledge the child?” Frederikke asked. “I certainly can’t acknowledge a child when I don’t even know if I’m its father,” Iver said. “This business here has taken a toll on me, Frederikke, because I’d counted on you remaining faithful to me. But that’s the way things are with womenfolk—you can’t trust any of them.” Iver looked as if the whole world had turned its back on him or the sky had fallen on him. His face twitched from cares, his eyes were constantly observing and unrelenting.

Frederikke bent her head and a hoarse, eery sound came from her. At first Iver thought she was crying, and he immediately felt better. When women cry, they’re not totally bad off. But Frederikke wasn’t crying. She laughed a howling laugh like a sick dog. Old-Jep had raised his head and stared at her. “Little Frederikke,” Iver said and stroked her in a friendly way across her back. “You mustn’t take it too much to heart. I could easily complain and cry, too, as hard as it’s been for me, and you have to remember what I’ve lived through with womenfolk before. But I know from my own experience that it passes with the years. And you have to remember that you’re in a much better position than me. You don’t have to tell Cilius what’s taken place between the two of us, and you’ll at least have a child—what’ll I have?” Frederikke turned her ashen face toward him. “Maybe you think you’re going to get off scot free,” she snarled. “But I’ll tell Cilius the whole thing no matter if he beats me to death. He’ll surely give you what’ll serve you right—he once beat a man till he was a cripple and he can do it again.”

“Come to your senses,” Frederikke, Iver said indulgently, but his voice was unsure, and Frederikke pursued her victory. “I’ll tell Cilius how often you slept with me,” she shrilled. He ought to get to hear what kind of buck you are. And I’ll go to the authorities and get you served with a summons. If you’ve fathered a child, you’ll also have to pay for it. And all that stuff you promised and told me!”

In the dark autumn evenings Iver had been sweet as honey.
He’d talked about how beautiful the two of them could have it if fate some day wanted them to be together. Back then Frederikke had been the only comfort that had been left to Iver in a wretched world. Frederikke recalled the fragrant hay and the peaceful stars, which had shined on them through a hole in the roof of the hayloft. But now it was over with. “You’ll regret how you’ve treated me till your dying day,” she shouted. “Before you seduced me, I was a decent woman. You seduced me and made me pregnant. But I’ll tell the whole story to Cilius and he’ll surely find you no matter where in the world you hide. You’re not going to seduce other women.”

“He himself said you were barren and the child could just as well be his,” Iver said doggedly. “There’s no use either in you saying you can’t get pregnant with him because you know he had a child with a girl down south. If it comes to a trial, I’ll swear an oath and get myself off.” “Then you’ll go to hell,” Frederikke said. “I’d also rather be with the devil’s great-grandmother than with you,” Iver said and left the living room. For a moment Frederikke looked at the door, which had closed behind him. Then, bent and sad, she went into the kitchen and cleaned up

Later in the evening Frederikke wrapped around a shawl and went up to the barracks. She’d thought over everything Iver had said. And the more she’d thought, the more she realized that he hadn’t spoken in earnest. He’d become hot-tempered and testy over her having been involved with Cilius. But if she managed to explain to him that she didn’t care about Cilius, he’d once again become the good, gentle Iver, who’d been betrayed by a woman and found happiness with Frederikke.

She stopped in the dark outside the barracks and couldn’t make up her mind to go in and speak to Iver. Maybe Cilius was sitting in there, and even if he wasn’t there, the others would think it was shameless for a married woman to be running after a man. She heard voices from inside the barracks. A man came out and staggered toward her, and for a moment she thought it was Iver. The man put his arm around her—he smelled of schnapps.

“How are you?” he asked, and Frederikke mentioned who
she was. “Don’t wait for Cilius because you’re not going to get him to come along” the man said. “But if you need a substitute, I’m willing. While he’s taking care of the cards, I’ll gladly take care of his wife.” “Let go of me,” Frederikke whispered. “I don’t want anything to do with you.” “You know, I’m not so bad,” the man laughed and put his arm more firmly around her. “We don’t get any pleasures in the world except the ones we take. And I mean, Cilius says you can’t get pregnant.”

Frederikke aimed a blow and hit him in the eye. She tore herself loose and ran home. That was what she’d gotten out of her brief love affair. If Karlsen had come riding on his bicycle now and explained to Frederikke that that was what sin and lewdness led to, maybe a soul would’ve been saved. But no one came to Frederikke’s rescue—she had to bear her burden alone on her own weak shoulders.
Every evening after work, Boel-Erik bicycled out to his moorland plot. Both Marinus and Lars Seldomglad had gone along to see how the work was progressing and they had to concede that Boel-Erik had put his back into it. “You’re good at breaking up the heath,” Marinus said. “Now the question is whether you can get anything to grow.” Boel-Erik explained that things could easily grow on his soil and that he’d planted an acre of land to potatoes. But Marinus didn’t think much of soil if rye couldn’t grow on it.

Boel-Erik didn’t drink schnapps and didn’t play cards. He was a man with big plans and he’d already determined where the buildings would be situated on the field. And when he’d gotten the soil well farmed, he’d buy more heath and cultivate it. “You’ll doubtless wind up a large farmer,” Lars Seldomglad teased, and Boel-Erik nodded. Why shouldn’t he be able to work the piece of heath up into a good farm? It wouldn’t be the first time. But Inger didn’t take his dreams seriously. “You’re a fool,” she said. “You think I’m going to go out and live on that desolate heath? A team of wild horses couldn’t drag me out there.”

Inger wasn’t cut out to be a smallholder’s wife and milk cows. She wasn’t cut out to be married to an obstinate person like Boel-Erik either. She was sullen when she spoke to him and looked as though she went about being angry about how life had treated her. She was far into her pregnancy and Boel-Erik was getting uneasy: what had become of the child? “Don’t you think you’ll be ready soon?” he asked. “Pah, it’ll come in due time,” Inger said. “I wish the child had died in the womb. I didn’t ask to have children.” Erik stroked her reassuringly across her back with his huge hands. When women were in that condition, they were always difficult to be around.

Boel-Erik got his potatoes dug up, and the likes of these potatoes hadn’t been seen in man’s memory. He stood with a cou-
pie of them in his hand at Marinus’s and explained that potatoes 
like those could grow on his heath. “See first if you can grow 
rye and if you can keep a couple of cows,” Marinus said, but 
Boel-Erik was triumphant and put his faith in the ability to get 
anything to grow if you worked with the soil. “Now if Inger 
would just have her child,” he said. “I’d prefer a boy I can get 
use out of when I get the soil in production. It can’t amount to 
anything as long as I’m a man all alone and have to do day labor 
on the side.” Marinus and Lars Seldomglad praised the potatoes 
and admitted they were good stuff, and Boel-Erik gave them a 
barrel each for the winter. The rest was to be sold for money to 
rent a horse and plow. He was going to bring in new land in the 
fall.

No one could deny that Erik was an industrious man. But 
things weren’t nearly so good with his wife. The other day-
laborer wives visited her and asked how she was preparing for 
childbirth. But Inger wasn’t preparing. It was as if she didn’t 
give a thought to the fact that a child has to have a bed and 
clothes when it’s born into the world. “But little Inger, you do 
have to provide for your child,” Tora said and clapped her hands 
in dismay. A lot of things are necessary and it can’t be lying 
there naked. You can have some of what I have lying around—I 
won’t have any more use for it.” Tora sighed. She’d borne 
many children into the world with pain and wailing, but she 
hadn’t had enough. She would gladly have lain down on her bed 
and begun all over again.

But Inger shook her head: “I don’t care about the child and 
I’d prefer it not to come into the world alive.” “But what in the 
world are you saying!” Tora said angrily. “Are you wishing 
death to your own child? Then you don’t deserve to have such 
a steady and hard-working husband.” “Oh, he goes and sweats 
over that crummy heath. But I’ll never move out there,” Inger 
snapped, but now Tora got angry: “Now I’m going to tell you 
right to your face, Inger: I don’t respect you. Menfolk are sup-
posed to work and womenfolk are supposed to have children,” 
she said. “And whether you like it or not, you have to have 
clothing so you can welcome the child.” “Oh, I’m fed up with
the whole thing,” Inger said. “I wish I’d never gotten married.” “You don’t know anything about what adversity is in this world,” Tora said. “Maybe the day’ll come when you’ll lose the child you’re now going to give birth to and then you’ll cry blood.”

Tora looked through her drawers and dug up children’s clothing. And one night Boel-Erik had to go for the midwife. The delivery went easily and Inger was lying with a big, healthy child in her arms. “It’s a girl, Erik,” the midwife said. “Well, so be it,” Boel-Erik said, resigned. “Yeah, we can’t do without womenfolk either. I mean I’d imagined it was going to be a boy since she was so fat.” He went into Inger’s room and touched the little wrinkled face. A girl was welcome in the world too, even though Boel-Erik had wished for a boy who could break up the heath.

The days became dark and the autumn storms came. The fjord flowed in over the meadows west of the cliff and people felt that the wharf probably wouldn’t make it through the winter. And even if it could take the autumn storms, it would be a mess when the ice was packed in the fjord. The excavations for the factory were full of water. Høpner and his engineers walked about in high boots and sized things up. “This won’t do,” Høpner said. “We’ll have to build a cement embankment along the bank by the spring. Otherwise we’ll wind up sailing around in this space every winter.”

Harder night frost, northerly gales, and snow set in, and now the work on the factory was over with for this year. One day the crew heard there was nothing more to do. The navvies packed their bundles and departed. Andres’ farmhouse was desolate and empty and Cilius’s farmstead was cleared out. The engineers and Høpner left. But Høpner had given instructions ahead of time that Kresten Bossen had to move now. He had to be out of the farmhouse as soon as Christmas was over and the artisans from Færgeby were going to fit up the farmhouse. Høpner himself was going to live here when he returned to the area.

Kresten Bossen looked for a place to live and it wasn’t easy to come by. Finally he managed to rent a dilapidated old house
in the interior of the parish. Marinus talked to him one day when they met: “So what were you thinking of doing with the animals?” he asked. Yeah, Kresten felt they had to be sold. For the time being he didn’t want to buy a farm—there’d probably be work once again for the spring. “It won’t be easy to find somebody who’d be good to the animals,” Marinus said. “I had them for many years and I have a soft spot for them.” Kresten Bossen understood that and gave his word that they’d be sold to decent people. But there was no way around it—Matilde had to go to the butcher. “Oh, dear Jesus,” Marinus said. “She was my best cow for many years. But we can’t last forever. Yeah, yeah, it’s not just us humans who have to go, the cattle also have to depart when the time comes.”

The winter brought dark, sleety days and frosty nights, and the people kept indoors. The navvies were out of the parish and everything was like in the old days. A breakwater and an excavation lay below the cliff, and a factory was going to be there. But in the middle of the harsh winter it was all unreal. The men hung around together and talked about this and that, and the women met at sickbeds and child-births. Things deteriorated with Louise, as they usually did when winter came. She lay in the circle of women bemoaning how hard her existence had been. But life still wouldn’t let her go.

The Pious held meetings at Martin Thomsen’s and Karlsen led the devotions. He went to the minister’s and sometimes he succeeded in getting Pastor Gamst to go along to a meeting. The minister sat modestly and listened, but didn’t express himself concerning his view of mercy and salvation. But people do know this—that a person had to be awakened before he could receive the gift of election. In the snow and slush old women came wobbling in from the poor moorlands and sometimes people also came from town. Before each meeting Karlsen went from house to house and, with gentle words, urged men and women to show up.

Karlsen’s face had become thinner and he had dark shadows under his eyes. He could become oddly absentminded while he stood talking to people. One evening there was a meeting in
Martin Thomsen’s parlor. The minister was there and sat by himself in a corner. About a dozen dark-clad men and women were sitting around the parlor and Martin Thomsen, the grocer, and others of God’s children were sitting right below the pine-wood lectern, where the speaker was standing. Karlsen had spoken, but today he was in low spirits. He’d finished and a hymn was sung, and Karlsen asked, as he was in the habit of doing, whether one of the sisters or brothers wanted to bear witness. There was a little pause, then Martin Thomsen went up to the lectern.

The farmer’s face was unusually solemn and nervous twitches flashed across it as if he had cramps in his facial muscles. He stood there and couldn’t really get started. “Sisters and brothers,” he said. “I’m just a simple man, I’ve neither studied for the ministry nor attended a Mission school, no, there’s no greatness about me, and I don’t consider myself more than the most insignificant creature on earth. But I do my humble best to read the holy scripture and it’s my guide in everything I have to do with, both in spiritual affairs and those of this world. And it is written: For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”

Martin Thomsen paused for a bit and cast a glance out across the assembly. The faces were sleepy and a few women who’d been up early milking were sitting with their eyes closed, sleeping. Then he began to speak again, slowly and in a drawl, while he avoided looking at the missionary:

“I’m a simple man, and I’ve never been in the habit of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds, as it is written. I’ve been together with many of the Lord’s warriors and champions, and associated in the Lord much with Pastor Faaborg back when he was minister here in our district. I’m not saying that to be haughty, but so you’ll understand I’m trying to distinguish the wheat from the tares. And I’ll say this straight out—from the first day Karlsen came here as a missionary, I’ve had many
doubts and scruples. It’s often seemed to me that he wasn’t truly one of God’s children, but that the devil and sin had a spot in a little corner in his soul.

Now suddenly all of them had become awake and attentive. Everyone understood that the farmer was going to bring an accusation against Karlsen. The missionary sat erect like a candle with his arms crossed and stared at the speaker.

“Many’s the time I’ve thought to myself: I wonder whether Karlsen is the pious person he passes himself off as,” Martin Thomsen continued. “Or isn’t he like the whitened sepulchres that are full of sheer rot and ruin. Now we all know we mustn’t level false testimony against a brother, and that’s why I’ve kept my scruples to myself and fought my fight in private. But now I’ve heard things that have strengthened my impression, and I’ve laid the matter on the Lord and gotten the answer. The Lord said to me that I must raise the matter before the congregation, before the sisters and brothers, so you can hear what Karlsen has to say in his defense.”

Martin Thomsen paused and enjoyed the attention his words had stirred up. He had a hard time maintaining a properly humble face and his voice broke with agitation.

“I always wondered that Karlsen went to Skifter’s so much more than to the rest of us God’s children,” he said. “It didn’t seem to me that was the only place where he could get help and assistance in his work. And I gladly admit that once in a while I thought about whether it was really out of concern for the kingdom of God that he went in and out there. But every time I had that thought, I put it out of mind and said to myself: Martin, Karlsen is a pious person who doesn’t covet the lust of the flesh. He’s a saved and a married man, who not even in his thoughts would commit adultery. But lately I’ve heard ugly rumors, and now as a simple, believing person I want to ask you straight out, Karlsen: Is it true, as people say, that you violated the grocer’s Meta?”

“Who said that?” Karlsen shouted, all worked up.

“Our girl is a school friend of hers,” the farmer said. And Meta told her that you pushed her down on a bed in the maid’s
room, where she serves, and that it was only with the utmost difficulty that she prevented you from committing the evil act against her. That's what our girl says, and she's not the only one talking about it. But now I've done my duty by presenting the matter, and you can have the opportunity to cleanse yourself of the ugly rumor."

It was deathly quiet in the room. Martin Thomsen remained standing for a moment at the lectern, then he stole back to his seat. All eyes were directed at Karlsen's figure. He sat with his head bowed and stared down at the floor. You could tell by looking at him that he was absorbed in prayer. Grocer Skifter sat and rocked agitatedly back and forth on the bench. The women began to whisper to each other.

Finally, when the silence had become almost intolerable, Karlsen got up and went to the lectern. His face was pale, but he smiled meekly and forgivingly. "Brothers and sisters," he said. "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. That's what I'm going to do. Martin Thomsen has brought a terrible accusation against me, and I confess with remorse and contrition that I am a sinner before the Lord. The devil has his grip on me and frequently I have to fight to take off the garb of haughtiness and vanity. But I know that as long as I put my load of sin at Jesus's feet, he'll bear it for me. He's my helper and comforter."

Karlsen dried his face and cleared his throat with difficulty. "Yes, I'm a wretched sinner, and if the Savior didn't exist, I too would have to end up in perdition," he said. "But the sin Martin Thomsen accused me of, I know I am innocent of. I can confess here before you that many is the time I've been carried away by vanity, but never by evil lusts of the flesh as regards the young woman Meta. Her father asked me to speak a word with her as often as it was possible for me, and I did. I visited her in her home, at the place where she's a servant, and in her room. I placed my hand on her arm and on her shoulder when I talked to her earnestly about the path she ought to walk, but I never approached her with carnal thoughts in my mind. And if Meta said that, then she's borne false witness against her neighbor."
Karlsen had regained his natural complexion and he spoke easily and in a relaxed manner. At first, the listeners didn’t know what to believe, but now he had them on his side. And now he talked on about young women, who may be so carried away with the fire of sensuality that they construe even an innocent touch in the worst way. “But this I know for sure, and I can swear by the Savior’s cross, that I’m a clean-living man, who only has intercourse with my lawfully wedded wife in chastity and decency,” he closed emotionally. “And if I ever touched Meta’s body, it was as a father can touch his daughter, indeed, as I myself stroke my daughter Johanne. And that’s the truth, brothers and sisters, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Karlsen had triumphed and repudiated an ugly accusation. Skifter shook his hand when he came down from the lectern and Martin Thomsen slanted his head and declared that of course he’d never believed it either, but just wanted to silence a rumor. Karlsen smiled forgivingly, but when he accompanied Pastor Gamst along the road to the parsonage after the meeting, he was angry. “It’s shameful,” he said. “But I’ve met that kind before. People who call themselves pious have the effrontery to spread malevolent gossip.” “That’s the way people are,” the minister said. “I know what’s bothering Martin Thomsen,” Karlsen said. “He’s angry that I didn’t turn to him for advice and aid in my work. He’s a self-righteous man. But that’s nasty of Meta to construe my concern for the salvation of her soul that way.”

The missionary told his wife about the attack he’d been up against, and Mrs. Karlsen cried. “Now we certainly can’t stay here any longer,” she sobbed. “But why not, little Kristine?” Karlsen asked. “When that kind of rumor gets out, it runs from mouth to mouth,” Mrs. Karlsen wailed. “I could never stand that shameless wench anyway.” And gently Karlsen had to explain to his wife that every person has his worth in the Lord’s eyes and that there’s salvation for everyone.

Meta came home on Sunday and Skifter interrogated her. Yes, it was true. The missionary had pushed her down on the bed, and if he hadn’t had a wife and children, Meta would’ve reported him. “That can’t be right,” Skifter said. “He’s a believ-
ing person and he says that it never occurred to him to do that kind of thing.” Meta stuck to her guns, but incidentally it didn’t matter, Meta said and turned up her nose because she’d become engaged now and was going to get a ring. “Who’s the fellow?” Skifter asked. “It’s Konrad Seldomglad,” Meta informed him. “And you can just as well find it out right away: we have to hurry and get married.”

Now the whole parish found out that Line Seldomglad’s prediction had come true: Konrad had gotten the grocer’s Meta pregnant. “What was it I said?” Line gloated. “He sure knows what he’s doing, that rascal.” “Yeah, he comes by it easily,” Tora laughed. “That’s the kind of thing the fellows usually pay for afterward; but he gets the pleasure and the money to boot.” And now the women discussed whether the grocer would leave Konrad and Meta to shift for themselves or give them a start in life. “Surely he can go to work, like his father has all his days,” Inger said sullenly. But Line looked daggers at her. “Just you wait till your own girl grows up, then you’ll surely want her to get ahead too. Hopefully our children won’t have to go slog around the same way we did.”
It turned out to be a severe winter almost without snow. But the wharf withstood the strain of the pack ice—it was sturdy stuff. There wasn’t much work for the day laborers to get. But this year the winter wasn’t so tough to get through—they’d earned well and put money aside for a rainy day. They carried their heads higher—they were provided for. Even if their money ran out, there’d be work once again early in the spring when the ground had thawed.

Black Anders went poaching in the woods on the other side of the fjord. He walked across the ice as soon as it froze over. It was a manorial forest and in the dark nights the forester was out after him. But Black Anders couldn’t be caught. Sometimes Bregentved went along. Bregentved was also a hunter type, but he had a hard time keeping his mouth shut when they were out with the gun. He’d worked at the cliff part of the fall, but now he was driving his fish wagon once again and Anton was his trusted man. If there was nothing else to sell, they could deal in eel.

Boel-Erik toiled on his soil and people felt that he’d now lost his senses. He ditched and dug, although the ground was hard with frost. It told on his strength, but Erik had plenty of that commodity. He’d set his mind on bringing the land into cultivation and it had to happen fast. He swung the hoe like a savage, while his breath froze to icicles in his yellowish-white mustache.

Peat smoke rose from all the houses toward the clear frosty sky. And one tranquil winter day Povl Bøgh’s William died. “Yeah, yeah,” Povl Bøgh said. “So William had to go—so be it. They didn’t want him to die at the sanatorium and we suspected as much when we got him home.” Louise cried and wailed in her bed. “He was the only thing I had here in life,” she said, and it didn’t help any that Line Seldomglad explained that there was surely a meaning to it. William had gone on ahead in order to greet his mother in the stories on high.
“Oh no, that’s the worst thing when the young people have to go,” Louise cried. “If it’d only been me who’d been called home. Here I am lying and nauseated by life, and a young lad has to die. You know how it is, Tora, you yourself lost one, and it wasn’t even your only one.” Tora nodded with tears in her eyes. Tora couldn’t forget Vera. Often she stole out to the cemetery and sat in the cold of winter by the child’s grave. It was a place she had, so to speak, all to herself. “We always have to be the humble little people,” Louise said. “The big shots treat us like the dirt under their feet, and is Our Lord much better? I really don’t think so.” “Watch your mouth, Louise,” Line Seldomglad said, frightened. “Remember, one day you yourself will have to account for yourself before your judge.”

William had a nice burial. Everyone wanted to honor Povl Bøgh, who was a well-regarded man. Afterward the mourners gathered in Povl Bøgh’s small rooms and teacher Ulriksen spoke about William, who’d been a clever boy in school. People didn’t say much, but Magda did manage to whisper to Tora and Line Seldomglad: “Look at Frederikke.” They looked at her and both realized she was with child. Magda accompanied Tora home. She was full of indignation. “In spite of everything, I wouldn’t have believed that about Frederikke,” she said. “Because a body can surely figure out who that kid’s father is.” But now Tora became angry.

“I don’t want to listen to your nonsense, Magda,” she said. “Frederikke is a married woman, and if she has a child, then Cilius is the father unless he himself denies it.”

“But now that she’s gone outside the marriage,” Magda said stubbornly.

“I don’t respect that,” Tora said. “Womenfolk certainly also have to have rights. If you’d had a child, Magda, people would’ve gossiped more about you. I mean, you lived in lewdness with Andres.”

Magda blushed and paled and her eyes flashed sparks. “I’d never expected that—that anybody would call me lewd,” she said. “I’ve never done anything but what I can account for on judgment day.” “Then keep your nose out of other people’s
sheets,” Tora said cuttingly.

But Magda wasn’t inclined to keep to herself. The next day she went visiting at Cilius’s. She sat in the kitchen chatting with Frederikke, who was peeling potatoes. When Frederikke was going to lift the pot with potatoes over on to the stove, Magda took it from her. “You mustn’t strain yourself lifting in the condition you’re in, Frederikke,” she said. “That much I do know, even if I haven’t had children myself.”

Frederikke grabbed the pot out of her hands and put it on the stove. “Who says I’m going to have a child?” she asked. “I can surely see that for myself,” Magda smiled. “That must be nice for you. I almost began to think you couldn’t have any.” “I’m not going to have a child,” Frederikke said icily. Magda lost her temper. She’d come to be a comfort to Frederikke and listen to her grievances about men’s wiliness, but if she wouldn’t take of the sweet, she could have some of the bitter. “That’s sure got to be a surprise for Cilius; many’s the time I’ve heard him say you were sterile,” she said and inclined her head sideways. “Mind your own business,” Frederikke said. “If you’re in that mood, I certainly better go,” Magda said with dignity. “Otherwise I came with the best intentions.”

She was boiling with anger and when she saw Cilius go and take care of something out in the hen house, she couldn’t contain herself. She stuck her head in the shed and nodded to him. “Anyhow, you need to take care of Frederikke a little— she’s working at things too hard,” she said and inclined her head sideways. “Mind your own business,” Frederikke said. “If you’re in that mood, I certainly better go,” Magda said with dignity. “Otherwise I came with the best intentions.”

Astonished, Cilius followed her with his eyes. What did she mean by saying Frederikke had to be looked after. And suddenly it dawned on him that his wife had recently put on weight. Surely she couldn’t be with child?

He went into the kitchen and chatted with Frederikke. “Magda was here,” he said. “What did she want?” “You know, she seldom comes for a good purpose,” Frederikke said. Cilius followed her with his eyes, and there was surely no doubt about how things stood. “I’d sure like to know where Iver, who used
to work here, has gone to," he said and looked out the window. "Why are you thinking about him?" Frederikke asked. "How am I supposed to know what became of him. I don’t correspond with him."

Frederikke’s voice was snarling as always when she talked to Cilius, but she was afraid. Why was Cilius starting to talk about Iver now? So he knew all about it—he’d discovered she was with child. Now he’d be beside himself and kill her. But Cilius just went into the living room and took money from the wall cabinet. It was what he had left from his wages. "I’m going to run over to the inn," he said curtly.

Cilius went to the inn. He had to sit in peace and think about how to take what had happened. But there were others in the taproom and Cilius wasn’t allowed to sit alone with his reflections. There was the fat little pig dealer, whom Cilius had met before and who thought he’d been a sow in his last earthly life. He was drunk and offered Cilius a coffee laced with schnapps.

"Did you manage to do some business?" Cilius asked, but it had been a long time since the pig dealer had occupied himself with business. He’d gone on a binge from place to place for over a week and his small blinking eyes were red from fatigue and boozing. "I’m going to drink myself to death, I can’t stand it," he complained. "Can’t you leave the bottle alone?" Cilius said. "No, I can’t, I have to drink myself into consolation," the businessman said. "I’ll tell you, I was a pig for a long time, it sits deep in me, I have to have my snout in the mud, it’s my nature." And the pig dealer recounted how things were with him. He’d fallen in love with a bad woman, and she had intercourse with everybody else, but she didn’t want anything to do with him, though he wanted to marry her.

"That’s stupid of you," Cilius said. "You can have a good time without her—there are enough womenfolk on earth. You earn money and every one is yours for the asking." The man shook his head sadly. What was the use of his being able to get others if there was only one he wanted. "But she’s not worthy of you if she goes to bed with other men," Cilius said. "But I can’t
be without her,” the businessman said. “You see, that’s my nature, I had my snout in the mud too long. I still have a lot of the animal in me.”

The two men drank together till far into the evening. “Hold your head high,” Cilius said. “There’s enough womenfolk and schnapps. There’ll be quite a donnybrook if those commodities run out. I came here on foot to this parish without soles on my shoes and I’ve managed well to this day. I drank away a farm and beat a guy till he was a cripple. I’m not afraid of anybody, I don’t care about anything.” Cilius gave the pig dealer an encouraging slap on the back, but the man had had his share. He’d collapsed and had to be brought to bed in a room at the inn, and Cilius went home.

Cilius hadn’t had time to ponder what he was going to say to his unfaithful woman. Frederikke wasn’t in the living room, and he thought she’d gone to bed. Old-Jep lay awake and he nodded happily to him. “I’ve been at the inn and gotten boozed up, grandpa,” he said. “Maybe you want a drink too.” There was a drop of schnapps in the bottle in the cabinet and Cilius fed it to the old man with a spoon. But this evening it was as if Old-Jep didn’t care about the schnapps. Agitated, he shook his head and moaned.

“You’re not sick, are you?” Cilius asked. It had never happened before that the old man had made such a fuss when he was fed the strong stuff. But Old-Jep probably wasn’t sick. He was agitated about something, and Cilius remembered that Jep was a tremendously gifted man. Doubtless he’d been lying here in his bed and following what had been going on. He knew that Frederikke was with child.

“Yeah, it’s not easy with womenfolk,” Cilius said and had a drink himself. “Sometimes they want one thing and sometimes they want something else. You think I should kill her?” “Oh sili vaasikum,” the old man wailed in a voice from the depth of the grave. “Oh sili vaasikum, sili vaasikum.” And Cilius understood that the old man didn’t want blood to be shed.

“No,” Cilius said pensively. “All of us surely have our own share of things to be accountable for. You gambled your pros-
perity away, and I squandered everything I got on boozing and drink. Womenfolk do it a different way. There’s no use in us judging them too severely. I myself had a child with a girl, I know how things happen. There’s none of us without flaws.”

Now Cilius had fought his fight. Frederikke had had lovers and committed adultery. She’d made herself and Cilius the talk of the town; another man had gotten her pregnant. But Cilius wasn’t the one to treat life in a mean-spirited way. He got up and went into the bedroom. His wife wasn’t in bed. He hurried out into the yard and looked in the well. There was a danger that in remorse or dread Frederikke had done away with herself. But she wasn’t in the well, wherever in the world she was.

It was a starry night and Cilius hurried down to the fjord. If Frederikke had lost her mind and wanted to take her own life, that’s where she probably could be found. And when he went out on to the cliff, it seemed to him he could glimpse a figure huddled out on the wharf. He crawled down the narrow path and ran out to the water. And sure enough it was Frederikke, who was sitting there pitiful and exhausted, wrapped in her gray shawl. She started when she discovered Cilius in the dark, but she didn’t try to fling herself into the water.

“Are you sick, Frederikke?” Cilius asked, and Frederikke replied hoarsely that she’d just felt like going out into the fresh air. “But you better come home with me now,” Cilius said and took her firmly by the shoulder. “The night cold won’t do you any good, and even if you’re not thinking of yourself, don’t forget the child.” Frederikke held her breath and sensed how her heart hammered in her chest. “Yes I know you’re pregnant,” Cilius said. “And womenfolk get strange ideas when they’re with child. Come along, Frederikke.”

Frederikke got up without any will of her own and walked toward land. Cilius followed vigilantly right on her heels. He helped her up the cliff. She panted heavily as if she were dragging a heavy load. Otherwise Cilius had never regarded her as much. She’d come into his bed once many years ago, and he’d stuck around with her. But now he took her arm and managed to calm her down. It wasn’t for her beauty’s sake. Frederikke’s
skin was sallow and she was careworn and resembled a cow. But she was with child.

Word soon got round how things stood with Frederikke, but no one cared to talk to Cilius about it. He was the one who first mentioned what was going on. He was visiting at Marinus’s and Lars Seldomglad was in the living room. “Well, the wife’s with child now,” Cilius said, and the others nodded and avoided looking at him. “I’d thought she was barren,” Cilius said. “But she sure is pregnant now. Otherwise I’d never counted on having a child with her.” “Better late than never,” Lars Seldomglad said and Marinus nodded. Now people knew that Cilius would regard the child as his, even though Frederikke had had a lover.

It was a blow for Magda that things went so easily. She’d imagined consoling Frederikke and assisting her, but she’d been rejected. “There aren’t so many men who’d put up with it,” she said to Andres. But Andres was of a different opinion. “If somebody’s been cheated in business, it’s smartest for him to keep it to himself if he at all can,” he said. “And we shouldn’t talk too loudly about who womenfolk go to bed with. It can strike each and every one of us. Nobody knows for sure in those matters.” “That’s good for me to know,” Magda said. “Maybe I’ll also take it into my head to go take a lover.” Andres shook his head indulgently. “Your flesh has become too oily, little Magda,” he said. “And you mustn’t forget that if you do that, I can demand a divorce, and you’ll have lost your rights.”

Offended, Magda fell silent. She was a married woman, and it would never occur to her to risk what she’d gained. She lived well together with Andres. Before she got married, they’d fought like cat and dog, and Magda had promised herself that if she ever got him, she’d teach him what money was to be used for. But now she was as close-fisted as Andres. Nothing was spent unprofitably in their house.

Christmas came and the days began to grow longer. The sunshine sparkled over the fields, which were frozen hard. It was warm and stuffy in the day laborers’ small living rooms. It smelled of peat smoke and lots of people. Every afternoon the women gathered and the men met at the grocer’s and heard the
news. Right after New Year Konrad and Meta were married. It turned out that Skifter didn’t abandon his daughter because she’d chosen a husband after her own heart. Konrad lent a hand in the shop, and the two young people lived in a couple of rooms in the attic and ate together with the grocer. Meta stood behind the counter heavy and swelling, but Karlsen never came to visit. He’d disavowed what he’d been accused of—he’d cleansed his reputation.

The farmers held Christmas parties. They drove around to one another’s houses in wagons pulled by heavy horses that had been rubbed shiny, and they ate well and played cards. They had their own affairs to keep an eye on. A corporation had been formed to sell the lots for workers’ houses, and in the spring the surveyor was supposed to mark off the lots. And one day a man came to Anders Toft wanting to buy land out to the village street. They negotiated and agreed on a premium price. And now the farmers realized, if they hadn’t before, that they had to watch out carefully for their assets. People were coming from the outside wanting to buy land and build houses. Building lots could be sold if you had a field that was well situated.

There were the day laborer houses. Only Povl Bøgh and Lars Seldomglad owned their own cottages; the others rented. Now the day laborer houses became valuable. When people earned a huge day-wage, it was only reasonable for them to pay decently to get a roof over their heads. You don’t get anything free in this world. And the farmers agreed that if the little people didn’t have to pay a reasonable price for their necessities, they’d just spend the money to no purpose.

There was much talk in the farmers’ warm, cozy living rooms about the future and the outlook. Previously they’d talked about crops and cattle, about prices and new machines. Now the talk was about what they should demand for the land when people flocked there wanting to buy. One thing was certain: lawyers and speculators weren’t going to run off with the whole pie.

The day laborers began to long for work once again. Their hands were soft and their muscles flabby from loafing around,
and money was beginning to get tight. They had to have credit at the grocer’s. That was the way it had been before. Marinus, who had many mouths to feed, was especially hard up. He borrowed a little money here and there and pulled through. They always did that in the day laborer houses. But when spring came, the children were pale and thin like potato sprouts.

Once in a while teacher Ulriksen looked in and chatted with Tora. “The children have to have more nourishing food, Tora,” he said. “They can’t manage on skim milk and potatoes.” “They have to take what we’ve got—we can’t give them anything else,” Tora said. “Poor folks’ kids have to thrive on what’s there, just like young rats. I’m making it as good as I can for them.”

Ulriksen shook his head and quietly put a few crowns on the dresser. Ulriksen was a well-meaning man, but he didn’t have a fortune in wages and had many places to help. One day he came and recounted that things weren’t going with Soren the way they should. He’d gotten behind in high school—he was having a hard time keeping up.

“O dear me,” Marinus said. “Isn’t the lad minding what he’s supposed to? And after everything that’s been done for him.” “Nonsense, Marinus,” Ulriksen said. “But it’s taking a toll on him. He has to get up early in the morning and bicycle that long way to school in all kinds of weather. We have to try and see about finding a place where he can live for a reasonable price.” “I’m afraid I can’t manage that,” Marinus said. But Ulriksen brusquely explained that it wasn’t his intention to put Marinus to expense. The money would definitely be provided.

Ulriksen found a place for Soren to live. It was at the home of a wheelwright in Færgeby, and now Soren came home only on Sundays. He was like a stranger in his fine Sunday clothing and with his city speech. Marinus spoke to him in a different way than to his other children. Soren had moved away from his home. He was going to be a scholar, and you could already see it by looking at him.
The church was never overcrowded when Pastor Gamst held services. “I like him,” Line Seldomglad said after she’d been in church. “But I hardly understand everything he means. It’s nothing for uneducated people.” That’s the way it was. People came to church once in a while because they weren’t heathen. Afterward they stood in small clusters and heard news from out in the parish or greeted friends and acquaintances. Pastor Gamst felt it. He was a lonely man, outside the life of the parish.

One day he came home from afternoon services and missionary Karlsen was sitting and waiting for him. The minister greeted him in a friendly way. Something pitiful had come over the missionary—his plump self-confidence had disappeared.

“Excuse me for coming,” Karlsen said. “But I have to talk to a human being. I have to confide in someone.” “Did something happen?” the minister asked, wondering. Karlsen didn’t answer, but took a little book out of his inside pocket. It was The Mirror of the Human Heart, and he opened the book and showed the picture that represented man inside once he’d been saved but had once again become impure. The minister noticed that small drops of sweat were forming on his forehead, and from his breath you could tell he’d been drinking.

“That’s the way it looks inside me,” Karlsen said. “Satan and all his impure animals reign in my heart. If I could cut my heart out of my body and throw it in the fire with all its impure lust, I’d do it. Then maybe my soul could be saved.” Karlsen sat slumped in the chair, while Pastor Gamst stood in front of him, tall and lanky in his vestments.

“I have to have someone to confess to,” Karlsen said. “I have to relieve my soul of its burden of sin. I can’t go to the friends—they wouldn’t understand me, but would condemn me as a hypocrite. But I’m no hypocrite. I’ve wrestled like Jacob with the Lord, but he hasn’t wanted to bless me. Christ hasn’t wanted to take my sin from me. Is it my fault?”
The minister left the living room and immediately returned with cognac and a glass. “You’ve lost your equilibrium, Karl­
lesen,” he said in a friendly way. “You’re going through a spirit­
ual crisis. You need a little alcohol to brace you. You’ll stay here and eat dinner, and my housekeeper can make up the bed for you in the guest room.”

“After you’ve listened to me, you won’t want to give me shelter,” the missionary said. “I’ve committed the sin that can never be atoned for, the sin against the holy ghost. Three months ago I stood in Martin Thomsen’s parlor and swore by the name of the savior that I’d never lusted after the grocer’s Meta or behaved in an unchaste way toward her. It was a false oath I swore. I not only lusted for her, but I pushed her over onto a bed, and it wasn’t my fault that more didn’t happen. She began screaming.”

Dumbfounded, the minister stared at him. He himself wasn’t very much the erotic type, and it appeared to him unbelievable that a person could lose control of himself to that degree. And there was something at the same time unappetizing and comical about the thought of the portly missionary as a violent suitor in a maid’s room.

“I’ve always been a sensuous type,” the missionary said. “And female beauty has always made a strong impression on me. But till now I’ve been able to hold my base lusts in check. You’ve never seen my wife Kristine. She’s a capable and pious woman, but she doesn’t have the physical charms that can satisfy sensuousness. She’s been a good wife to me, but in the erotic area, no, there she’s never lived up to what a strongly sensuous man desires. A true Christian person, of course, must not give into the savage, sinful urges either, but must behave towards his wife in chasteness and modesty. I’ve lived chastely with my wife and begotten children with her in a Christian marriage, and I managed to push back the infernal animal urges in my soul until I met the girl Meta.”


“Fell in love . . .” the missionary sighed. “No, there were no
deeper feelings involved. I was obsessed by sexual lust, by a lust like hell’s fire. It took a while before I realized how things stood. I tried to fight against it, I implored my savior because of my soul’s affliction, but the carnal passion wouldn’t let go of me. Then it happened that it got the better of me in the girl’s room. It was my first terrible sin. I pretended as if I’d come to save her soul, while in reality I’d come full of desire for her body. It is the sin against the holy spirit.”

The minister poured another glass of cognac and forced Karlsen to drink it; the missionary was dreadfully agitated, his face was gray and ravaged, and his eyes shone as if in a fever. He poured it down in one gulp.

“That was my first terrible sin, and it brought the next one in its wake,” Karlsen said. “Martin Thomsen stood up and brought his accusation against me, as you recall, and it was true every word. Now I understand it was the Lord who was answering my burning prayers. If I’d confessed my guilt and revealed what a sinner I am, there’d also have been forgiveness for me. But the devil whispered to me: if you admit it, you’ll be fired as a missionary. You’ll lose your livelihood and your good reputation. How will you earn a living for your wife and children? And the shame will not merely be on you, but also on God’s children. That’s what the devil whispered into my ear, and I listened to his voice. I saw myself expelled from the congregation. I saw my wife and my children suffering distress. And I stood up and the devil’s voice spoke through me. I swore by my savior that I wasn’t guilty of any offense.”

“Surely forgiveness can be had for that too,” the minister said earnestly.

“No, that sin can never be forgiven,” Karlsen said. “From that moment I also sensed in myself that the devil had completely conquered my heart. Before I thought unchaste thoughts about Meta, but now my soul is a dunghill of stinking lechery. Lewdness has totally overpowered me. I think only about women and sensuous things. Oh, don’t let me say what I think and what I do. I’m like a wild beast.”

Karlsen flung himself across the table and sobbed. It was
unpleasant to see the big man totally collapse, and the minister took him by the shoulder and shook him furiously. But Karlsen was like a sack. Then he sat up straight, grabbed the cognac bottle, and poured himself a big glassful. “I also drink,” he said with a stupid smile on his sallow face. “I never had a craving for it before. But now you’ll ask me to leave. You can’t have a stinking cadaver in your parlor.” He wanted to get up, but the minister pressed him back down into the chair.

“Missionary Karlsen, now come to your senses,” he said helplessly. “Senses,” Karlsen sneered. “Do you say to a house that’s burning that it should come to its senses? Do you demand of a corpse that it not stink? I often explained to others what it’s like to be eternally lost. Now I know myself. I’m eternally damned, I’ll end up in hell’s fire. Yeah, I’m already there.”

And now the insanity totally overpowered the half-drunk, shaken man. While the slobber flowed down his chin, a stream of lewd words surged out of him. He babbled like a fool, his mouth with its thick lips was soft and moist, and his eyes shone wildly. The minister tried to get him to keep quiet. But Karlsen kept it up. He told about Meta, his wife, about women he’d seen and desired, about savage lusts that reigned in his soul.

“Be quiet, man!” the minister shouted, and Karlsen stopped talking in the middle of a sentence, reached out for the bottle, and again poured himself a glass. Pastor Gamst went out to give the housekeeper instructions about making up the room.

“It’s strange to be damned,” Karlsen said when the minister came back into the living room. “Sometimes you feel the fiercest desperation and pain in your soul, and sometimes you have a lascivious feeling of dirtying yourself in the filth. My wife doesn’t suspect anything. It will take her completely by surprise. She believed in me just as so many others believed in me.”

Karlsen sat for a while yet and chatted. The more he drank, the more mournfully resigned his manner became. He refused to eat dinner, and at about eight the minister got him to go to bed. “Good night, Pastor Gamst,” Karlsen said when the minister had accompanied him into the guest room. “I’d never have supposed it would be you I’d confess to in the agony of my
soul.”

The next morning Karlsen wasn’t in the room. The minister thought that he’d bicycled home in the morning. But a couple of hours later a pale and bewildered girl came running over. She’d found Karlsen dead in one of the parsonage’s stables. He’d hanged himself.
One day in March Høpner returned to Alslev. He was driving in a car with a lady at his side. The car was a small, automobile with sparkling paint, a horn, and brass lights, and half the town crowded round to see it. It was rare that a car came to town. Høpner inspected Marinus’s old farmhouse and was satisfied with its layout. People understood that he’d ordered furniture in the capital and that he intended to move in as soon as possible. For the time being he was living at the inn.

The lady was tall and slim and had a fashionable perfumed scent about her, and it was soon rumored that she was an actress. She had her own room, but otherwise there wasn’t any doubt that she was Høpner’s lover. The women were offended. It was bad enough that ordinary people sinned, but the bigwigs should regard themselves as too good for that. That wasn’t anything for the youth to learn from.

But in spite of everything, Høpner was welcome. He brought work and earnings. Cilius went to him and made inquiries about when they’d begin working. He was received in a friendly way, Høpner was in a good mood, and Cilius returned with the message that the construction would get going again in a week. Høpner surveyed the wharf and the excavations—everything was as it should be.

People came marching in from the countryside, navvies and day laborers, smallholders and farmhands, good folks and rabble. This time there was no contractor—Høpner and his engineers directed the work themselves. When the ground was completely excavated, the construction work would begin.

Winter was over. Small lumps of snow were still lying here and there on the fields, but the ground was black and shiny from the moisture, and the sun was getting stronger. The women were doing spring cleaning. Even Line Seldomglad flew into a passion and cleaned the muck up in her house. She washed and scrubbed, and the rooms couldn’t be recognized. But Line was
the same—she hadn’t become cleaner. And just at springtime Frederikke gave birth and the grocer’s Meta had twins.

Meta got off easy, even though she had two. She lay down one afternoon and by evening she had two healthy girls in her arms. Line Seldomglad was proud. She didn’t go to the young people’s house much—she didn’t pester anybody. But she’d been sent for when Meta was going to give birth and was the first who got to see the children. “It’s what I always said about Konrad—what he does, he does thoroughly,” she laughed. “Where others produce one, he produces two. But that’s the way he’s been right from when he was little. He doesn’t know when to stop.”

It was worse with Frederikke—she lay there tormented for two whole straight days. Cilius had to go to work, but Tora and Dagmar aided Frederikke. Frederikke hardened her heart. The midwife talked about getting the doctor, but just when she’d decided to send for the doctor in Færgeby, Frederikke gave birth. Cilius came home for lunch and finally it was over and done with. He inspected the boy. “Huh!” he said and went a step closer. “Is there something wrong with him?” Tora asked. “No, no,” Cilius said, “but I’ll be damned if the boy isn’t red-haired.” “Why shouldn’t he be red-haired?” Tora said calmly. “I mean, you yourself are.” No, Cilius couldn’t give any reason either why the boy shouldn’t be red-haired. Delighted, he said: “He’s red like a fox. A fella sees that plainly enough even if he’s got nothing but down.” Cilius patted Frederikke carefully on the arms, as if he had an injustice to redress. When he’d gone to work, Frederikke, feeble, said: “Now I was red-haired too back when I was a child. It wasn’t until later that my hair turned brown.” “Shh, don’t ever talk about it,” Tora said quickly. “Better keep it to yourself.”

The work went on in a whirl and Cilius was in the lead. He staggered with his wheelbarrow till the sweat was dripping from him, and the rest of them had a hard time keeping up. After work Lars Seldomglad and Marinus absolutely had to go home with him and inspect his first-born. “He’s a great guy,” Cilius said and pointed at the child’s head. “If you guys look closely,
you can surely see he’s red as a fox.” Tora poked Lars Seldom-glad, who nodded to her so nobody could see. “He’s just as fox-red and ugly as you are,” Lars said. “And when he reaches the age, he’ll probably be just as given to drinking schnapps.” “Let’s hope so,” Cilius said proudly. He took the child from Frederikke’s arm and strolled into the living room to show it to Old-Jep. The old man grumbled grumpily, but Cilius paid no heed to his bad temper. He nodded encouragingly to the old man: “He’s red-haired, damn it, can you see it, Old-Jep! And he’s going to be named for you.”

Now people saw that Hopner had been in America and had learned something over there. He was a whiz at getting work going. He was here and there and everywhere and cursed and bellowed, now in Danish, now in English, when things didn’t go the way he wanted. People moved into the barracks, but they were a different kind of people than last year. They were artisans, masons, and carpenters; they didn’t drink like the navvies. If they took a drink after all, it didn’t turn into a fight, but a discussion. They sat and got all worked up and discussed odd things, and the day laborers listened in wonderment. They were learned people, many of them. They probably knew more than both the minister and the deacon.

Now it was socialism they were talking about. Yeah, yeah, nobody here was so stupid he didn’t know what kind of guys socialists were. They were wild people who lived in the cities and wanted to take from the rich and distribute the wealth to the poor. It sounded good and maybe could be practiced in the cities where they were rolling in money. But how could you divide up a farm? No, out in the countryside things had to stay the way they’d always been. On a farm somebody had to be master—you couldn’t have a group running things.

The building’s walls rose from day to day, and the day laborers worked as helpers. They became more acquainted with the craftsmen in the barracks. They came to visit them there and invited them home. Those were people who came from all areas of the country, from distant towns that a fella had heard of in his school days, and they knew how to tell stories. They spoke city
Danish and were dressy in their Sunday best, they were in a union and got big wages. But the more you have the more you want. They weren’t satisfied with their lot in the world. They wanted it all.

“Yes, but that can’t possibly work—that we’re all going to be equal,” Marinus said. “We have to work according to the abilities we have.” “And do you think you’d have had greater abilities if you’d been born to the owners of a big farm?” a mason asked. No, Marinus didn’t think so. But there’s no getting away from the fact that wherever you were put in the world, that’s where you should do your duty. After all, where we were placed wasn’t accidental. “Ha-ha!” the mason laughed. “They really gulled you people but good. If they could get all of us to swallow that bait, that would be all right.”

Boel-Erik worked by the cliff and in his free time he slogged away at his heath. But one day he didn’t come to work. The others wondered: had Boel-Erik gotten sick? In the evening Lars Seldomglad looked in on Inger. “Are you keeping Erik in bed?” he asked. “I think he’s sitting at the inn,” Inger said. “He’s become a complete fool. Now he’s going to drink everything away.” Lars learned it was something to do with his moorland. Doubtless things weren’t the way they should be. “But it doesn’t matter,” Inger said. “Because he’ll never get me out there.”

Boel-Erik was a sober man; he rarely squandered his money at the inn. Lars Seldomglad made up his mind that it was probably best to get the details. He went into the inn and there Erik was sitting drunk. And little by little Lars Seldomglad wormed out of him what was going on. He hadn’t taken care to get papers for his moorland plot and now the owner had taken it back.

“That can’t possibly be legal, can it?” Lars Seldomglad said, all worked up. “Those are nothing but dirty tricks—they can’t treat a person that way.” But it was legal; Boel-Erik had been in Færgeby and talked to attorney Schjøtt. He’d fairly and squarely bought the land for a small down payment and gotten an option on more, but now the farmer came and said it was merely a lease. And Erik had no proof—nothing had been written down. He’d assumed the man was an honest person.
Lars Seldomglad was seldom wont to utter oaths, but now he cursed like a trooper. “He let you plow up the soil,” and he slammed the table. “You slogged away in the heath like an animal. And now he comes and takes it away from you. I’ll say this: if it was me, and I couldn’t get justice through the law, I’d kill him.” “That’s exactly what I’m going to do,” Boel-Erik said brusquely. “I’m going to go out there tonight.” Lars Seldomglad became frightened. “No, no, you can’t do that, Erik,” he said quickly. “Remember, you’ve got a wife and child. We can’t let ourselves get carried away; you have to try it through the courts.” “I don’t have any proof, I don’t have so much as a scrap of paper,” Boel-Erik said. “But the rest of us can testify for you, we know what the agreement was like—we have it directly from you,” Lars Seldomglad said. But Boel-Erik had been thoroughly informed by the attorney. It was no use for the others to testify for him if they hadn’t heard the agreement being made.

Lars Seldomglad was an elderly man, who had an adult son, and now he spoke to Boel-Erik as if he were a big boy: “You have to remember that you have a wife and child, and that they’ll pay the price if you harm that scoundrel. You have to be sensible, little Erik, and be satisfied with giving him a sound thrashing when the chance arises.” “Such a scoundrel shouldn’t be allowed to live,” Boel-Erik said. “It’s going to cost him his life—I’m going to kill him tonight.” It was early and Lars Seldomglad realized there was nothing to do but get Boel-Erik blind drunk.

Then he’d surely forget his crazy plan. “I’m going to cut his throat like I slaughter a pig,” Erik said. “He’ll go to his grave with his throat ripped to shreds—he’s not worth anything better.”

Boel-Erik pulled his big clasp knife out of his pocket and displayed it. His eyes were wild and bloodshot, and there was murder in them. That’s the way things were. A peaceful man was provoked beyond endurance and committed an irreversible deed. Lars Seldomglad swore to himself that he wouldn’t let Erik out of his sight until he’d simmered down.

“Yeah, yeah, he deserves the worst,” he said. You’ve put
toil and sweat in that piece of heath. It’s a shame the way you’ve been treated. But let’s have another coffee with schnapps. It’s on me.”

Cilius came to the inn and heard what had befallen Boel-Erik. “I’ll slaughter him,” Boel-Erik said. “You better remember you’ve got a wife and child,” Cilius admonished him. “Keep your knife in its sheath, Erik, and don’t make yourself miserable. Give him a drubbing—you can’t go to jail for that.” The men drank and Boel-Erik went outside. A long time passed and he still hadn’t returned, and Lars Seldomglad went out to look for him. Erik wasn’t to be found.

“Lord Jees.” Lars Seldomglad said, when he came back into the taproom. “This isn’t going to end well. He’s going to go out and kill the man.” The others felt that Erik had probably gone home and slept off his drunkenness, but Lars Seldomglad got Cilius to come along. They looked in on Inger—Erik hadn’t come home. “You see,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Now we have to hurry if we’re going to avoid bloodshed.”

The two men got a move on down the road Erik presumably had taken. It was a dark, sleety evening, and they could barely see their hands in front of them. “If we don’t manage to overpower him, he’ll stab the farmer,” Lars Seldomglad said. “There are some people who’re all talk, Cilius, but when Boel-Erik makes a threat, he means it for real. He’s lost his mind.”

They speeded it up, and from the highway they turned onto a narrow moor road where they almost kept falling the whole time. They reached the farmhouse and it was dark and deserted. “He’s certainly not here,” Cilius said. “He didn’t run out into a boghole, did he?” But at that very moment the watchdog bayed and they heard a window shattering. “Oh, good Lord, that crazy guy,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Now he’s breaking in.” They ran for all they were worth, and were just outside the farmhouse when a shot boomed. “That’s the man defending his life,” Lars Seldomglad said. “How is all this going to end? We have to overpower him—there’s no other way.” They heard Boel-Erik swearing and cursing in front of the windows and rushed at him. Cilius landed a blow on the back of his head and Lars Seldom-
glad grabbed him from behind. The three men tumbled over onto the ground. A light was turned on in the farmhouse and they heard women’s voices shrieking inside.

“Lord Jesus, Erik, come to,” Lars Seldomglad moaned, and now another shot thundered and buckshot tore about them. “Stop the shooting!” Cilius bellowed. “I mean, we’re lying here scuffling with him.” Boel-Erik was lying quietly beneath them, and Lars and Cilius got up. “We have to get hold of a lantern,” Lars Seldomglad whispered. “No, let’s just get out of here with him,” Cilius said. “Maybe they haven’t discovered who it is.” They dragged Boel-Erik and there was still life in him. Slowly he got to his feet. “Now, little Erik, we’re dealing with something there’s no need to be ashamed of,” Lars Seldomglad said. “We have to get away before they send for the parish sheriff.

They lugged Boel-Erik and a little afterward he regained consciousness. He growled deeply and snorting like a baited bull, and once in a while he tugged at them to get free. But his strength gave out, and soon he was tottering, ponderously and worn out and panting, between them. “Little Erik, what is it you’ve gone and done?” Lars Seldomglad wailed. “You may wind up being miserable the rest of your life. They can prove you came to cut his throat.” But now Cilius stopped. “Does he have the knife on him?” he asked, and they inspected Erik’s pockets. The knife was there and Cilius pocketed it. “Surely you remember when we were sitting at the inn, I said to Erik: Now be peaceable and give me your knife!” “I very distinctly remember that,” Lars Seldomglad said. “I took the knife and have had it the whole time, I can testify to that on the bible to the authorities,” Cilius said. “And now let’s get him home.”

They got Boel-Erik home and into bed. He hadn’t been hurt and neither the parish sheriff nor the police had come. The farmer was probably afraid he’d get into trouble himself because he’d fired a round. Boel-Erik slept a whole day and showed up at work once again. You couldn’t notice anything by looking at him except that he’d become a little more sullen and withdrawn, and no one talked to him about what had happened.

Høpner had gotten his furniture and moved into Marinus’s
farmhouse. It was only for the time being, people understood, until a president’s house was built. He’d hired a housekeeper, but the actress was still living in his house and was his lover, even though she had her own bedroom. Her name was Mrs. Marja and had been married if she wasn’t still.

The women talked about that when they got together. Indeed, what kind of womanfolk was that who lived with a man openly in sin. “If the rest of us did that, we’d surely be the talk of the town,” Magda said. “But the big shots can do whatever they fancy. She’s doing it openly—she’s not even his housekeeper.” “But otherwise she’s nice enough to chat with,” Dagmar said. And the others had to admit that the woman wasn’t arrogant. She talked in a friendly and plain way to people when she met them on the road or in the shop. “And she surely has a big say with Høpner,” Line Seldomglad said. “We’d probably do best not to run her down so that he gets to hear about it.”

The point was to be cautious in this world and not to squander anything. The craftsmen talked about a union and the day laborers nodded: please, of course they knew what a union was. There’d been agitators in the area before who wanted them to join an agricultural workers union. But what was the good of going into a union if you lost your good job. The farmers didn’t want to know anything about unions: the man who joined wouldn’t get work on the farms, and where was he supposed to earn a living? Politics and talk were fine, but daily bread was more important.

Now the people from the union returned and wanted them to join up. These were people with the gift of gab, and the day laborers stood around in clusters after work and listened to them. “You need to stand together with the other workers,” one of them said. “We need all of you to come into the union.” “Sure,” Lars Seldomglad said. “But can you guarantee us that we won’t be turned out of our jobs? No, you see yourself, little fella.”

But the man could. He and his followers swore that not the slightest thing would happen if the day laborers were organized. But if they didn’t enter the union, they’d be certain sooner or later to lose their jobs. In any event, they’d get no work once the
factory was finished because only organized workers were permitted to operate the machines. The day laborers stood in silence. It was easy for a fella to come to grief. It was simple enough for city folk to come here and preach. But the day laborers were ordinary people, and it wouldn’t do for the ordinary people to challenge those who have the power.

The men from the union called a meeting of the day laborers in the barracks and they came. They made speeches and explained again that ordinary people had to unite to defend their rights. The day laborers listened attentively—nobody said anything either for or against. Finally Boel-Erik got up from his bench. “I just want to ask: will the unions defend ordinary people’s rights?” he asked. “Of course,” the union agitator said. “That’s what we’ve got unions for.” “Do they exist so we can be a match for the big shots?” Of course they do. “Then I’ll join,” Boel-Erik said. “Because the way it is now, no poor man gets justice done.” He calmly sat down again.

“That’s really good—here’s a man who isn’t scared,” the union man said. “Scared,” Cilius said, and his face flushed. “Did you make a trip over here to tell us we’re afraid? The person hasn’t ever been born I’m afraid of. I don’t reckon the big shots worth the dirt under my feet.” Cilius was angry. No one could call him a timid man. And if there was danger associated with being in a union, then he was a member for sure.

Boel-Erik’s and Cilius’s names were written down and now the other day laborers joined hesitantly. The beginning had been made. The union people went from man to man and brought them to their senses. They understood that if there was a danger in joining, it wasn’t easy to stay out either. You might risk the craftsmen’s stopping work and refusing to work together with an unorganized man. It was Kresten Bossen’s turn. “I hardly know,” he said. “You know, you’re working on the factory, too, and you want to stand together with your colleagues, don’t you?” the agitator asked. “I want to stand where I can defend standing in good conscience,” Kresten Bossen said. “You say the rich are our enemies, but it’s written that we must love our enemies.” Kresten Bossen couldn’t be budged. He didn’t want to join the
union; he didn’t want to go down the path of struggle.

The buildings were growing. A cement edge was poured along the fjord so the water wouldn’t run over when stormy weather came. The huge factory building began to take shape. On the clear spring days the walls rose skyward. The scaffolding pushed upward. Hopner walked about the construction site in high boots in the mud, issuing orders. Wagons drove there with timber and stone, men dragged beams, loads of bricks and barrows with sand and lime. They hammered and planed and riveted, the flames hissed from blowtorches, there was a raw smell of slaked lime and fresh timber. The men shouted to one another, drivers cursed when the wagons were about to get stuck in the mud. There was work and life here. Up on the cliff people stood and looked down on the construction site and were amazed how fast the whole thing was going.

The dredger returned and worked in the fjord with its barges. And now it had been deepened so much that small craft could come alongside the pier. They brought bricks and cement, and there was work, more and more work. Almost every day people came on foot or bicycle and were hired. Here there was enough to do for everybody. On the farms the hands gave notice. They wanted to work at the cliff, where they paid a high wage and where you were your own man when the workday was over. The barracks were full of people, every room in town was rented, and workpeople slept three and four in the same room. In the evenings scores of people made a racket at the inn. They drank good and hard and there was no doubt about it—the innkeeper was becoming a well-to-do man. The customers stood in throngs in Skifter’s shop. It was all the grocer, Konrad, and Meta could do to serve them.

Skifter’s face had become a shade more melancholy. Karlsen’s death had worn severely on him because this he understood—that Meta had told the truth. Skifter had taken down the sign that forbade cursing and swearing and now it was permitted to take God’s name in vain in his shop. If a believing person could sin like Karlsen and take his own life, what was the point of making severe demands on the unbelieving? Skifter didn’t go
to the Pious's assembly much. Martin Thomsen ran the show there now. But although so many new people came to the parish, there weren't more at the meetings.
Cilius got his child baptized. He solemnly went to Marinus and Tora and asked them to be godparents. Frederikke wanted to present the child for baptism herself. Tora and Marinus appeared one Sunday in their best clothes and witnessed Little-Jep’s christening. The child screamed when the minister poured water over its head, and Cilius took it as a good omen. “He’ll be good at singing,” he said. “Yeah, I mean, someone else could also sing with the best of ’em in his younger days. And I can still sing when I get drunk, but it’s not hymns.”

Afterward there was to be a party at Cilius’s. As many people had been invited along as could fit in the small rooms. Old-Jep was in a nice shirt and was lying in his bed looking fierce. His eyes flashed hideously when Cilius showed him the boy and explained that he’d now gotten the old man’s name. The women noticed it and stole glances at one another. You could sense that Old-Jep knew who the child’s father was. But thank God his speech had been taken from him.

“When he gets to be old enough, you’ll teach him how to play cards, grandpa,” Cilius joked. “Maybe he’ll win back what you lost and I squandered. He already looks sly, the little red fox.” And Cilius patted the boy cautiously on his red hair. He already had great hopes for the lad.

The women looked at Frederikke, but you couldn’t notice anything. Her face was calm and her haggard features were as if chiseled in stone. She provided her guests with food and drink and answered when she was asked something. But otherwise Frederikke had become taciturn.

It was a christening party and the women sat in a circle around the little one and recalled how they themselves had had their children. Tora had the most and it had been easy for her to have them—it was harder to lose them. Tora sighed and thought about Vera, who was lying in her grave. “I never thought I’d escape with my life back then when I was pregnant with Kon-
rad,” Line Seldomglad said. “He kicked and made a fuss while I had him in my womb. But when the time came, he didn’t want to come out. That’s the way he’s always been—he’s always had a will. And he sure got his way with Meta, too—she couldn’t resist.” And Line recounted how good the two young people had it with their twins in the grocer’s attic. They’d gotten plush furniture in one of the rooms and a carpet a body had scarcely seen the likes of.

And Line Seldomglad told about the christening, which was to take place next Sunday. It was probably mostly the farmers who’d attend because the grocer, of course, frequented the farms and was friends with the big ones. Ida Bossen looked peevish. “Yes, he’s changed a lot,” she said. “It’s not everyone who can keep his soul when earthly mammon beckons. I’ve really never had any great faith in him.” Line’s face became taut—aft all, she’d now become in-laws with the grocer. “I don’t know anything about his religion, and I never meddle in that,” she said. “But surely there can’t possibly be any disgrace in sticking with your peers. I know there are many people who think it’s peculiar that your husband doesn’t want to be in the union with the others.”

Ida’s voice became ingratiating and she explained that Kresten abided by the words of the scriptures and didn’t want to seek combat and strife, but peace and reconciliation. But now at least he had joined a union, an association of Christian workers and employers, and one association could surely be as good as the other. “It seems to Kresten that a Christian man has to be humble of heart wherever his place in the world happens to be,” Ida Bossen said. “I wonder if instead it isn’t that you folks have something to fall back on,” Line Seldomglad said caustically. “You managed to sell Marinus’s farm for a good price and have money in the savings bank. You think you’re better than the rest of us.”

The men were sitting in the living room at Old-Jep’s and were talking about their work. They were certain they’d be hired at the factory; when it started running, they’d have their future secured. And even if they didn’t always earn as high a day-wage
as now, they could also make do with less. The most important thing was to have work every day of the year.

Cilius had gotten a new blue serge suit and resembled a dashing fellow. He no longer drank so much after Frederikke had had the boy. Now Cilius preferred going up to the barracks to the workers and discussing politics. Cilius had learned a lot from them. He knew what labor unions were for. He banged the table so hard the cups rattled: "I'll be damned, I believe the guys are right. We have to unite—that's the way we have to go.” And none of the others contradicted him. Cilius had become a different man since he’d gotten a son who was red-haired. And Old-Jep whimpered his silu vaasikum and got schnapps with a spoon.

After services Pastor Gamst walked with teacher Ulriksen from church. “Come home with me, Ulriksen,” the minister said. “I need to talk to a thoughtful man. I’ve gone through a critical time.” “Aren’t you always doing that, Pastor Gamst?” the teacher smiled. “I think your mind has been agitated as long as I’ve known you. You go from one spiritual crisis to the next.” The minister didn’t respond and teacher Ulriksen understood that he’d doubtless taken a serious matter too lightly.

The minister invited Ulriksen into his study and went in to take off his vestments.

“You say I’ve gone from one spiritual crisis to the next, Ulriksen, and doubtless I have,” he said as soon as came back in. “I wasn’t able to find peace until I managed to investigate life’s various possibilities. Days and nights I’ve pondered life’s meaning and grieved its meaninglessness. And yet the solution was lying right in front of my nose.” “Precisely,” the teacher said. “We should get the best out of life and leave the rest to Our Lord.”

The minister shook his head: “I explained to you before that life for me was full of inconceivable horror. I saw man as a being who’d grown intellectually beyond the essential conditions of his life. I regarded the human brain as the great shining miracle of development. In short, my mistake was that I overestimated man’s intelligence and morality. In reality, teacher
Ulriksen, we are, in fact, only impure animals, full of wickedness and impure instincts. There’s no use clutching at what is human because it lets us down. The humane is only a soap-bubble. There’s only one thing for us to do: to fling ourselves in the dust and recognize our powerlessness and sinfulness. Then the soul will find peace.”

“And how did you arrive at that result?” the teacher asked.

“You remember Karlsen, the missionary who committed suicide,” the minister said. “You also know that he spent his last hours here at my house. At first, you know, I couldn’t stand the man. But gradually I gained a certain qualified respect for him. There was passion behind his self-righteousness and pushy manner. He struggled with himself, with his evil nature, with the devil, who raged in his flesh, and he was vanquished. But what made an impression on me was the seriousness with which he took his fall. He staked his life. You can call it a pitiful life; perhaps the man was not very valuable. But he couldn’t live after he’d let people down. He didn’t try any defense, he didn’t run away from his deed, he went to his judgment voluntarily. You can say what you will about him, but he taught me more than any other person.”

“Hmm,” the teacher muttered. “This isn’t shaping up really well.”

“Yes it is—well is precisely how it’s shaping up,” the minister said with a smile. “For me Karlsen’s unpleasant end bore witness to where the struggle is and what it’s about. It’s written: Judge not, and none of us can know whether it wasn’t by means of his suicide while of unsound mind that the Lord called him unto him. Surely there was also a design in the fact that he came precisely to me. Why didn’t he confide in someone else—after all, many people were closer to him than I was? But I’ve learned that the only thing that’s important is complete submission to the great, everlasting will. The only thing that means anything is humility. There’s where I found the solution to the puzzle—that’s how simple it was.”

The minister fell silent for a bit, then he continued. “I found a peace I hadn’t known since I’d been a child,” he said. “Unlike
the unfortunate Karlsen, I’ve never been ripped to shreds by the knife of the erotic passions. But I’ve felt a constant unrest, a constant uncertainty in my heart. Now it’s completely different. I have the same peace and bliss in my soul that I had when as a boy I’d been disobedient and had been punished and forgiven by my father. That’s the path to the true life: We shall do our Father’s will who art in heaven.”

Pastor Gamst had found peace, and there was joy in the small circle. But otherwise there weren’t many who noticed; other things were going on here. A factory was being built here; work was being created here for people.

May first was a Sunday. The craftsmen and city workers wanted to go to the celebration in Færgeby; they departed just after noon, some on bicycles and others on foot in a group. It might be nice to see what such a celebration was like. Marinus, Cilius, Boel-Erik, and Jens Horse walked to Færgeby. Lars Seldomglad would’ve gone along, but he had to go to a party at the grocer’s. The twins were going to be presented for baptism, and both the minister and deacon were coming to the meal.

It was beautiful weather and the fields and pastures were green. The larks chirped energetically overhead, and a salty and fresh breeze was blowing in from the fjord. “Oh, for all the world,” Marinus said and breathed deeply. “In spite of everything, it was a glorious time when a fella had his own farm. When things began to grow for real, a fella felt at ease.” The others nodded. They certainly understood the way Marinus felt. “Now I’ve tried a little of everything,” Cilius said. “I took to the road much, and I’m not cut out to be a farmer. But if Little-Jep had arrived a bit earlier, I might have become one.”

They went past farms where they’d worked and bogs where they’d dug peat. It was an area they knew. It had given them a livelihood, but in exchange it had demanded hard toil. Oh no, they hadn’t received their daily bread as a gift. Small overgrown estate forests were located in the hollows, and from the hills they looked out across the heath inland where low-lying farms were huddled together. Far out in the distance the sun gleamed on the steeple of a manor. Jens Horse had served there as a young
farmhand and almost split the skull of an overseer who’d struck him hard with his cane. He’d been sentenced to a fine for the deed even though the overseer had hit him first. And Boel-Erik pointed out a farm north of the fjord where he’d been placed in service by the parish council when he was a boy. He got many beatings and lived in a room teeming with rats. Marinus couldn’t complain. He’d gone out to serve when he was twelve years old, but it was with honest people, who wished him well. He’d worked from five in the morning till six or seven in the evening when he wasn’t in school, but it was easy to do some work when a fella was otherwise well treated. No, Marinus wouldn’t utter a complaint because they were honest people.

Many people were gathered on the square in Færgeby, and there were red flags and musicians in frock-coats and high hats. The day laborers stood at the edge of the crowd—the whole thing was unfamiliar to them. “I wonder—is it here they’ll be speaking?” Marinus asked, but a man explained they’d be walking in a procession through the street and up to the marketplace, and that’s where the speeches would be held. The procession got going and the music was playing. “That’s the Socialist March—I know that one,” Cilius said. “I’ve gotten involved in many things in my life, but still I never thought I’d become a socialist.”

The four day laborers kept to the very back of the procession. The red flags were waving at the front and the townspeople were standing in their front doorways and at their windows watching the procession stride by. “They can play,” Marinus said and stamped off in step among the rest of them. “There are a lot of people, but all the same it’s us from Alslev that are taking a lot of room.” That was true enough. The workers from Alslev filled in the ranks nicely.

At the marketplace a platform was decorated with green and red flags, and a member of parliament was making a speech. The day laborers listened attentively to every word. The speaker was a strong, broad-shouldered man with a flaming red beard and a tremendous voice. “Boy, the way he can use his mouth,” Marinus said, impressed. “But probably it’s lies, half of it.” All
four of them had to admit they’d never heard a better speaker. Clergymen and deacons couldn’t hold a candle to him.

After the meeting they stood around a bit and didn’t know what to do with themselves. “Well, I guess we got to go home,” Marinus said reluctantly, but Cilius didn’t feel there was any hurry. “Surely we can always have a quick one,” he said. “It’s rare we come to town together.” There was a lot of sense in that, and they found a little pub where they were served coffee and the schnapps bottle. Cilius was in a good mood and wanted it to be on him. “Remember you’ve got children to support,” Marinus admonished. “Now it’d sure be smarter if you set something aside.” “I’ll definitely be man enough to support both Old-Jep and Little-Jep,” Cilius declared. “But I want coffee laced with schnapps now and then.”

One coffee with schnapps led to the next, and the men began to get hot under the collar. The pub was filled with farmhands who were celebrating the day on which their term of service ended and started again, and many of them were drunk. A couple of master artisans were sitting at the next table and were boozed up. They’d been at the marketplace and listened to the speaker and were angry about what he’d said. “He talks for a living,” they agreed, but they said it too loud and Cilius got up and offered to give them a beating. “You guys can get just as much of this commodity as you want,” Cilius shouted. “Don’t give us any of your nonsense. Maybe you don’t like what he says, but he’s our man.” Soon there was a row going on all over the room. Half-drunk men were discussing politics underscored by tremendous banging on the tables, voices shrilled, glasses toppled over, and a couple of men were already in a scuffle. “We better get out of here,” Marinus said, terrified. “This can easily come to a nasty end.” But Cilius wasn’t inclined to leave the pub. He was involved in a violent quarrel with the two master artisans.

One of them poked Cilius a little and now it all started. Marinus surely knew that this pub here didn’t have the best reputation, but all the same he hadn’t thought they literally came to blows on a Sunday afternoon. “Let’s get out of here,” he
shouted. “Let’s pay our bill—this thing can’t possibly end well.” But nobody heard him. The room was a jumble of people staggering about among overturned tables and smashed bottles. A windowpane was knocked out with a crash. A farmhand was leaning against the wall, blood streaming down his face from a hole in his head. Cilius and Boel-Erik swung their arms like flails, while Jens Horse calmly stood next to Marinus and followed the course of the battle.

Cilius had felled his adversary and took a survey of the situation. There was definitely no doubt that police would come in a moment. He dashed over and grabbed Boel-Erik by the arm. “Come on, Erik, let’s get out of here while the getting’s good,” he said. Boel-Erik let go of his grip on the other master artisan and stood there for a bit and panted. Cilius poked him, and with Marinus and Jens Horse on their heels, they got out of the pub just as a couple of officers came running in.

“I mean, it’s about time you came,” Cilius shouted to them. “That’s no place for peaceful folks in there. Make sure you get out your nightsticks before you go in there with those savages.”

The officers paid no attention to them and the four men got out of town. They got a little ways out onto the highway and stopped by a brook so Cilius and Boel-Erik could wash the blood off their hands and faces. “Hold your head high, Boel-Erik,” Cilius said. “We gave ’em what they needed, those riffraff. He talked better than the bishop himself, and what he said was true—that the high and mighty want to make us knuckle under. He was our man, Erik.” And Cilius lay down on his stomach and cooled his hot, bruised face in the fresh water in the brook.

Marinus stood and looked at a couple of horses grazing on the meadow, and suddenly he recognized a little shaggy nag. It was one of his horses walking here, and he recalled that Kresten Bossen had sold both of them to a horse dealer in Færgeby. He stepped over the fence and went over to the horse. It recognized him when he stroked its back and nuzzled its muzzle in his jacket.

“Imagine me meeting you out here in the world,” Marinus said and petted the animal. “You were a game little horse while...
I had you.”

He inspected the horse and judged that it had been treated well. It was well-fed and had all it needed. He stepped back over the fence and followed the others, but he didn’t say anything about the fact that it was his horse standing there.

Marinus came home and Niels was sitting in the living room. “You must have off from your job today,” Marinus said and Niels explained that he’d given notice as of May Day. He didn’t want to work for the farmers any more, but wanted to see about getting work with the others on the cliff. “That’s a risky step,” Marinus felt. “You’re only nineteen years old and still have a lot to learn before you can be called a capable fellow. It’ll come to haunt you, if you ever get your own farm, that you didn’t learn enough in your youth.” But Niels stuck to his guns—he didn’t want to be a farmer because a fella didn’t get anywhere without money. Marinus tried to admonish his son, but it was no use. Niels adamantly insisted on his position and Tora sided with him. And if that’s the way it was, Marinus definitely felt Niels could also earn a day-wage.
Bregentved had had work on the cliff, but now he got something else to do. He’d sell land, and that was better than dealing in herring. Anton lost his job, but he soon got himself another. Skifter was looking for a boy to help out in the store room and take goods into town in case people ordered them, and Anton got the job and lent a hand in the shop when he wasn’t in school.

The lots where the workers were going to build houses had been parceled out, and roads and boundaries marked. Some man had to conduct negotiations with the buyers, and here Bregentved felt he was the right one. He talked to attorney Schjøtt and they agreed that Bregentved would get a commission on what he was able to sell. Bregentved hung up a sign in his bedroom window: Good building sites for sale, it said, and now he’d achieved a big goal—he’d become a businessman and dealt in land. You could see that he felt he’d been promoted in life. Before he’d gone about dressed like the other day laborers, but now he went about every day in city clothes with a detachable celluloid collar and green tie.

But it wasn’t enough to put a sign in the window—nobody came and wanted to buy lots. Bregentved had fitted up his room as a kind of office. He sat at the desk with paper and ink in front of him, and there were chairs where customers could take a seat while Bregentved wrote the contract note and contract. But no customers came, and it dawned on him that if he wanted to do business, he’d have to go out and talk to people.

So Bregentved went calling. He brought the conversation, coincidentally as it were, around to the fact that it had probably become necessary for the day laborers to have their own houses. Now that they had come to earn a good day-wage every day of the year, they could also afford a decent house. “It’s pitiful the way you folks are living,” Bregentved said and looked around in Lars Seldomglad’s living room. “This isn’t anything for a woman like you, Line. You should have a little house with a
tiled roof and high-ceilinged rooms.” “Uh huh, will you give us a new one as a present? Because we own this one here,” Line Seldomglad said. Of course Bregentved didn’t exactly want to give them a house. But he wanted to sell them a lot, and once they had the place where the house would be, they could always get themselves a building loan. Line shook her head: “We’re not going to bite off more than we can chew,” she said. “Beggars can’t be choosers.”

He didn’t have any more luck at Marinus’s. “But what on earth,” Marinus said, becoming alarmed. “What kind of prices are you demanding for a bit of land to build on? Why that’s as much as people otherwise pay for an entire little house. And how am I supposed to get all that money?” Bregentved explained that he wouldn’t have to pay down more than a very small amount. The rest could be paid off in instalments over many years. But no, Marinus knew what it meant to be in debt. He wasn’t going to get into any big commitments.

There were no lot sales and Bregentved went to Færgeby and poured out his troubles to Schjett. “Take it easy, they’ll come all right,” the lawyer said. “But if you’re smart, you’ll go to the farmers and get them to promise that all land for building lots will be sold through you. The important thing is to keep the prices up. In half a year or maybe a year, there’ll be a run on lots in Alslev. A town will grow up around the factory. One way or the other, it’ll happen.” Bregentved followed his advice, and it wasn’t hard to reach an agreement with the farmers. They were best served by not underbidding one another once buyers came. They realized that.

It was summer. The crops were growing in the fields and in the mild evenings there was a sweet scent of lilac and jasmine from the snug farmers’ gardens. Every Saturday there was a dance at the inn and the girls were in greater demand than ever before. There were many unmarried fellows in town and not enough girls for them. Old hands shook their heads at this wild life. Things were in a bad way when the girls went to a dance and came home early in the morning with hay in their hair. And if they got into trouble, whom would they turn to? These
weren't fellows from here in the parish, and who knew if they had wives or sweethearts at home.

During the day a roar rose from work at the cliff. Fully loaded wagons creaked along the rough road through town, working people came riding on their bicycles at the crack of dawn, alarm clocks rang out from farmsteads and houses, sleepy men tumbled out of bed, woke up, and got going. Peddlars came wanting to sell woollen goods and boots and God knows what else. They came on foot with bundles on their shoulders or with the goods in a wagon. They talked up their stuff and disposed of their goods. There were enough people here and they were flush with money. The farmers shook their heads. It was hideous to see how the laborers flung legal tender about instead of putting the money in the savings bank and letting it multiply. Now Black Anders' daughter Matilde had gotten a piano. Rumor in the parish had it that her father and her sweetheart, who was from the west and worked on the cliff, had paid through the nose for a used piano and given it to her as a present. It was the same old story. Set a beggar on horseback and he'll ride to the devil. The word on the farms was: what did lame Matilde need a piano for? Only rich farmers' daughters had that kind of stuff.

The weather turned hot, the sun was baking, there was a hot wind, and the workers turned brown and were burnt by the sun. The sweat poured from them during the hard work, and the young workers flung off their shirts and had only pants on and a belt around their waists. During the lunch break they also flung off their pants and jumped off the wharf. They lay there snorting in the fjord like seals and hardly had time to get anything to eat. The day laborers didn't bathe. Salt water weakened you and it was well known that getting wet wasn't good for your health. But what was the point of preaching. In the strange times that now prevailed all the old customs were replaced.

It wasn't just humans who needed to cool off. The cattle in the fjord meadows waded out and stood in water to their stomachs. A thunderstorm broke over the area and the workers took shelter while the hard showers lashed down. Afterward everything was fresh and green, and the cliff's white spots had turned
whiter. The sun sparkled, and an ear-deafening noise rose from the work again. Stones were loaded, iron girders were hoisted up on creaking tackles, hammers and axes crashed against iron and wood, and everywhere there was a clamor of enthusiastic human voices. There Marinus was working as a hod carrier and balancing a load of stones on his back. Here Cilius and Black Anders were hoisting girders aloft, while people they barely knew by name gave a helping hand. Andres and Boel-Erik, Jens Horse and Povl Bøgh, lodgers from Klovhusene, fishermen from the fishing village, smallholders from the moor, laborers from Færgeby, bricklayers, craftsmen and laborers from far away, hundreds of men at work. It went on in a collective rhythm and it went fast. This wasn’t farm work, this work here—it was group work and fast-paced.

Once a week they pocketed their good day-wage. It happened without nonsense and haggling. Here there was none of that stuff about the farmer’s not having any money and that it had to wait till he got milk money from the dairy. Two clerks sat in a wooden shed and paid out. Each person got his pay envelope with his name written on it. The whole thing was done properly and was right down to the penny, and it was calculated according to the wage scale. The men brought home money, and they could afford clothing for their children. Now, for example, there was Marinus—his children had never been dressed smartly. Now they got blouses and new dresses, and Tora sewed till the sparks flew from the nickel on her sewing machine. A little was put aside for a rainy day—you didn’t know how long this splendor would last. But the day laborers had never felt so well-off before. They had cash in their pockets and didn’t owe anybody anything.

But living also became more expensive. The man in whose house Marinus was a lodger felt that they could now probably pay somewhat more for shelter. “We pay enough for the couple of rooms as it is,” Tora said. “I can’t believe you’d have the nerve to demand more.” But the man had the nerve. If they didn’t want to pay, there were others who lacked a roof over their heads. “You should be ashamed to come and demand more
for this crummy house,” Tora said. “I thought you were an honest man, but I don’t respect you.” The farmer wasn’t at a loss for an answer to Tora: “You people take what you can get for your labor,” he said. “Surely the rest of us can also take what we can get in rent. Every man for himself.” “First myself and then myself and then myself again! that’s you farmers’ prayer morning, noon, and night,” Tora said cheekily. “And if you people could undress us down to our slips, you’d surely do it.” “If you’re the one I’m going to undress, I’ll take the slip too, Tora,” the farmer said and laughed. “You’re a beautiful and buxom womanfolk, but you really have a damned big mouth.”

That’s also the way things went with the others who lived as lodgers with strangers. Their rent was raised. And now Bregentved got his chance. He managed to sell lots and Andres bought the first one. He wailed about all the money he’d have to pay, but cheaper land was not to be had in the vicinity of the factory. Andres had figured out that if he built his house spaciously, with an apartment to rent out and a couple of rooms for unmarried workers, he could get his expenses covered and live free himself. And one day Niels came home and had bought a lot on installments.

“Oh dear me,” Marinus said. “You must be out of your mind. What are you going to do with a lot and how will you pay for it?” “I paid Bregentved a deposit and the rest I’ll pay from my wages. When the lot is paid, we can borrow money to build. We’re not going to sit here and pay the farmers double for their hovels.” “We’ll surely wind up paying for them all the same,” Marinus said. “Because it’s their land we’re going to build on and we’re certainly not going to get it free. I’d never thought land could be sold at that price.”

There were others who were thinking about building—those were the Pious. Many people had come to town and it was time to get a Mission house. Once the Mission house was standing there with the cross on the gable, the sinners would presumably also find their way in there. The fisherman has to cast his net where the schools of fish go.

After his conversion Pastor Gamst had taken up Karlsen’s
work and become a leader of the little troop. He collected for the Mission house, and one evening he stopped at Høpner’s with his subscription list. “I’m the parish minister,” he said and explained what he wanted. Mrs. Marja had put down her cigarette and sat a moment and listened to the minister. Then she stole out of the cozy little, low-ceilinged, living room.

“A Mission house?” Høpner said. “That’s nothing I’d be interested in. You have to remember, Pastor Gamst, that in a year Alslev won’t be a little farm village, but an industrial town, a factory town.”

“That’s precisely why,” the minister said. “There’ll be great tasks to be worked out here, there’ll be words to speak to the soul here.”

“Sure,” Høpner said. “But the question is merely whether the souls will care to listen. There’s a difference between an impoverished rural proletariat and a modern industrial proletariat. Religion doesn’t do it any more for the factory worker—he’s grown away from its primitive symbolic language. He’s achieved so much in material welfare that all that nonsense about suffering and renunciation appears foolish to him. Don’t resent me for using the expression—I’m speaking as an industrial leader.”

“But even if the material conditions are ever so good, still the soul has to satisfy its hunger,” the minister objected. “Death still exists and life is just as difficult.”

“Animals don’t think about death,” Høpner said. “Healthy people don’t either. And it’s a question whether religion helps modern man over difficulties. If we’re going to have a religion, then it at least has to deal with the problems of the day. Found a new religion, Pastor Gamst, or modernize the old one. Let’s have the eleventh commandment: thou shalt not strike! If you can hammer that into your congregation, and if you can get my workers into your fold, then you’ll have my blessing. Then you can have a Mission house or a new church if you’d like. That’s what we need: a religion that suits the modern industrial and economic organization—capitalism. The old bait doesn’t cut it any more.”

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“Engineer Høpner!” Pastor Gamst said angrily and got up.
“Sit down,” Høpner commanded. “I’m not saying this to offend your belief, I’m speaking as an industrial leader. I’m building a factory. That demands more than you think. I’ve had to overcome untold difficulties, I’ve had to procure capital, I’ve put my own fortune at risk. That’s the first phase. The next is to run the factory. I have to get it to be profitable, and I have to bring home the bacon for my workers. If I’m going to compete successfully, I have to have labor peace. No strikes, no unnecessary commotion. I’m best served by steady, bourgeois people, and it’s my task to make them as bourgeois, as level-headed as possible. The propertyless industrial worker is difficult to have to deal with, much more difficult than the ignorant and naive rural proletarian. He knows a little about where things are headed. But give him property, let him become head of a family and a pillar of society on a small scale. Let him amuse himself in the blessed democratic institutions and be pleased with the power he doesn’t have. Every man his own house, his own garden, his seat in the parish council, give him obligations and apparent rights, and he’ll keep quiet. That’s the modern religion, that’s democracy. And that religion will get my unfailing support.”

“But the soul, the innermost and deepest in man?” the minister said.

“Where is the innermost and deepest in a healthy potato?” Høpner replied. “But if the potato is sick, you can find dark spots in it. A well-oiled machine glides steadily in its own contented roar. But if the machine isn’t oiled, it squeaks. Soul is sickness. It can be rather decorative, just as a tumor can be crimson and purple. But the human mentality is a series of functions and reactions. In reality, pastor, there’s no big difference between the human and the machine. It’s the modern industrial leader’s task to get that portion of humanity that serves industry, the workers, to function as splendidly and noiselessly, as unexceptionably as the machine itself. It can be done, and it is being done, and we don’t need religion. All we need is knowledge of modern mass psychology. But if you absolutely want to
give us a religion as a present, then it has to be up-to-date. It has to preach the great commandment: Thou shalt not stop the machine! It’s your god, whom you must serve with your life and your blood. Thou shalt not strike, thou shalt not covet higher wages, thou shalt not stop the machine.”

Pastor Gamst leaned back in the chair. He was tired, he’d walked around all afternoon with his list and had hardly had time to swallow his dinner.

“But, you see, no one can live in your terrible world,” he said. “Better a poor world without machines . . . .”

“And that’s what it would be,” the engineer nodded. “Without modern technology, of course, we’d tumble head first back into the middle ages. The machine means reasonable living conditions for all of humanity. Without modern technology we’d once again need religion and ministers. Soulfulness would grow proportionally to hunger and misery. But never mind, let me finance religion the way one signs for an insurance premium. How much did you assess me for on your list?”

The minister got up. “I can’t accept a contribution under these circumstances,” he said. “But a time will come when you’ll discover that you have an immortal soul that needs spiritual food. Some day it will rage in your breast like a wild animal in its cage. One can’t kill the soul, one can lull it to rest, but some day it will awaken.”

Pastor Gamst walked around with his list and collected contributions, but it didn’t amount to much. It would probably be a good while before the Mission house was erected. He also diligently made house calls. He looked in on the new families who’d moved to the parish, he spoke a few words with the young workers, and he ventured up into the barracks and chatted with the craftsmen who were lodged there. Everywhere he was received politely. A bit embarrassed, people listened to him when he talked about mercy and salvation, and he himself felt that his word didn’t penetrate into the depths of their hearts.

One day he came home and there was a woman who wanted to speak to him. It was Karlsen’s widow, Kristine, who poured out her troubles. After her husband’s death she’d moved home
to her parents with the children, but they couldn’t keep having her there, and she was at her wits’ end. “No, it’s not easy,” the minister said. “I really understand that. We’ll have to see about finding a living for you.”

“And how could he even do it?” Kristine cried. “I don’t blame him for becoming crazy after that shameless affair because, you know, for many years I knew how things stood with him in his heart of hearts. But the idea that he went his way without thinking about the fact that he had a wife and children to support.” “He did think about it, to his soul’s destruction,” the minister said. “But what’s the use of complaining, Mrs. Karlsen. Your husband’s fall was great—we humans can’t say anything else. By comparison material matters mean so little.” “But here I am, a widow with children, and they won’t even give me a little pension,” Kristine said. “Why should they and I be the victims?” The minister patted her gently on her hand. “Just take it easy,” he said. “We’ll surely think of something or other. I’ll talk to some people with experience.” “And even if he’d been thrown out of the Mission, he did have his trade to fall back on,” Kristine said. “I mean, he’d been a gardener before he began to preach.”

The minister spoke with Martin Thomsen about the matter and the farmer felt that it would probably be all right if Karlsen’s widow got a little store with yarn and thread here in Alslev. Surely the Pious could in any event grant her their patronage. The minister bought a bit of land from Bregentved and made an agreement with a mason in Færgeby to erect a little house for Kristine.
Word came that a branch of the union was going to be opened in Alslev, and a secretary traveled over to get things into shape. He went around and talked a little with the day laborers and the workers before the meeting. It was easy enough to create a branch, but there had to be an executive committee. Lars Seldomglad invited the man to dinner and the people who lived closest were sent for. Soon the living room was filled with men dressed in work clothes. They talked about who should be chairman of the committee. It had to be someone who wasn’t afraid.

“A fella practically doesn’t know anybody better than Cilius,” Marinus said, and the others laughed. “Now don’t laugh, because he’s not afraid, that guy,” Marinus said, a bit offended. “He stood up to a lawyer and the authorities. There’s never been anybody who’s made short work of him.” The others conceded that Cilius was all right, but he had a weakness for drinking and a chairman definitely had better keep sober and attend to his post in a sober condition.

“He’s gotten better since Frederikke had the boy,” Lars Seldomglad said. “I almost can’t remember when I last saw him drunk.” And the others had to admit that Cilius had become really abstemious since he’d gotten a red-haired boy to take care of. To be sure, he went to the inn, but he indulged in moderation. “Otherwise I scarcely know who we could find,” Marinus said. “But, you know, it may be some of the rest of you have the talent for being chairman.”

Somebody mentioned Boel-Erik, but Erik shook his head. “I don’t have the knowledge for it,” he said. “I can’t find out about all those wage scales and provisions. I’ve never been strong at arithmetic.” The rest of them knew that’s the way it was. Boel-Erik was a reliable man, but he wasn’t suited for a difficult post. A couple of others were suggested. But it was doubtful whether they were hard enough when push came to shove. “If we could just take one of the womenfolk,” Lars Sel-
domglad said. “These employers here would surely have their troubles with them.”

All of them were a little anxious. It was dangerous to be the leader and absorb the blow when there was disagreement about the wages. They knew that the bigwigs hated unions, and who cared to risk his livelihood? They were used to being the little people; they were like trees that are bent by the wind. But Cilius! He’d walked to the parish without soles on his shoes, he’d been a navvy and beat a man till he was a cripple in his youth. He’d never thought much of the farmers, and he was surely no more afraid of the employers, that guy! “Now I feel it has to be Cilius and nobody else,” Marinus said, and, a little hesitantly, the rest of them agreed with him. And once they were agreed about who should be chairman and be at their head, it wasn’t hard to find people who could sit on the executive committee. The union’s traveling secretary wrote down a series of names.

All the unskilled laborers had appeared in the banquet room at the inn and the secretary opened with a speech. They agreed to found a branch and the secretary proposed electing Cilius Andersen as chairman. Cilius got up from his chair. “Cilius Andersen, that’s me,” he said. “I propose you as chairman!” the secretary said. “Will you accept if you’re elected?” “Am I going to be chairman of the union?” Cilius asked. “I’ll be damned—I never thought I’d end up as that.” Everyone in the banquet room laughed and Cilius sat down with a broad grin in his disheveled red beard. Cilius was elected unanimously. Boel-Erik, Black Anders, Marinus’s Niels and a couple of unskilled laborers were elected to the executive committee.

Cilius was solemn when he came home. He ordered the schnapps bottle to be put on the table and Frederikke had to make coffee. “Yeah, now you’re pouring coffee for a chairman,” Cilius said. “What kind of chairman is that?” Frederikke asked. “It’s me and nobody else,” Cilius said proudly. “The whole bunch voted for me for chairman. You probably wouldn’t have believed, Frederikke, that it was a chairman you took into your bed many years ago.” Frederikke didn’t reply, and Cilius got up
and fed Old-Jep schnapps with a spoon. “Yeah, they elected me chairman after all,” he said. “Oh sili vaasikum,” the old man smacked his lips. “I’ve become chairman of the labor union, Old-Jep,” Cilius said. “And that’s why us two are going to have ourselves a drink.”

Cilius was doing well— you could tell by looking at him. He’d had a son, he was earning a good day-wage, and a position of trust had been entrusted to him. Cilius seemed, as it were, broader shouldered and more compact, and he sat at home in the evening and studied the union’s by-laws and the figures in the wage scales. There was nobody who’d bamboozle Cilius. He’d surely straighten things out if the employers made some crazy fuss and wouldn’t pay as they were obliged to.

Frederikke had become less shy. Once in a while she put Little-Jep in the baby carriage and wheeled to town with him. As a rule it was Matilde she visited, and the boy stayed outside and slept in the sunshine, while Frederikke heard Matilde play the piano. Matilde was musical. Teacher Ulriksen had presented her with a book with notes, and soon she knew all the songs by heart. She strummed the tunes, while Frederikke sat and stared straight ahead and tried to stop thinking about a fellow who’d been disappointed in love and sought comfort at Frederikke’s bosom. From time to time Tora and Line Seldomglad also came, and dance tunes were played, while the women recalled how they’d shaken a leg at balls in their youth.

One morning Line and Tora were visiting at Matilde’s when there was a knock at the door. It was Mads Lund’s women who stepped in. In a chorus they apologized if they’d come at a bad time, but they did so very much wish to have a chance to listen to Matilde play the piano. Matilde played and the two black women sat with their heads tilted and their small blinking eyes and listened.

“A body must say you can certainly . . .”

“...certainly play,” they blathered at the same time. “And what did you pay for such a fine instrument?”

Matilde explained that she’d gotten it as a gift from her sweetheart and her father. It had been in the temperance hotel in
Færgeby, but they were getting a new one, and the men had bought it for her for eighty-five crowns.

“Oh, eighty-five crowns,” the farm women gushed. “So much money! You people must certainly be earning a lot at your job. The rest of us would never be able to afford it.”

“Surely Lund can get work by the cliff,” Tora said dryly. “But you know he has to take care of his farm,” the women said. “Oh, can it really pay for him to run that farm?” Tora said as gently as an angel. “Wouldn’t it be smarter if he let the credit association take it and he earned a big day-wage by the cliff just like the day laborers? Then you two could get a piano and sit here all day in the living room and play duets.” “We really thank you for the music, Matilde,” the women jabbered away in a chorus. “We’ll come by another day and listen to you play.” They hurried out of the living room. “You know, I don’t respect those two disgusting hags,” Tora said. “No,” Line Seldomglad said. “And now we don’t need to either because now the men don’t need their work.”

Harvest time was close at hand. The grain had grown golden and heavy in the fields, but this year the day laborers didn’t long for the harvest and its work. They barely even noticed how the season was progressing. Høpner stepped up the pace at the construction site. The concrete foundation for big machines had to be poured, and the store room and warehouse and a building for the office had to be built. He hurried about. The roof had to be on the factory by winter, and there was more and more overtime. Frowning, Cilius studied his wage scale and discussed prices with Høpner, and now the day laborers realized that they surely couldn’t have elected a better chairman than Cilius. Cilius stubbornly stood up for their rights, and they got them to the very last ounce.

There were shrewd union people among the craftsmen, and Cilius didn’t lack good advice. Now there was Kresten Bossen, who was in a Christian labor union, as he called it, and wouldn’t stand together with the others. Could that really be permitted? Cilius went up to the barracks and sought assistance, and he found out there that there was only one kind of labor union and
Kresten Bossen had to be in it if he wanted to be considered organized. So Cilius went to Kresten and explained to him in a gentle and friendly way that he’d definitely be obliged to give in. “I can’t act against my conscience, Cilius,” Kresten Bossen said. “I have to stick to the words of the scriptures, no matter what else happens.” “But it can’t possibly be against the scriptures for you to stand with the rest of us,” Cilius said. And Kresten Bossen once again stated the case for his standpoint and cited scriptural passages proving that he was right. But now Cilius got sore. “I have nothing against you being Pious, Kresten,” he said. “But I can’t put up with you being unreasonable. And I’ll say this: if things went according to the words of the scriptures and not according to the wage scales, we wouldn’t have the day-wage we’re earning today.”

Kresten Bossen couldn’t be led or driven, and Cilius went to Høpner and explained that they couldn’t work together with Kresten Bossen, who had to be regarded as nonunion. “What’s that supposed to mean?” Høpner asked. “We’ll be obliged to strike,” Cilius said. “Have you lost your mind, Cilius Andersen?” Høpner railed. “That’s just some nonsense. Send the man into me—I’ll try to talk sense to him.”

Kresten Bossen went up to Høpner, who was standing and talking to one of the engineers in the half-finished engine house where the electricity for the factory would be produced. “What do you want?” Høpner asked gruffly, and Kresten explained that he’d been sent for. “Don’t you want to join the union?” Høpner asked. “I’m in the union I can stand up for,” Kresten Bossen said. “Then go in and get your account settled,” Høpner said. “I can’t have a conflict for the sake of your peace of mind. We’re building a cement factory here—this isn’t some kind of revival meeting.”

The other day laborers watched Kresten Bossen as he slowly walked home from their workplace. “That’s rough all right,” Marinus said. “He has a wife and kids to support—I mean, a fella himself knows how it is. Now it seems to me Cilius is certainly being hard.” “No,” Boel-Erik said. “He has to stand with the rest of us. Otherwise they’ll get the upper hand on us. We’re
good for nothing if we don’t stand together.” The others sided with Cilius. “Kresten Bossen is really an honest man,” Marinus said. “He handed me a hundred crowns back then when he sold the farm. And how many times does somebody get money as a gift in this earthly life.”

Kresten Bossen came home to his house and Ida greeted him with astonishment. “Are you sick?” she asked. Kresten explained what had happened and Ida flushed with anger. “I’d never have thought you were so stupid,” she shrilled. “To be guided by the Lord’s word can’t ever be regarded as stupidity,” Kresten said meekly. “I know the Lord’s word as well as you do,” Ida said. “And not in one single place is it written that you mustn’t join a labor union with the others. It is written that in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, but that’s what you don’t want to do. I consider it blasphemy to twist the scripture’s holy word the way you do.”

“Ida, little Ida,” Kresten Bossen said, taking fright. “You know I’m guided only by my conscience.” But Ida couldn’t be stopped. She rattled off the scriptural passages that proved that servants were bound to obey their masters with a humble disposition. Was Høpner perhaps not Kresten Bossen’s master— was he not in the engineer’s service? Well, then, why did Kresten become so rebellious and not join the union as Høpner asked. Wasn’t it written in plain words: Render therefore unto God the things which be God’s, and unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and could that mean anything but that we have to obey those who have the right to rule over us?

Ida cited scriptural passage after scriptural passage, she slammed solemn sacred text at her husband’s head from all parts of the holy scripture, and Kresten Bossen wasn’t allowed to get a word in edgewise. Every time he tried to interrupt, Ida was there again with Paul’s epistles and Solomon’s proverbs and Luke’s gospel. You sensed that she was a believing woman for whom the bible was her guide. She stood there tall and lanky, with red cheeks and sparkling eyes and fought with spiritual weapons for daily bread for herself and her children and for a dream of a fine, freshly whitewashed little house and a living
room with plush furniture.

"Little Ida," Kresten Bossen nearly cried. "Of course I can see I’ve come a cropper. I just wanted peace and reconciliation, and instead, as ill luck would have it, sowed bickering and quarrelsomeness. I should have obeyed Høpner, who’s my master—I certainly realize that now." "Surely it can be undone, can’t it?" Ida asked. "I don’t know if it can," Kresten said. "But I can easily get work with the farmers in the harvest now." "And go for a paltry wage while all the others are lining their wallets," Ida said. "No, you have to go back and admit you made a mistake."

Yes, yes, so Kresten Bossen had to walk back to the construction site by the cliff and humbly present himself before his master the engineer. "Is that you again?" Høpner asked impatiently. "Are you dissatisfied with your wage statement?" Kresten Bossen explained plaintively that he’d gotten carried away and hadn’t managed to think the matter through thoroughly. He would in fact join the union if it couldn’t be helped. "All right, then you can go back to work," Høpner said. "Report to the foreman and say you talked to me."

Cilius had been somber and unrelenting since Kresten had left. When he saw him at work again, his face brightened. He thumped Kresten on the back with his hairy fist. "My good friend," he said. "I thought you’d come to your senses." And with a grin on his red face he added: "I’ll tell you something, Kresten Bossen, it may well be you’ll go to heaven and I’ll go to hell, but here at work we’ve got to stick together."
The eel traps were set in the fjord; now the silver eel was migrating its mysterious way toward the great depths. The harvest was in the barn and the gardens began to turn yellow. Ships came alongside the wharf, and heavy machine parts were put ashore. A crane was rigged up and the precious machines had to be treated carefully. But those were only a small part of the machines that belonged to a cement factory. A power station and water works had to be installed and many machines had to work with the chalk and the clay before it found its way into sacks and was cement.

When ships came with machine parts, Høpner himself was at the wharf and directed the work. If the crew didn’t go at it carefully, he roared like a savage. He gesticulated with his stick and gave orders like an officer in war: “Ease the crane carefully, all hands pitch in! Watch out that it doesn’t knock against anything.” A mother couldn’t have been more tender to her infant in the cradle than Høpner was to his machines. If something was done wrong, people heard how they went about cursing in America, and it didn’t sound good.

Huge iron pipes and cylinders came, boilers and strange machine parts. Among the workers were people who knew about that kind of thing. They were smiths and machinists and were used to setting up machines. The cylinders were for a rotary kiln, which would run through practically the whole factory and be stoked day and night. The cement would be burned to powder there after it had been mixed and washed. But the hugest thing was the steam engine, which would make the electricity. To be sure, the agricultural workers had seen machines before, both steam engines and threshing machines, but they hadn’t imagined that anything that huge existed. They stood, absorbed, and stared at the shiny steel monster as it was being put ashore on the wharf. How in the world would the machine be put in place in the engine house? But they did it.
Beams were laid the whole way, and many teams of horses were hitched. And the huge machine parts were hauled off on a kind of sled. It took an entire day, but it was done.

Teacher Ulriksen came to the cliff with his school while the moving was going on. He pointed out the machine’s parts and explained what they were called and how they rotated. The machines gleamed in the sunshine like gigantic toys, and Ulriksen explained that they’d been invented by human ingenuity to make life easier for human beings. “In India they tame elephants and use them for work,” he explained to the children. “But a machine like this is more powerful than a hundred elephants. It will make life easier for us and save us unnecessary toil. The machine is a blessing for humanity.”

It wasn’t just the children who flocked over, but almost the whole town. It was an experience to see the workers handle the shiny machine parts as carefully and yet firmly as when you put your arm around a girl at a dance. Old farmers shook their heads: the idea that they could figure out how to get it together. Women stood in small knots up on the cliff and stared in wonder down at the sweating, sunburnt men. And after the machine parts had been safely brought ashore, Høpner had had beer brought, and the dry throats were moistened. Two hundred men threw back their heads and gurgled down the beer. A machine had been brought ashore.

Høpner was busy and that was perhaps why Mrs. Marja left. But all the same you wouldn’t have thought he was so busy he couldn’t drive his lover to Færgeby in his car. Mrs. Marja had to rent a vehicle for herself and her suitcases. The women ran to the windows as she drove through town, and later they agreed she’d looked red-eyed. That’s the way it went when a woman didn’t have a ring. The day the man was tired of her, he threw her away like a rag and didn’t think about her heartache.

Mrs. Marja put up at the hotel in Færgeby. She was supposed to take the steamship to Copenhagen the next day. Attorney Schjøtt came to the hotel to drink his afternoon port while Mrs. Marja was sitting there drinking tea. The attorney had met the actress in Alslev and greeted her. “You’re on a trip to Fær-
" conduct," he said. "The engineer isn’t along?" Mrs. Marja shook her head. She was passing through here and would be traveling on the next day. Schjøtt understood that she and the engineer had had a falling out.

"Of course, one must also be on the lookout for a theatrical engagement," Mrs. Marja said in a forced way. "It’s high time if I want to have something for the winter. I’ve taken too much vacation, but it was so interesting to see the cement factory spring into existence." Mrs. Marja smelled of fine perfume, she was discreetly powdered—a lady from the great wide world. The attorney had been impressed by her and a little in love with her from the first time he saw her. He’d give a lot to know what had happened between her and Høpner. Why had they had a falling out?

"Engineer Høpner is an able man," the lawyer said, and Mrs. Marja conceded that. "But all the same . . ." she said hesitantly and earnestly looked straight ahead. "What were you going to say, madam?" Schjøtt asked. "I don’t know whether one doesn’t become a little tired of technological supermen," she said. "After all, there are other things in the world than steam engines. I’m tired of hearing about flywheels and cranks and tube mills. I’d been engaged to engineer Høpner; we couldn’t get married until my divorce went through. Now I’ve broken off the engagement."

It pleased the lawyer that Mrs. Marja’s relationship to the engineer had had that character and that she hadn’t simply been his lover. "I’m sorry, madam," he said. "You really shouldn’t be, counsel," Mrs. Marja laughed. "It was hopeless, and it’s just as well it’s over with." And now the attorney felt it his duty to keep Mrs. Marja company that evening she was going to spend in Færgeby. He invited her to lunch at the hotel. As a bachelor of course he didn’t have his own house and couldn’t invite ladies home.

Schjøtt was no social butterfly, but Mrs. Marja kept the conversation going. She told about a woman artist’s sad life, about the disappointments of the theater and the critics’ malice. The attorney ordered the best wine and was in high spirits afterward.
Tomorrow it would be all over town that he’d eaten lunch alone with a beautiful actress. He bought champagne so that too would be included in the gossip. The next afternoon he stood by the steamship with red roses for Mrs. Marja.

Bregentved’s business was picking up. Now he could sit at home in his room and sell lots. Many of the workers from outside the parish wanted to settle down in Alslev and take work in the factory, and they had to have a roof over their heads. They had to buy Bregentved’s house lots, though they cursed about the price they had to pay for a patch of land. Bregentved explained that the lot wasn’t one bit too expensive. It cost money to divide up the land and build roads, and they could pay the purchase price in instalments. It was hardly worth mentioning. He got his commission paid out at the attorney’s and put the money in the savings bank. It was money for operating capital when he took up business for real one day.

Now it was rumored that a new grocer intended to settle in town and Skifter was not pleased when he heard about it. “There’s not enough business here for two,” he said, but Konrad felt that when the factory was finished, there could really easily be three. Konrad suggested that Skifter remodel the shop and modernize it with large display windows and new signs. “What for? Does it make the merchandise any better?” Skifter asked. “No, but it’s just like with womenfolk,” Konrad said. “I mean, actually, all of them are equipped exactly the same, but still it’s the pretty ones we fight over.” And in that respect Konrad was an experienced man.

Meta blossomed like an unfolding rose since she’d brought twins into the world. The young workers had a smile on their lips when she handed them tobacco or chewing tobacco across the counter. You could understand why a missionary had hung himself and gone to hell for her sake.

Meta’s twins were really thriving and so was Inger’s girl. But it was no thanks to Inger. Everyone agreed that Boel-Erik hadn’t gotten the wife he’d deserved. “She keeps house like a slob,” Line Seldomglad said, and those were harsh words in her mouth because at her house things were left to themselves.
Cleanliness wasn’t Line’s strong suit, but she could get flowers and people to thrive in the clutter. Inger didn’t have flowers in the window, and she didn’t have kind words to spare for Erik when he came from work. Inger didn’t want to stay in Alslev—she wanted to go to a real city.

“But I mean now people are coming here,” Boel-Erik said soberly. “Be content, Inger, you’ll be in clover all right. It can’t be long before we’ll be able to build our own house.” But Inger didn’t get anything out of dreaming about a house with fine rooms and an oakwood sideboard and plush furniture. She snapped at her big, gloomy husband. “This place will never be a real town,” she said. “No, a body should never have gotten married before she’d had her youth.”

Boel-Erik didn’t reply. He didn’t understand Inger. Was she going around with a disease inside—maybe she’d been injured when the baby came? Because other womenfolk were satisfied if their husband just treated them tolerably and brought his day-wage home. Inger was, after all, a big, strong female right in the prime of her youth, and Boel-Erik didn’t feel himself that he was that bad. “Shouldn’t you go to Færgeby and talk to the doctor?” he asked. But Inger didn’t want to; there was nothing wrong with her—she was fed up with everything. “And it wouldn’t be any use talking to the minister either, would it?” Boel-Erik asked. “Nonsense,” Inger snapped, and Boel-Erik had nothing else to suggest. If neither doctor nor clergyman could help, who could?

There was a dance at the inn. The same evening an executive committee meeting was held at the union, and the men met at Cilius’s. After the meeting Boel-Erik walked home with Niels, and Niels invited him into the living room. Tora had just come home and she went out into the kitchen and made coffee. She’d heard in town that Inger had gone to the dance. Tora hadn’t believed it, but through the door to the dance hall she herself had seen Inger taking a whirl in the young fellows’ arms. It was an ugly sight, and how a married woman could bring herself to do that was beyond Tora.

She brought in the coffee and served the men. Boel-Erik
was sitting and listening to the distant music from the inn. “Now they’re surely dancing again,” he said. “There’s a dance all right practically every evening.” “Yeah, they’re really shaking a leg,” Tora said and hesitated a little. Then she added: “It seems to me you should know, Erik, that Inger went to the dance.” Boel-Erik obviously didn’t understand. “Inger,” he said. “But I mean married women don’t go dancing.” “No, of course, they’re not in the habit of doing that,” Tora said in her quiet way. “But, you know, something new happens almost every day. It just seems to me you should hear it from somebody who’s friendly disposed to you and Inger.”

Boel-Erik’s face was hard at work, he flushed with anger, and knots and pits formed on his forehead. This business was going too far. A married woman who went dancing became the subject of gossip and made a fool of her husband, and if Inger went dancing, she had to be fetched home. Boel-Erik got up. He let the coffee that had been served stand and he left without saying goodbye. A moment later he was in the middle of the hall where Inger was whirling a polka with one of the young craftsmen from the factory. He tore her away from the fellow and the couples that were closest shrank away in fright. You could see Boel-Erik was angry.

“Now you’re going home, Inger,” he said. “Surely it can’t be any skin off your back if I go dancing,” Inger answered. “Why should I sit and stare while you’re at a meeting.” A couple of the young fellows approached Boel-Erik and were prepared to defend the woman if he should lay hands on her in a temper. Erik brushed them aside and took Inger in his arms. She scratched back and pulled his hair, but he didn’t loosen his grip. Inger was carried out of the inn banquet hall and into her home.

“I won’t put up with it,” Inger screamed. “You can’t stop me, you milksop, I want to go back over there.” Now Erik could have explained to her that it had never before happened in the parish that a married woman went dancing alone. But Erik had become hotheaded and he wasn’t an articulate man. “Now shut your mouth,” he said. “No, I won’t, I won’t let myself be ordered around,” Inger shouted. “You’re about the lowest manfolk
a woman can get anything out of.” “You can’t let the kid lie here without any care while you race around at the dance,” Boel-Erik said. “Oh, I don’t care about the girl—she’s just a pain in the neck,” Inger jabbered away, but that was the last straw.

Boel-Erik had served on farms and was more used to associating with horses than women. There were nags that had to have the bit hard in their mouths, and it was dawning on him that Inger was probably that kind. Without a word he took his wife and turned her upside down. And while Inger was kicking her strong legs and screaming as if her life were at stake, he slapped her on the behind as if punishing a child. When he thought she’d had enough, he put her down. Inger sobbed, but her bad temper had disappeared. And suddenly she threw her chubby arms around Erik’s neck and had a good cry on his broad chest. “You got so furious you could’ve easily beaten me to a pulp,” she whispered and clung to him, and Boel-Erik understood his wife’s nature even less than before.

Old-Dorre and Nikolaj had to move; they had to go to the poor farm, which was located a half-mile outside of town. The owner of the house had arranged it with the parish council—he could no longer have the old woman living there for a small payment. But Dorre didn’t understand where she was going; her brain was totally muddled. “Now I’ve sold the farm here,” she said to Tora. “I’ve toiled a lot in my day and I can’t keep it up. But I’ve talked to the new man and you folks are welcome to keep living here as long as you yourselves want to.” “It’s high time, too, for you to allow yourself a little rest, Dorre,” Tora said. But Dorre didn’t feel there’d be much rest for her; after all, she had her worries to lug around: what would become of Nikolaj when she could no longer watch over him. No, a person didn’t get any rest until they were in the bosom of the grave, and Dorre yearned for her grave. “It’s going to be a harsh winter this year,” she said. “I can feel it, and where are we going to get fuel from? No, little Tora, a body is never without worry. If I could just take Nikolaj with me to the cemetery, the poor child.”

There was a touch of cold in the air. But at the cliff they were working at full speed. The factory smokestacks had now
been built so high that they reached up over the edge of the cliff. You saw the people building the smokestacks balancing at the top on the scaffolds. New people were constantly coming to work, designers and technicians traveled there and did work others couldn’t perform. It didn’t look as though the work would stop in the winter. But the factory definitely had to be enclosed before the frost set in.

A winter with work—it was almost unbelievable. The men talked about it in muffled voices, as if they didn’t dare say it all too loudly. But even if there turned out not to be any work, they wouldn’t lack fuel or food. So let it freeze. The day laborers had put aside some of their earnings; they could manage through the winter, which stood at the door.

Things usually took a turn for the worse with Povl Bøgh’s Louise when it turned colder, and that’s the way it was this year too. Louise had a doctor who wrote prescriptions for her, but she herself knew that no prescriptions were any good for her illness. “Here I’m lying and can’t live or die,” she complained when the women came and visited her. “I can hear all that life that’s outside. I lie and listen when the men go to work in the morning, and I can hear their talk and shouting when they come home. I can hear the music from the inn every other evening and the girls flirting when the fellows walk home with them. I’m lying so to speak in the grave and listening to the living.

The women comforted Louise as well as they could. She’d been sick for many years and hadn’t died, so why shouldn’t she get well? But of course they knew as well that she just couldn’t part with her life, and she was right about the fact that she was to be considered a dead woman. Big things were taking place, but they weren’t happening for Louise. She wouldn’t live to see the factory standing with smoking smokestacks and providing work for everyone. Work and daily bread.

“The girls are complete fools,” Louise said. “I can hear it in their voices at night when they’re leaving the dance. They’re in great demand—there are many menfolk in town. I didn’t get any benefit out of my youth. I was afraid. And now I’m lying here and it’s too late. I envy your Olga, Tora.”
“Why do you envy her?” Tora asked. “ Surely things aren’t any different for her than for other girls who have to go out into domestic service. And we sure know what that’s like.” A silence arose at Louise’s sickbed and Tora understood there was something they weren’t supposed to divulge to her. She had sensed it several times and it probably meant that Olga was about to get herself a sweetheart.

Magda came to visit Tora; she had an errand at the grocer, she said, and got it into her head to look in. “A lot’s changed here in town,” Magda said. “They’re building and making a rumpus, it’s becoming a different town than the one the two of us are familiar with. And the factory—it’s almost impossible for anybody to imagine something so gigantic. We have to be pleased about Høpner, that’s for sure.” “Oh yeah,” Tora admitted. It was good there was work and earnings for people who were in need. And that sure was true of most of them.

“Yes indeed, now you’ll all be on easy street,” Magda said and was so full of smiles and innocence that Tora knew right away that venom and unpleasantness were going to be dished up. That’s of course the way Magda was—nothing good came from her. “Surely we’re not going to be any better off than other working people,” Tora said and was on guard. “And we certainly can’t expect it either.” “I really regard Høpner as both a nice and thoughtful man,” Magda said. “You can rest assured he won’t forget who you people are.” “No fear, he won’t forget or remember,” Tora said. “Surely he doesn’t even know our name.” “Then you can certainly count on Olga reminding him of it,” Magda said. “She’s never been dumb, and I can say that having known her since she was a little girl.”

Tora stared at her. Olga’s name was being mentioned in the same breath as Høpner’s! And if that kind of stuff was coming from Magda’s mouth, there was no doubt about the meaning. “What does Olga have to do with the engineer?” she asked pointedly. “Now you better come out with it point blank, Magda: what is it you came to say?”

Appalled, Magda clapped her hands and stared at Tora. “Lord, dear Jesus, truly I didn’t come to say anything,” she said.
“You know better than anyone that I don’t run around gossiping because, after all, we’ve been neighbors for many years. I thought certainly and definitely that your daughter would’ve told you she was good friends with the engineer. Everybody in the parish knows that.”

And now Tora found out what had been going on behind her back. Olga was acquainted with Høpner, they’d been seen together, and he’d gone for drives with her in his car. It was no wonder, Magda felt, because Olga was of course a good-looking girl who could surely catch a man’s eye. “And now you’ll see, Tora, before you know it, the two of them will probably be engaged,” Magda said, and her eyes gleamed with malice. “That’ll be grand for you folks to have the engineer himself as your son-in-law. I don’t begrudge Line Seldomglad being about to burst with conceit because her Konrad got that poor grocer wench. But the engineer—now that’ll be something else. I suppose you won’t become so high and mighty that you’ll ignore the rest of us?”

“You’re a windbag and you’ll never be anything else in all your life,” Tora said. “What kind of gossip is that to run around with? Just because he meets her on the road and picks her up in his car, doesn’t mean he’s wooing her. It seems to me you should know how difficult it is to get menfolk to get married. It sure took many years, Magda, before you got Andres to the minister.”

“Oh, there was no hurry with Andres and me,” Magda said. “We had time to wait.”

Tora became angry. Nobody was going to talk like that about Olga. “I know my own daughter, Magda,” she said. “I could have you punished for slander. But I wouldn’t touch you with a pair of fire tongs. I don’t respect you—you’re a malicious person.” “Nobody’s ever said that kind of thing to me,” Magda wailed. “I mean, only as bad luck would have it did I tell you what I thought you already knew. Little Tora, you mustn’t take it to heart. I certainly know how highly you think of your own children. Oh, Lord Jesus, why did it have to be me who was chosen to bring you sad tidings.”
Magda had learned in her marriage—she’d gotten on an intimate footing with the heavenly powers. “I don’t think much of your whimpering,” Tora said. “Why won’t you be an honest woman? I mean, none of us did you any harm.” “But you say yourself you don’t respect me,” Magda cried. “I certainly know how all you married women look at me because I was Andres’ housekeeper . . . . But you heard, Tora, didn’t you, that he sent her, the actress, away? That might certainly suggest that he has honest intentions with your daughter.” “Oh, you and your Hopner,” Tora said, annoyed. “What business of ours is his courting. I know my own daughter and know she has nothing to do with him.”

Magda dried her eyes and said goodbye. Tora saw her go into Line Seldomglad’s. And she knew it was out across the whole parish that Olga was sweethearts with the engineer. They’d been ashamed to tell her about it. Tora went over to the bureau drawer and took out the little doll that had belonged to Vera. When your children grew up and went out into the wide world, you couldn’t be of any help to them and couldn’t prevent them from causing you grief. But one of her children would never cause her grief, and that was little Vera, who was lying and waiting for her in her grave in the cemetery.
The next Sunday Olga came home and Tora interrogated her. What had gone on between her and Høpner; how had Olga become the talk of the town?

Olga was blushing red and Tora had to wring every word out of her. This much she found out—that Høpner had seen Olga for the first time in the spring while he was living at the inn. She’d been at a dance.

“Did he dance with you?” Tora asked, but Høpner hadn’t. He’d spoken a few words to her and asked what her name was. About a week later she’d met him as he was driving in his car and he’d asked her if she wanted a lift. Høpner had to go to Færgeby and Olga was going to visit a girl friend who was in service halfway between Færgeby and Alslev. “What did he say to you?” Tora asked. “Oh, nothing special,” Olga answered. “He questioned me about something. He was nice.”

“Did you go out with him later on?” Tora inquired, and Olga confessed that she’d met Høpner outside the farm where she was serving. At first it happened coincidentally, at least Olga thought it was, but later they’d had an arrangement. They’d had rendezvous in the evening.

“Did you visit him in his house?” Tora asked, and Olga said no, she hadn’t been in the engineer’s rooms, though she definitely wanted to see how her childhood home was furnished now. Tora cautiously interrogated further, and Olga answered briefly and evasively, but it did come to light that Høpner had kissed her, but nothing worse had happened. Olga had been a smart girl and guarded her virtue.

Tora silently looked at her daughter. Olga had become a pretty and fully mature girl. She was tall and slim with small, firm breasts. Her eyes were blue and clear, and her light hair curled up at her temples and neck. Her skin was light and tender, and her hands fine and well-shaped, though you could see by looking at them that she had them for something other than
finery. “Look after yourself, little Olga,” Tora said. “You have to remember that a rich man seldom means well by a poor girl.” Olga bridled and said she wasn’t in any danger. “You don’t know that, you don’t know anything about it,” Tora said admonishingly. “It happens suddenly without us being aware of it. It’s not easy to be a womanfolk—you’ll definitely find that out.”

Tora didn’t speak to Marinus about Olga because where would that get you. She didn’t get any promise either from her daughter that she’d ignore Høpner. If he wouldn’t leave her alone, how would the girl avoid him? She thought about going to the engineer and having it out with him. It would’ve pleased Tora most to tell him to his face that if he were an honest man, he’d let a poor girl go. But, of course, nothing illegal had happened, and a couple of kisses weren’t worth mentioning.

The men had their work and their own lives. They sat in the barracks, at the inn, or at one another’s places and talked about work, about wages, about politics. They got up early in the morning and went to work, they slaved away at it like dogs, while Høpner thundered his orders and cursed in American English. Their world had become a different one; the parish had become remote to them. It was as if it had been years since they’d been day laborers and worked for the farmers for a small sum. Now they were laborers and in a labor union.

But the women? It wasn’t easy for them to keep up with the new times. They couldn’t talk about prices and wage scales, they didn’t know anything about labor unions and politics. They didn’t go to work every morning and talk to people who were in the know; no, they took care of the house and children as they’d always done. They had more money, they could buy food and clothing for the children and fuel, and they didn’t have to be afraid of the winter, which was coming now. But their world was the same; no great change had taken place in them.

There was Matilde, who’d gotten a piano. Black Anders had worked for the farmers, and in the winter he’d managed with a little fishing and poaching. Now his daughter was sitting there like a large farmer’s daughter playing the piano. But wasn’t that starting in too grand a style? They talked about it on the farms,
and the day-laborer wives were still a little diffident. Maybe Black Anders and Thomas Trilling should have put aside the money for hard times instead of buying such an expensive thing. Matilde in her heart of hearts had a bit of a bad conscience when she sat down at the piano. It was as if she hardly had a right.

A factory was being built and that was a great thing. But it was almost more extraordinary that Høpner had cast his eyes on a girl of humble station. It was like a folk ballad about the rich, faithless suitor and the poor young maiden, and of course it had to end sadly. The women whispered in animated voices about how far things had gone now between Olga and the engineer. Had they been to bed, had he managed to seduce her? When Tora came visiting, the band of women fell silent. They didn’t want to offend her by talking about her daughter.

Tora lay awake at night and thought about Olga’s fate. And one day it occurred to her that only one person could advise her in this matter and that was Ulriksen, who was a smart man and her friend. She went down to the teacher and found him in his garden. Ulriksen was walking with his long pipe in his mouth and a basket under his arm picking apples.

“So, Tora, it’s Olga you want to talk about,” he said. “Let’s go inside—everyone can see us from the road. It’s a good apple harvest this year. I planted the trees myself.”

He led Tora into his living room after he’d carefully scraped the garden soil off his boots. A bit of cobweb from the trees was hanging in his shaggy hair.

“Sit down, Tora,” he said in a friendly tone. “I’ve certainly heard rumors about the girl. What’s she going around and doing with this engineer?”

Tora recounted what she’d gotten out of Olga—that she’d had rendezvous with Hopner, but it probably hadn’t gotten any more serious. Annoyed, Ulriksen shook his head.

“The man’s twenty-five years older than her,” he said. “If he were a worker, dairyman or farmer, Olga would ignore him. At the ripe old age of twenty, she’d regard him as a ridiculous old codger. But it’s the usual thing: honest ambition turns into eroticism.” “I scarcely know what that is,” Tora said. “I just
mean that she falls in love with him because he’s a man over her station,” Ulriksen said. “She’s become blinded by him as if by a prince in the fairy-tale. Once again it’s the humble-man temperament! If you people would just learn to stiffen your backs.”

“You must be a socialist, Ulriksen,” Tora laughed. “No, I’m a Grundtvigian,” Ulriksen said. “I don’t know anything about economic matters, but we have to be people who hold our heads high wherever we stand.” “Well, poverty has always been prone to bend,” Tora said. “And so we wind up back at money matters.”

Ulriksen sat for a moment frowning with his cold meerschaum pipe in his hand. “If he seduces her, that’s wrong,” he said. “I’ve known Olga since she went to school: that would be a blow to her. And if he marries her, that’s worse still. The age difference is too great. No, that’s the only solution: we have to get her out of the way. She has to go away from the damn engineer. He can get himself women from somewhere else to play with.” “But where am I going to send her?” Tora asked. “I have a sister who’s married to a teacher on Funen,” Ulriksen said. “She’s a woman with guts, and if I ask her to take Olga in as a maid, she’ll do it.”

That was Ulriksen’s suggestion and Tora certainly saw it was the smartest thing they could do. But there were many difficulties. “People will talk,” she said. “They’ll think the worst.” “Let them think whatever they want, Tora,” Ulriksen said gruffly. “You and I have never been afraid of gossip. Let them say whatever they want about Olga, just as long as we get her out of the way. Is she going to change jobs in November?” Olga wasn’t, and Ulriksen was satisfied with that. Both the husband and the wife on the farm where she served were his old pupils and his word carried weight with them. Ulriksen would surely manage to get her released from that service.

Olga bridled and was offended when she heard what was going to happen with her. “He’ll write to me, I’m just telling you ahead of time,” she said. “So let him,” Tora said. “But it seems to me best if you got away from the gossip. You can also learn a lot at Ulriksen’s sister’s.” Tora wasn’t afraid of letters.
They couldn’t cause much harm. And otherwise Ulriksen’s sister was certainly the woman who could keep Høpner away from Olga if he took it into his head to visit her. They furnished Olga with nice clothes and friendly admonitions and she traveled to Ulriksen’s sister on Funen.

“Well, just as long as he doesn’t get angry and fire Niels and me,” Marinus said, troubled. “A fella never knows what people are like with these things. It might happen that he’ll turn into a total fool when he discovers she’s gone.”

But Høpner didn’t turn into a fool. One afternoon he went to the farm in his automobile and asked for Olga and found out she was gone. “Did she go away? And where to?” Høpner asked and frowned gruffly. The man on the farm certainly didn’t know. But she’d probably gotten a position somewhere on Zealand or maybe it was on Bornholm. “I see,” Høpner said and turned the crank handle. Then he thundered out of the farmyard in his automobile. He’d been a little in love with a pretty girl and she’d slipped out of his hands. What a fool! There were plenty of women in the world and he had a factory to build.

A man came on foot from Færgeby with his suitcase in hand and walked through Alslev without looking to the left or the right. He was dressed in a way you otherwise didn’t see people dressed there: in a coat with a large pattern and boots with huge toes. His face was tanned and had deep wrinkles, and he puffed on a short pipe. He went out to the cliff and people in town judged that he was probably a man who was going to set up machines. But the man didn’t go down to the factory; he remained standing on the cliff and looked down and then went back to the inn. There he asked for Marinus Jensen, who’d had one of the small farms on the cliff. Was he dead?

When Marinus came from work, the man was sitting in his living room. “It’s probably a stranger,” Marinus said, and Tora explained it was none other than his brother Laurids, who’d come home from America. “But is that really Laurids?” Marinus asked and looked at the peculiar man. And it took a long time before he recognized his brother’s features in the tanned and wrinkled face. It was Laurids, who’d gone to America in his
"You look somewhat worse for wear, Marinus," Laurids said in his broken Danish. "I couldn’t have recognized you if I’d met you on the street. You sold your farm—how are you managing?" Marinus gave an account of how things had gone for him in the world and, in turn, heard how Laurids had done abroad. And before long Marinus and his family understood that Laurids hadn’t come home a well-to-do man. He had a couple of hundred crowns in his pocket—that was all.

"I thought you people earned such an awful lot of money over there," Marinus said. He felt somewhat disappointed. For many years he’d looked forward to the time when his brother would return home with his pocket full of dollars and impress the whole parish. "Well, you can earn money, but you can also lose it," Laurids said. "I earned good money and many was the time I had my wallet full. But it was women who were my downfall. I couldn’t resist. It’ll be easier here at home; here the women aren’t so pretty, and they aren’t such good judges of money."

Laurids was some years younger than Marinus; he was a man in his best years and there might well turn out to be something for him to do at the factory. The next day Laurids went to speak to Høpner. They spoke for a long time in English and Laurids had to say where he’d been in America and what he’d worked at. Laurids was hired and he certainly hadn’t been abroad for nothing. He knew all about practically every kind of work and before a week had gone by, he was Høpner’s trusted man.

"We’d be more than happy to have you live here with us," Marinus said. "But space is tight, and of course we’re also thinking about building our own house some day. It wouldn’t be in your interest to be a lodger here. And space is touch and go in practically the whole parish." Marinus asked Tora for advice on where Laurids could get a roof over his head and they agreed that the only possibility was Andres and Magda. They had a couple of rooms, and space could surely be made.

"How’s the wife?" Laurids asked, and Marinus said that
Magda was like most wives. She kept her house nice and clean, but the food was perhaps a shade plain. It wasn’t always easy for her to get money from Andres, and of course she herself had become somewhat close-fisted too. “I mean what does she look like?” Laurids asked, and now Marinus remembered that his brother had himself confessed that he was weak when it came to womenfolk. “There’s no risk with her,” he laughed. “I can’t imagine anybody going to her voluntarily. And she was the one who lured Andres into her bed; no, you’ve no need to fear her.” Relieved, Laurids nodded.

It was arranged that Laurids went to live at Andres and Magda’s. He slept on a sofa in their living room. They were satisfied earning the extra penny.

Laurids went visiting his old acquaintances and he went to the barracks and to the homes of the day laborers and workers. And he was a man who’d experienced something. He hadn’t just been in North America—in South America he’d fought savage Indians and risked his life among wild beasts and snakes. Marinus’s children sat breathless when Laurids reported on his experiences; indeed, even Cilius fell silent. “You’ve kind of gotten around,” Cilius said. “Did you also taste human flesh?” Laurids had. “It tastes about like a calf,” he said. “We had it among the savage Indians in the jungle. Just as I was beginning to eat, I saw an arm sticking out of the soup pot. Then I realized it was human flesh and I didn’t want any more. I really didn’t stay in South America for long—I couldn’t stand the climate.”
Little-Jep was thriving, but things weren’t so good with Old-Jep. One morning Cilius and Frederikke came into the living room, where he slept, and the old man was lying there quietly and resembled a dead man. “Well, grandpa has gone away.” Frederikke said, but Cilius discovered that the old man was blinking a bit with one eye and that there was life yet.

“Grandpa, are you sick?” he shouted, but Old-Jep didn’t make a sound. Even if he wasn’t dead, he was bad off, and Cilius gave Frederikke instructions to fetch the doctor from Færgeby. The doctor came. Old-Jep had become completely paralyzed, and the physician couldn’t say definitely whether he’d die right away or whether the paralysis perhaps might abate somewhat. In any case he wasn’t long for this world.

At first it looked as though Old-Jep would pull through. He got a bit of his voice back and could whisper a weak sili... vaasi.... He didn’t get any further—he lacked the strength for more. But when the physician came the next time, pneumonia had supervened, and Old-Jep had to go. The old sinner had been summoned and he had to migrate.

“ Aren’t we going to get the minister?” Frederikke asked. “What do we need him for?” Cilius said. “I mean, it’s the custom,” Frederikke said. “If the old man could make himself understood, I suspect he’d ask for the minister to be called and to get the sacraments before he died.” Far be it from Cilius to deny Old-Jep his last wish, and he went himself for the minister and asked him to give Old-Jep the sacrament. Pastor Gamst had visited the old man now and again and was a bit uneasy. “Do you think he’s of sound mind?” he asked. “Does he understand the character of the sacred act”? “He understands every last word you say to him, even if he’s paralyzed,” Cilius claimed. “He’s so gifted, so gifted.”

The minister came the same day and administered the sacrament to the old man. The wafer was placed on his tongue, but
the wine? The minister stood with the chalice in his hand and
didn’t know how he’d get the dying man to drink. “Let me,”
Cilius said and took a spoon from the table drawer. The wine
was poured into the spoon and Cilius guided it carefully into
Old-Jep’s mouth. Most of it ran out of the corner of his mouth,
but the old man half-opened one eye, looked at Cilius, and
wailed: Sili vaasikum, oh sili vaasikum. That was the last thing
Old-Jep uttered; the next morning he was dead.

Old-Jep got a proper burial. There wasn’t much space in
Cilius and Frederikke’s apartment, but they borrowed a room at
a neighbor’s and entertained the mourners in the best possible
way. Old-Jep was to go to his grave respectably. Old farmers
came doddering in from inland to accompany him to the ceme­
tery. They were people who’d known Old-Jep in his youth.
They’d drunk with him and won his money playing cards, and
fought with him when they were in the mood.

Old-Jep lay in the open coffin in the out-building, which
Cilius had decorated with spruce branches, and the old people
stood quietly for a bit by the coffin and took leave of the de­
ceased. Afterward there was a meal in the small rooms, and
they revived memories of what Old-Jep had been up to in his
youth. The drinks went down smoothly and the men were
flushed and agreed that the old man had been made of the right
stuff. People of his kind were rare nowadays, indeed, the world
was going downhill. Who’d drive to market now and gamble his
horse and wagon away? Who’d lose the farm he was bom on at
cards? Old-Jep got a nice posthumous reputation.

Most of the funeral guests were older people who went home
early. At the end only Marinus, Tora, and Laurids, and Andres
and Magda remained. They’d been Cilius’s neighbors while he
himself had land, and he invited them to stay and take another
coffee laced with schnapps. Cilius was a bit drunk; that went on
rarely now, but today he’d drunk heavily in the old man’s honor.

“Dammit, I’ll miss him, the old bird,” Cilius said. “I always
valued him highly because, well, gifted is what he was. I gave
him a lot of schnapps with a spoon and he was welcome to it.
But I managed to arrange his successor: we’ve got that little red
fox in the house.”

The women stole secret glances at Frederikke, but she looked as though she wasn’t aware of anything spiteful. She sat at the table, haggard and feeling a little cold; it had been a long time since Frederikke had had her heyday.

“It’s been a great expense for you,” Andres said. But Cilius didn’t care about the expenditure. Old-Jep was welcome to what he’d gotten. “He gambled it all away,” Cilius said. “I respect him for that. Most people sit and watch over what they have.” “And you sure went in his footsteps, too, while you had your farm,” Andres said tartly. “You know it’s written: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Those are words a fella can easily make a mental note of.”

Andres wasn’t in a good mood this evening. He grumbled at Magda; there was something that didn’t sit right with him. Magda, in contrast, was unusually kind. She didn’t talk much, and not a nasty word came from her mouth. The others definitely noticed that she kept close by Laurids from America. Had Magda gotten Laurids in her net, Marinus thought. Wasn’t he able to resist?

Laurids was quite a story-teller when people would listen to him. He recalled how he’d worked in America’s forests. There’d been hundreds of forestry workers and they lived far from other people in these desolate places. They’d gambled and drunk, and sometimes the men had gotten into fights where the revolver rang out and the men fell down dead.

“Why were they fighting?” Magda asked. “Oh, you know, there were no womenfolk,” Laurids said. “No, so you see,” Magda said. “There have to be womenfolk to keep the peace. They have the better character.” “Oh, that’s hardly what it is,” Tora said.

Magda didn’t run around town much now, in any case not after quitting time, when the men come home. She took care of her house and Laurids didn’t have much to complain about with regard to the food. He got good fare at Magda’s, but he hadn’t noticed that Andres found the provisions too generous. “Now
you watch out carefully with her,” Marinus said, and Laurids declared that he was doing his best. He couldn’t believe there was any risk living at Magda and Andres’ house.

Søren brought home his report card every Sunday and Marinus went over it carefully. Søren was number one in his class and he received nothing but praise from the school. But Marinus was not easily satisfied. “It seems to me you got an A minus in natural history,” he said. Søren explained that no one could have straight A’s every time. “But you have to exert yourself, little Søren,” Marinus admonished him. “You have to remember that other people are paying for you to stay in school. You mustn’t disgrace us.” Søren had turned into a pale-faced little city boy and Tora could scarcely recognize her own offspring.

No, there was Anton—he was her lad. He ran errands for grocer Skifter and helped out in the shop. He earned his own wage and bought his own clothing. Anton was involved in whatever was going on. He heard the men chatting in the shop, he knew what the farmers were thinking, he knew the out-of-town craftsmen by name. Anton was good friends with his uncle Laurids, but he’d abandoned the thought of going to America. He wanted to work at the factory as soon as he was old enough, and Karl, who was sixteen and serving on a farm inland, wanted to do the same. When the mothers wanted their children in the evening, they had to fetch them on the cliff. Tora’s three smallest ones, Tinus, Sofie, and Little-Laurids, were there; all the town’s small-fry were there. They were at the wharf when the steamers moored; they slipped into the factory to look at the machinery; they stood in clusters and stared at the smokestacks to see whether they swayed in the wind.

There was a jumble of pieces of lumber, stones, and heaps of rubble around the factory buildings. The earth had been churned up as if wild elephants had been fighting with one another. Work was going on here; Høpner’s voice rang out everywhere, and now he’d gotten Laurids as a helper, who could also curse in American English. People understood that the factory wouldn’t be ready to manufacture cement for the time being. The walls had been erected, machines put into place, but there were still a
Cilius studied the union by-laws and wage scales, but there was no strike—he didn’t have to use his knowledge. Høpner wasn’t the man to have a tug-of-war over a few pennies: he was building his factory and paid whatever it cost. Cilius’s demeanor had become dignified and whole weeks went by without his going to the inn. If he went to the grocer’s and there were several farmers in the shop, he jousted with them. “You’ve become chairman of the labor union, Cilius,” Mads Lund said. “Surely that must give you a chance to earn something, doesn’t it?” “It does,” Cilius said. “If the day laborers had had a union before, they’d certainly have been better off. Then you people would’ve wound up paying a good price for the work.” “We can’t pay more if we have to pay interest and taxes,” the farmer said. “But that’s good you people are earning money—then we’ll be rid of you running to the assistance fund and parish council. Then you people can manage on your own.”

Cilius nodded in a friendly way to him. “It’s outrageous that ordinary people have put you to any trouble,” he said. “There’s surely no way around it—we’ll relieve you of the labor and the annoyance.” “I wish you people would,” the farmer said. “I’m almost sick and tired of the whole thing: a fella has only ingratitude and trouble.” “If you’ll just hold out till the next parish council election, there’ll be no more demands,” Cilius said. “Then we’ll lighten your burden. Then we’ll put our own people in.”

It became quiet in the shop; no one had thought about that—that when the factory came, it would be the workers who’d have the majority. “Yeah, just do whatever you want: come and take the whole thing,” Mads Lund said and slammed the door behind him with a bang.

Cilius had been a spendthrift and a rowdy, he’d honored Old-Jep for his feats and poured schnapps into him with a spoon. Now he had a son and a position of trust; now he was in a different struggle. It occurred to Cilius that the union ought to have a banner, and he went from man to man and collected. Andres complained terribly when he had to fork over the money. “I
can’t keep it up,” he wailed. “I have to pay to the union and Magda has become totally unreasonable; I almost think she uses bank notes where other people can make do with a newspaper. You can’t be hard on me, Cilius, I can’t keep it up.”

But Cilius was hard. “May I see your savings bank book?” he said. “Let me see how much you’ve hoarded up.” “I don’t have a savings bank book,” Andres said. “I live from hand to mouth. I owed a lot of money when I sold my farm, and it was all used up.” “If you’re in the union, you have to pay along with the rest of us,” Cilius said, and Andres, weeping and wailing, parted with a crown, which Cilius entered in his list.

Konrad had now gotten his way. Skifter had gone along with remodeling the shop and modernizing it. Craftsmen came and at the same time it was arranged so that Konrad and Meta moved into the grocer’s rooms and he installed himself upstairs. Skifter was willing to give Konrad the reins. He’d been frightened out of his wits: Konrad had said something to the effect that it would probably end up with a consumer cooperative coming. “Surely they’re not that stupid?” Skifter said. But Konrad felt that if they were that stupid elsewhere, they’d probably be stupid here too.

If you walked through town, there was no big change. But change had taken place. The lots by the village street had been sold and building would start in the spring. There were people who wanted to move to Alslev to work or run a business. It was no longer a village, but a town next to a factory.

The November storms lashed the fjord and the fishermen had hauled their boats ashore. From up on the cliff you looked across the bare woods to the north and the heath to the south, where the farms hunched up against the ground to seek shelter from the wind. But the winter no longer had its grip on the day laborers.

Laurids from America was still living at Andres’, but things apparently weren’t going the way they should. One day he came and confided his troubles to Tora. Things had gone the wrong way with him and Magda: he’d been in her bed. “But can’t you restrain yourself?” Tora laughed, and Laurids sadly shook his head: womenfolk had always been his misfortune. “What does
Andres say?” Tora asked. Laurids supposed that Andres knew, but he hadn’t expressed an opinion; he behaved as if nothing had happened and was nice enough to Magda’s lover.

“So what,” Tora said. “Don’t worry about it. You know Magda isn’t exactly an infant: she knows what she’s doing.” “But she wants to marry me,” Laurids said. “She’s already married,” Tora said. “But she wants to divorce Andres and marry me,” Laurids said. “I can’t get a moment’s peace from this female. That’s the terrible part—that a fella knows ahead of time and still lets himself be seduced.”

Laurids’s furrows became still deeper: he’d gladly have been a decent man and not wrong a woman. But now Tora got angry. “I really don’t respect her,” she said. “Because now that she’s got a husband, she should surely be content with him. She had a lot of trouble getting married to Andres, and now she wants to get rid of him because she likes you better. She’s just doing it for her own selfish reasons—I don’t have any respect for that.” Laurids tried to defend Magda, but Tora wouldn’t listen to him. “You’re no judge of that—you don’t know Magda,” she said. “I’m telling you, Laurids, you’re putty in women’s hands.”

Laurids looked at her. “I’m what?” he asked. “You’re putty in women’s hands—they can do whatever they want with you,” she said. “But this stuff is going too far. I’ll never go along with Magda marrying you. She wanted Andres and his savings bank book and she has to stick to that. I’ll go talk to her—I’ll tell her my opinion.”

Tora was really angry and she visited Magda while the men were at work. “How nice of you to come,” Magda said. “It’s rare a body gets to see anything of you.” “No, because you surely don’t have any time,” Tora said. “I mean, you have to go to bed with Laurids every spare moment you have.” “But Tora, what are you accusing me of?” Magda said, horrified. “I think it’s time you realized you’re not a housekeeper, but a married woman,” Tora said gruffly.

Magda got tears in her eyes. “You’re speaking awfully harshly to me, Tora,” she said. “I mean, it’s not my fault that the men won’t let me go. I’ve had my troubles with them almost as
long as I can remember.” “No, when you crawl into bed with them and throw your arms around them, they won’t let you go,” Tora said. “We know all right how things are with that kind.”

“I was never out to hook Laurids,” Magda said. “It would’ve been better if you had,” Tora said. “You can go to bed with the whole town and I’d never ever blame you for it. We womenfolk have to have our rights too. But every time you’ve managed to lure a manfolk, you try to get the upper hand on him. I don’t respect that, Magda—I think you’re a hussy.”

“You’ll have to answer for your mouth,” Magda said, all steamed up. “I’ll answer for everything I do,” Tora said. “But Laurids is moving out of your house tomorrow without fail. You can go to bed with him as often as you want, but you’ll never get married to him. You’ll have to be content with Andres.”

Magda collapsed in grief and agony; she took Tora’s hand and confided to her that she’d never been fond of Andres. She’d taken him because she was an unhappy woman and didn’t have anyone to lean on. “You could surely have gotten yourself a job,” Tora said ruthlessly. “You didn’t have to take Andres; he resisted, he was far from willing. Now you’d rather have Laurids, but now it’s too late.”

Tora got her way: Laurids moved from Andres and Magda’s. He lived again at Marinus’s, and that’s where he was to stay until Marinus and Niels got a house built some day. A spare bedroom was to be fitted up for Laurids. It wouldn’t do to have him without supervision. He couldn’t be at large.

Tora put on weight; she was doing fine. She had an honest husband, who came home and put his weekly wages on the table. There were no worries about the winter and food. Marinus had work and got his wages. But once in a while she went up to the cemetery and sat down by Vera’s grave. That little burial plot was Tora’s room where she had peace. Otherwise there were people wherever she went.

Now and then the day-laborer wives visited Old-Dorre at the poor farm. They took along pastry and jam for her, and Dorre sat in her little room like an old ravaged and melancholy bird. “I don’t know what kind of people a body has come among,” she
said. “But they don’t hurt me, they speak in a friendly way to me. But now Nikolai is going to play for you. He’s good at playing.”

Nikolaj took the violin out of its case and played a piece. There was wailing and screeching, but deep down a little tune was struggling. “Yes, Nikolaj can play,” Dorre said. “If a body could just take him along to the grave. But they’ve promised me, as certain as the words of the scripture, that they’ll keep him here when I’ve gone to my Savior. As long as I live, it won’t matter where I am, just as long as they don’t send me to the poor farm. I don’t want to go there.”
The machines were standing in the factory waiting to get going. The work had now gotten to the point where they could celebrate, and Høpner invited them to a party at the inn. Grand preparations were made, and, after all, it wasn’t every day either that a topping-out party was held for a factory.

Rectangular tables put end to end in the inn’s banquet hall were set, and Høpner was standing at the door and greeted every single person. It was rainy weather and the hall smelled of wet clothes and peat smoke. The wives had also been invited and a penetrating odor of mothballs rose from their dark festive clothing.

Everyone who’d worked on the construction was invited as a guest, and the hall was packed full. Some had to eat in the taprooms, but there was a superabundance of food and drink.

There were craftsmen, masons, carpenters, smiths, and day laborers. There were people from far away, and from Færgeby, there were almost all the working people from the parish. There were fishermen who’d earned a day-wage at the cliff, farm lodgers, smallholders whose land was so poor that it couldn’t yield them a living, young farmhands who’d served on the farms, but had given notice and taken work at the factory. They brought their women and greeted Høpner. Then they lined up along the walls, solemn and a little uneasy.

Cilius and Frederikke were among the last to come. His face was red-blazed from the rain. It suited Cilius fine that there was going to be a party. He glad-handed Høpner and went over to a knot of silent day laborers. “Damn it,” he said. “It’s good to get in out of the rain. I say that even though I’ve never despised wetness.” “Surely none of us do,” Jens Horse said. “I’ve run many a mile to get a bite to eat and a drink,” Cilius said. “And it never hurt me in the least.”

Wherever Cilius popped up, there was liveliness and hilarity; he had a joke on his lips and a word for everyone. The day la-
borers stood there humble and earnest in their nice clothes, but now Cilius came and he was their man. He’d beaten a man till he was a cripple in his youth, he’d taken to the road, and now he was chairman of their labor union. “You know, this here is a kind of harvest festival,” Cilius said to Andres. “Back then when the two of us had property on the cliff, there was only grass growing. But now we’re getting oats and nothing but in our feed bag.” “Yeah, you can talk, Cilius,” Andres sighed. “But I’ll sure never be able to forget how they treated us. They hoodwinked us and that certainly wasn’t legal.” “But now we’ve got us a factory,” Cilius said.

Høpner announced that dinner was served, and it perked people up to get food and drink. The men clinked glasses with one another and their voices rose. Then Høpner called for silence and got up. There was silence. He was going to make a speech.

“Folks,” Høpner said, and from the taprooms people streamed into the banquet hall to listen. “We’ve done a piece of work and now we’re celebrating. We’ve built a building and we’ve filled it with machinery. Where before there was a cliff with poor soil, which could barely give people a living, we’ve erected an enterprise that can give all of us our daily bread.”

Our daily bread! The day laborers nodded: they knew what the words meant. They’d worked for their food, they’d suffered humiliations and contempt, they’d scarcely been regarded as human beings. All their efforts had gone into getting their daily bread. They’d struggled for a living for wife and children.

“The machine can give us a carefree living,” Høpner said. “The machine puts the food on the table and the clothes on our backs. Without the machine a modern society can’t exist; it’s the prerequisite for our existence. If the machine stops, life stops. We can’t exist on earth, as many as we are, without the machine and modern technology. But we can live well and in abundance if we let the machine provide for us. There are no limits to what we can produce. If we didn’t have machines, we’d still be living in the Middle Ages. If the machines were destroyed, half of humanity would die of hunger.”

“Previously you cultivated the soil, you were artisans, agri-
cultural laborers, fishermen, and farm servants. Now you’ll be tending a machine. You’ll be leading a new life. And this new life has a single law which must never be violated: Never let the machines stop. You’ve become workers. You’ve gotten your organizations, you have power, but watch out how you use it. It’s the machine that has created you and given you this new life. You’ll be the ones to suffer if you let the machine stop. The machine has to work in peace. We who attend the machine have to understand that we are its servants and not its masters. But if we serve it well, it will reward us royally.”

The day laborers followed the speech attentively, but they thought it was rather lofty. It sounded almost like a sermon. The new life! It was as if the minister in his pulpit were talking about the eternal life. But everyone did hope that something new and big was imminent. They’d have it better and more secure in the world; they’d have bread on the table. They’d have a day’s wage every day of the week if everything went well. Their children wouldn’t have to go out and be servants from the time they were little, nor their women weed beets or dig potatoes on the cold fall days for a low wage. This was the new life.

Høpner and his engineers were sitting there: they were the ones who’d set the plant in motion. Behind them stood people with money, and it was surely for their sake that the factory had been built. They certainly didn’t build an entire factory so that some unskilled laborers could make a living. But it would be a new life all the same.

“We’re going to produce, we’re going to make cement,” Høpner continued. “We’re going to make a commodity that stands on a par with the best that’s produced, and we can do it. That’s one side of the matter. But at the same time we’re going to provide people with a livelihood, and we can do that too. The machine isn’t just going to grind cement—it’s also going to create a secure existence for us. All of us are going to serve the machine and remember that we owe our daily bread to it. We’re not just going to work, we’re going to work together. We’re in the same boat—we mustn’t ever forget that.”

And Høpner went on to talk about the small homes that
would be built up and defended. The day laborers had heard speeches before and they knew that everyone speaks on behalf of his own interests. But the words gave them a strange feeling that they meant something. He talked so much about the fact that they mustn’t stop the machine. In other words, they could stop it!

Høpner called for three cheers for the factory and his guests shouted at the top of their lungs. Then conversation started up again. The schnapps bottles went round briskly, and the men let the drinks go down to the good food. Cilius sat there, flushed and comfortable, next to his silent wife. There sat Tora and Marinus, a cautious and humble man in this world. There were Povl Bøgh, Black Anders, Lars Seldomglad, Jens Horse, and Boel-Erik with their women. They were at a topping-out celebration for a factory—they were going to begin a new life.
It still froze at night, and every morning the fields were white with hoar frost. In the early dawn the unskilled laborers bicycled to the cement factory, whose rooms were all lit up. They drooped over the handlebars in the cold and raw morning, with their lunch boxes flapping on their backs. Some came from far inland. The night shift went home. The glow of fire from the smokestacks slowly faded. On the other side of the gray mother-of-pearl fjord the woods were still dark. The gulls screeched over the fjord’s seine netting. The fishermen were tending to the herring nets. On the farms it was light. A farmhand led a team of horses from the stable. The servant girls rattled milk pails.

At night there was a steady boom from the factory; now it rose to a heavy din. You could hear the workers’ shouts and the sound of their picks against the wall of the chalk pit. Dump cars rumbled along the tracks, fully loaded with chalk and clay, to the slurry station. The huge rotary kilns turned slowly round with the fire roaring in their interior. The tube mills droned in the cement grinding plant. The pyrator crushed the large lumps of coal to dust. Heavy wheels, glistening with oil, turned round steadily in the engine room, hot motors sparkled. The conveyor belt glided from room to room. Small and large wheelbarrows clattered on the cement floor of the storehouse.

From the cliff the factory resembled a pile of gigantic toy building blocks that had been dumped out there, but you knew that everything had been precisely thought out. Everything was gray with cement dust. It drifted invisibly down like ashes from a distant volcanic eruption. It settled over fields and roads, trees and roofs of houses. Even the coats of the red cows grazing on the fields in the vicinity turned gray. You got it in your throat, in your lungs, and it was doubtless the dust that was responsible for the fact that Black Anders’ daughter Matilde, who was married to Thomas Trilling, began coughing and spitting blood and had to go to the sanatorium for tuberculosis.
Everywhere people were at work. They clung to the cliff and hacked the chalk loose, and their shapes were cloaked in a white cloud when the large pieces of chalk crashed down through the funnel. The dump cars drove forward and were filled one after the other; heavy horses hauled the wagons along tracks shiny from use. And the chalk proceeded to the wash mill, was washed and mixed with clay, burned to clinker and ground to cement in the cement mill. A hundred and fifty men were at work, in the power house, the slurry station, in the mills, in the storehouse, in the workshops, and on the chalk-white cliff. Steamers and small craft lay at the wharf and loaded cement. And the cement dust settled over everything. It drifted in the wind, and when it rained the roads turned into a gray slush.

It was early spring and the world shone bright and new like polished brass. The moist topsoil had a violet gleam and the first flowers that came out of the ground were yellow and blue and hard in their color like enamel. One day in March, Olga, the daughter of unskilled laborer Marinus Jensen, came home. There was no one to greet her as the little fjord steamer moored at the wharf. With her suitcase in hand, Olga walked up past the factory to the little working class district where Marinus had bought a lot and built. Right next to the house she met a haggard, pot-bellied woman. It was Magda.

"But it’s you, Olga, and we haven’t heard the slightest thing about you having come home," Magda said, almost bowled over with curiosity and surprise. "Did you get off from your job or maybe they give notice at this time of year on Funen?" "I didn’t write, it was decided so suddenly," Olga said and shook her hand. "You have a singsong intonation as fine as the way the deacon sings the offertory," Magda said. "Your mother will sure be happy. I mean it’s almost a year since you were last home. And are you going to stay now?"

Olga didn’t know exactly; she stood and shuffled her feet to get away. But Magda took her sweet time, and her vigilant eyes glided up and down the girl’s figure. But Olga was in a long coat, and Magda couldn’t judge whether she’d come home because she’d gotten in the family way. "Otherwise things aren’t
all that great here," Magda said. "The men have become totally nutty over the big weekly wage they’re earning. They want to strike to get more. That’s what Andres says. They won’t get their mouths full enough until they get them full of dirt at the bottom of their grave. And they don’t ask us womenfolk, but it’s the old story, little Olga, we’re asked by a manfolk only that one time, when he wants to get into our bed, and afterward he never asks again about this world’s things. But I won’t keep you, little Olga, you’re longing to go home.”

Magda said goodbye, but a little ways off she turned and looked again at Olga’s figure. But you couldn’t make out whether her back had become broader.

Marinus’s house was a solid and spacious dwelling of yellow stone with a slate roof. In front was a little yard. Olga slipped around to the kitchen door. Her mother was standing by the stove and baking.

“But Olga, you’ve come without letting us know the slightest thing,” Tora said, and Olga explained, a bit out of breath, that she’d given notice to her employer. The woman was an unreasonable person, nobody could please her. Olga’s voice turned shrill while she recounted how hot-tempered her mistress had been. She bossed the folks about and carried on like quite the mistress of the manor, even though it was nothing but an ordinary farm.

“Now take off your coat,” her mother interrupted. “You’ve got to be hungry after the long trip, and now I’ll take care of you a bit.”

Olga took off her outer garments and Tora cast a covert glance at her figure. Olga’s breasts had become rounder and her hips fuller: you could see she was now a fully mature young woman. But she was slim and lissome, the way a girl should be, and as far as Tora could see in all haste, she hadn’t come home because she was going to have a baby.

Olga went on to tell about her experiences while she ate. One day the woman had become totally ridiculous and had said she wished Olga were long gone from the farm. You can soon get that wish fulfilled, Olga said, and that very evening she
packed up her things and left. "A body doesn’t have to put up with everything," Olga said and blushed. "It was she herself who chased me away, and now she can’t complain that I ran off. She won’t get other girls to stay in that job either."

Tora stole a glance at her daughter. "What were the other people on the farm like?" she asked. "There was a farmhand, he was very nice, but he was engaged to the girl on the neighboring farm, so I didn’t see much of him," Olga said. "And the husband?" Tora asked. "It was the wife who controlled everything and they couldn’t keep people," Olga said. "You know, it’s not nice for a girl to leave her job early," Tora said. "You should have talked to Ulriksen’s sister when you were first on Funen; she’s supposed to be a terribly sensible woman." But Olga hadn’t talked to teacher Ulriksen’s sister before she left the farm. She lived in a totally different district, and besides, she was old-fashioned in her way of thinking. "Unless you’re the one who’s a little bit too modern," Tora said. "I’ll say it straight out, Olga, I don’t like your running away from your job. You should have given notice on time. "Maybe you’d prefer for me to go on my way again?" Olga flew into a temper. "My, how you’re carrying on," Tora said. "If there’s something wrong, you better speak your piece. It’ll make things easier." Olga passionately threw herself into her mother’s arms and cried. "It’s just that I’ve been at a strict workplace," she said. "And now I’d like to be at home for a while."

Olga cried a little at her mother’s breast and calmed down. And then she heard how things were at home. Marinus and Niels were working in the chalk pit, that was piece work, and they could take home a good day’s wage. Karl was in the cement mill and Anton in the slurry station, and when their weekly wage was put in the pile, it added up to one heck of a heap of money. Then there was also Laurids, who lived in a room in the attic and paid well for room and board. The smallest ones, of course, still went to school and behaved themselves.

"I appreciate what we have," Tora said. "But I surely know that it can’t keep up. Some day the boys will of course have their own families to support and then it may be hard enough for
Marinus to live up to his responsibilities. Before we earned less, but we also had fewer expenses. The man got board where he was working and we got milk and potatoes cheap. Now we have to pay dear for everything we buy, and this house here, you know, costs almost as much in interest and principal as the place we moved out of. But you’ll never hear me say a word, because joyous days don’t come back to haunt us.

Tora had no reason to complain. Five upright menfolk went to the factory every day and brought home the bacon. “Have another cup of coffee, little Olga, you’ve had a long trip,” she said. “I’m glad you’ve come home. Soon I won’t be able to manage any more; you know, I’m not young and taking care of cooking and cleaning for all the menfolk is a lot of work. I scarcely know how things would work out if I didn’t have Sofie. She’s a hard little worker for an eleven-year-old.” While Tora kept chatting on, she didn’t take her eyes off her daughter. There was just something odd about Olga. Maybe she’d been heart-broken on Funen and that’s why she’d come home. A body surely knew that much could happen in the wide wide world.

Tora took Olga through the house: she had to see what was new. Here was the bedroom and next to it the three oldest sons had their rooms. They were in the parlor, which smelled stuffy because it was seldom used. They had gotten fine new green plush walnut furniture. Tora’s big worn-out hand glided gently across the soft upholstery. Niels and Karl and Anton had bought the Færgeby station master’s furniture at an estate auction. That’s the kind of sons Tora had—they didn’t waste their money at the inn. Then Magda came to visit. “I thought I had to come in and give Olga a real welcome,” she said. “That was surely a great pleasure for you, Tora, to get your daughter home again unexpectedly.” Again Magda scrutinized Olga’s figure. Now Olga didn’t have her coat on and Magda could see that she hadn’t come home a sinner.

“I also served on Funen in my younger days,” she said. “But I really didn’t like the natives of Funen—it was nasty serving together with the farmhands. If a body wouldn’t submit to them, she could scarcely get on among them. I certainly understand
you’d prefer to get away from that place, Olga.” “Nobody did anything to me,” Olga said. “So maybe you want to go back to Funen?” Magda asked. No, Olga didn’t. “I didn’t think so,” Magda said. “You’re a decent girl and can’t put up with their loose way of life. They almost require all servant girls to leave their bedroom doors ajar.”

And then Magda recounted the most terrible things she’d experienced when she was young and a servant girl on Funen. On the farm where she was the farm foreman tried to force his way into her room at night and Magda had to shout for help to save her young innocence. “I’ve never been able to stand a lewd way of life,” Magda said. “And I don’t think you can either, Olga, because you’ve seen here in your home what good and Christian mean.” Magda became absorbed in how low morals had sunk since the factory had been built. The young people earned money and thought about nothing else but running to dances to get their money used up, and the girls! Magda sighed with a sorrowful heart. They certainly didn’t know, like the girls in the old days, how to keep the menfolk at arm’s length.

“Did you remember that trick back when you were Andres’ housekeeper?” Tora teased. “I lived with Andres in all decency, even though we didn’t get married till late,” Magda said. “You know better than anybody, Tora, that he lured me by promising me marriage. I never had anything to do with anybody before him.” “But you sure got Laurids into bed after you were married,” Tora said. “I’d sure hate to say how your brother-in-law Laurids treated me,” Magda said somberly. “But I’ve learned that where there’s sinning, Adam shifts the blame to Eve. If Laurids ever says I lured him, then I’ll swear by living God that Laurids was responsible for my fall. How is a poor simple womanfolk supposed to resist somebody who’s seduced maybe more than a hundred girls over in America? But Andres and my savior have forgiven me my offense, and so I hardly think it’s right of you, Tora, to mention it, especially when your daughter is listening.” “I don’t respect your sanctimoniousness, Magda,” Tora said. “No, you’re one of those who kick against the pricks,” Magda said. “But surely you see that Laurids has such
a bad conscience that he walks out when I come into a room. He certainly knows how he’s sinned and was on the verge of leading me into misfortune and that’s why he can’t stand to see me. But now you’ll surely stay here, won’t you Olga—I mean you can easily get work at the factory? After all, you know the director from old times.”

That’s the way Magda was, full of venom and bile, and nevertheless Tora accompanied her to the door in a friendly way. “I don’t respect her,” she said. “But she’s always had a hard life. We become the bread we’re kneaded into. She came to see if you’re with child. Then she’d have that to spread around.” Olga blushed. “Let me tell you there’s nothing wrong with me: I’m not going to have a child.” “It really doesn’t matter,” Tora said. “I’ve known many an honest girl who got into trouble. But I’m satisfied it hasn’t happened to you.”

The children came home and the men returned from work, and Tora was busy preparing the food. Marinus was filled with wonder that his daughter had come home. “The idea that you just came all of a sudden,” he said. “I mean, it’s a long trip.” “We almost thought you’d stayed on Funen and gotten married there,” Niels said. “But there wasn’t anybody who wanted you, was there?” Olga assured him that the man didn’t exist who’d be allowed to touch her with his pinky. “Surely we could also imagine him wanting to touch you with something else,” Niels teased, but Olga declared: “I’ll never get married. A body is really stupid if she gets married. A body should enjoy life while she’s young.”

It sounded odd here in the kitchen where Marinus and his sons were sitting, tired after a long day’s work, white with dust from the chalk pit, their skin gray from the cement. Marinus looked at her and gently shook his head. “That isn’t any kind of good doctrine, little Olga,” he said. “But I’ve surely heard tell that they’re a bit frivolous about such things on Funen.”

In the evening Tora accompanied her daughter up to the garret where she’d be living. “I’m happy you’ve come home, Olga,” she said, and touched Olga’s shoulder lightly. Olga listened to her slow, heavy steps as she went down the stairs. Then
she threw herself on the bed and bit the pillow so no one could hear her crying.

— The same day Olga returned home, a navvy came to the town of Alslev. It was the Zealander Iver, who’d been Frederikke’s lover and abandoned her in deep distress. He’d worked many places and wandered the roads homeless, and it was a long time since he’d taken a woman in his arms.

Line Seldomglad was standing at her side of the house washing clothes, and Boel-Erik’s Inger had been at the grocer’s and was standing for a bit and talking to her. Line glistened with soap and water and it was a rare sight. But in the clear sunlight you could also see that her wash wasn’t clean. It was downright exasperating to see how gray the clothes were. Inger felt totally ashamed that she’d hang her wash out to dry here facing a public highway.

“I really don’t care about that at all,” Line said as if she’d guessed Inger’s thoughts. “You shouldn’t wear the flesh off your knuckles, because once it’s worn off, it won’t grow back. And no matter how much we scrub the clothes, you know, they’ll get filthy dirty right away once we’ve got them on our bodies.”

She smacked a piece of linen against the wash cart and her wet, round face smiled at Inger. But Inger just looked sullenly at her and didn’t smile back. At the same moment Iver walked by out on the road.

“Who could that man be?” Line Seldomglad said. “I’m sure I’ve seen him before.” Inger turned and followed Iver with her eyes. “It couldn’t possibly be anybody but that Zealand guy, the one who’s the father of Frederikke’s child,” she said after having pondered it a bit. “You’d be well advised to assume it was Cilius who fathered Little-Jep,” Line said. “Oh, I say it like it is,” Inger said. “Frederikke’s always been arrogant, she looks down on the rest of us because she comes from a farmer’s family. But if Iver is coming here, she’ll surely have her own troubles. Because, you know, she can’t possibly get around the fact that she let him get her pregnant. Whatever you hide in the snow, will turn up after the thaw.” “You shouldn’t be so hard, Inger,” Line said. “It could happen to all of us. Presumably you’re a woman-
folk, too.” Inger didn’t answer, but nodded a sullen goodbye and walked on.

The Zealander didn’t notice the two women at Line’s side of the house. He was a traveling journeyman and was used to people looking back at him. He walked on down the desolate village street. He didn’t recognize the town. He’d come to the area by chance and had heard about the cement factory—maybe there was work to be had. Without giving it any further thought, he returned to the place where he hadn’t done the right thing.

Iver had gone out to the cliff and looked out over the factory with all its buildings and sheds. He flung himself on the grass—it had rained in the morning and a moist warmth rose from the sunlit earth. Iver took a bottle out of his pocket. He’d met a girl he wanted to marry, but she didn’t want anything to do with him, and from that time on he’d turned somewhat seedy. He’d knocked about on the bum and taken to drinking.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he’d also had a woman here. Luckily he’d gotten away with it when she got pregnant. He recalled her now as something secure and trusting while he was lying here drinking in solitude. He was just about to cry over being so lonely in the world. But of course there was Frederikke, who’d become pregnant and who’d earnestly begged him not to abandon her. Maybe she still thought about him, maybe she’d take him back in her arms.

The bottle was empty and he sauntered down to the factory. The office building was a low, white house by the wharf. He went in and stood in front of the counter with his dirty cap in his hands. There was only a clerk in the room and he didn’t think there was any work to be had. Now the president himself came in from a room at the back. Iver definitely recognized him although he’d put on weight. Iver explained that he was looking for work. “Are you from the area here?” Høpner asked. No, Iver had worked all around the country, but he’d been there back when the factory was being built. “Then you should’ve stuck around when the getting was good,” the president said. “Now we hire only local labor. Can’t do anything about it.”

Høpner went back into his office and closed the door after
him. The schnapps was raising havoc in Iver’s head—he was becoming violent. “What the hell, a guy can’t even get work,” he said. “Well, you can try on the farms,” the clerk suggested.

“No, I’ll be damned if I’ll go serve with the lousy farmers,” Iver said. “Here you are sitting on your ass in a chair all day and getting money for doing nothing. Look at my hands, huh? But there’s no work here, you people say, just go out into the highway ditch and drop dead of starvation.” Iver put his cap on and left. He slammed the door with a bang behind him.

He’d hoped he could hit the engineer up for an advance on his weekly wage. He had to have more schnapps and a bed. For months he’d slept in barns and on threshing floors and had crept frozen stiff out of the straw at the crack of dawn. Now there was nothing to do but beg. Schnapps, it sang inside him, schnapps for hot, goddamn hell, I have to have money for a new bottle of schnapps. He began down in the working class district; most places the women were home alone and he’d soon collected a crown. Iver stood humbly at the kitchen door and begged for a penny for a night’s lodging.

At one of the last houses he had to wait a little till the door was opened. Finally a frail, middle-aged woman came to the door. “You don’t have a penny for a traveling journeyman, do you?” Iver said, and at that very moment they recognized each other. Iver had come to Frederikke’s door.

Frederikke stood stiff and stared at Iver’s blotchy face and his mouth, which was black from snuff. “What do you want?” she asked. “I didn’t know you lived here,” Iver said and added: “So you folks have moved.” He stood with his cap in hand, in rags, and with flabby features, and was no longer the dashing fellow Frederikke had once loved. “Why did you come?” she asked. “I felt like seeing the kid,” Iver said defiantly. “I’m its father, aren’t I? Frederikke looked him in the eye firmly and full of hate. “I thank my maker that I didn’t have any more to do with you,” she said. “But that wasn’t why you came to the door either. I mean, you didn’t even know who lived here.” She looked at his clothes, his cracked shoes. “Surely you’ve seen a man in work clothes before,” Iver said. “I’ve also had a beggar
on my stone doorstep before,” Frederikke said mercilessly. “Wait a second, let me see if I can find a penny in my purse.”

Frederikke went in and Iver, humiliated, hurried on. He’d trudged for a long time on the roads and needed a woman’s gentleness. But Frederikke, who’d been like a spineless willow in his hands, had now become a spitfire, and no mercy could be expected from her. He stopped and counted the money he’d collected begging. It might well be enough for a night’s lodging at the inn and a couple of coffees laced with schnapps. He didn’t miss food—he need schnapps in his body.

The taproom was filled with people. It was pay day and many had gone to the inn. Iver sat down in a corner and ordered coffee with schnapps. More people came into the taproom and tables were moved together. People were sitting at the big table in the middle of the room whom Iver recognized. It was Cilius and Lars Seldomglad, Boel-Erik and Jens Horse. They were flush with money and were ordering.

“It seems to me I know that man,” Cilius shouted and turned his flushed face toward the corner where the Zealander was sitting. “My name’s Iver and I worked here as a navvy back when we dug the foundation,” Iver said. The schnapps had given him new self-confidence. Even if Frederikke had scorned him, nobody should think he was afraid of her husband. No, Iver didn’t give a damn about anything. He looked Cilius defiantly in the eye. “It kind of seemed to me that we were old acquaintances,” Cilius said. “I was a navvy myself, and back then my throat was always parched. Sit down next to the rest of us. I’ll stand you a drink.”

Iver moved over to them. The others at the table turned silent and stole glances at one another. Of course they knew all right what had gone on between Iver and Frederikke back then, and it was odd to see him now in Cilius’s company. “You were here back when we laid the foundation for the factory,” Cilius said. “It was also back then that the foundation for Little-Jep was laid.” “Of course you surely know that Cilius here had a son,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Yeah, I had a son and he’s getting redder and redder the older he gets. He’ll surely end up as the
reddest socialist. Otherwise I almost began to think Frederikke was barren. Surely you know my wife Frederikke from the time you worked here.” Iver mumbled that he supposed he remembered Frederikke. “If a fella doesn’t want kids, they come if he just tickles a girl between the ribs. But if a fella wants them, it won’t work. Isn’t that your experience, Zealander?” “Well, but I’m not married,” Iver said. “But you’re a navvy. I know that life as well as anybody,” Cilius said. “I mean I fathered a child with a girl in the south. Then I came to this parish here and jumped into bed with Frederikke. I drank the farm away, but they couldn’t get the better of me. My name’s Cilius Andersen, and people know me all right.”

Music could be heard outside in the dark. It was Frands the musician. He was called in. He was together with a gaunt, lame woman, who accompanied Frands’s accordion with her shrill voice:

My Frands whom I love and will ever think of fondly,
‘cause he plays his accordion ever so lovely,
he plays the sweetest tunes for me,
and declares, my Hanne, I love only thee!

My Frands, he can sing, believe me it’s neat,
my Frands, he can dance, whatever the beat,
my Frands, he sings tenor so very sweetly,
his voice is strong, he knows things so greatly.

I knit! I crochet! I sew and embroider,
I milk the hardest cow and never avoid her,
I cook and prepare the finest of meals,
for my Frands, when home he comes, dragging his heels.

Afterwards Hanne went from table to table collecting change while Frands was standing small and stooping by the door with the accordion in his arms. “Come over into the taproom, Frands,” Cilius shouted. “Did you write that ballad yourself?” “I sure did.” “I mean you’ve got a real gift for it,” Cilius said. “If you’d had a better education, who knows how far you’d have
gone." "Oh, I can’t complain if only I can keep away from the poor farm," Frands said. "When we get our chance, nobody will be sent to the poor farm—you can count on that. You’ll live with your dearest in pleasure and delight."

Cilius was drunk now. His red hair was wet with sweat, his voice boomed through the rooms at the inn. "Let’s get more in the vats, boys," he shouted. "Hand me the schnapps bottle, Boel-Erik. It’s the same with schnapps like with water—it runs easiest downhill." Many voices made a din; you could hardly make yourself heard. Some spoke the language of the city and not the flat speech of the area. They were workers who’d come from the cities, stokers, mechanics, kiln attendants. But Cilius sat as the focal point in the group. He was a reliable man and elected by the labor union.

Cilius snorted like a horse and let the beer trickle down. He demanded more on the table, beer and aquavit. Cilius was a solid man and it was seldom that he went to the inn. But when he went there, things had to happen fast. "Let’s have more from the strong tit," he said. "Don’t worry about paying, Zealander, it’s on me. I walked many a mile bumming it without soles on my shoes and with a bottle in my pocket. But now I’ve got a deed to my own house, and it may also end up that way for you if you behave yourself."

The inn was bubbling with noise and discussion. Was there going to be a strike or would an agreement be reached amicably? Somebody began to sing the Socialist March and Cilius joined in with his thundering voice. "They should be thrashed, the big capitalists, if they don’t take the bait," he roared. "Isn’t it time that we found our way home," Lars Seldomglad said, but Cilius’s time hadn’t come yet. "The old hag in bed isn’t going to run away from us," he said. "Don’t you think so, Zealander?"

He looked at Iver with bloodshot eyes. Iver kept his mouth shut: Cilius was dangerous now and the important thing was not to provoke him. "In my youth I beat a man till he was a cripple," he said. "The man hasn’t been born who’s a match for me. I’ll show you you’re dealing with a navvy. I was a match for four men at Brønderslev fair."
Cilius had gotten up—he was wild. His figure swelled with a dangerous energy; his huge fists were clenched in fury. Now Cilius would take revenge for Frederikke. Iver grabbed a chair and was ready to brandish it. “I didn’t insult you,” he shouted. “Don’t count on it, little man,” Cilius said. “I can see you’re looking for it. So let’s see you come on out onto the floor.” Lars Seldomglad and Boel-Erik grabbed hold of Cilius, but he shook them off. “Don’t use violence, Cilius, come to your senses, little Cilius,” Lars Seldomglad moaned. “I’m not going to use violence,” Cilius grinned fiercely. “If I used violence, you people could carry him to the grave like a bloody sack of meat. I want a trial of strength with the Zealander.” “I don’t like it,” Lars Seldomglad sighed. “A fella should be allowed to drink without blood having to flow. Boys, now let’s be reasonable and go home.”

The rest of the inn’s patrons had crowded together and suddenly the fight was on. Cilius turned over the big table with a crash so the bottles and glasses shattered. Iver brandished the chair over his head, but Cilius grabbed it and took it away from him by force. He slung it over into a corner and grabbed hold of the Zealander. They lurched back and forth, breathing heavily and gasping, they hit up against tables and chairs and against the people who were standing around. The innkeeper came running. “If you’re going to fight, you’ll have to go outside,” she shrilled. “Oh, God help me, is that Cilius?” She stood and wailed about the destruction. Drunken voices shouted out. Lars Seldomglad repeated over and over: “This is just tomfoolery, come to your senses, Cilius, be reasonable.”

Now Cilius had overpowered the Zealander. Slowly he bent him backwards, while Iver, gasping, tried to slip from the hold. He braced himself till his back was about to break; then he couldn’t go on, and with a thud tumbled over onto the floor with Cilius over him. Cilius pressed his body down. Iver had his adversary’s red face over him. Cilius grinned like a wolf. Then he freed one hand and put his hand almost caressingly around Iver’s throat. He squeezed hard, very carefully, but the hold became firmer, and the Zealander’s throat gurgled nastily. The men sud-
denly became very quiet. No one intervened; they stared with strangely tense faces at Cilius and Iver. Only Lars Seldomglad said, whiningly: “Cilius, little Cilius, now don’t kill him—come to your senses.”

The Zealander had been in fights before; he’d fought with knives and with knuckle-dusters and looked danger in the eye. But now for the first time in his life he felt real fear. It wasn’t so much Cilius he was afraid of as the cold, tense mood in the room. It was as if he was going to be slaughtered. There was no mercy here; he was like a sheep that was tied to the slaughterhouse bench and inevitable death steadily approached. He writhed and breathed, wheezing heavily, under Cilius’s huge paw. The innkeeper was suddenly beside herself. “People, you can’t just stand and watch him murder him,” she shrilled. “Tear him away, for Christ’s sake.” But no one moved.

Cilius’s hold around Iver’s throat became hard, then it loosened again, and Iver gasped for breath. “Now you can say you’ve met somebody you’re no match for,” Cilius said. “I can beat you till you’re a cripple, I can mess you up so they’ll have to carry you away in a shroud, even if I am ten years older than you. I could break every bone in your body and wring your neck like a young cock’s. You’re worthless, you stupid Zealander. You should’ve stayed home tied to your mother’s apron strings instead of taking to the road as a navvy.”

Cilius’s voice was sinister and short of breath while he was lying on top of the Zealander and explaining how he could have dealt with him. His broad hard hands opened and closed around Iver’s throat; he pressed hard, just a little bit, and Iver gurgled and squirmed in mortal dread. But suddenly he released his grip and got up. Iver got on his feet and stood a bit and tottered. “I can lap up schnapps like a thirsty dog,” Cilius said. “I can beat a man till he’s a cripple if he gets too close to me. Give him a glass of schnapps—I mean him no harm.”

A man brought a bottle of schnapps and glasses and Cilius poured and handed Iver a glass filled to the brim. He’d conquered the Zealander and magnanimously granted him his wretched life. “Drink, I won’t hurt you,” Cilius said. “Now you
know that Cilius Andersen is your superior in life and death."

Tables and chairs were put upright and broken glass swept up. More beer was brought to the table. “You can have it whichever way you want with me,” Cilius said. “I can give you schnapps and I can give you a sound thrashing.” Cilius was now inordinately calm and polite and he asked the Zealander where he was headed. Iver recounted that he’d looked for work at the factory, but hadn’t gotten any. “They’re short a man in the slurry station—I know that for sure,” Cilius said. “Go to Laurids-American and say I sent you. Then he’ll definitely give you work. But once you’re hired, you have to come to me and get your union book in order. You’re my friend in life and death: I can get you work and I can bash your brains in, my good friend.”
For the first time in a long time Iver slept off his intoxication in a bed and the next morning he went to the factory and found Laurids from America. Was he from the area here? Yes indeed he was. He’d had work on a large farm a little south of Alslev, but he was tired of being a farmworker. So Laurids thought there was work for a man in the slurry station—now he’d see about it. Iver got work. The first time Høpner came into the wet mill, Iver was afraid he’d be fired, but the president didn’t recognize him.

Iver lived at the inn for a few days, but he had to look for lodging. American-Laurids thought he could probably go live at Andres and Magda’s. “I don’t know how you stand with women,” Laurids said. “But I’m warning you about Magda—if you don’t watch out, you’ll have her in bed right away.” “The only thing I go to bed with is my schnapps bottle,” Iver said cockily. “It gives me the pleasure I need.” “Yeah, you’re young and you talk, but you’ll learn,” Laurids said. “It’s easy to take up with womenfolk, but it’s harder to get away from them. And I’ll tell you, it doesn’t get any easier when you get older. Oh, damn it, if we just knew how to keep away from womenfolk.”

Laurids was almost an aging man, but he had his thorn in the flesh. Now it was a woman who was married to one of the stokers. Her name was Minna and Laurids visited her when her husband was on the night shift. He was a decent man and a good worker, and he could certainly have deserved a wife who was faithful to him. But women aren’t to be trusted, and when Laurids stole home to his room in Marinus’s attic in the late-night hours, he didn’t think well of the woman whose bed he came from.

The work in the wash mill, where clay and chalk were washed together into a thin paste, was child’s play for a navvy who was used to hard excavating work. After a few days had passed, Iver was once again cocky. He had work and sensed
how his muscles gradually gained strength—what did he care if there was a girl somewhere who didn’t want anything to do with him? And Frederikke? No, Iver wasn’t that down in the dumps that he’d have his nose rubbed in her. Frederikke was forgotten and over with, and besides, Iver wasn’t going to get in Cilius’s way.

From work he accompanied a man who showed him where Andres’ house was. Although it was only a few years ago that it had been built, it was already dilapidated. The plaster had fallen from the walls in big flakes and many windows lacked panes. Andres came from work just as Iver was arriving. Although he was an elderly man and had what he needed, he couldn’t give himself any rest. He was a driver in the factory and drove the coupled dump cars from the chalk pit. He came stumbling, tired, and round-shouldered, and got to hear what had brought the Zealander there.

“I hardly know if you can live here,” he said. “We’ll have to talk to Magda about it.” Magda gasped when she saw who the stranger was. “He says he wants room and board with us,” Andres said. “But I really don’t know if it pays. It’s unchristian the way people can stuff themselves when they get it for a fixed price.” “Fiddlesticks, you know we’ve got the room empty,” Magda said and mentioned what Iver would have to pay per week. “But you’ll have to take the same food like the rest of us—I’m not going to treat you to dainties. Why in the world are you doing that?”

Andres was emptying the contents of his pockets out onto the kitchen table. In one there were small pieces of coal, in the other a couple of handfuls of oats. “Why are you lugging that home?” Magda asked. “Half a loaf is better than nothing,” Andres said. “Now that’s what I call petty larceny,” Magda said. “No, no, little Magda, don’t ever use that word,” Andres said. “I pick up little bits of coal so they won’t be wasted. And the oats—I only took a little handful in the stable for the chickens. The horses get much more to eat than’s good for them. Be content in all things, as the scripture says. Our Lord doesn’t like for any of his gifts to be wasted.”
Iver had no belongings to fetch—he moved into the room right away. The room was simple enough, a bed, a table and chair, but Iver wasn’t spoiled. In the evening they ate in the kitchen, and as to the food there was nothing to complain about. The kettle sang on the peat embers and a cat purred on the peat box. Magda pumped Iver as to where he’d been in the world, and he replied that he’d been in practically every part of the country. “And the womenfolk everywhere were probably sorry you left them,” Magda said. “Then they hid it well,” Iver said. “Of course you were well acquainted with Cilius and Frederikke when you were here last,” Magda said. “I suppose you heard Frederikke had a child a little after you left?” “Mind what you say,” Andres said. “I’m not saying anything my creator isn’t permitted to hear,” Magda said. “Surely we’re allowed to talk about well-known people.”

Andres ran outside every quarter of an hour and Iver asked whether something was wrong. “Oh yes, oh yes,” Andres sighed. “May the Lord in his mercy look kindly upon my sins. I can’t hold my water, I keep feeling I’ve got to go, and it never amounts to anything but drips and drops.” And Andres explained that as long as he was working, he didn’t feel anything. But as soon as he sat down comfortably and was going to enjoy his well-deserved rest, he had to go. “It’s a nasty affliction,” Iver said, and Magda said disapprovingly: “Surely there’s a meaning to it.” “Magda, little Magda, I don’t like what you’re saying,” Andres complained, and his gaunt old man’s face became miserably twisted. “Self-inflicted is well-deserved,” Magda said. “It’s punishment because you’ve always been so tight.” “I’ve been faithful over the few things that were entrusted to me by the gospel’s sacred word,” Andres said. “You hoarded and penny-pinched all your days, and that’s the punishment—that you can’t get rid of your water,” Magda said. “Oh, little Magda, you mustn’t make complaints about me, I can’t stand it,” Andres cried, and he had to go outside again.

The next day after quitting time Iver went to Cilius to join the union. Cilius was standing in the mudroom washing himself. He snorted and scrubbed his red face with the coarse burlap
cloth. He took his sweet time and Iver didn’t feel comfortable. He didn’t care much to see Frederikke again.

Finally Cilius had washed up and they went into the living room. In the corner was a desk with drawers and shelves. Cilius sat down, pulled out a drawer and rooted around in some papers; then he looked for his glasses on the shelf. “I don’t know where I put them,” he said. “I have trouble reading if I don’t have them.” Finally he found the glasses and put them on. Here at the desk Cilius was a different man. He sat with dignity with his glasses on and conducted an interrogation as if he were officialdom itself. “When were you born and where’s your place of birth?” he asked. “Have you been in a union before? There’s a lot of scribbling, but it’s necessary. Yeah, so you’ll get the book when we’ve gotten it filled it out, and behave yourself, Zealander, now that you’re a member of a labor union.”

Yes, of course, Iver nodded, he certainly knew it carried obligations with it. “And if a strike comes, you’ll stand with the rest of us,” Cilius said. “I bet that must be Frederikke who just came. You knew her, right, back when you were working here as a navvy?” Cilius went out into the kitchen and got Frederikke and the boy. “Here you have my wife and Little-Jep, and this is a man who worked here when we were building the factory. Maybe you remember him, Frederikke?”

“I think so, I seem to recall you,” Frederikke said and shook hands with him. Her handshake was hostile—it was as if he were touching a piece of wood. “And there’s the little red fox,” Cilius said, pointing to his son. But Frederikke took the boy hard by the arm and pulled him over to her. “He has to run an errand for me right now at the neighbor’s and borrow a cup of sugar. I forgot to buy some.” She quickly went out into the kitchen with Little-Jep.

“So you absolutely have to come if there’s anything you’re in doubt about,” Cilius said when they were out of the living room. “You’re a new man in the place and can’t be up on everything. And watch out that you don’t report for work drunk. Laurids from America doesn’t like that, and if you’re fired for that reason, the union can’t help you.”
— It was decided that Olga wouldn’t look for a new position as a servant for the time being, but would instead help Tora in the house. Tora could certainly need help: she had five adult menfolk and three children to take care of, and the food had to be on the table before they went to work, and be ready when they came home. Tora was the first one up in the morning and the last to go to bed in the evening, and she didn’t sit down for many minutes all day long.

In the evening the sons drifted out, and it was wisest not to ask where Laurids from America went off to. In the starry spring evenings you could glimpse the glow from the factory and hear the weak roar of machines. Once in a while Laurids came home early and sat for a bit in the living room. “Have you got a drop of schnapps in the bottle, Tora,” he said. “I need something bracing.” “Then you’ll get a drink, Laurids,” Tora said and brought a bottle and glass. “It’d be better if you stayed home in the evening.” The wrinkles in Laurids’s beardless face became even deeper with melancholy. “I’ve always been able to manage at work,” he said. “But womenfolk have been my misfortune—I could never resist.”

Marinus sat half-dozed over his newspaper and didn’t get involved in the women’s chatter and Laurids’s complaint. But if the talk turned to Søren, he woke up. Of course, they heard from Søren often, and only good news came from that quarter. Beginning in the summer he was going to be a university student, and so it all depended on whether money could be obtained to let him keep studying. It cost a whole lot of money. Marinus’s speech remained solemn while he mentioned the least it would cost to keep Søren in school. In any event, it far exceeded Marinus’s capacity.

“Just so long as his greatness doesn’t go to his head,” Tora said. “It hardly seems right to me to make distinctions between brothers and sisters, but after all it’s Ulriksen who decided it that way.” Marinus fetched his son’s letters from the bureau in the parlor and read them aloud, even though they were all familiar with them—Søren wrote about his studies, he was making good progress and was in the good graces of his teachers at the learned
college in Copenhagen. "That lad is not going to disgrace us," Marinus said and carefully folded up the tattered letters. "Last time he was home he spoke Latin like a priest."

"We've got to go to bed, we've got to get up early in the morning," Tora said. "There's no point in waiting for the lads—a body never knows when they'll be coming home." "I don't rightly like them gallivanting about so much," Marinus said. "In my youth we had more to do and less time for flirting."

"Oh, youth is for the young," Tora said. "As long as they don't drink, I'll never complain."

She chased the children into bed and Marinus was out at door to the mudroom to look at the weather. "I think it'll be nice weather tomorrow," he said when he came back in. "And now it's about the time where they get going with the spring plowing." No one responded; they hardly paid attention to his words. But Marinus remained sitting for a bit sunk in his own thoughts and recalled the days when he'd been a farmer and driven the plow through the moist spring soil.

Tora was surprised that Olga stayed home for the most part and that she never got it into her head at all to visit old acquaintances. "Aren't you going to visit Ulriksen," she said. "It seems to me you owe it to him to let him know you've come home."

"All right," Olga said, and one afternoon she went to the school. Ulriksen had aged, his shaggy hair was now completely white. "But if it isn't Olga," he said. "I really didn't think you'd ever say hello to your old teacher." "It's not very long ago that I came home," Olga said, and felt like a little girl who'd missed school. "You got tired of being on Funen," Ulriksen said. "Yeah, I longed for home," Olga said. "Yeah, yeah, I know, I heard this and that from my sister," Ulriksen said. "The farm where you happened to serve probably wasn't a good one. The man doesn't have a good reputation . . . . Well, but surely you can hardly recognize your home town. The factory has changed everything, even the school. I've gotten an auxiliary teacher and now the children go to school every day. And that's the way it should be." Ulriksen talked about the factory, which had made the day laborers into workers and socialists, about the
union, where Cilius ruled, and about the parish council, which three workers now sat on. "They've straightened their backs," Ulriksen said. "That's the good thing about the new times—that people become conscious of their human worth; they no longer stand with their hat in hand. But I'm getting old, Olga, I talk too much." "So long as what you say is wise," Olga said. "That was well said," Ulriksen said. "But I'm going to tell you one thing, my girl: despite everything, now it's easier to be old in the new times than it was to be young in the old times."

And now Olga also visited the other day laborers she'd known from childhood. They'd all gotten new houses except for the Lars Seldomglads, who still lived in their old hovel. "I'll tell you, Olga, we've gotten accustomed to it," Line Seldomglad said. "And the lice that thrive here are our own." But Olga became most closely attached to Inger, Boel-Erik's wife. She now had two children, a boy and a girl, and Boel-Erik brought home the bacon. He worked on the dredge that dug clay in the fjord and earned good money. When he came from work, he didn't say much, Boel-Erik had always been a man of few words, and he became more and more taciturn with the years.

"I'll tell you this, Olga, don't ever get married," Inger said. "As long as a body has her freedom, she doesn't appreciate it. But if I could leave Erik and the children today, I'd do it. But where should I go?" "He's good to you, isn't he?" Olga asked. "Yes, he doesn't harm me," Inger said. "And he isn't taken to drinking more than other men; and surely he's more good-natured to boot. But, you know, one day goes by like the next."

"But you love your children, don't you?" Olga asked. "I really don't know myself," Inger said. "Of course I've had them now, but often I wish they'd never been born."

Whenever there was a dance at the inn, Inger was in a bad mood. She was annoyed that she couldn't be there too. "I think it's totally wrong that a married woman can't go dancing," she said. "If I were you, Olga, you can bet I'd shake a leg. And no fellow would get me as a sweetheart for more than that same evening. Why don't you ever go dancing?" "I don't care for it," Olga said curtly. "Surely you danced when you were on Funen,"
Inger said. "A body should go some place where nobody knows her. But I can’t get Erik to move to a city."

Inger wanted to go to a city, even though Alslev could practically be regarded as a little market town. There was the factory with its complex of buildings and sheds, president’s residence, and salaried workers’ houses. There was the working-class district, and in the village there were new houses, large two-story buildings with cement ornaments and shops. A dry-goods dealer had moved in right across from grocer Skifter, a footwear store had arrived, a couple of butchers, a midwife, several artisans.

In Skifter’s shop the farmers stood in front of the counter; they were still the ones who ruled in the parish council and assistance fund. But farming deteriorated more and more: it became more difficult to raise money for interest, principal, and taxes, and a fella got nothing for his products. It was Mads Lund, the biggest farmer in town, who complained most, while Anders Toft and Martin Thomsen and the other farm owners listened and once in a while interjected an affirming word. Indeed he was right. Only the person wearing the shoe knows where it pinches.

Konrad was standing behind the counter offering cigars. He’d relieved his father-in-law of control: now he ran the grocery business and was considered a prosperous man. Yes, oh yes, Konrad was inclined to agree with the big customers. Little people think only of demanding and demanding and never give a thought to who has to pay. The shop had been modernized: there were large windowpanes and a counter with display cases. “Skifter & Co.” was written in gold letters on the glass of the shop door. Skifter for the most part went out into the store room and weighed out the goods in bags—the modern business conditions were too much for him. He couldn’t keep up.

“But let ’em take it all,” Mads Lund said. “The rest of us can surely earn a day-wage too if we give up our farms. Let’s see if others can run the farm better. And how’s it all going to end? I mean, there’s got to be somebody to put the bread on the table. A way sure hasn’t been invented yet so we can live from
eating cement.”

The others in the shop agreed with him about that. And now, to boot, it looked as though the workers at the cement factory were going to strike. Martin Thomsen felt it came from all that newfangled ungodliness. “But if they won’t work for a good wage, surely there are others who’ll buckle down,” Anders Toft said. “No siree, that’s where you’re wrong, little Anders,” Mads Lund said. “The ones who want to get some work done aren’t allowed to by the labor union.” “Oh dear God, things are going more and more downhill on this sinful earth,” Martin Thomsen sighed.

It was lunchtime and the workers came into the shop to buy tobacco, schnapps, or chewing tobacco. The farmers stopped their chatting and Konrad got busy serving the customers. Andres came and was supposed to shop for Magda, who didn’t have time. While Konrad was packing up his items, Andres had to run out of the shop and into the yard. “You’ve become so light on your feet in your old age, Andres,” Mads Lund said when he came back in. “Oh, God help,” Andres said. “I keep feeling like I’ve got to go and sometimes it comes without warning.” “Don’t you think you should go around with a diaper,” Mads Lund asked, and the whole shop laughed. “Yeah, you people mock,” Andres said, offended. “But mockery will be smitten on one’s own mouth.”

Now there was talk of Andres’ affliction and many a coarse word was said. “You should have a pair of pants made of oilskin,” Konrad said. “But now let’s see, Andres, if this isn’t something for you.” Konrad brought a bathing cap. It was green with yellow stripes. “What in the world kind of device is that?” Andres asked. “It’s a bathing cap, which women put on when they don’t want their hair to get wet,” Konrad explained. “But if it can keep the water out, it can surely also keep it in. What if you tied it around you?” “It looks water-tight,” Andres admitted, and examined the rubber cap. “I wonder if it’s possible a fella can get it into position. And surely it’s simply too expensive?” “Just get Magda to sew long tapes in and tie them around you,” Konrad said. “It won’t cost you in the slightest—you can’t say...
I’m taking advantage of your infirmity.” Sure, sure, then Andres could try it after all and he took the bathing cap home with him.
When the workers sat with their lunch boxes and coffee thermoses in the canteen, it was the strike they talked about. The final strike notice had been given, but negotiations were still going on between the organizations, and of course it could happen that the strike would be called off at the last moment. Marinus and Andres were among those who hoped that the negotiators would reach an agreement peaceably. "It seems to me we've got an outrageously good wage," Marinus said. "I'd never imagined we'd become so prosperous." "But, you know, they're the ones that can never get enough," Andres said. "They want to get the day-wage up and the working hours down. As if the scripture didn't say: In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."

But it was no use talking to the other workers about it. Most of them thought the earnings were too low. They'd forgotten what it was like to serve with the farmers, but Marinus recalled the hard times. When he came home and sat among his family, he expressed his opinion. "If only they could come to terms," he said. "We surely can't expect to have it better than we've got it." But his views weren't accepted here either. Niels was a member of the union executive committee and adamantly insisted that if the capitalists wouldn't pay of their own free will, they'd do it when faced with harsh measures. And Tora felt that a few cents an hour also added up to real money.

"I'd be tremendously upset about a strike," Laurids said. "Yeah, you see." Marinus said. But Laurids explained that he regarded the strike as reasonable enough, but it wasn't easy for him as foreman. "If they demand that I work during the strike, I'll say no," Laurids said. "In America I was involved when they beat up people with nightsticks and shot at them with revolvers. But a strikebreaker—that I'll never be." And Laurids recounted how things had been in the mines and factories in America where he'd earned his bread. Now he had a trusted position, and Høpner respected him highly because they'd both been abroad and
could swear the same nasty, incomprehensible curses. But a strikebreaker—now that’s something he wouldn’t be. “It seems to me we should watch out for making unreasonable demands,” Marinus said stubbornly. “And I’m afraid it’s Cilius that’s fast-talked them in the union in Copenhagen. He’s always been so wild.”

Marinus shook his head; he was surprised that the other workers dared put their trust in Cilius, who’d never feared God or the devil. He was very organized as chairman of the union—everybody knew that. He’d been to congresses and negotiations in Copenhagen; he was in the thick of the big game. But Cilius was one of those who bet everything on one card. That’s the way it seemed to Marinus, but he was a meek man and kept his opinion to himself.

Høpner didn’t say anything about what he was thinking. He went around looking like a mad bull. But it just happened that he was talking to Laurids from America. “It’s those damned organizations,” he said. “You people let yourselves be ordered about by them. It ought to be a crime to stop the wheels. You people don’t think about the fact that we have to compete with cement on the world market, we have to get the goods sold—otherwise we can just as well close the whole shop, and then what?” “You know, they’re not making big demands,” Laurids said. “No, for the individual worker an hour less a day and a few cents more an hour don’t mean anything, but for the industry it amounts to millions. That’s what you people don’t think about. We’re in the same boat, but the union directors want to be chief officers. But here in this factory I’m the one who rules.”

Laurids didn’t answer because when Høpner was in that mood, he didn’t brook contradiction. But otherwise Laurids was, after all, a man who believed that if it was Høpner who ruled, there’d certainly be an amicable settlement. But in the years before, Høpner had had his own war to conduct with the big cement trust, and there he’d become the little guy. He’d been compelled to enter into the cartel and had been barely allowed to keep on being president.
The fire was still burning in the rotary kilns, the cement mills were grinding, sack after sack was filled with cement from the exilor. The factory was working and the fine dust settled everywhere. But Høpner was restless: every hour he was in telephonic communication with Copenhagen. Anything new? No prospect of a settlement of the conflict at the last moment? Høpner slammed down the receiver and nervously roamed up and down the floor. His broad lower jaw jutted out. Now if he’d just been his own master, he’d surely have straightened things out with the men. If you yielded a little, the others also gave way a little, and the machines were kept going. But he had nothing to say; now he was only the manager of the factory he himself had built.

The excavator was out in the fjord taking the clay from the bottom of the fjord. The workers hacked chalk on the cliff, dump trucks were slowly hauled along the rails, the smoke rose steadily from the smokestacks, the machines boomed. At the pier the tackles squealed; three small craft were loading cement. It was a rainy spring day with low clouds and showers. There was a spicy odor from topsoil and manure from the spring-plowed fields. The work proceeded at its steady pace, each man in his place. A violent thunderstorm came, and the workshift on the cliff crawled into shelter. “Do you think we’ll be coming to work tomorrow?” Lars Seldomglad asked in a low voice, but nobody responded. They were all thinking about the fact that when they got their weekly wage today, it might be a long time till they had a weekly wage in their pockets again.

“Of course, it may well be that they’ll cave in,” Lars Seldomglad said. “And if they don’t, it’s not the worst time to go on strike. We don’t need fuel and there may be work on the farms.” “The farmers will begrudge us that,” Boel-Erik said. “They won’t give us work—we’ll be forced to rely on ourselves.” “Well, then we’ll have the fjord,” Lars Seldomglad said. “It’s never denied little people a meal. And of course we’ll also get help from the strike fund as long as there’s money in it. All of us have surely been without work before today.”

The others nodded confidently: they’d been poor before and
they could surely endure being poor again for a while. Most of them had been farmworkers and knew how to stick together, and that was what was demanded of them now. “When they see it’s for real, they’ll surely have to cave in,” Boel-Erik said. “And you can be sure it’ll be no use trying to keep the factory going.”

The work day was over and the men were slowly walking home from work. They stood in clusters on the road from the factory. Now it had been decided—now they would strike. They stood there in the dusk, hundreds of men, and down below was the factory, where the fire was about to go out in the rotary kilns, under the boilers and furnaces. There were dusty unskilled laborers, sooty stokers, workers from the coal mill, mechanics, coopers, coachmen, women from the workshop where the sacks were mended. The clerks and salaried workers came by. They cast a sidelong glance at the workers. Laurids from America joined them. “How’s it going, Laurids?” Cilius shouted. “Hold your head high, you were in the war before, over there among the Americans.” Things weren’t going well with Laurids. Hopner wanted to have a new lining in the rotary kilns now that the work had come to a halt, and foremen and salaried employees were supposed to take care of it. But Laurids had said no. When the work had ceased, he wouldn’t lift a hand. “That’s the way it’s got to be,” Cilius said. “You’ve always been a helluva guy.”

Cilius was in high spirits and the circle around him grew. He was chairman of the union and was talking to his people. “If we just stand together, they won’t get the upper hand on us,” he said. “We’ve lived on skim milk and potatoes before and we can do it again for a time. You can bank on it that dancing this dance won’t be roughest on us. I’ve been involved in this kind of thing before.”

And Cilius told stories from his youth, how the navvies had struck and forced the big contractors to raise the piece rates. If strikebreakers came, they were thrown into the nearest body of water so their passion could be cooled off, or treated to a sound beating. “You’ll definitely have to remember that,” Cilius said. “That’s the way we gain ground. We don’t get something for nothing. We have to give as good as we get because if the high
and mighty had their way, they’d begrudge us dry bread.”

Cilius sparkled with fighting spirit. He stood compact and thickset, radiating strength and confidence. One man cut loose from the crowd; little by little the workers began to scatter. But that happened slowly: this evening they were in no hurry to get home. As long as they were together, they felt strong. Now there was Kresten Bossen—he had the words of the scripture to stick to. “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters,” it was written in plain words. “Servants, be subject to your masters. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” And weren’t the workers to be regarded as servants—weren’t they the ones who were supposed to be humble? Kresten had lain awake many hours at night pondering what his Christian duty was, and he’d talked to Ida about it. What should a child of God do if a strike was declared? Ida felt he should do as the others did, but Kresten Bossen couldn’t be persuaded by her talk. The words he cared about were from the Lord’s own mouth.

Kresten Bossen didn’t like Cilius, who was an unbeliever and a mocker. The path he wanted to go down wasn’t the right one. He’d stood on the fringe of the crowd and listened, and now he knew what he had to do. Cilius wanted struggle, but the Lord wanted submission, and God’s commandment takes precedence over man’s. He went back to the factory and there was still a light on in Høpner’s private office. Kresten Bossen knocked on the door and entered. He stopped just inside the door with his hat in his large hands.

“What do you want?” Høpner asked. “I came to say I don’t feel it’s right to strike,” Kresten Bossen said. “I’ll keep working if the engineer requests it.” “If I had fifty men of your kind, I’d certainly be able to keep the operation going,” Høpner said. “But damn it, surely you can understand that I have no use for you as a man all by yourself. Do you think you alone can keep the rotary kilns going, are you able to stoke the boilers, to watch the tube mills? No, you see.” Kresten Bossen understood that the president wasn’t demanding of him that he work during the strike, and his mind was eased. He’d done what his Christian faith enjoined, he’d subordinated himself to the one the Lord had
placed above him. And now Kresten Bossen entered the strike with the others.

The lights went out under the furnace; a glow no longer rose from the smokestacks in the dark spring night. People out in the heath went outside their farmhouses to see whether the glare was there, and now they knew the workers were on strike. Old people shook their heads: what kind of people were the workers anyway? They had their good wages, but instead of thanking providence’s mercy, they demanded more. The world was out of joint: it wasn’t like in the old days, when people took their modest wage with a grateful disposition.

It was odd not to have to go to work in the morning. No factory whistle called people out of their houses. But it was unbearable to lie on your eiderdown and enjoy the rest; you had to get in your clothes and go out and speak to other people. Maybe something new had already happened. Perhaps the employers had climbed down now that they saw it was for real. You looked in on your neighbor or found a pretext for going to the grocer. It was dead all over town. A sound was missing in daily life. The noise from the factory at work.

Cilius had called a meeting for the afternoon in the banquet hall at the inn, and here the workers found out that the fight would probably be long and hard. Cilius stood on the dais and explained about strike assistance and reporting to the union and about strike pickets in case the employers thought of putting other people to work. “And no drinking now, boys,” Cilius admonished them. “We’ll let the schnapps be till all this is over with—you hear that?” The men nodded. “And then we’ll surely get through this, be certain of that,” Cilius said. “We’ve got all the rest of the workers in the country behind us.”

Cilius clenched his fist with its freckles and bristly red hair and let it fall on the lectern with a bang. “If we don’t fight for it, we’ll never get better conditions,” he shouted. “You know that as well as I do. We’ve got to get tough and stand firm.” Cilius had beaten a man till he was a cripple and been in countless brawls, but this one here was a bigger struggle. Now the big shots would get to know Cilius for real.
A strike committee was elected. Cilius, a stoker Karl Børgeesen, and Marinus’s Niels and Boel-Erik. There was a leadership now and their word had to be obeyed in all points. “I mean, do I know anything about that kind of thing?” Boel-Erik said uneasily. “Sure you do,” Cilius said. “We have to elect people who aren’t scared.” And Boel-Erik wasn’t afraid—he knew that.

The farmers gathered in Skifter’s shop to hear news about the strike. Were the workers fools? they asked one another. “Now you’re probably going to have to sell on credit, Konrad,” Mads Lund said. “Make sure you’re not the one who winds up paying for the whole party. If it drags on, they’ll run up a bill they’ll never in the world be able to pay.” “Oh, they’re honest people,” Konrad said evasively. “And of course a fella knows how much he can give to each one.” “Doubtless there aren’t many of them that have put anything aside,” Anders Toft said. “It’s only by the skin of their teeth they can manage to make do no matter how much they earn.” There was a little pause and then Martin Thomsen said: “And if it gets long and drawn out, then we can surely get cheap labor for weeding the beets.” The rest of the farmers didn’t reply, but sucked thoughtfully on their pipes.
It was as if the area had died after the factory had come to a standstill. You heard the lark’s song, and for every day the fields were greening, the weather turned warmer. But the factory was silent, and the large smokestacks rose menacingly over the cliff. Høpner was busy lining the rotary kilns. It was engineers and office workers who were doing the work, and Cilius had nothing to object to. He just made sure that no worker lent a hand.

The workers had trouble making time pass. They dug in their gardens, sowed, and planted, and some borrowed a skiff and were out in the fjord spearing eel and jigging cod. Strike pay was paid out, but they had to look at every penny twice before spending it. Skim milk and potatoes were daily fare, and a fish course was a luxury. The worst thing was to be idle, but of course they knew that the crucial thing was to wait and hold out. For every day they waited and held out, the employers lost money, and that was doubtless what those people disliked most of all. That’s what Cilius and his strike committee said, and they were familiar with these matters. The workers’ confidence in them was great.

It wasn’t easy for Boel-Erik to be at home because Inger was becoming more and more unreasonable. She bossed him around and often Boel-Erik clenched his big fists and felt like giving her a beating like the last time. “Why don’t we move to a city,” Inger said. “I mean, living in a hole like this is impossible.” “Because here’s where our work is,” uttered Boel-Erik. “Now you people can’t even be bothered to do any work—you’re striking for two cents: in the city a fella can practically earn as much as he wants.” But Boel-Erik wasn’t going to any city; he felt fine where he was, and womenfolk weren’t going to get the upper hand on him.

Boel-Erik embarked on a deal and bought a piece of heathland of fourteen acres. But now he’d learned his lesson: he went to a lawyer and made sure that the papers were in order so no
one could take the land from him after it was plowed up. No big
down payment was necessary, a hundred crowns, which Erik had
put aside in case sickness or unemployment struck. Inger got
angry when she heard about the deal. “Are you crazy,” she said.
“I’ll never move to the heath.” “I just want to raise potatoes,”
Boel-Erik said. “They’ll probably say that that land is no good.
But the work a fella puts into it is sure to pay in the long run.”
Boel-Erik rented a horse and plow for the money he could spare
and began to plow the heath. He was up early in the morning
and came home late. Boel-Erik had once again gotten land.

Every day Høpner took a walk through town from the dead
factory. The workers touched their hats when he went by and
Høpner put his finger close to his hat brim without looking at
those he met. Now they’d finished with the rotary kilns and all
work came to a halt. One day Høpner met Olga on the road—he
was just about to run into her. “I think I know you,” he said. “I
don’t know anything about that,” Olga said, and, frightened,
stood aside. She knew that women were sitting behind the win-
dows and paying attention to what was going on on the road.
Many eyes followed Høpner when he took a walk.

Høpner walked on, but Olga stood there for a moment,
breathing deeply. Olga’s face had become bony, her eyes sat
depth in her head, but her mouth was big and red. After she’d
done her work in the house, she went up to her garret and sat
there with her hand under her chin and stared out the window.
There was so much bustle in Marinus’s house. Niels and Karl
and Anton were up to something in the mudroom. They’d
locked the door—no one was allowed to go out there. But they
dug a kind of well outside in the yard and lowered a huge pipe
down there; they were laying brick and pipe. Indeed, it was a
kind of modern sewer they were putting up, they explained. But
what use it could be, they wouldn’t say. That would definitely
be revealed when they were done. Tora was annoyed about all
that mess—she couldn’t get into her own mudroom. A water
main had been laid from the factory’s waterworks to the work-
ers’ houses so it couldn’t be a pump. It was mostly Anton she
interrogated, but he just bit into a fresh piece of chewing tobacco
and repeated that it was just a kind of modern sewer.

One afternoon they were finished and the door to the mudroom was thrown open. In a corner a little room had been walled up with a flowery porcelain bowl. “What in the world is that for?” Tora asked. “Well, I mean, it’s a water closet, the equal of the one that was installed in Høpner’s president’s residence.” Anton had been involved in setting it up back when the president’s villa was being built, and he’d learned the art there. “But boys, a body gets totally frightened the way it rushes and roars,” Tora said. “It seems to me we can certainly keep managing the old-fashioned way.”

But Anton was for what was new. It had to be tried even if it cost money. Now word spread over the whole district that Marinus had gotten a water closet in the middle of the strike. They didn’t even have any on the big farms. “I’m afraid that arrogance is too blatant,” Marinus said. “That kind of thing isn’t for ordinary folk.” “Surely we’re created like the fancy people at both ends,” Anton said. “Now you watch your mouth, little Anton,” Marinus said. “There are many people who get into trouble because they don’t watch their language. That’s why the scripture says: Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” But Anton was a grown fellow and didn’t care for his father’s admonition. He bit himself off a piece of chewing tobacco, spit into the bowl, and flushed. “Goddamn, how that thing does foam,” he said.

Marinus was an experienced man and knew that you prosper more in humility than in arrogance. They were on strike now and it was totally absurd to withdraw money from the savings account book and waste it on tomfoolery. “Oh, we’ll make ends meet,” Niels felt. “I mean, we have to have something to do. Idleness is the worst thing.” But the rest of the day laborers thought it was arrogance. “Can that really be possible?” Lars Seldomglad said. “You know that surely cost an awful lot of money. I mean, otherwise you’ve always been a sensible man, Marinus.” “A fella should definitely have given the children a better upbringing,” Marinus said and, ashamed, bowed his greying head. He knew very well that the business with the water
closet was too blatantly arrogant.

But of course it was always a change to visit Marinus’s house and see the miracle. The women came and were preoccupied with the new thing. They had coffee, which wasn’t as strong as usual because Tora wanted the strike pay to last. It was Magda, Line Seldomglad, Dagmar Horse, Boel-Erik’s Inger, yes, even Meta, who was to be regarded as a grocer’s wife and otherwise didn’t mix with workers’ wives. “A body should have made several more lads while there was time,” Line Seldomglad said. “Your children are truly a blessing for you.” “Yeah, this thing here is not for the rest of us common people,” Magda said. “It roars like the wild ocean when you pull the chain,” Line said. “You know what, little Tora, if it was me who had this in my house, I’d have my ass gilded. I mean, you’re sitting on shiny polished mahogany.”

The women were frisky like young girls: they pulled up their skirts and tried out what it was like to sit on the seat. Suddenly Line Seldomglad gave a squeal and it turned deathly still in the mudroom. Magda, who was trying out the seat, remained seated as stiff as a stick. Pastor Gamst was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. “Excuse me,” he said. “There was no one in the living room, but I heard voices from out here. I profusely beg your pardon.” Magda didn’t move, but remained seated where she was sitting, and the minister caught sight of her and stared in confusion. Tora quickly slammed the door to the toilet. “Wouldn’t the minister prefer to go into the living room?” she asked.

“I’ll come back another day,” Pastor Gamst said. “I’m very sorry, I really didn’t know . . . .” The minister was very red and quickly turned and left. Line Seldomglad opened the door for Magda. “Oh Lord Jesus, now I’m really wretched,” Magda wailed. “Fiddlesticks,” Line Seldomglad said. “That the minister himself had to see me sitting here,” Magda cried. “Now I’ll never again dare go to church or to the meetings because what must he think of me for fooling around with that kind of thing.” “It’s really nothing to take to heart, Magda,” Line Seldomglad said, comforting her. “I mean, he’s got to know that once in a
while all of us sit in that position in such a place.” “But it was me it had to happen to,” Magda said. “I mean, it could just as well have been one of the rest of you. But misfortune always has to strike me. That’s the way it’s been for as long as I can remember. He looked at me all the way up my thighs. Oh little Tora, you have ether drops in your house, don’t you? I’m sick, and I mean I’m very sick.”

A couple of the women took Magda by the arm and led her into Marinus and Tora’s bedroom. They put her on the bed and Olga ran over to Cilius to get some ether drops. They were poured out into a spoon and after Magda had taken them, she calmed down a little. “Still and all it’s odd that a minister comes tearing along like that,” she said. “I mean, he might have knocked on the door before he came out into the mudroom.” “But of course the door to the kitchen was open,” Olga said. “Well, then he didn’t need to be standing there for so long,” Magda said. “But maybe that was precisely his intention—clergymen are surely just like other menfolk. It seems to me you’re putting on weight, little Olga. You’re definitely thriving on your mother’s cooking.”

But actually Olga wasn’t thriving whatever else was the matter with her. She’d surely had her unhappy love-affair troubles on Funen, and when she talked about looking for a new position, Tora pooh-poohed it. Even though there was no abundance in the house now during the strike, Tora didn’t care to send her daughter out into the world before she’d regained her cheerful disposition.

Little-Laurids, Marinus’s youngest, had become assistant to Bregentved, who drove out into the heath to deal in fish. As they struggled along the sandy roads, Bregentved’s gift of gab rarely failed. He initiated Little-Laurids into his plans. In the long run it was a humble life for an enterprising man to deal in fish. And Bregentved had tried the real estate business: he’d earned good money and lost it again, and now he wanted to try a factory. “Is it going to be next to the factory we have?” Little-Laurids asked. In any case it wouldn’t be far from there, Bregentved informed him, but it really wasn’t a cement factory Bregentved wanted to
establish—that surpassed his powers. No, he was going to equip a concrete block plant. The cement was at hand and there was plenty of sand in the localities here. Bregentved already had his eye on a suitable sand pit.

Little-Laurids was skeptical. "Where are you going to get the money from to get this organized?" he asked, but Bregentved had taken that into account too. Banks and savings banks would be more than happy to lend their money—after all, that's what they lived on. "So you'll be president just like Høpner?" Little-Laurids asked. "Of course I will," Bregentved said. "An egg is an egg no matter whether it's big or small." "And lice also lay eggs," Little-Laurids said. "But do you think you can cast cement with your bad hand?" "Oh, it'll be all right; I've been able to perform all my other work with it," Bregentved said.

Bregentved had two fingers on one hand that had grown together and they'd always filled Little-Laurids with profound wonderment. "Has your hand always been that way ever since you were born, Bregentved?" he asked. Yes indeed it had, Bregentved nodded. "How can something like that happen?" Little-Laurids asked. "I'll tell you," Bregentved said. "Degeneration is what they call it. It's something the aristocrats have. That's because new blood didn't get into the stock." And now Bregentved confided to him the deep secret that his grandmother had been a servant girl in a castle called Bregentved on Zealand, and so everyone could draw his own conclusions. "I'm only a fish dealer," Bregentved said. "But who knows, maybe I should've been a count and driven in a carriage and four." And Laurids looked with respect at Bregentved's deformed hand. "But the womenfolk don't like it," Bregentved said. "I always have to hide that hand when I caress them."

Bregentved had rented a room at Povl Bøgh's, who had an extra room after Louise's death. Povl Bøgh was bent from arthritis; he couldn't work any more, but lived on his old-age assistance. When it was warm in the evening, he'd sit for hours on a bench in front of the house. Often someone would stop to talk to him, but Povl Bøgh had only one thing to talk about: how much he'd toiled. Thirty years ago things were just crazy with
the harvest: it rained and rained, and when the weather finally made it time to harvest, they had to work five days nonstop. But that was before people thought of striking; yes, indeed, back then people knew how to use their hands. Povl Bøgh’s face was moved when he recalled the hard work, the tough life.

The new people, who’d moved here from distant areas, were no concern of his. But when Black Anders came and sat with him on the bench, Povl Bøgh talked about days of old. “We got up at daybreak and toiled till late in the evening,” he said. “And the first years I was married many was the time we had nothing but horse grease to spread on our bread. But we were allowed to get some work done and people thrive on that. I don’t know what good labor unions and socialism and strikes are. I really don’t like it.”

A young girl stopped near the bench where the two men were sitting. She was waiting for someone and Povl Bøgh asked her whose daughter she might be. It was Andrea, Kresten Bøssen’s oldest girl, a slim, pretty lass of sixteen. “I certainly know him,” Povl Bøgh said. “He’s the one who bought Marinus’s farm and sold it again to the factory. You’re a pretty little girl. Now mind you, don’t ever let yourself be seduced.” But Black Anders quietly added: “Of course that’ll happen some day.”

Strike assistance was paid out at the inn, and here Cilius gave out information. There was no sign that the employers would give in, but with time they’d probably wise up. “Every hour the factory stands still costs them money,” Cilius said. “They have to pay interest and taxes and they’re getting no return on their money. We just need to hold out, boys. Those people also wrote us that from over there.” The big heavy stoker Børgesen nodded: you’re not kidding. Cilius talked and paid out money and gave good advice in all directions. “We just have to stay away from the schnapps and then the money will easily last,” he said. “We don’t need coffee every day either: we drank a brew of roasted rye before. Hold your heads high, fellows, we’ll certainly get the upper hand.”

Man after man got a word of encouragement from Cilius and several crowns in his pocket for food for wife and children. Ci-
lius kept his army together and wrote reports to Copenhagen. The permanent salaried employees had placed new lining in the rotary kilns: they couldn’t be forbidden to do that. And Cilius had permitted one man to remain at work—that was Andres, who took care of the factory’s horses. The animals shouldn’t have to suffer hardship. We’re in good spirits and send greetings in the struggle for socialism. Cilius Andersen, chairman of Alslev local. That was written in Cilius’s rough, stiff handwriting and wasn’t always easy to decipher. When Cilius sat at his desk with his glasses on and wrote a report, Frederikke went easy with the doors and shushed Little-Jep.

People got their money paid out at the inn, but nobody indulged in schnapps or beer. They went home with the few crowns in their pocket—they had to last. “Take care of the children first,” Cilius said, and his words were listened to.
Early summer was approaching now and work hadn’t started up. The strike had been going on for six weeks and there was still no prospect of its ending. The rich employers presumably didn’t calculate the losses they were suffering by letting the factory stand idle, but in Alslev it was noticeable that no wages were being paid out. Konrad no longer smiled when customers came into the shop because most of them had to have credit. The strike pay had been reduced and those who had many mouths to feed had to ask Konrad to write it in the book until work started up again. Skifter went around with a worried look and many times a day he looked through the account books. The numbers grew and grew, and how would the large debit items ever be paid?

“This will never do, little Konrad,” Skifter said. “You’ll truly be obliged to say stop.” “That’s not so easy,” Konrad felt. “But if things keep up this way, we’ll go bankrupt,” Skifter said. “I mean, almost no cash is coming in because once they discover they can get the merchandise by putting it on their account, they won’t pay.” “But all they have is their strike pay,” Konrad said. “I can understand that you think we should pay for their strike,” Skifter said. “I wish everybody well, but why can’t they be content with their good wages? Now they’re getting into debt and destitution and can’t pay what they have to.”

Konrad disregarded that, but every day Skifter started all over again. Meta sided with her father. It was unreasonable for them to bankrupt themselves by giving too much credit. And Skifter began dropping hints that, after all, he was the one who actually owned the business, even if to some extent he’d let Konrad take the helm.

“Otherwise I’ve done a good job driving the business forward from the little shop it once was,” Konrad said, offended. “Of course many people have come to town,” Skifter said. “And I’m really not totally certain that they moved here to do business
with you. I mean, there’s never been a shop that could last if a fella doesn’t get money for his goods.” Konrad didn’t reply. But next time Skifter started talking about these things again, Konrad got angry. “I mean, the shop is yours and you can operate it the way you want,” he said. “Now don’t make such a fuss,” Skifter said. “But you can’t forget that I have the experience.” “Then for the future you’ll be the one who’ll attend to the customers,” Konrad said. “Then you can decide yourself who you’ll give credit to.”

Konrad kept to the back of the shop and the storeroom, while Skifter dealt with the customers. But Konrad kept nearby when people came into the shop. He surely wanted to see whether Skifter would let anyone leave without goods because they didn’t have money in their pocket to pay with. Nothing happened the first day, although there were about a dozen workers who asked to have the goods put on their account. But the next morning Cilius entered and wanted flour and meal and sugar and chewing tobacco. Skifter put the goods on the counter. “You’ll put them on my account?” Cilius said.

Skifter’s face became deeply troubled and he scratched his neck. “Cilius, I hardly know if I can keep doing it,” he said. “I mean you’ve built up a pretty big account.” “I’ve sure done that before,” Cilius said. “I’d never deny that,” Skifter admitted. “But you have to remember we can’t know when this strike here will be over, and if it continues, how will you ever get this debt paid?” “That’s my business,” Cilius said. “I’ve never owed anything, neither money nor a beating.” “No, you’ve always been lucky,” Skifter said. “But earthly luck is a fragile thing and it’s rare that it lasts.”

Cilius stood for a while and thought it over while Skifter looked past him through the shop window out on to the road. “So I assume it’s not just me you’re denying credit?” Cilius asked. “No, I’ll be forced to cut it back across the board,” Skifter said. “I myself have obligations I have to meet and how can I do that if no money comes into the cash register? I can’t pay bills and trade charges with a song and a dance.” “You know, we have house and home, most of us,” Cilius said. “And there
shouldn’t be any risk in giving us an extension.” “I can’t extend myself any further, Cilius,” Skifter said. “It also seems to me there’s got to be an end to this strike soon. How long are you people going keep it up?”

Cilius didn’t answer; he turned and left. The goods remained lying on the counter. Konrad had heard the conversation from the back of the shop; now he went over to his father-in-law. “Cilius really got mad,” he said. “I don’t care,” Skifter said. “He’ll get over it.” “He’s worst when he doesn’t flare up,” Konrad said. “But he’ll certainly remember it. Yeah, of course, it’s your grocery store and you can do whatever you want. But it really wasn’t smart to begin with him.” “The rest of them will definitely get the same answer,” Skifter said. “Nobody can possibly expect us to keep doing business till we become destitute.”

Word got round town that Skifter had shut off the credit and it was a bad blow. Line Seldomglad visited Konrad and Meta in the evening and asked whether what she’d been told was true. Yes, it was true all right. “We can’t keep it up,” Meta said. “It’s a lot of money we’ve got outstanding.” “You know, I thought your father was a prosperous man,” Line said. “I don’t know anything about it,” Meta said. “But of course it may be that he doesn’t care to get rid of it all.” “You know, he earned a lot off of us for many years,” Line said. “His wares were never cheap. I really didn’t regard you as the kind of people who’d deny us support.”

You couldn’t easily upset Line Seldomglad, but now she was angry. “But of course you people have become big shots, you hang around with the farmers and like to ignore the rest of us. And it’s your fault, Meta, because Konrad’s never been arrogant.” “But I mean it’s neither Konrad nor me that decides,” Meta said. “It wouldn’t have happened if I’d decided,” Konrad said. “I’ve been standing in the shop so long I certainly know who’ll pay and who won’t.”

Line Seldomglad wouldn’t have coffee. “We’ve almost weaned ourselves of that drink,” she said. “And now we surely won’t be having it until the strike is over. No, drink your coffee yourselves.” She hardly looked over where the twins were. “I’d
never expected that,” she said. “But now we’re going to be dis­
graced by our children.” “It’s strange that you’re making such a fuss,” Meta said. “No, fancy people just can’t understand that ordinary folks also have some honor,” Line said.

Konrad spoke to Skifter again, but the grocer stuck to his guns. For the future, credit would be curtailed—otherwise he’d end up destitute. “But your parents can have what they need,” Skifter said. “They won’t accept it,” Konrad said. “They don’t want to be made any better off than the others. But after all this, there’s probably nothing else for me to do but begin on the fjord.” “I mean, there’s a real need for you in the shop,” Skifter said. But Konrad wanted to fish again. Now there wouldn’t be much business, he felt, and Skifter could easily manage alone.

Cilius called a meeting at the inn and made a report. If they could no longer get groceries on credit, they’d have to manage without groceries. And there was no doubt either that they could. Cilius explained how little people needed in a pinch. “First we take care of the children,” Cilius said. “The rest of us will certainly manage. They’re writing from Copenhagen now that there are good prospects if we just hold out a little while yet. And we can’t let them say we weren’t able to hold out just as long as the others.” Other speakers agreed with him. The strike had to be carried out—they’d hold out. The workers had become skinny: just looking at them you could see they weren’t getting as nourishing food as they were accustomed to. “And we have to remember who helped and who opposed us,” Cilius said. “The day will certainly come when we can express gratitude for both good and bad.” People left the meeting in silence. There weren’t many who asked for credit at Skifter’s.

Kresten Bossen hadn’t been at the meeting. He didn’t get involved with the rest of them, but mostly sat at home and read the Bible. Once in a while Ida chased him out to work in the garden, but the work progressed slowly for Kresten Bossen. He became lost in thought over the manure fork and the rake. “It doesn’t look as though we’re going to have our garden sown this year,” Ida said, but Kresten didn’t hear her. A moment later he was again sitting by his Bible. It would also happen that he’d get up
in the night and sit down to read although they couldn’t afford to waste the expensive kerosene. But Ida’s scolding didn’t help.

Pastor Gamst was sitting in his study when Ida came one afternoon and wanted to talk to the minister. “I’d urgently beg the minister to come with me: there’s something all wrong with Kresten,” she said out of breath. “What’s going on,” the minister asked. “He’s lost his mind,” Ida said and began to cry. “He’s never been totally right in his head, but he’s surely become totally unhinged since the strike began. I can’t stand it any more. Now he’s been out in the heath and caught two vipers, which he’s sitting and playing with.” “What does he want with vipers?” the minister asked, astonished. “Yeah, don’t ask me,” Ida said. “I’m at the end of my tether. I want to get divorced from that crazy man.”

The minister took his hat and cane and went with Ida to bring Kresten to reason. When they got to the house, Kresten Bossen was sitting peacefully in the living room reading. “Hello, Kresten Bossen,” the minister said. “It’s your wife who fetched me. She says you caught a couple of vipers. What are you going to do with the vipers, Kresten Bossen?” “I want to test whether I’m a Christian man,” Kresten said and looked up from his book.

It was plain that Kresten was possessed by a wild impulse and Pastor Gamst said: “You shouldn’t read so much, all that reading isn’t doing you any good.” Kresten looked broodingly at him. “The procurator Festus used roughly the same words to the holy apostle Paul: And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad!” “But I mean, after all, you’re no Paul,” the minister said. “No,” Kresten Bossen said. “But it’s a human being’s duty to work day and night toward his own sanctification.”

There was a preoccupied expression on Kresten Bossen’s face, and Ida stole a glance at him as if she were afraid. But the minister’s presence gave her courage. “I’d never object in the least to your sanctifying yourself,” she said. “But the garden has scarcely been put in order even though it’s almost summer, and
the house is so dilapidated that it's probably going to fall over on our heads. It seems to me you're obligated to think about your family." "Little Ida, the scripture says: one thing is needful," Kresten Bossen said gently.

"But what about the vipers, Kresten Bossen?" the minister interrupted. "The minister knows what it says in Mark the evangelist chapter sixteen," Kresten Bossen said. "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

"But surely you're not going to let yourself be bitten by the vipers, are you?" Ida shouted. "Yes I am," Kresten Bossen replied. "Because the important thing for the cause of salvation is to know whether somebody believes. Right before in Mark chapter sixteen our savior says: 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' And now I'm going to do a test on myself according to the words of our lord Jesus Christ."

Ida looked at Pastor Gamst; now it was plain to everyone that Kresten had read himself out of his mind. "Where do you have the vipers?" the minister asked. "I've got them in a box," Kresten Bossen said. "They can't escape and I put it away from the children." Pastor Gamst thought it over. What was he going to do with this stupid man? He felt Ida's gaze on him and knew that she expected him to bring her husband to reason. "Kresten Bossen, it's tempting God," he said. But Kresten Bossen shook his head: he was acquainted with the words of the scripture and knew better.

"It's not tempting the Lord," he said. "You know that perfectly well—otherwise you couldn't be a minister. I'm also not doing it to be haughty on account of my faith. I just want to be convinced that my faith is as the Lord demands of me. If with full confidence in my savior I can stick out my hand and let it be bitten by a viper, then it won't injure me and my faith is as it should be. It's not the Lord, but myself I'm testing." "But that word in Mark has to be taken with reservations," the minister
said. “We have to remember that Mark was a simple man and lived in times that were superstitious and in many ways benighted. That passage has to be taken in a spiritual sense, Kresten Bossen. We must never forget that our Lord Jesus, in order to be understood in the time he lived in, had to use the language of the time.”

Kresten Bossen smiled and it struck the minister that it was the first time he’d seen a smile on his face. You could also see that Kresten’s features were not accustomed to smiling. It turned into a crooked and sick grimace; his face refused to come out of its heavy folds.

“It’s strange to hear these words from a minister,” he said. “You mustn’t be self-righteous and feel that your view is the only conceivable one,” the minister said.

“No, but I have to believe every jot written in the Lord’s gospel,” Kresten Bossen said, and his otherwise so cautious voice began to screech. “I have to believe every word according to its obvious meaning; I’m not permitted to reinterpret it as I please. If the scripture says we must believe, then we must believe and not like the doubting Thomas put our finger in Christ’s stigmata. I’ve tried in accordance with my slight abilities to do God’s works, but it’s faith and only faith that saves, and now I’m going to see whether I have faith like a grain of mustard seed.”

“We won’t find peace of mind by continuing to brood and brood,” the minister said. “I advise you to follow your wife Ida’s advice. Go out into your garden—take care of the day’s work. The only thing God expects of us is that with full confidence we place our fate in his hands.”

Ida stood up straight and cried, and the two smallest ones had come in and hid in her skirts. There was a heavy, stuffy atmosphere in the little living room and the minister felt an intense urge to get outside into the fresh air.

“Now you’re going to go out and kill the vipers,” the minister said authoritatively. “What you’re planning isn’t God’s, but the devil’s work. And then look after your house as is first and foremost your duty.”

The two children burst into tears and Kresten Bossen bent
down and took the younger one in his arms. “Since you’re so versed in the scripture, surely you’ve also read Luke chapter eighteen,” the minister said. “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. We don’t gain the kingdom of God by brooding and speculating, but by abandoning ourselves to God’s will, like the child who places his hand in his father’s. And you should know that all this reading in the scripture is arrogance. One must live, not read, one’s way close to God. One shouldn’t study the scripture the way an attorney reads his lawbook, and if the Lord wants to test our faith, he will himself determine which way that has to happen. But in your heart of hearts, underneath all your humbleness, you’re an opinionated know-it-all, Kresten Bossen.”

“May the Lord have mercy on me, what is the minister saying,” Kresten said, terrified. “You want to be better than others, you want to have, so to speak, God’s signature that your faith is as it should be,” the minister said. “You’re arrogant about your fear of God the way a rich man is about his money. You’re humble the same way a millionaire can be content with little. But that’s not fear of God. Now I’m speaking to you as the servant of the Lord, Kresten Bossen, and I’m enjoining you to abandon your blasphemous idea. Go out and kill your vermin. Have you understood me?”

“Yes,” Kresten Bossen mumbled, and the minister quickly took his leave. He slowly walked homeward toward Alslev in the mild spring weather. It had recently rained and the air was scented and heavy with growth. Tadpoles were quivering about in a water hole. Pastor Gamst stood still and looked down into the green deep. He smiled. Oh, these childish scruples, this folk-theology, which is nourished by misty scriptural passages. He sat in the warm spring and was amused by his own authority. A boy came scurrying toward him and he recognized Kresten Bossen’s youngest. The boy stopped, out of breath, where the minister was sitting. “I was told to ask the minister to come back,” he said. “Father was bitten by the viper.”

So the semi-lunatic had tested his Christian faith anyway!
Pastor Gamst got up and ran back to Bossen’s house. Ida was standing at the door crying. “I knew it would end in disaster,” she said. “He’s gotten out of hand. I’d rather be married to a heathen than keep putting up with this stuff here.” The minister walked by her into the living room. Kresten Bossen was sitting there. “You did it anyway?” the minister asked. “No, but one of them managed to get a tooth into my leg as I was going to kill it,” Kresten Bossen said.

The minister examined the leg: there were a couple of small pricks and the flesh had already begun to swell up. “Oh, dear me,” Kresten Bossen groaned. “Do you think I’ll escape with my life?” The minister took out his pocket knife, struck a match and singed the blade and drove the knife into the wounded leg. Bossen screamed, but the minister knelt and sucked the wound out. After it had been done, he sent Ida for a cord and tied the leg. And Andrea, the oldest daughter, was sent to the grocer for a bottle of cognac. In the meantime Kresten Bossen sat and moaned: “Oh, Jesus have mercy on me.”

Pastor Gamst got him into bed and poured cognac into a beer glass. “Drink,” he ordered. “I’ve never tasted schnapps in my mouth,” Kresten Bossen said. “Drink,” the minister repeated,” and Kresten Bossen emptied the glass. Now the sweat stood on his forehead. “So I got proof that my faith wasn’t strong enough,” he said. “You got punished because you tempted the Almighty,” the minister said. “You wanted to be bitten by the viper and God let it bite you. Now you know that the Lord hasn’t designated you a Paul, who can shake off a poisonous snake the way the rest of us can a caterpillar. Remember the words, Kresten Bossen: Down to earth, down to earth, that’s where life has summoned you.”

Pastor Gamst went home and Kresten Bossen lay and stared straight ahead. His leg thumped and ached—he wondered whether he was going to die now. He called Ida and she poured another glass to the top with cognac. “I’m burning all the way down into my bones,” he said. “I don’t understand—people drink this kind of stuff for enjoyment. But we’re allowed to when our health is at stake. Saint Paul writes in his epistle to
Timothy: Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities. It seems to me too right away there's relief in my leg. We mustn't forget either, Ida, that our Lord transformed water into wine when he was invited to a wedding in Canaan.”

Kresten Bossen had yet another and it did him well. He no longer felt the pains in his leg and soon fell asleep. The leg was black and swollen for another couple of days and yet another bottle of cognac was sent for. Then Kresten Bossen was once again on his feet, but Ida had hidden away the Bible. Kresten asked for it, but Ida said: “You certainly heard what the minister said, that you overdid your reading. We have to take everything in moderation, even God’s word. There’s no use in your wanting to be as book-learned as a clergyman. You learned from what happened, didn’t you? And thank God on your knees that your foolishness didn’t get out to people. Then we would’ve been ridiculed by the whole parish.”

Kresten Bossen bowed his head. The minister had said that in his heart of hearts he was an opinionated know-it-all who wanted to be better than others. And even though Kresten Bossen didn’t have his Bible, he mumbled to himself the parable about the Pharisee who went up to the sanctuary to pray. He stood and prayed to himself this way: God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I tithe all my income. No, Kresten Bossen understood that there was a long way to go yet before he received God’s spirit.
It wasn’t easy for Tora to have all the menfolk in the house. They didn’t know what to do. After all, they couldn’t sit and play cards all day long, and nothing comes of idleness. Tora didn’t like it when she realized that Niels was killing time at Boel-Erik’s house. It wouldn’t have mattered if Boel-Erik had been home, but he was out on his moorland plot from early in the morning till late in the evening. The whole thing had to be plowed up and trenched now during the strike.

“It doesn’t seem to me you should be hanging out at Inger’s all day,” Tora said. “I don’t respect her. Erik is much too good a man for her.” But Niels explained that, after all, he had to be somewhere and surely nobody would be harmed if he stuck his head in once in a while and chatted with Inger, who was lonely, while her husband was in the heath. “Watch out, Niels,” said Laurids, who was sitting in the living room smoking his short pipe. “All of us share the same weakness, and the important thing is to beware in time.” Tora went out into the kitchen and Laurids explained to his nephew that you had to deal cautiously with womenfolk. “I could have been a well-to-do man if womenfolk didn’t exist,” he said. “I hate to do them an injustice, but it seems to me their greatest pleasure is to lure us into their snares. Watch out that the same thing doesn’t happen to you that happened to me. The nasty witch doesn’t exist who wasn’t able to get me into bed.”

Niels didn’t feel there was anything to worry about. Laurids was in a bad mood during the strike. He’d worked his whole life and he couldn’t take being idle very well. And to boot he couldn’t even visit Minna. Her husband, of course, was home now and there wasn’t any place ready for him in her bed as there was when her husband went to work.

Laurids was out in the heath to see how things were progressing with Boel-Erik’s farming. Erik had gotten a big piece of heath broken up, and even if it wasn’t the best soil, surely po-
tatoes could always grow. Erik had planted potatoes on an acre of land, and now he was trenching a piece of acidic, peaty soil that could become a pretty meadow. He explained in detail what the whole thing was going to be like. The buildings would be there once he got money to build with. Laurids sucked on his pipe. “You should’ve gone to America in time—you could’ve gotten good land there,” he said. “I’m satisfied with this here,” Boel-Erik said. “It can turn into a pretty little property if a fella will just put some work into it.” Boel-Erik had flung off his jacket and shirt and the sweat moistened his back with its tough muscles, while he toiled in the heavy, sticky earth. “I can easily have a go at it with the hoe,” Laurids said, and then he was at work too.

In the evening Laurids came home tired and was in a better mood than he usually was. “It does me good to get the lazy sweat out,” he said. “If you give me a couple of slices of bread to take along in the morning, Tora, I’ll go out to Boel-Erik and give him a hand.” And early next morning Laurids bicycled out into the heath. He’d gotten an idea. If Erik was going to build anyway, he could just as well begin right away building a well. Laurids had done every kind of work over there in America; it was a snap for him to provide water for Boel-Erik.

And after several evenings of hearing Laurids tell what they’d accomplished, Marinus got it into his head one morning to bicycle with him. Marinus wouldn’t ordinarily have been familiar with a modern vehicle like a bicycle. They hadn’t known about that kind of thing in his youth, but he did know how to ride the animal—his sons had taught him that. Marinus borrowed Niels’s bicycle and struggled behind Laurids along the sandy heath road. Boel-Erik had already arrived and he showed Marinus his property and where the stable and the dwelling house would be located. Marinus admitted that it might become a nice little farm. And if in the beginning Boel-Erik would just be content with little, it would be an easy matter after a while for him to get cattle and machines. Oh boy, if Marinus had been younger, he’d really have done the same.

Laurids had reached a ways down into the well and he was
bracing it. The loose sand easily gave way, and Laurids was not the man to deal rashly with his life. While he was working with beams and rope, which he’d borrowed at one of the moorland farms, he cursed in American English, and then you knew he felt well. “Now how can you know there’s water?” Marinus asked. Of course, Laurids had found the vein of water with a divining rod; that was an art he understood. And the water wasn’t far down either, because the rod had downright wriggled about in his hand. “I’m not so sure you’ll find water here,” Marinus said. “And that’s dangerous work when you get farther down—the whole thing can slip real easy.”

But Laurids didn’t accept good advice. Water had to be found even if he had to go to the center of the earth. Marinus didn’t like it, but he did make up his mind to give his brother a hand, and if the well collapsed, it would also be better if people were around who could dig Laurids-American out. And while Laurids stood at the bottom of the deep hole in the ground, Marinus hoisted the dirt up. Many times a day they inspected the supports—they weren’t imprudent men.

And Marinus had to attest that it was nice to get working again. During the long strike all his limbs had positively hurt with longing to get cracking again. Marinus had toiled for as long as he could remember, and he wasn’t made to walk with his hands in his pockets and do nothing. “I scarcely understand how they can bring themselves to say work is a curse,” he said. “It almost seems to me it’s the greatest pleasure there is.” “That’s for sure,” Laurids said from the depth of the well. “And while you’re working, you’re not sinning.”

From day to day the well went deeper and deeper; there was still no water. Lars Seldomglad was out to view the well and spat down into the dark deep. “There’ll never be more water in there than you yourselves can piss,” he said, and Laurids from America became furious and cursed as never before. “You’re digging yourselves down into glowing hell,” Lars Seldomglad said. “But the way you can curse, you’ll be going there anyway some time.” Laurids again told about the divining rod, which had writhed in his hand like an eel. And it was a well-known
fact that the rod was never wrong. “There’s water here,” Laurids said. “And it will turn up no matter how far down we have to go.” And Laurids once again climbed down into the deep with boards and poles to brace the well.

Would the strike never stop? Høpner took a walk through town: his face was sullen and he didn’t greet anyone. There was probably not much money in the strike fund. The benefits had been reduced again. Cilius called the workers together at the inn and explained that now it was a matter of one final tug. Cilius had a piece of paper in his hand which said how much the strike was costing the employers per week. They were colossal sums, but the crazy thing was of course that these people had money like dirt, and what did the workers have? They hardly had that much that they could get their fill on rye bread and margarine. “But we’ve got the fighting spirit,” Cilius said. “We can keep striking for as long as it’s necessary. And we’re not used to anything better than rye bread and margarine anyway.” Cilius frowned and smashed his fist on the table. He looked like an ascetic, though everyone knew he’d drunk his farm away and lived like a spendthrift.

One of the workers from out in the heath, Jens Glud, stood up and asked to speak. “I’m not used to speaking and you folks’ll have to excuse me.” “Just speak your mind,” Cilius said. “It’s what you have to say that matters.” And the tall man, who was stooped from toil, gave his opinion that it was wisest to stop in time. “It seems to me we should try to come to terms with them even if we don’t get any more in daily wages,” he said. “I mean, we can’t get around the fact that they’re the big shots and we’re the little people. And before we were able to exist on the wage we got at the factory and doubtless we can do it again. It seems to me the strike should be over with.” Jens Glud stood a bit as if there were more he wanted to say, then he popped down from the dais. Some down in the hall shouted: “That’s honest enough. It can’t go on.” But then Cilius was on the dais once again, and now he’d forgotten that he was the union chairman and was supposed to take the parliamentary road.

Suddenly Cilius had become a different man, a ruffian, a
navvy. His red hair bristled, his eyes were red with rage. He stood for a bit at the lectern snorting and couldn’t catch his breath because he was agitated. His big hands, clenched, rested on the lectern, and they twitched as if he felt like hitting somebody or something.

“Now, dammit, I’m going to tell you, Jens Glud, you should change your name to Jens Klud,” Cilius said. “You’re an old woman and can’t be regarded as a real man. What were you before you became a cement worker? A miserable day laborer every farmer could kick around. But I took to the road, I’ve been a navvy, and I’ve been in a strike before. I can also become a navvy again. And if the rest of you feel the same way the milk-sop there does and want to come to heel, then I’ll take to the road. We’d agreed we were going to hold out and stand shoulder to shoulder, and if you have a different opinion now, then I don’t care about you.” “Hear! Hear!” they shouted down in the hall. Cilius noticed that his supporters were in the majority and he became calmer. “We’re not old women, are we?” he asked. “You don’t want people to say, do you, that it was us here in Alslev who gave in first? No, we’ll show them that we can strike for as long as necessary. We haven’t lost yet and we’ll certainly get the upper hand. And now listen to what they’ve written from the central executive committee.”

Cilius put his glasses on his nose and once again he was the sober-minded union man. Look, this is what they wrote from the central executive committee. There was every prospect that the employers would give in before long. The important thing was just to hold out a little bit yet. That’s what the people wrote who were in the know and had the main responsibility, and presumably Jens Glud didn’t think he could shake that. Cilius pushed his glasses up onto his forehead and looked out over the meeting. “And if there’s no one else who wants to speak, we’ll adjourn the meeting,” he said.

While the hall was emptying, Cilius called Jens Glud into a little room behind the taproom. “I just want to have a word with you,” he said. “If you ever talk such nonsense again, you’ll also get to pay the price.” And Cilius gave his critic a couple of re-
sounding boxes on his ear.

When the men left the inn and had gotten their benefit paid out, it happened that a band of them strolled out to the cliff and stared down at the dead factory. It was very quiet, only the lark’s song could be heard, and a strip of smoke wreathed from the chimney of the president’s villa. A couple of small cement tubs lay in the harbor. The crews had presumably gone ashore. Suddenly the weather had turned warm and out in the northwest a thunderstorm was rumbling. “It’s following the fjord,” Jens Horse said. “It can’t be long before it’ll be over us. We need a decent downpour, too.” The thunder broke out and flashes of lightning blazed under the dark sky. The men had sought shelter in a work shed now that the storm was directly overhead. A bolt of lightning made everything swim before their eyes: it had a strange metallic crack to it, and the thunder came rumbling right after it. It produced a booming echo under the hills. “It struck something,” Lars Seldomglad said and went out to see. “Yes, it’s Kresten Bossen’s farm that’s burning.” The others came out to look. The straw roof on Kresten Bossen’s house stood in flames.

Before the rain-soaked men reached the house, the fire had such a firm grip that it couldn’t be put out. Heavy, suffocating clouds of smoke drifted along the ground from the wet roof. The thundershowers had drifted over, and out over the fjord a huge, glittering rainbow hung from one shore to the other. A little motor-schooner came gliding slowly through it as if through a gate to paradise. The air was fresh and spicy, and the house’s timber calmly crackled like a huge bonfire.

People stood calmly and watched it burn. Everything living had been saved, but Kresten Bossen had been struck when the lightning touched down. He had a red stripe down across his chest and had fallen down lifeless. But Ida and the children had dragged him out and now he was lying at the neighboring farm and the doctor was sent for.

The fire engine from Alslev came. The fire warden ordered men to the pump handles and a hose was laid down into the well. It took time before the preparations were completed, but finally
a thin stream of water did hiss into the fire. “That’s not going to be a big help,” Lars Seldomglad said. “No, but it has to be done,” the fire warden said. “The law says we have to try to put it out.”

The doctor had been there and it turned out that Kresten Bos­sen hadn’t been killed by lightning. He was a little burned and the doctor gave him an injection. Ida sat by the bed and cried with her children around her. All their furniture had been burned; they hadn’t managed to save anything. How would they now get a roof over their heads and new household utensils? She thought about the beautiful plush furniture in the parlor which had been her pride. Now when would Ida ever again get a living room with plush furniture? Now they were to be regarded as nothing but homeless tramps.

Good friends came to see Kresten Bossen and one day the minister came and sat down by his bed. “That was a tragic acci­dent,” he said. “Yes, so I was struck by the Lord’s wrath,” Kresten Bossen said. The minister looked at him in wonder­ment, and Kresten Bossen explained that God had struck him with his thunderbolt on account of his sins. Hadn’t Kresten Bos­sen tempted the Lord and hadn’t he wanted to play with snakes. Hadn’t he believed himself to be so pious that the lizards’ venom wouldn’t harm him? Hadn’t he put himself on an equal footing with the Lord’s own apostles?

“But please be reasonable, Kresten Bossen,” the minister said. “You can’t possibly mean that the Lord let the storm rage for your sake?” “Yet not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the will of the Lord,” Kresten Bossen said. “There shall not one hair of a person’s head fall to the ground without God’s willing it. I offended grievously and I got to feel the Lord’s scourge. Now I’m lying here and perhaps will never become a real person again. But I want to praise and extol the Almighty, hallelujah, the Lord’s power is great.” There was no use in the minister’s explaining that the elements in their dominion fol­lowed the laws that had been fixed by God. Didn’t the Lord rule over gale-wind and lightning and storm? Kresten Bossen asked. Why, then, did people pray in church for tolerable harvest weath-
er, and why did shipwrecked men implore the Lord to calm down the wild gale? But it wasn’t intended that Kresten Bossen should long suffer for his transgression. After a week had passed, he was up again and he rented part of a house in Alslev for himself and his family.

During the strike Thomas Trilling’s wife Matilde came home from the sanatorium. She’d become fat and pale and had put up her hair in a different way. She looked like a city woman and had also acquired a prim way of speaking among the sanatorium’s patients. Black Anders was concerned: how was Thomas Trilling going to provide her the food she needed for her illness? Matilde wasn’t permitted to lose weight; she was supposed to be spared work and have milk and butter and thick cream. But Matilde didn’t care much for food; she nibbled at what her father and husband put in front of her and talked about the people she’d been together with at the sanatorium. There were both merchants’ daughters and ministers’ sons, but none could play the sanatorium’s piano like Matilde.

Thomas Trilling went to see the chairman of the assistance fund to get money for nourishing food for Matilde. But it wasn’t to be had. As long as they were striking, the assistance fund was closed. “But go to the poor-law fund: they probably won’t deny you a little there,” the chairman said. “Surely you can also sell your piano. Such a thing costs a lot of money, and it’s a luxury for people who’re applying for public assistance.” Thomas went home. “Don’t you think we should sell the piano, Matilde?” he asked. “It’s the best thing I’ve ever owned, and if we sell it, I’ll never get one again,” Matilde said. “I won’t care about living if you people take the piano.”

Thomas cut back on his own food so Matilde could get nourishing food, and anyway he realized that she was getting too little. Black Anders had moved over to his daughter and son-in-law’s—it always saved a little to be able to have one household. Most of the day Black Anders sat in his boat in the fjord. But Matilde didn’t like fish. It nauseated her to eat the flounder and codlings that Black Anders brought home. “But it doesn’t matter,” Matilde said. “Because if I get sick, I’ll go back to the san-
atorium.” And Matilde became lost in remembrances of the wonderful people she’d been together with. They’d read books together and taken long walks, and Matilde wrote letters to many of them. But the stamps cost money.

Matilde lost weight. Her flesh had come easily and it would probably go away easily. Black Anders and Thomas Trilling didn’t talk about it, but they both noticed it. One day Black Anders was cleaning his rifle. “What are you going to do with the gun?” Thomas said. “You know that all game is protected—it’ll never do for you to be shooting.” “I’ve never asked permission when we lacked food in the house,” Black Anders said. “I learned from my father that the game in the field belongs to the one who takes it, and I’m sticking to that doctrine.”

In the evening Black Anders rowed out to spear eel. But he had the rifle along in the boat. The next morning when Thomas Trilling got up, he found his father-in-law in the mudroom where he was flaying an animal. “It’s a billy goat,” Black Anders said, “and it’s very fat. I was out most of the night picking up its scent.” Matilde came out. “But where did that animal come from?” she asked. “I thought we needed a roast in the pot, Matilde,” Black Anders said. “I don’t think the lord of the manor over there will miss it.” “But you know it’s not legal,” Matilde said. Black Anders let go of the bloody hide and looked at her. But Matilde quietly began crying. What would they say at the sanatorium if they knew that her father went poaching and to boot during closed season? “I mean I just wanted your best, Matilde,” Black Anders said. “I won’t eat that animal,” Matilde cried. “We have to bury it—I’ll get sick if I put it in my mouth.”

Black Anders didn’t understand his daughter since she’d been at the sanatorium and gotten to know fancy people. While she was in his house, she’d certainly been able to eat the game he brought home, even if he hadn’t come by it legally. But the good meat couldn’t go to waste, and Black Anders cut up the animal and gave it away to the neighbors. Line Seldomglad clapped her hands. “My, that was a nice roast you got on your eel fork, Anders,” she said. “Yeah, it jumped up into the dinghy to me and I didn’t have the heart to let it drown,” Black Anders said. “But
meat doesn’t agree with Matilde.” Jens Horse and Boel-Erik didn’t say no either to the gift Anders brought. You can’t tell from the pot where the roast comes from.

Out in the heath the well got deeper and deeper, but still there was no water. Laurids cursed and swore up a blue-flamed storm, and he insisted there was water there. The divining rod had never deceived him, neither here nor in America. Marinus asked him to stop because if the well collapsed while Laurids was digging at its bottom, he was a dead man. “Let’s call the well-digger,” Marinus said. “If there’s water, he’ll soon find it with his drill. This here will never work out.” But Laurids swore that when he braced a well, it didn’t collapse. He climbed down again into the dark deep on the ladders that had been tied together, while Marinus and Boel-Erik stood ready at the tackle to hoist the dirt in buckets. “He won’t listen to reason,” Marinus said. “I’d wish this was over and done with.”

There was a roar from Boel-Erik: “It’s falling down!” “Oh, Jesus have mercy on us,” Marinus wailed, but Boel-Erik was already on the way down the flimsy ladder. “Stand by with the hoist,” he shouted to Marinus. “And if I say so, you have to run for help.” But Boel-Erik hadn’t gotten far down into the well before he realized that there was indeed still life in Laurids from America. Half-smothered incantations could be heard from the deep. “Are you all right, Laurids?” Boel-Erik shouted. “I’m stuck in the dirt up to my neck,” he heard Laurids answer. “You people will have to brace it better—otherwise the whole well will come down. It’s just about to fall down over my head.”

Boel-Erik crawled up out of the well again, and now he and Marinus ran to the nearest farm for help. People brought ladders, ropes, and timber, and they began rescuing Laurids. Women and children had arrived and stood at a distance, while the men worked. The side of the well was braced where the earth threatened to slide, and with his big hands Boel-Erik shoveled the earth loose around Laurids’s head. About an hour went by before they managed to dig Laurids free, and they clambered up out of the well.

“Did anything happen to you—are you hurt internally?”
Marinus asked. “I certainly am not. It would have to take more than that. But I did reach water—that’s how much the rest of you know. I was standing with my feet in water. With my toes I could feel the water come trickling out.” And Laurids wasn’t so worn out that he couldn’t get cracking again with the digging. He was right: the well had reached down to an aquifer. “I knew it,” Laurids said. “The divining rod was dancing in my hand. And now after we get the well set up, Erik, you’ll have good water on your property.”
Workers rarely came into Skifter’s shop and they had little to buy with. But following old custom the farmers met in front of the polished mahogany counter to hear what was new. They asked about Konrad. Yeah, of course, he’d figured out that he’d be going out fishing again and he’d bought a boat and tools. That was, after all, reasonable enough because during this strike period, of course, there wasn’t any more to do than one man alone could manage. Otherwise it looked as though there’d be a good crop this year.

Yeah, Mads Lund admitted, it didn’t look so bad, but you shouldn’t hold a harvest party until the harvest was in the barn. And with the prices for grain and meat and everything that agriculture produced, it was almost the same whether anything grew in the field or not. The farmer cast a sidelong glance up to the shelf where the cigar box was standing. But you could sense it was no longer Konrad who was serving the customers. Cigars weren’t offered as before, and Mads Lund slowly filled his pipe.

“And they’re still striking, those stupid people,” he said. “They deserve never to get work again. All the money they’ve let slip away. But if people like Cilius are going to be running the show, a fella can certainly understand that they’ll end up destitute.” “Yeah, it’s terrible that such a person has to have power,” Martin Thomsen said. “I often think about how things will end up if some day they get the majority on the parish council.” Mads Lund blew out a cloud of smoke. “They’re surely not going to get that in your lifetime, little Martin,” he said. “There’s surely still a tiny bit of sense in people. And there’s nobody, neither smallholders nor day laborers here in the parish, that would vote for the socialists.” “Oh, please Lord, if you were right after all,” Martin Thomsen sighed. “But I’m afraid we’re headed for hard times.” “You said it,” Mads Lund said. “But we farmers have a broad back to bear it.”

Andres was at work: he took care of the factory’s horses and
got his wages. He had money and could show up in the shop
without asking for credit. Andres came to the grocer for goods,
and Mads Lund asked how things were going with his infirmity.
Could he hold his water now? “I can’t complain,” Andres said.
“The water still gets away from me, but I’ve found a way out.”
“Then it’s surely that bathing cap Konrad gave you,” the farmer
said. But the bathing cap didn’t keep the promise Konrad had
made. It wasn’t water-tight and water leaked from it. No, now
Andres had found a better way—now he had nothing to worry
about. He winked and gave Skifter the list with the things he
needed to take home.

“That’s certainly good that you got the upper hand on your
infirmity, Andres,” Martin Thomsen. “Maybe they operated on
you?” No, no, Andres wouldn’t dare let himself in for such a
venture. He didn’t like them cutting him and especially not in
that place. But he’d found a receptacle that could take the water,
indeed every drop that got away from him. Andres cautiously
looked out the door to see whether there were any womenfolk
nearby, then he opened his pants and displayed the invention. It
was a porcelain vase, embellished with roses, which he had tied
on in front. “It’s one that Magda once got as a gift,” he ex­
plained. “And the shape really fits so well. All I have to do is
strap it on and empty it once in a while—then I never notice the
wetness in the least. It’s a real relief to get rid of all that crap.”

Andres had found relief for his infirmity, but he had other
troubles. It was totally unchristian how his lodger Iver could
stuff himself. You’d think the man hadn’t had food in years, and
it was certainly also imaginable that he’d starved when he took
to the road. But was it fair for Andres positively to have to
fatten him up? Andres didn’t think so and he talked to Magda
about it. “It seems to me we have to tell him to exercise mod­
eration,” he said. “I mean, he gobbles down almost half a rye
bread for his dinner with both margarine and cold cuts on it.
And you know, he isn’t paying what we agreed on.” “Of course
he can’t pay as long as he’s on strike,” Magda said. “That’s not
a reason to gorge himself,” Andres said. “We have to be content
with little, as the scripture says. But he’s a sot and a glutton.”

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Magda didn't respond; instead she peevishly turned her back on Andres. It was true that Iver had a good appetite and no money to pay with. But he was welcome to it. When Andres was in his stable at the factory, Magda gave Iver extra treats and poured him another drink. The Zealander was stout—he was becoming downright fat. You couldn't tell with him, as with the others, that the strike had lasted for months. He was thriving.

Iver no longer thought about Frederikke. What did he care about that middle-aged hag. He'd gotten her pregnant and gotten off scot-free, and now he was having new love affairs. The world was full of women, and if one didn't want to have anything to do with a fella, the next one was willing. Of course Magda wasn't among the youngest and prettiest, but she sure was shaped like a womanfolk.

One evening Andres came home from the factory stable and Iver and Magda had fallen asleep in Magda's bed. Andres found them there. He stood in the doorway and Magda awoke and stared at him bewildered. "Where do you get off creeping in?" she said. "Perhaps you want me to send a message ahead of time, you shameless whore," Andres said. "You're lying here with your fornicator and wallowing in fornication, while I have to support the both of you." Iver pretended he was asleep. He didn't wake up till after Andres had gone.

"Why didn't you lock the door?" he asked crossly. "There's surely no point in you letting him run right in. Of course now he'll go crazy." "Oh, I don't care," Magda said. "I never cared for Andres. He was too old for me even when we got married, and if he's no good, I have a right to take another man." "But if he throws you out, that's his right?" Iver said. "You know, we'll never be able to deny this." "Then we can move in together," Magda said. "You'll certainly be earning a day-wage again, and I won't let him make me go naked—he can rest assured of that. I want the money he owed me back when I was his housekeeper." Iver didn't say anything. "It'll amount to so much that we can get our own house," Magda continued. "I wasn't thinking of getting married," Iver said.

Wailing, Magda collapsed at the edge of the bed. "I'd never
have thought you’d leave me in the lurch,” she cried. “What will people say if they find out about this. Before I met you I was a woman of unblemished reputation.” “You were certainly keen enough on getting it started,” Iver said. “Surely you can understand, can’t you, that we can’t get married: you’re almost twice as old as me. And surely we can have fun together without it having to be forever.” “I’ll never again trust a manfolk as far as I can throw him,” Magda said. “Oh, you’ll certainly get someone else into bed,” Iver replied. “Yeah, now you’re cocky after you managed to seduce me,” Magda said. “But you were a poor wretch back then when you first came into the house. And I should have known the way you were since even Frederikke refuses to acknowledge you.”

Magda was indignant, her cheeks flushed, and she shrilled like a savage. “Out of my house,” she shouted. “I don’t want anything to do with you any more. Go back where you came from—I don’t want to have anything to do with you.” “It’s a little late for you to be thinking of that,” the Zealander said. “But I’ll be more than happy to go. Your kind is a dime a dozen.” Magda gasped for breath, then she flew at him like a cat. She dug her nails into his face and scratched deep. Iver roared with pain and hit her so hard she fell. The blood streamed down his face from the gashes she had made in her righteous anger.

Iver went up to his room to collect his things and find shelter under another roof. Magda heard him going downstairs and out through the kitchen and she thought about whether she should jump him and stab him to death. But he was already gone and she lay down across the bed and sobbed. Somebody went into the kitchen and she thought it was Andres, who’d come back. “Little Andres,” she whispered. “You have to make allowances for me. I don’t know how he got control over me.”

But it was Tora who came to visit. “Are you sick?” she asked. “Yeah, I wish I were,” Magda replied. “If only I were lying in my grave and had peace forever.” “You know, we’ll achieve that in due time,” Tora said. Magda told of her fall from grace and how Andres had caught her and Iver in the evil act. “You’ll never learn,” Tora said. “The brute hasn’t been invented
who can’t talk you into it. You certainly knew that the Zealander was a lousy rascal.” “He buttered me up and caressed and swore me eternal faithfulness,” Magda sobbed. “But now I’ve learned for real that faithfulness lasts only as long as it takes them to get their way. But I scratched him in the face,” Magda laughed through tears. “People can really see that it wasn’t just sweet things he got.” “That was very good,” Tora said. “Then he got what he’s deserved for a long time.”

Tora went out and made coffee; she brewed it strong because what was going on here was lover’s grief. Then she brought cups and coffee into Magda’s sinful bed. “For God’s sake, now don’t take it so hard,” she said. “You’re not the first woman who’s lifted her sheets high and you won’t be the last either. But what became of Andres?” “He cleared out, he literally ran out the door,” Magda said. “I do hope he hasn’t done away with himself.” “I’m sure he hasn’t,” Tora said. “Now just drink your coffee; there’s no danger with Andres. He’ll certainly come after he’s walked off his fury.” Magda emptied her cup and was poured another, while she explained that Andres was different than Tora thought. He could become violent and then he was more dangerous than a raging bull looking for a man. Magda’s voice turned hoarse with horror: maybe he killed the Zealander. But Tora didn’t think so. “We’ve become old women, little Magda,” she said. “And there’s nobody who’d commit acts of madness for our sake.” “You mustn’t get angry for me saying so,” Magda said in an offended voice. “But I’m scarcely as high up in years as you are. And I really do know Andres, and when he flies into a rage, he’s worse than a wild animal.”

Andres went straight to the parsonage and demanded to speak to Pastor Gamst. He was shown into the minister’s living room. “Is there something wrong, Andres Johansen?” the minister asked. “You look so upset.” “I’ve come to report my wife Magda for fornication,” Andres said. He’d remained standing just inside the doorway and crumpled his hat in his hand. “You mean your wife has committed adultery?” the minister said. “I found her in bed with our lodger,” Andres explained. “And now I want to have her punished. She was my housekeeper and I
made her my wife, and she grossly sinned against holy matrimony."

The minister offered him a chair. "That is of course a serious matter," he said. "Is it your intention to have your wife prosecuted under the law?" "That’s what I want," Andres said. "And afterward perhaps you’ll want to divorce her? That’s permitted on account of fornication." "No, I don’t want to get divorced," Andres said. "That which God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. But the woman must get her rightful punishment for her fornication, and if I can get her fornicator in prison, I’ll be satisfied. But I don’t want to get divorced—I know the scripture’s words about that matter."

"I have nothing to do with secular punishment," Pastor Gamst said. "If you really want your wife in jail, you’ll have to approach the authorities. You have the right according to the law, but the provision in question hasn’t been applied in many years to my knowledge. Think twice before you act, Andres Johansen; is it really your intention to use the criminal code against the one whom you promised to share with for better and for worse?" "She promised to be faithful to me, and I’m not sure this is the first time," Andres said.

The minister got up and paced the floor, while he spoke friendly words of reconciliation to Andres. Andres sat and rocked on the chair and suddenly he said: "The pastor will have to excuse me, but I have to get this emptied." "What do you have to do?" the minister asked. "I’ll truly be obliged to empty the vase, otherwise I’m afraid it’ll run over" Andres explained. He got up and with mincing steps ran out through the entrance hall. From the window the minister saw him hurry over to a corner in the yard where he opened his trousers and emptied the vase with the rose decoration.

"The pastor will have to excuse me once again," Andres said. "A fella has his weakness, as the scripture says, a thorn in the flesh, as the apostle says." "You ought to keep in mind that your wife also has her weakness, her thorn in the flesh," Pastor Gamst said. "Now as your spiritual advisor I’m going to give you a word of advice: You’re going to go home to your wife and
forgive her the sin she committed. Because if you carry out your intention, you’ll be the talk of the town. It will be discussed all across the country that you demanded that your wife be punished for adultery.” “The pastor thinks perhaps that it will be in the newspapers?” Andres said. “That’s quite certain,” Pastor Gamst said. “Then I’ll forgive her this one time if the minister will promise to speak an earnest word to her.”

When Andres came home, Magda was lying in bed. “Is that you, Andres,” she said. “Can’t you get me the red drops in the cabinet—I’m so sick, so sick.” “I suppose you also took him into bed to relieve the pains,” Andres said and laughed maliciously. “You’re a damned whore, that’s what I know.” “If you mention that again, I’ll jump in the fjord,” Magda screamed. “Wasn’t it you who seduced me the first time? Didn’t I come as an innocent girl to your farm? And year after year you kept me here without making good on marrying me. I became overstung from that and I haven’t been in control of myself since that time you were on the verge of pushing me over into the well. Thank your God, Andres, you’re not sitting in prison at this very moment.” Magda moaned, and it looked as if the convulsions were about to take hold of her. Andres quickly fetched her drops and gave them to her in a spoon. “Where’ve you been, Andres?” she whimpered. “I went to the minister,” Andres said. “And you told him what you’d seen? I’d never have believed I’d be so wretched. Now you’ve made us the talk of the town for all eternity.”

Magda poured out her troubles. Now her offense had been revealed, making her the laughing stock of the whole parish, and she’d be regarded as a harlot. And it was her own husband who’d betrayed her error and brought disgrace down on her. “I’ll go jump in the fjord,” Magda said. “I can’t stand this wretched life any more. But I’d never have expected that from you, Andres, back then when I let myself be seduced by you as a young girl.” Andres had no idea what to do. He poured her a new dose of drops, but it didn’t have a calming effect. “Oh, Andres, Andres, you’ve brought us such misery.”

By and by Andres was almost convinced that it was he and
not Magda who’d committed an offense. “You’re making much too big a fuss,” he said. “I allowed myself to get carried away by running to the minister, but you’re the one who offended first. There are mistakes on both sides and so let the whole thing be forgotten. Forgive one another, as the scripture says.” “If you’re not so mad at me, I won’t reproach you for anything either,” Magda said, comforted. “And I don’t care about Iver in the least. I scratched him till his face bled and I threw him out of the house.” “But then how are we going to collect the money he owes us for room and board?” Andres said. “Oh he’ll certainly pay it—even he can’t be that impudent,” Magda said. “Otherwise everybody will find out how he treated us.”

Next day Magda was well, and she and Andres didn’t talk about what had happened. But in the afternoon she went visiting at Frederikke’s. Cilius wasn’t home; she knew he was at the inn to pay out the strike assistance. Frederikke was making coffee. “I don’t know if you recall Iver,” Magda said. “What about him?” Frederikke asked and happened to spill coffee on the table. “I can surely tell you how he treated me,” Magda said sadly. “The whole time he was living with us he tried to seduce me, and after he got nowhere, he crept into my bed while I was lying and sleeping after lunch. I scratched and tore at him, but what can a poor womanfolk do against a fellow when sexual desire takes control. I can get him punished, and you mustn’t get angry, but was that the way he treated you?”

“No,” Frederikke said, and her mouth with its thin, pale lips was like a line.

“You mustn’t be angry,” Magda implored her. “It was an ugly experience when a woman has otherwise kept decent and I didn’t know anyone to talk to except you. I never gave him cause and still he came into my bed. Do you think I should charge him with rape—next time maybe somebody will be with child by him?” Frederikke smiled a bitter, little sneer. “I truly don’t know, Magda; if he raped you, you should surely do it,” she said. “But who can prove it’s rape, because of course he won’t admit it, we know,” Magda said. “But if it could be proved that he’s done it before.” “I don’t know anything about
his way of life,” Frederikke said and sat mute.

Magda, too, turned silent with anger. How good it would’ve been if Frederikke had lightened her heart and told about her love for Iver and how ill he’d rewarded her. Then Magda could’ve tearfully reported how he’d forsaken her in her misery so she’d nearly jumped in the fjord. They could’ve cried together and found relief in their hard fate. But Frederikke sat there stubborn and stiff, and Magda felt bitterly disappointed. She was always outside. That’s the way she’d been since she was young—that was her hard lot now.

Iver was not well respected, and who cared to have one more man in the house in times when food was tight. Iver inquired of people he knew best. “I mean, you were living well enough at Andres’ house,” Lars Seldomglad said. “I couldn’t get along with the wife,” Iver said. “It’s not going to be easy to get board with anybody now,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Even the mice are moving because there’s too little to eat in the pantry.” At night Iver was sleeping in a barn and happened to think about the pious Kresten Bossen. He found Ida in the kitchen, but she didn’t think they had room.

“I’ll ask my husband,” she said and Kresten Bossen came out. “You’ve got nowhere to stay?” he asked. “No, I had a falling out with Andres and his wife,” Iver said, as was true. “I suppose we can house you,” Kresten said. “But things are tight for us, and I don’t know how we’ll get food for one more person.” “I can certainly pay a little for myself,” Iver said. “After all, I am getting strike pay.” “It’ll be all right,” Kresten Bossen said. “But let’s get this straight first,” Ida said. “If you want to live here, you’ll have to pay me with the money you’re getting.” “I’d certainly like to have a little bit for tobacco and whatever comes along,” Iver said. “I don’t know anything about that,” Ida said. “But if Kresten wants to have boarders, even though everything just burned and things are pure misery for us, you’ll also have to pay whatever you can.” “Ida, Ida,” Kresten Bossen said. “The scripture says: Let all your things be done with charity.” “Oh get away from me with your scriptural passages,” Ida grumbled. “Now you yourself have seen what piety has led to.”
There was little room where Kresten Bossen and his family had rented, but a bed was made ready for Iver under the straw roof in the bare attic. But he had to hand over to Ida the benefit he got at the inn when Cilius made disbursements. She knew to the penny how much it was, and Iver wasn’t allowed to pocket anything for chewing tobacco or half a pint of schnapps. And it was no use in his putting his arm around her waist and trying to hug her. “Keep your hands to yourself,” Ida said and tore herself loose. “You’re wrong if you think I’m one of that kind. Try that again, and you’ll get the dishcloth across your ears.” Kresten Bossen’s Christian mildness had not rubbed off on Ida.
Pastor Gamst worked for a couple of hours in the garden every morning before he went in for coffee. After missionary Karlsen’s suicide his friends had set up Kristine, his widow, in a little yarn business in Alslev, but it didn’t work out, and the minister had taken her in his house as housekeeper. Samuel was an apprentice in a business in Færgeby, and her daughter Johanne lent her mother a hand in the large parsonage. While the minister was weeding the hazel walk, someone cleared his throat behind him. It was Martin Thomsen.

“Upon my word,” the farmer said, and Pastor Gamst let go of the hoe and dried his sweaty forehead. Martin Thomsen commented thoroughly about weather and harvest prospects and then he came to the point. He’d been to a meeting of friends north of the fjord, and the friends there had been surprised that a big town, which Alslev had become, still didn’t have its Mission house. “And it seems to me we have to agree with them,” Martin Thomsen said.

“I mean, you yourself are the treasurer of the building fund,” the minister said. “And you know how things stand here in the parish.” “Truly I do,” the farmer said. “There aren’t many who’ve found grace. But the scripture says that we children of God must be the yeast that leavens the bread. I’m only an unlettered man, but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” “Don’t you think you could speak your mind without all the biblical language,” the minister said, irritated. Martin Thomsen blinked his small, sneaky eyes. “I’m a simple man, and the minister must bear with me if I express myself improperly, though a fella thinks that surely the words of the scripture . . . . And I don’t think we’ll get started with salvation until we get an abode for the holy spirit here in the parish.”

What Martin Thomsen had talked to the children of God about came to light. They needed to step up the collection and hold a bazaar, and good friends in Færgeby would certainly con-
tribute their help, both in money and gifts. And they'd surely get a site gratis. “Of course, the Mission house could be situated on your land,” the minister said. “I’d thought about that.” Martin Thomsen replied. “But it seems to me it would look too small if we placed it here. But it could have a nice location on the hill on the road to the factory. The workers go by there when they go to and from their work. And I suppose we can get a site as a gift from the president.” “As far as I know, he’s an atheist.” “He denies God!” Martin Thomsen said. “Then he ought to know that the Lord will also deny him when the last trump resounds.”

It was agreed that the minister would try to talk to Høpner, but Martin Thomsen remained standing there even though he’d taken care of his business. “Is there anything else?” the minister asked. “Oh no,” Martin Thomsen said. “The pastor really likes the garden work, I can understand. Pastor Faaborg did too, I correspond regularly with him, you know, he was the parish minister over in Spourup at one time and a really splendid preacher. But he said many a time: A minister must be the very last to give offense. And I might mention it, there are indeed those who are offended when the pastor hauls a wheelbarrowful of dung to the garden from the parsonage’s tenant’s dunghill. They certainly don’t think that’s work for a minister.” “You can say hello to the offended and say that even parsonage gardens have to be manured,” the minister said. “Christ was a carpenter and presumably he handled saw and ax once in a while.” “Of course,” Martin Thomsen said. “Please don’t take it amiss—I just wanted to mention what people are saying.”

The peace and equilibrium that the minister felt in his heart when he worked in the garden in the fresh-as-dew summer mornings had deserted him. Fatigued, he went in for his morning coffee. In the first period after his conversion he’d lived fervently and ecstatically. He’d felt the warmth flow toward him from the friends’ trusting hearts. But slowly he’d simmered down. “If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” he mumbled and at that very moment he remembered that was the phrase that insufferable sourpuss Martin Thomsen had used. A Mission house. Worn out, he sighed. In the small
meetings of the Pious he could sense the acrid smell of the stable and the moldy Sunday best and unwashed bodies, the bleating hymn singing, the wailing prayers.

He decided to talk to Høpner right away about the site for the mission house. In the past years the two men had exchanged words only now and then. Høpner never went to church and it was seldom they met in public. He walked through the dead factory to the large white president’s villa on the cliff. Høpner was at home; the minister was shown into the library. The engineer was sitting at his desk with a book. The minister went right to the point: would the factory donate a lot for a Mission house. “Is it the Mission house again?” Høpner said. “At one time you wouldn’t accept a contribution because I’m not Christian. You’ve mellowed with the years, Pastor Gamst.”

The minister didn’t respond and the engineer continued. “By all means, you can have a lot on the road up to Alslev. It’ll take a couple of hundred years before we’ve eaten our way all the way up to town. And by then Christianity won’t exist—take my word for it.” “Christianity is old and it’s tough,” the minister said. “But it won’t survive modern industrialism,” the engineer said. “You want your Mission house and for all I care, be my guest. Let the old women also get their lust curbed. Unfortunately, you’ll never get hold of the workers. Coal, clay, and chalk are the simple things that provide him a living and they are the basis for his outlook on life. Coal, clay, and chalk, they’re also a kind of trinity.”

The engineer was sitting and playing with a letter opener; his fingers were thin and nervous. “As far as I can remember, Christ always used parables from daily life,” he said. “He lived in the reality that surrounded him. The clergymen don’t. They can give a sermon off the cuff on Peter’s haul in Gennesaret Sea, but they’ve never seen a rotary kiln even though half of their congregation lives from it. How can you propagandize for religion among people whose daily work you’re not familiar with? But let’s go right now and look at the site for your Mission house.”

They walked through the factory complex. The large buildings stood there desolate and everywhere there was a trace of di-

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lapidation. There’d been a shower and the air was pure and clear. Hopner walked ahead into the kiln department. Hopner pointed with his hand to the huge rotary kilns. It was very quiet in the room, like in a church, and they instinctively lowered their voices. “These kilns are a masterpiece of human ingenuity,” Hopner said. “There’s more delicate calculation in them than in all the world’s finest cathedral architecture. When they’re burning, 1500 degrees of heat is given off. Is it hotter in your hell? But now they’re standing cold. The chairmen of a few organizations have extinguished the fire in them. And not until they’ve talked their way to an agreement, will they be turned on again. That’s the tragedy of our time, that stupid workers and stupid capitalists can stop the wheel of technology. It’s technology that supports our whole culture and clumsy fingers shouldn’t be permitted to fiddle with it. Explain that to the workers in your Mission house.”

They walked on through the factory and stood now up on the cliff, where they looked out across the silent factory. “It’s a sad sight to see a factory lying idle,” the minister said. “Yeah, damn it,” the engineer said. “It gets on my nerves to come here day in and day out, while the whole thing is standing idle. It’s like a cemetery. But good God, when the wheels are going! People say that industry has robbed us of the old pleasure in our work, but that’s nonsense. There’s nothing as glorious as a large modern factory with its tremendous latent forces roaring to be let loose. Don’t bother me with all that sentimental drivel about the old artisan culture. Modern technology is the world’s mightiest wonder.”

“But is there room for man?” the minister asked.

“I once worked in a mining camp in America. There was nothing to read but old magazines and the Bible, so I’m well-versed in the Scriptures,” Hopner said. “You know, the Devil suggested to Christ that he should make stones into bread. It was a good, practical suggestion and Jesus’s reply was a sophism: Man does not live by bread alone. No, but man lives first and foremost on bread. And we carry out the miracle. The factory down there transforms stone into bread. That’s man’s first need,
and the rest will take care of itself.” “Just listen,” the minister said, and they heard a frail sound on the mild day, a lark’s song. “The soul, too, demands its food,” the minister said. Høpner cleared his throat, but didn’t reply.

“You regard the universe as a watchmaker’s workshop, where the important thing is to get the clocks to go right,” the minister said. “If I didn’t believe that the world had a soul, I couldn’t bear to live. I’d freeze to death in the cold from the dead stars.” “Precisely,” Høpner said, drily. “Your religion is a wish-dream. If one is afraid of dying, one invents a life after death. Eternity makes you freeze and you animate it with God. But I have only one task: I have to manufacture cement. I have enough to do here on the planet. I have to provide people with their daily bread.” “You regard me as a social parasite, President Høpner?” the minister asked. “No, I know others who are social parasites,” Høpner said and angrily struck the ground with his stick. “I view you as a friendly tradition. From a primitive period, a primitive society.”

They walked toward Alslev without speaking to each other. Then the engineer stopped. “Here’s where the boundary of the factory’s area runs,” he said. “We can have the surveyor divide out a thousand square yards, which you’ll get a deed for. I’ll take care of it. Damn it all, I certainly still have that much of a say so, in spite of the big shots in there.”

On the way home to the parsonage Pastor Gamst came by the school. It was recess and teacher Ulriksen was standing on the stairs puffing on his long pipe. He waved to the minister. “Did you come to conduct exams, Pastor Gamst?” he shouted. The minister crossed the playground diagonally among the children who were playing. “No, actually I’ve just been out begging for a site for the Mission house,” he said. Ulriksen took out a whistle and whistled. “You’re allowed to play till I call you in,” he shouted to the children. “Let’s go for a walk in the garden. You have to see my roses,” he turned to the minister.

“So now it’s in earnest about the Mission house,” he said. “Otherwise I thought that idea was dead and buried. Instead build a church meeting hall—that’s what’s needed here.” “I
know your view of the Inner Mission,” the minister said. “And I can agree with you in many respects,” the minister said. “I don’t like all that scriptural text hairsplitting, but your cheerful folk-culture and folk-identity is really more alien to me. When I sit in a poor cottage, where people in fear and humility are trying to find the path to the truth, I feel an inner joy. Seek ye the places most lowly . . . .”

“Confound you,” the teacher grumbled and stopped to light his pipe. “You have a rare gift for always falling in love with the wrong thing. You better believe that I know the humble, trusting little people, who stand with hat in hand not just before Our Lord, but before everybody who’s got more land. It’s precisely the humble man’s temperament we have to get rid of. Humility doesn’t work—it’s a bad inheritance from the past. No, the free, wholesome folk-temperament makes the people straighten their backs and look even Our Lord right in the eye. For all I care, you’re free to call it socialism.”

“It was the roses we were going to look at,” the minister said. “They’re already in bud. You’re a capable gardener, Ulriksen.” “If I were just a capable teacher, too. But the teaching has been going so sluggishly these past months. And I’ll tell you why: many of the children are getting too little to eat. It’s the strike.” “That’s not so good,” the minister said. “It’s not all bad, either. Now I really like poverty that kicks against the pricks. The people with their unions and organizations have learned to stick together and hold out. I’m telling you straight out, Pastor Gamst, that the day they win their strike, I’ll run up my flag here at the school. But I don’t think much of your Mission house—I’m old enough to be allowed to say it. . . .”
A messenger came on bicycle from Færgeby with a telegram for Cilius Andersen. Cilius wasn’t at home and Frederikke accepted it, but she didn’t dare open it. She ran over to Marinus’s to ask Niels whether he knew where Cilius was. A telegram had come.

Niels and Anton ran out into town to find Cilius and finally it was discovered that he was sitting at Børge’s together with a couple of others playing cards. Niels was, after all, in the union’s executive committee and he’d put the telegram in his pocket. “Is Cilius here?” Niels asked, and Cilius was there to be seen. He was sitting in shirt-sleeves at the head of the table thumping his cards on the table.

“There’s a telegram for you,” Niels said. Cilius took the telegram with calm dignity as if he were accustomed to receiving that kind of message every day. “That’s certainly a shame, I forgot my glasses,” he said. “I can’t read writing well without them. But this here looks to be print, and suitably large-type. So let’s see what it says.” Slowly Cilius read the address aloud: Union Chairman Cilius Andersen, Alslev near Færgeby. That was all right: the telegram had landed where it was supposed to. “Now hurry up,” Børge said. “Presumably it’s news about the strike.”

“I suppose that’s what’s can be presumed,” Cilius said and gave himself plenty of time to open the telegram. He moved his lips while making out the content. “Now get a move on,” Børge said. “Presumably it’s not a telegram from your sweetheart. Let’s hear what it says.”

“So we won the strike,” Cilius said. “In spite of everything, they were forced to give in.” And Cilius read the telegram aloud: “Central executive committee with authorization concluded agreement. Essential demands met. Work to be resumed as soon as practicable.” The living room turned quiet. For months they’d struck, been on rations, scarcely had the absolute
necessities. Lots of times they’d thought that the employers surely would get the upper hand after all because they had the money. And now the hard times were over, the strike had ended.

“It’ll be good to go to work,” Niels said, and the rest of them agreed with him. Nothing was worse than idleness. The days were without end, the weeks were like months, yes, it was good to go to work. “Damn it,” Cilius said. “We gained the upper hand after all. I haven’t been this happy since the little fox was born. We danced a polka with the big shots and they got a little bit winded. And Niels, now we’ve got to get people out and call a meeting this evening. This is big news.”

Word soon got round in Alslev as to what Cilius’s telegram said. People stood and talked in clusters on the road and the topic was the same: Now when can we get started. How many days would pass before the factory was again ready to admit them? If they could decide it themselves, they’d have gone back to work immediately. The men shouted to one another; it was a great day. They’d held out and won a victory, and what it cost meant nothing. “So Cilius was right after all,” said Lars Seldomglad, who was standing in a cluster outside the grocer’s. “It’ll be good to have a drink again. A fella’s almost forgotten what it tastes like.”

The women too had emerged in the doorways; it was as if there was a party in town. It would be nice to get the men to work and get rid of having them loaf at home. They were of no use and became hot-tempered and unreasonable and nothing suited them. Some played cards from morning till evening for a few pennies, others lay on the sofa and loafed. They needed to get cracking again.

Cilius had gone to the factory right away to talk to Høpner, and it turned out that Høpner had been informed by telephone. And here Cilius found out how the settlement had turned out. The workers had gotten most of what they’d demanded. “What do you know,” Cilius said. “Damn, that’s not so bad.” “No, you can say that again,” Høpner replied. “We certainly wouldn’t have needed to have a tug-of-war over that for months. But, of course, there are certain people who have to demonstrate their
absolute power. If we can pay today, we could surely have paid back then too. If I were the one deciding, the strike would never have begun or it would’ve been carried on to the bitter end.”

Høpner was angry and Cilius understood that he definitely didn’t have much to say when decisions were made about big issues. “Yeah, damn it, they’re not very bright,” Cilius said. “Would you finally shut your trap, and keep it shut,” Høpner said, and Cilius grinned. “Now take it easy,” he said. “I came to find out when we’re going to get the work going.” “We’ll light the fires tomorrow,” Høpner said. “Have the crews talk to the foremen and stand by. “And look here . . . .” Furiously he grabbed his wallet and pulled out a hundred-crown bill. “Go get yourselves drunk to the gills. Since you people won the battle, you should also have the party.” Høpner pushed Cilius out the door and slammed it behind him. “Damn it, he was mad,” Cilius grinned.

A messenger had gone out to the heath where Boel-Erik, Marinus, and Laurids were working on the well. It was Tinus who rushed off on a borrowed bicycle. “You have to come home,” he shouted from a great distance. “The strike’s over.” Laurids from America swung himself up over the rim of the well. “So we’ll get to do something else,” he said, “but we’re really almost done now.” “That was good news,” Marinus said. Boel-Erik didn’t say anything. He cast a glance out across his land, then he nodded. He’d gotten a good piece of work done. He’d ditched and dug and planted potatoes, and now it was just a matter of whether the dry land got rain. “I mean, after all I can certainly also get out here in the bright summer evenings,” he said. “What do you mean?” Laurids said. “It’s almost time for the potatoes to be hoed,” Boel-Erik said. “But now the nights are getting bright.” “You have a young wife, little man,” Laurids said. “And it’s surely smartest for you to use the nights for something else than hoeing potatoes.”

Anton was sent round to the smallholders in the heath who worked at the factory. Laurids wanted for them to hear the big news too. The three men walked home toward Alslev. Boel-Erik turned around many times and looked back. “It can become a really good farm if a fella can just get time to put the work into
the soil,” he said. But the others were not inclined to hear more about Erik’s moorland. They talked about how the strike had presumably wound up. Who’d won? Marinus felt they couldn’t expect to have achieved a wage increase because, after all, they were the little people. But it was good that they’d be going back to work again. “Yes, thanks and praise be to God,” Marinus said as solemnly as if he were at a burial.

The banquet hall at the inn was packed full: all the workers had come to the meeting. Cilius stood on the podium explaining what he’d managed to get clarified about the peace terms. It didn’t look so bad after all, and Cilius was greeted with applause and cheers. “You shouldn’t clap for me,” Cilius said. “Because it was you yourselves who held out. Is there otherwise anybody who wants the floor?” But no one had anything to say. So Cilius went at it again. “There’s one thing we can just as well talk about now that we’ve all gathered together,” he said. “All of us know that the grocer denied us credit. He was well within his rights to do that, we’d never deny that, but we’re also within our rights in starting our own general store. I propose that we start a consumer co-operative society store.”

Everything in its time. Now the strike was over and now it was Skifter’s turn. “Since the grocer denies us credit, surely he can’t have anything either against us going somewhere else with our trade. And in order for us to get clear on how such a co-operative store is set up, I’ve asked the co-op manager from Færgeby to come.” A tall withered man stood up at the podium and explained about shares and joint and several liability, about the co-operative movement and the consumers who’d be their own suppliers. With dry numbers he proved how much the grocers cost society and how much cheaper it was to get the goods through the co-operative enterprises. “That’s taking things pretty far,” Lars Seldomglad whispered to Børgesen. “But I definitely thought it was a gross mistake for Skifter to deny Cilius goods. Now Cilius’ll take the whole business from him.”

A committee was appointed to found the consumer cooperative, and then Cilius invited them for coffee. “You can also have pastries or schnapps, whatever each of you wants,” he said.
“And it won’t ever cost you a penny. Damn it, we sure could do with wetting our gills. I don’t think I’ve ever used my mouth as much as during this strike, and I otherwise certainly never spared myself in that regard.” There was a throng in the rooms at the inn. But Cilius had arranged it ahead of time with the innkeeper, and the coffee was ready to be served. “Where I got the money from?” Cilius said. “You don’t need to bother about that, boys, just you drink as long as there’s schnapps in the bottles. It’s the bigwigs who’re paying.”

The mood quickly soared. It had been months since people had last been at the inn. “Drink boys,” Cilius shouted. His head was boiling red from the coffee laced with schnapps. “Let the good times roll, and the schnapps is paid for. We deserve to take ourselves a drink.”

Cilius gulped it down and there were others who were polishing them off. But there were also temperate people, who were cautious with hard liquor. “Who’s going to pay,” Marinus said. “Where did Cilius get the money from?” “Don’t ever bother yourself about that,” Lars Seldomglad said. “What you don’t know won’t hurt you. And Cilius is a fellow who knows what he’s doing.” The young workers had gotten hold of the musician Frands, who struck up his accordion. Word was sent out into town for the girls, and some of the young wives also came. Inger came. Did you leave the children?” Boel-Erik asked. “Surely they can sleep by themselves, and otherwise you’ve certainly got the same right to take care of them.” And Inger shook a leg dancing. Mostly she danced with Niels and Marinus didn’t like that. Because of course everyone could see that Niels was all too preoccupied with Inger, who was a married woman.

More young people came and the hall was packed. Now it wasn’t just the young workers from the factory and their women, but hands from the farms and young farmworkers and fishermen. The floor rumbled with heavy boots and the tune from the accordion could barely make itself heard. Kresten Bossen had come to the meeting. Afterward, of course, he should have gone home, because Kresten Bossen wasn’t in the habit of sitting in an inn. But one single little coffee with schnapps presumably
couldn’t hurt. He had one, and he had more, and Kresten Bossen didn’t tolerate much. He became drunk. While sitting in the taproom he saw his daughter Andrea getting together with Iver. “What are you doing here?” he asked. “I’m just going to dance,” Andrea said. “But little Andrea, did I have to live to see you dancing,” Kresten Bossen complained. “If you’re sitting here drinking, then I’m certainly allowed to dance,” Andrea replied cheekily, and now Kresten Bossen realized that he’d set his child a bad example.

He got up and left the coffee laced with schnapps standing. “Come on home with me,” he said. “Why do I have to go home now,” Andrea said sullenly. “Everybody else is allowed to be here.” “Come on, Andrea,” Kresten Bossen said. “We know all right what dances and dancing lead to. It’s not good for a young woman to go to an inn.” “You know, I’ll certainly make sure she gets home all right,” Iver said. “I thank you for your kind intention,” Kresten Bossen said. “But Andrea’s coming with me now.”

They’d gone outside in the warm summer evening and Andrea began to cry. “Why am I never allowed to have fun with the rest of them?” she said. “I never have a happy moment.” “The time will certainly come when you’ll thank me for having taken you home,” Kresten Bossen said. “There’s many a girl who danced straight into hell’s fire.”

In the still evening they heard the noise from the inn and the faint sound of the accordion’s strains. The others were now having fun, while Andrea was being hustled home. But in November she wanted to go out into service; she wanted a position far away from home. Andrea had made up her mind.
The factory was in operation again. The rotary kilns revolved day and night like worms in eternal torment with a sea of fire inside them. The smoke rose like a plumed fan from the smokestacks, the machines boomed, and a fine layer of cement dust fell softly on roofs and trees. Ships came sailing in and docked at the wharf: they unloaded coal and loaded cement. Men came home from work exhausted, gray with cement dust, sooty with coal and oil. At night the factory gave off a glow for miles around. If you went outside the house, you saw the reflection of the fire, and it was good to know there was food to be had.

People shouted and gave orders; shiny with sweat, they stood and slung coal into a fiery kiln or hung like bank swallows under the white cliff and hacked pieces of chalk loose. A bucket-ladder dredger and barges were out in the fjord, a little factory in the deep blue. The steam hissed from the safety valves, heavy horses pulled dump cars to the slurry station. The cement mill thundered, the burned clinker glided on the conveyor to the clinker storage area. In the cement storage area they worked for dear life. Sacks and barrels had to be filled; now cement had to be sold. The factory had stood idle all too long.

The factory was operating; everywhere people were toiling for their daily bread. The workers on the cliff had flung off their jackets and shirts; their naked bodies were scorched by the sun and shone like copper. They toiled like the devil—they were working on a piece rate. And they were in need of money: money had to be found for many things now that the strike was over. In the cooper's workshop the coopers collected barrels that had to be filled with cement. In the sack-cleaning shop women sat and repaired sacks. The sunshine sparkled through the dirty windows. Olga sat there together with Line Seldomglad, Dagmar Horse, and a couple of other women. Olga had grown tired of spending her time in the house—she'd taken work at the factory.
Gossip passed among the women while they mended the sacks. Olga sat silently and listened. She learned who was sweethearts with whom and which girls were expecting. When she came from work, she went up to her room early and stared listlessly out the window. Such were Olga’s spirits: sometimes she was wild and had to fly and rush, sometimes she didn’t feel like doing anything, but sat with her hands in her lap.

The haze from the heath shimmered over the hills—it looked to be a plentiful year. The early summer had brought rain to the dry regions and the rye was promising. On the hot days there was an odor of putrid seaweed, and the cattle walked almost to their bellies in the meadow grass. The sweethearts whispered in the haystacks; the young people came home late at night. But Tora wished that her two oldest children had been among those who went out. Olga sat in her room in the evening, and Niels went about oddly restless. Now Boel-Erik was at home in the evening and he couldn’t visit Inger too often.

A letter came from Søren with big news. With splendid grades Søren had now become a university student and had done his parents credit. He was soon coming to visit, but they shouldn’t expect him to stay at home the whole vacation. Søren had been invited to visit one of his fellow students whose father was a district magistrate up in Vendsyssel.

Marinus first read the letter to Tora and afterward it was read aloud to the whole family. “May the Lord be praised that he brought it to a happy end,” Marinus said and had tears in his eyes. “He’s always been an awfully gifted lad, but there are many who squander their talents, and of course a lot of reading is necessary—we know that. And now we get to see him before he’s going to visit a district magistrate.”

“The rest of them could surely have passed their exams, too, if they’d been kept in school,” Tora said. “Søren has really always been good at learning,” Marinus said. “Now what I respect most is that people can earn their living by honest labor. Let’s wait and see what becomes of Søren,” Tora said. “The Lord decides in his wisdom which station in life we’ll be put in,” Marinus said. “Really, if anyone it’s teacher Ulriksen who decided
for Søren,” Tora said. “And really I hardly know if I’m that grateful to him for it.”

That’s the way it was every time Søren was mentioned. Tora was jealous, as it were, on behalf of her other children. She pretended as if she weren’t pleased that Søren had become a scholar, who was now going to visit a district magistrate’s house. “I was also once a guest at a district magistrate’s,” Marinus said. “I was a farmhand and drove a load of peat to him and was invited into his kitchen for coffee. While I was sitting there, he himself came through the kitchen and he nodded in an extraordinarily friendly way to me, though he otherwise had the reputation of being very crusty.”

About a week later Sofie and Little-Laurids were walking to meet Marinus, who was coming from work. Søren’s come! Søren’s come! they shouted from far off. Marinus really felt like starting to run, but of course it would never do to show how delighted he was over Søren’s coming home. “So, he’s really come,” he said and took the children by the hand.

Søren was sitting in the living room and Marinus shook his hand, with a little bit of deference, because Søren, after all, was now a university student. And there was also something dignified about Søren, as if he were already in a government post. He was squat and a bit stooping, as if he’d sat too much over his books. Søren had come with the steamer from Copenhagen to Færgeby; there was no cabin, but walking on deck on a warm summer night wasn’t so bad. He’d traveled together with a young man who was studying for the priesthood and was going to visit his uncle, the large farmer at Holle Estate. “That’s where I applied for a job as herdsman,” Marinus said. “I didn’t get the position, but the farmer was such a very nice man. And now his nephew was going to be a clergyman. So you see.” And Søren explained that after graduation it was the young man’s intention to go to India as a missionary.

In Søren’s honor Tora had set the table in the living room—otherwise they ate in the kitchen. “That’s an odd way you’re eating,” Anton said, and Søren informed them that in the city you didn’t touch the food with your hands, but cut your
open-faced sandwich in pieces with knife and fork. "You should be happy you don’t have to use your hands to get anything done—I mean, they’re as thin as a girl’s," Anton said. "Søren also has to work hard with his brain," Marinus said. "Now you watch your mouth, Anton, some day you’re going to get in trouble with your big mouth."

Marinus couldn’t get to know enough about everything Søren had learned. "Excuse me, little Søren, now have you also studied Latin?" he asked. Yes, Søren had learned a little Latin, and if it could be arranged so he could keep being a student, then he would indeed come to learn more of that learned tongue. "I’ve heard that the learned folk have to debate with one another only in Latin or Greek," Marinus said. "I don’t understand how they can keep it all straight in their heads." But that wasn’t really true. The students spoke Danish among themselves just like other people.

There was a question Marinus had been preoccupied with from the first moment, and now he spat it out: "So what do you think you want to be, Søren, which road will you take? It seems to me it would be lovely if you could become a clergyman." Marinus’s face was earnest and he looked at his son in suspense. That was a thought he’d brooded over during the long nights. If Søren became a clergyman, he’d get a parsonage, and then it was certainly possible that he could offer his own father the position of managing the parsonage’s farming. Marinus had a dream about getting a plow in his hand again and once more moving about in the cozy semi-darkness of the stable. "No, I don’t want to be a clergyman," Søren said. "I mean, I don’t know at all whether I can keep studying at the university; it depends on money matters, but a clergyman—in any event that’s one thing I’ll never be." Marinus sighed quietly. It was probably not intended for him to become a farmer again.

Next day Søren visited Ulriksen. The teacher had a cold and was sitting with a woolen blanket around his legs and a steaming glass of elderberry syrup in front of him. But he wasn’t so sick that he couldn’t smoke tobacco. The smoke rose in dense clouds around him. "Sit down, learned Søren, and get yourself a glass
of port,” he said, but Søren neither smoked nor drank. Ulriksen grimaced—his pipe was acidic. “A person has to have some vices—otherwise he’ll become inhuman,” he said. “The morally perfect person of course has to resemble a skeleton, a polished skeleton. I’ll confide one thing to you, Søren: now that I’ve become old and will soon depart, I’m damned annoyed that I don’t have more and hotter sins on my conscience. By god, I can risk Our Lord’s putting me at a lectern and letting me teach little angels morals. But as far as tobacco is concerned, I haven’t had my pipe out of my mouth in the last forty years, except when there was a burial or an episcopal visitation. So what have you been thinking of studying if we can get the money?”

“I’m most inclined to something pedagogical,” Søren said. “Excellent, my boy,” Ulriksen said. “Out among the people with the youngsters who are good for something. I’d recommend to you Ranum, my old teacher’s college.” But that wasn’t what Søren had been thinking about. Blushing, he stammered that if anything it was the study of philology he’d meant. He wanted to be a high school teacher and above all go in for an academic career.

“That’s a damn rotten idea, Søren,” Ulriksen said. “Your father’s a day laborer, your mother a splendid woman, your brothers are unskilled laborers, you have the whole people’s destiny with you as your marching kit. What do you mean by sitting and cramming lessons with better people’s children. The rich will definitely get their information, but how will the little people get their share of the knowledge of the times?”

Ulriksen had gotten excited, he hobbled around in the living room, while he held the blanket around himself with his broad, hairy hand. “Ask your father whether he ever got a rap from the overseer’s stick back when he was a farmhand,” he said. “Whether he didn’t have to stand hat in hand and let himself be reprimanded by the lord of the manor. Can’t you feel the whistling of the estate bailiff’s whip? We don’t need stupid academics, because we have enough of them, but people who’ve seen a glimpse of the free, open sky that Grundtvig beheld. The people’s freedom, my son, that’s what you should be fighting for.
The bread of life and the bread of the spirit for every living person on earth, that’s the program of progress—and they can call it socialism as much as they want.”

Søren stood there, an overworked village boy sent to the university, with his stiff collar, which still made his neck feel uncomfortable, and thick clumsy shoes. He had slaved his way to a degree and had found good friends from nice homes where they respected his iron discipline. He’d been a guest in living rooms where there was shiny furniture, refined manners, and pretty, carefree girls. And in two weeks he’d be a guest at a district magistrate’s house. Søren didn’t intend to let his future be determined by an old Grundtvigian school teacher.

“Of course people have different talents,” he said. “I don’t think I could cope with work to enlighten the general public.” It came with a droll earnestness and Ulriksen smiled. “Yes, yes, you’re young and I’m old, and you have to find your own path. You’ve always had a head for books, you have a good memory. But it’s not grades that count, little Søren, but character.”

Ulriksen hobbled over to the tobacco table and filled his pipe while he shot a glance over at Søren. Was that Tora’s boy? But what had been begun had to be carried through. “Well, don’t be discouraged, it’ll work out,” he said. “For the time being a solution will be found so you can continue your studies. Pastor Gamst is willing and I’ll contribute what I can. But promise me this, Søren, don’t forget where you come from when you keep company with the big shots.”

Søren went on to the parsonage. He was a little afraid of the minister, who, after all, was in the Inner Mission. But Pastor Gamst seemed not to be interested in Søren’s salvation; he trotted out neither admonitions nor scriptural passages. He spoke calmly and gently as an educated man, and Søren looked at the many books in his study. That’s the way he wanted to have it some day. He’d certainly attain erudition and a good position.

Pastor Gamst didn’t have time for long conversations: a bazaar was to be held in the parsonage for the benefit of the Mission house. Kristine’s baking could be smelled in all the rooms; it was as if the whole parish were going to be fed. But the min-
ister certainly knew that not many came there from the parish. Instead it was the friends from Færgeby who attended to buy the gifts of love they themselves had donated, drink coffee, and sing hymns. Whether it was all right to hold the bazaar on a Sunday had been much discussed. But Martin Thomsen had maintained that Sunday trade was, after all, Sunday trade and a sinful deed, even if it took place in a parsonage with a god-fearing purpose. So it was decided to hold the bazaar on a Saturday.

On Saturday the minister had a good mind to pretend that he was sick and to shut himself up in his bedroom. By late in the afternoon the yard was full of cars and wagons. In the big garden room, which was used only for meetings of the Pious, booths had been set up where the Inner Mission women from Færgeby sold doilies and sofa cushions, devout pictures and framed scriptural passages. There was tombola and serving of lemonade, but the coffee table, which was permanently standing ready in the dining room, was gratis. It was on Pastor Gamst.

There was a throng of people in the garden room, but there wasn’t any merriment. Black-clad women went from booth to booth inspecting the fine things, but there weren’t many who had money to buy with. All heads turned toward the door: a lady in an elegant cape strode in. “Who’s she?” the minister asked. “That’s attorney Schjött’s wife,” the man standing next to him whispered, and now Pastor Gamst recognized Mrs. Marja. “She’s been in the Mission house in Færgeby a couple of times,” a woman whispered. “And she cried during the missionary’s talk, but she probably hasn’t overcome the world yet.”

Mrs. Marja strode through the crowd with genial nods in all directions and went over to Pastor Gamst. “You’re not angry because I came, are you?” she said. “I read the advertisement about the bazaar and I so much wanted to be allowed to be there too.” “You’re welcome, madam,” the minister said. “There’s something endearing about these earnest people,” Mrs. Marja chirped softly. “I admire them because they have a philosophy of life. They are striving for something greater than money, money, and money once again. But I have to buy, I have to shop and play tombola—that’s why I came.”
The attorney's wife flitted from one booth to the next and bought cushions and doilies. Her manner was smiling and modest, and none of the women could have anything to object to about her, even though she certainly could have dressed a bit less stylishly on such an occasion. Mrs. Marja bought almost half of the tombola tickets, and people had to help her carry purchases and prizes out to the car. She didn't want to drink coffee, didn't want to consume the least bit—she had to go home right away. "But won't you visit us if you come to Færgeby one day, Pastor Gamst," she said. "After all, I too have a soul."

"That's a strange womanfolk," Martin Thomsen said. "I mean, a fella isn't any expert on that kind. But she truly spent a lot of money. If she hadn't come, there wouldn't have been a large surplus." The minister was happy when the last bazaar visitor was out the door.

Søren had brought his books home and he'd set up for himself a whole study in the room he shared with Niels and Anton. Anton was a big, rough, strapping fellow and the girls liked him. And now he wanted to find out about what experience Søren had had with womenfolk in the big city. But it wasn't much. On the other hand, Niels was able to tell about back when he was a soldier in Viborg. "How are the girls in Copenhagen?" Anton asked. "I suppose their complexion is kind of somewhat more delicate, isn't it?" But Søren turned sulky—that's not the kind of thing he'd studied with the minister's and schoolmaster's money. "If only it were me," Anton said. "I'd definitely make sure to have three or four sweethearts. Here a fella can't even have two without them being on the verge of tearing his eyes out."

No, Søren was a solemn person; he had something other than flirting in his head. While Karl and Anton gallivanted off in the bright summer evening to trysts with the girls, Søren sat at home and studied his books. "I can't understand how you can keep it in your head," Marinus said. "And even so people aren't nearly so well read as they were in the old days." And when Søren claimed that human knowledge surely had progressed, Marinus told a story his grandfather had witnessed in his youth. Mari-
nus’s grandfather served at a minister’s on the other side of the fjord, and one time one of the farmhands got mad at the minister. One evening, when the minister had been out administering the sacraments to a sick person and came home on foot, the farmhand met him outside the cemetery. He’d put a sheet over his head and pretended he was a ghost. But he came to a bad end: the minister began to exorcise and as the farmhand had sunk up to his waist, he shouted in his distress who he was. But the minister said: “Now it’s no use, Ajs, you have to go down there!” And the farmhand was conjured into the black earth, and a spot can still be seen by the cemetery levee where grass can’t grow. That’s the daring farmhand’s grave, that’s where he was conjured into the soil.

“That’s just superstition,” Søren said, but Marinus shook his head: much old wisdom had been forgotten in the modern age.

Olga had listened to the story and she laughed. “It’s strange you’d trot out that kind of nonsense, father,” she said. “That’s the kind of thing nobody believes in our day.” But Marinus got really angry with his clever children: “Neither you nor I know what in it is true or false,” he said. “But I really believe that after death we’re allowed to atone for every offense we commit, and you’re not going to talk me out of that.” Olga was silent, she breathed deeply, like a sigh, and her gaze was preoccupied; she was suddenly far away. “We have to atone before we gain peace,” Marinus said. “If people remembered that, perhaps they’d live differently. But I’m not complaining that the black magic’s been forgotten because it wasn’t good for anybody. My mother’s uncle could knock a person’s eye out, and he screamed in the most terrible torment on his deathbed. There he repented all the damage he’d caused.”

The lamp was shining in the living room, and if you went outdoors, you could see the gleam from the factory and hear the heavy boom of the machines. But Marinus had forgotten that he was a worker at a factory. He was telling stories from the old times, about killers who didn’t find peace in their graves, about unbaptized children who cried in the cemeteries in the dark nights. Pale, Olga got up to go. “I’m not frightening you, am I,
Olga?” asked Marinus, who’d become aware of her paleness. “It’s so ghastly,” Olga said. “Never you mind,” Marinus said. “Because we know that if we just stick to our baptismal covenant, evil will not gain the upper hand.” Olga didn’t answer; she went up to her room.

And now Marinus felt like talking to his enlightened son from the heart. “It seems to me something is wrong with Olga,” he said. “I don’t know if it might help if you had a word with her. She’s been odd since she came home from Funen. Sometimes she’s a complete fool and flirts with menfolk, both the married and the unmarried ones. And sometimes she falls into melancholy and is so totally depressed. I don’t know—are you a good judge of womenfolk, little Søren?”

But in this respect Søren couldn’t advise his father. “It’s not easy for me to say anything,” he said. “After all, I haven’t seen much of Olga for many years. But presumably she’s in love.” “Surely no other explanation is possible,” Marinus admitted. “It’s really not easy to have children, little Søren. The girls have their love affairs, which they won’t tell about, and the lads either want to drink or fight. But you’ll really never hear me complaining—my children have never caused me grief.”

Then the day came when Søren had to leave to visit the district magistrate’s son in Vendsyssel, and from there he was going to travel to Copenhagen to go on at the university. Just as they were parting, Marinus slipped Søren a ten-crown bill. “Don’t mention it,” he said. “Because we don’t have a lot of money here after the strike. But you can’t be without money when you’re going out among the bigwigs. I don’t want you to be put to shame when you’re out staying with people.”
One evening Tora went into Olga’s room. Her daughter was lying across the bed with her head in the pillows and crying. “But child, are you sick?” Tora asked, but it was nothing, Olga whispered, just as long as she was allowed to be left in peace. Tora sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked her gingerly across her shoulders. Olga’s crying became deeper; it was as if she couldn’t get the tears out. “You better talk about it,” Tora said. “It’s always a relief to talk to another person who wishes you well.” Olga’s shoulders trembled, as if she were having a convulsion. “You shouldn’t grieve even if somebody’s been unfaithful to you,” Tora said. “There are plenty of menfolk in the world. But the ones who leave us for the grave, they don’t return. The grief love causes passes when the next one comes, but there’s no cure for death. You should think about that, little Olga.”

Olga got up in the bed and stared with bewildered eyes at her mother. “It was surely something I dreamt,” she said. “I often have such unpleasant dreams at night.” “But I mean, you haven’t sleep at all, you haven’t been out of your clothes, child,” Tora said. “And you’ve been so strange ever since you came home in the spring. I don’t recognize you. At first I was afraid you were going to have a child, but now I definitely understand, it must’ve been a man who was unfaithful to you.” “Oh, if only it weren’t something else,” Olga whispered, and now Tora took fright.

“Olga, Olga, what have you done,” she said and shook her daughter. “Whatever it is, you have to say it, otherwise you’ll never be at peace.” Olga’s body became rigid, and she sank back into the bed with a scream. Niels and Marinus came stomping up the stairs and tore open the door. “What’s going on, has there been an accident?” Marinus shouted. “It’s Olga, she’s sick, but I’ll definitely call if it’s necessary,” Tora said. “Is she going to have a child,” Marinus asked, horrified. “Won’t you both please
go,” Tora said. “If she were giving birth, she certainly wouldn’t be needing two menfolk standing by her bed.”

The men left and Tora lifted her daughter up and held her in her arms. “What’s tormenting you—are you with child after all?” she asked. “Whatever we have to go through, we have to go through, and we can just as well use our common sense.” “No, I’m not pregnant,” Olga said. “But you mustn’t ask me any more, mother. I also want to get away from here. I don’t care to work at the factory—I want to go out and get a position as a servant.” Nervously, Olga began talking about her wanting perhaps to go to Copenhagen as a maid, so she could also be with Søren once in a while and look after his clothes. Tora listened to her for a while and then went down to the kitchen. “I’ll sleep with Olga tonight,” she said. “She’s so agitated.” “It would really be best if I took my bike and fetched the doctor,” Niels said, but Tora ignored the suggestion. “You people just go to bed now; I’ll stay with Olga till she calms down.”

Olga lay and wept quietly, and Tora got her clothes off. Then she got undressed in the dark and lay down in the bed next to her daughter. “Back when I was young, I also had grief,” she said. “I was fond of somebody, but he was above my station, and he took another even though it was me he cared for. I never thought I’d get over it, but now I know it wasn’t worth caring about. I married Marinus and learned not to take life for more than it is. Your father has always been soft-hearted and easily frightened, and if I hadn’t put up a fight, we’d have been completely wretched. But I certainly know how it can singe a person’s heart; I haven’t forgotten my youth.”

“Oh, what do I care if a man wants me or not,” Olga whispered. “I wish I were dead. I’ve often made up my mind to jump in the fjord. But what if it’s true that you’d be eternally damned.” Tora took her hand and lay with it in hers. “I don’t believe in any damnation,” she said. “But I know that we have to fight the good fight no matter how hard it is.” “I had a child on Funen,” Olga said, and Tora noticed how she was shaking over her whole body. “It was with the husband on the farm where I last served.”
Tora lay silent, but she held her daughter’s hand firmly, and she sensed how Olga was squeezing her hand as if it were the only thing in the world she had to hold on to. “He must be a bad person,” she said. “That he could bring himself to seduce a poor girl who was serving on his farm. But there are many girls who’ve gotten into trouble before you. I wish you’d been spared, little Olga, but you’ve got to straighten your back and take what comes. If you’ve had a child, you’ll also have to care for it. You have to go over there where you put it out to nurse and bring it home.”

“The child died,” Olga said.

Tora sensed that her whole body turned cold; she could barely get the words out.

“Did you kill child?” she whispered.

“Nobody discovered I was with child,” Olga said. “I laced myself up tight . . . but it wasn’t my intention . . . I was just so ashamed to go home.”

“And so you gave birth in secret?” Tora asked.

“It came suddenly one night,” Olga said and recounted how she’d given birth to the child without daring to scream so no one would hear her. And when she regained consciousness after the pain and exhaustion, the child was lying in her bed.

“Was it stillborn, or . . .” Tora asked.

“It wasn’t stillborn,” Olga said. “It made a sound, and I was afraid it would scream. So I put my hand on its mouth. I wasn’t in my right mind, I was sick and desperate . . . oh, I was totally beside myself.”

Tora lay totally quiet and listened to her daughter’s confession. She’d given life to many children and every new life had been a new joy in the world for her even though she’d been worried about how to support them all. Tora started crying. It wasn’t out of compassion with Olga; she wasn’t thinking about her at all now. She saw before her the infant child, the blue-red face with big, open eyes, the little pliant body. And Olga had put her hand on its mouth and killed it. That was the welcome the new creature had received in the world. Suddenly she asked. “Was it a boy.” “No, it was probably a girl,” Olga wept. “I
don’t know it totally for certain. I didn’t dare look at it... afterward.”

Tora didn’t ask anything else, but now Olga had to speak. She recounted how she’d wiped out the traces of the birth. Perhaps the mistress of the house had probably had a suspicion, but she acted as if she believed Olga’s explanation—that she’d had profuse menstrual bleeding at night. The woman had mentioned that it was surely best to send for the doctor, but Olga claimed that that’s the way things were with her once in a while, and that it didn’t mean anything. “I’m sure she knew all about it,” Olga said. “She didn’t at all dare look at me; it was as if she were afraid, but presumably she didn’t want her husband to get mixed up in anything. I laid in bed for about a week, then I requested permission to leave, and that went easily enough. She never said a word against it. But I’ll never find peace; every hour of the day I dread that it’ll be discovered.”

Tora got out of bed; she couldn’t bear lying there any more. She sat down next to the half-open window. It was a cool summer night and there was a sweet scent of lilacs from the garden. There was a faint rustling out there, as if the world couldn’t sleep and were just waiting for it to become day. In the east there was already a fine, golden dawn, although it was many hours before the sun would rise. Tora’s thoughts were with Little-Vera’s grave in Alslev cemetery. Vera had been called away in her innocent childhood; she’d been spared all the world’s strife, and now she lay in her grave, which was decorated with boxwood and pansies, and on a marble stone it read: “Sleep sweetly, little Vera, till we meet again.” Little Vera was the one child of hers who’d never again cause her grief.

And suddenly it dawned on her: “Where did you dispose of the child?” she asked. Olga hesitated a little, as if she had to collect her strength to answer. “I hid it in a box under the bed, and several nights later I buried it... There was a pitchfork in the dunghill... and I buried it. And now I’m afraid they’ll find it when they spread dung in the fall.”

Olga had turned around onto her back, and the down quilt had slid off her. Tora saw her plump arms, her ample bosom.
That's where the child she'd killed ought to have been lying. Tora felt like getting up, going over to the bed, and beating her daughter. Because she certainly understood that it wasn't grief about the evil deed that gnawed at Olga, but the fear of its coming to light.

"What am I going to do, mother?" Olga whimpered. "I've been thinking that if I went to America, then, you know, I'd be gone if it was discovered. Every day I'm in such torment. When I hear somebody knock on the door, I immediately think: Now they found it and now the police are coming for you."

"You'll never find peace till you manage to atone for your sin," Tora said. "But I don't want to go to jail," Olga wept. "I wasn't in my right mind, I was sick, I didn't know what I was doing." Tora sat down next to the bed and stroked Olga's hair. But she felt no compassion for her daughter, only a hard, dull anger, which she didn't dare voice. So what if Olga had brought a child home with her, even though she'd begotten it by fornication with a married man. Tora had broad shoulders and she could've endured it. But she'd never forgive Olga for the way she'd dealt with her child, who was now lying in a dunghill on Funen.

Finally Olga fell into a deep sleep, and Tora stole into the bedroom and went to bed. Next to her she heard Marinus's steady breathing. Things would have to go badly for Marinus not to get his night's sleep. She'd lain awake many, many nights in the old days and shuddered at how they'd all get food. But she'd never felt such anxiety as now.
The next day Olga lay there apathetically. Tora gave her food and talked to her as if nothing had happened. Before he went to work, Marinus asked how things were, and Tora explained that they weren’t good, but that it was probably not necessary to fetch the doctor. It was probably not a physical illness Olga was suffering from. Marinus saw from Tora’s expressions that it was serious. And it didn’t surprise him. For many years now Marinus had been living in favorable circumstances. He’d often thought that troubles would of course have to come. It wasn’t likely that fate would permit him to be without adversity for the rest of his days.

In the afternoon, after school, Tora put on her best dress; it was her intention to seek advice from Ulriksen. If anyone could help, he’d be the one. Ulriksen was walking bare-headed in his garden working. “I’d like to ask you for advice, Ulriksen, if you have a moment,” Tora said. “You’re looking so fine as if you were going to communion, Tora,” Ulriksen joked. “Now I’ll tell the housekeeper to make coffee.” “Thanks, I won’t be having any coffee,” Tora said. “If I could be permitted to speak to you in private.” Astonished, Ulriksen stole a glance at Tora. Tora was not in the habit of being so mild-mannered. She must be having trouble.

He invited her in and got her seated. “So what’s the matter, Tora?” he went straight to the point. “Olga got in trouble on Funen after she slipped out of your sister’s care,” Tora said and recounted Olga’s sinful love and how she’d killed her child. Ulriksen’s ruddy face suddenly turned old with worry. He sat and shook his head sadly. “I’d rather she were dead,” Tora said. “You dread the shame that will befall her?” Ulriksen said. “No, I’m thinking about the fact that she suffocated the child she herself gave birth to.” Ulriksen sat and stared ahead, and then he went over to the bookshelf and took out a hymnbook. “If we’re happy, we sing, and if grief strikes, we should also seek comfort.
in song," he said. "Now let the two of us sing together, Tora."
And in his deep, worn-out voice he struck up a hymn by Grundtvig. Tora accompanied him in a trembling voice.

God's purpose is in every storm,
however wild it is;
each flood and every raging fire
a servant is of His.

And when the world is casting lots
for honour, goods, and life,
God in His hand the outcome holds
with loving-kindness rife.

If you believe that God does love
what He from dust has made,
then in His Spirit rest and work
and never be afraid.

"Now the storm is over you, Tora," he said and put the hymnbook back on its shelf. "God's purpose is in every storm, however wild it is, each flood and every raging fire a servant is of His. You have riches in your children, and your grief will also become your wealth. I'm a lonely old man, who has neither sorrows nor joys. That makes the heart cold and barren. If God had loved me, he would have sent me a great sorrow." "It's Olga I'm thinking of," Tora said. "How's she going to keep living with that offense on her conscience." "Humans can live with much on their conscience," Ulriksen said. "It's best if I go talk to the girl. But you go ahead, there's plenty of time to ask what happened."

Ulriksen came right after Tora had come home. Together they went up to Olga, who, frightened, turned her face, which was red-eyed from weeping, toward the wall. "Your mother has told me everything," Ulriksen said. "That was a frightful deed, Olga, and we know you well enough to know that you wouldn't have done it if you'd been in your right mind. I didn't come to preach about what can't be changed, but so we can decide what
we’re going to do.” “Can’t I go to America?” Olga asked. “No
matter where you are in the world, you’ll discover you can’t live
with the deed on your conscience,” Ulriksen said. “No, Olga,
you have to go to the authorities and confess, and today rather
than tomorrow.”

“Oh no, oh no, I’d rather die,” Olga sobbed. “Death doesn’t
bring any solace, if what we learned as children otherwise has
any validity,” Ulriksen said. “But if you take your punishment
with a repentant heart, then peace will come to you.”

Olga threw herself about in the bed and wailed like a sick
animal. Tora took her hard by the arm and shook her. “Now
you’re going to pull yourself together,” she said. “You made
your bed, now sleep in it. If you’d brought the child, I’d never
have said a harsh word to you. We know that it’s not always the
worst girls who get in trouble. But if you killed your child, like
a sow devours its piglets, you’ll also have to take your punish­
ment. Those are hard words, little Olga, but I want it that way so
I can respect my own daughter.” Olga remained mute. “It has
to happen, poor child,” Ulriksen said mournfully. “And let’s do
it today before the men come from work. It’s best to get it over
with quickly.” “If I don’t turn myself in, will you?” Olga asked.
“No, I can’t be expected to report my own daughter,” Tora said.
“But I’ll never forgive you for your deed. I’ll regret the day I
gave birth to you.”

It was a difficult time when Tora helped Olga into her
clothes and combed her hair. It felt like back when she washed
little Vera for the last time and dressed her for her final repose.
They didn’t talk to each other, but Tora touched her daughter so
gently every contact was a mournful caress. Down in the living
room she heard Ulriksen’s heavy, tired steps. Then they were
ready for the rough trip, and it was about the time the fjord
steamer would be leaving for Færgeby. “We have to go,” Tora
said. “We have to leave, little Olga.” She took Olga by the hand
and led her through the house. Olga looked around as if she
were leaving forever. “You’ll come back, Olga, I know, you’ll
come back.” “Maybe I’ll be sentenced to death because I killed
my child,” Olga said. “No, you’ll return, Olga,” Tora said, and
cried.

It was a calm, mild afternoon. The steamer hurried off into the winding navigation channel, now near land, now out into the small broads. It went close to the heathery knolls and marshy meadows where the cows were grazing. The shore birds ran chirping along the shore, a fishing boat with red sails rocked in the steamer’s wake. Olga sat slumped between Ulriksen and Tora on a bench on deck. It looked as though she were sleeping. Tora held her hand firmly in hers. It was as if Olga had once again become a little girl who’d had an affliction and, exhausted, had fallen asleep. “Little Olga,” Tora whispered ponderously to herself. That things should end this way with pretty, spirited Olga. But it was fortunate that Ulriksen was now standing at Tora’s side. “Did I raise her badly,” Tora thought. “Didn’t I take her strictly enough in hand? Oh, anything but that—if she just hadn’t killed her child.”

The steamer docked at Færgeby harbor and they took Olga by the arm and led her ashore. It was as if she were no longer conscious. She just let it happen, she followed, with feet which just moved mechanically, and eyes which were open, but didn’t see. “Don’t be afraid, little Olga,” Tora whispered. “It’s best for it to happen this way. And you’ll come back and find peace. I know you’ll come back.” A clerk received them at the judicial district office. The district magistrate wasn’t available—the office hours were over.

“Please tell him that we have to speak to him,” Ulriksen said. “It’s a matter of life and death.” The clerk hesitated. “I’m not much inclined to disturb the district magistrate,” he said. “He’s in the habit of resting at this time. But I can fetch the head clerk. He’s in the habit of drinking his afternoon tea over at the hotel.” “We have to talk to the district magistrate himself,” Ulriksen said. “If he has a post, he also has to attend to it. Would you get him up out of his sleep this instant. This is serious.”

The clerk thought it over for a bit—he wasn’t pleased about the situation. “Can’t you say what this is about?” he asked. Ulriksen tapped his fingers on the counter and didn’t answer. The clerk left and a few minutes later the district magistrate came.
He was heavy and squat with a short neck and small, fierce, red-rimmed eyes. He approached the counter, slowly and menacingly, like a bull with its horns lowered.

"Who are you?" he asked brusquely. "Schoolteacher Ulriksen from Alslev," Ulriksen replied in the same brusque tone. "We came to . . . ." "You must have come in an extremely urgent matter," the district magistrate interrupted. "It's not altogether customary to literally order me down here. What's on your mind, my good man, teacher Ulriksen?" "You'll find out how urgent our business is, my good man, district magistrate Arelius," Ulriksen said in a rage. "I've come with this young girl and her mother to report that she bore a child clandestinely and killed her child in delirium." "When?" the district magistrate asked. "In March, over on Funen," Ulriksen said. "It would have been more proper for you to approach the local parish sheriff and let him undertake what's necessary. I find it quite improper for you to demand that I be personally sent for when it's not a matter of a crime with fresh tracks."

The veins swelled on Ulriksen's forehead, and he thumped his clenched fist against the counter. "This won't do, damn it, district magistrate," he said. "You're the authorities, and it's your damn duty to hear what we want to say." "Are you banging the table right in my face," the district magistrate said, overwhelmed. "This is coming very close to insulting a public official while on duty, and that could become an expensive business for you." "Is it also a crime to try to get a public official to begin his duties," Ulriksen said. "But I'm going to go home right now and write a complaint about you to the government ministry. Surely there must be someone over the district magistrate in Færøgeby." "I'll be damned if that isn't impudence that I'm supposed to let myself be taken to task by a deacon," the district magistrate shouted. "The only thing I'm demanding is to get you to be on duty," Ulriksen shouted. "I'll be damned if I'm going to put up with this any more," the district magistrate thundered. "If you don't hold your tongue this minute, I'll have you arrested."

Tora had pulled Olga over to a bench standing next to the
door. She sat quietly and patted Olga's hand, while the men quarreled. The clerk had stolen out the door and run across the market square into the hotel. The head clerk was sitting there with company and playing dice for his afternoon toddy. "You have to hurry over, Harhoff, the old man is about to arrest a school teacher," the clerk whispered. "Who the hell woke him?" the head clerk asked, but he got up and went along. He didn't bat an eyelash when he saw the two men standing face to face each on his side of the counter, both hotheads flushed. "What's going on here, district magistrate, sir?" he asked. "You might well ask about that," the district magistrate said. "The deacon from Alslev comes here and is rude to me in my own office. But now that we've had a deacon as prime minister, these guys think that they can push royal officials around as they wish. But damn it, I demand that my office be respected. This is a law office and not a small huckster's shop." "Now I'll deal with this matter, district magistrate, sir," head clerk Harhoff said and looked stiffly at his superior. The district magistrate, with his eyes menacingly pointed at Ulriksen, withdrew out the door. They heard his heavy steps up the stairs.

"Hello, Mr. Ulriksen," the head clerk said and shook hands. "Well, you know the old man and I needn't say any more. A good-hearted person at bottom." "In fact, if I had my druthers, I'd spank his bottom," Ulriksen said, seething with anger. "Indeed," the head clerk laughed. "But to whomever God gives a government post he also gives a head clerk. You should've sent for me right away."

And with a smile and little witticisms the head clerk calmed Ulriksen down. A policeman was sent for and took down a report. The head clerk dictated the counts of the case to him. Concealment of birth and infanticide in March on Funen. It came in small, short, hard juridical sentences. The case shall be instituted in the competent jurisdiction. Jespersen, run over to the keeper of the local jail and tell him to prepare a cell for the prisoner. The constitutionally guaranteed arraignment before a magistrate will be held tomorrow. The head clerk cast a glance at the child murderess on the bench. Incidentally she looked
damned good. Yeah, these damned girls.

"How much do you think . . . how many years . . ." Ulriksen said, and his lips quivered. "The fact that the party charged with the crime turned herself in will be of significance," the head clerk said. "But we’re not the ones who’ll pass sentence. The case will be instituted on Funen. We hope for the best, Mr. Ulriksen, after all she was hardly entirely herself." The policeman slowly approached the bench where Tora and Olga were sitting. "Goodbye Olga," Tora said, and now you could see that she was practically an old woman. "Goodbye Olga, my little girl. . . ."

Tora and Ulriksen silently walked down the street, but suddenly Ulriksen stopped and banged his stick hard on the bumpy cobblestone. "What do the big shots care about the misfortune of us common people," he said. "We have to make inquiries concerning our troubles during office hours. A report is written and then the authorities go back to their afternoon nap or their tea and rum." "Do you think I’ll be allowed to visit her?" Tora asked. "I understood that she’d be sent to Funen," Ulriksen said. "It’s going to be rough on Marinus," Tora said. "Marinus always wants to yield to fate," Ulriksen said. "There’s no rebellion in Marinus, the meek man. It was us two who should’ve danced together, Tora. It wouldn’t have been easy for others to take liberties with us."

In the midst of her deep grief Tora felt a warmth in her heart. "We’d probably have been too uncompromising, the two of us," she said. "We would’ve been the beams that could support a house," Ulriksen said. "We would’ve been able to take the hard times that pass slowly." And Ulriksen hummed: "As the days grow longer, the winter grows stronger, the winter grows stronger and that’s dire! Hard times pass slowly, pass slowly, that’s their way." He took Tora very tenderly by the hand and said: "Tora, it’s a shame we have to die soon."

Ulriksen was right—Marinus did bow to the will of fate. "May the Lord preserve the poor child," he said, and his face was so wretched that it singed Tora’s heart. "But I suppose it had to be. We’ve given our children a good upbringing, I reckon, and I’d never have expected that Olga would disgrace us.
It’ll be bad if Søren finds out about it. It’s not possible, is it, that the district magistrate would throw him out of his house?” Tora didn’t think so, and besides, after all, they didn’t have to write Søren about Olga’s misfortune till he was back at his studies in Copenhagen.

Many times that summer Tora went to the cemetry and sat down beside little Vera’s grave. She thought about the child who’d had such a brief life on Funen. Now it, too, would surely be laid to rest in a Christian manner, but no one would plant flowers on its grave.
It was in the middle of the harvest, and it was a good crop. The clattering of the reaper could be heard from the fields, swinging cartloads of grain were driven into the barn, but the workers hardly saw it. The factory was in full swing. The workers went to and from the factory, day shift and night shift, people who for generations had had their home here, and others who'd moved here. Every man had his place in the line, his work day after day. Conveyor belts glided along with burned clinker, with sacks, with coal. The factory hummed as if with a tremendous latent energy. Seamen went ashore from the cement barges and steamers and danced in the bright summer evenings with the town’s girls at the inn. It happened that things ended up in a brawl, the foreign sailors were too wild with the girls, and the young workers gave them a thrashing. At night you could hear the tramping of heavy boots and curses and dull blows.

Tremendous thunderstorms moved along the fjord. The lightning crackled around the tall factory smokestacks, downpours knocked down large pieces of the face of the cliff. From the hills you could see fires like a small, steady flame far inland. But the thunderstorm brought coolness, and it was easier to work than in the broiling heat. The rain kept down the cement dust, which was a curse for people.

People talked about Olga’s misfortune—it couldn’t be hidden of course. The men didn’t say much—mostly they listened. But the women had sympathy for Olga. Of course, it must’ve been a shameless person who’d seduced her despite being a married man who was settled down. It would serve him right to be sitting behind bars together with Olga. But that’s the way it’s always been. The man had the pleasure and the weak woman had to bear the risk. Now there was Magda. She melted into tears when she heard about Olga’s fate. She was visiting Tora, but there wasn’t much talk about Olga; it was as if Magda’s words got stuck in her throat when she was about to mention
Olga’s name. Instead she talked about Iver, who surely wasn’t the best company, either for Ida or her innocent daughter. Magda didn’t feel that Kresten Bossen could defend taking such a lecher into his house when he had womenfolk to watch over.

“I surely know that I offended with him; I mean, I confided in you, Tora,” Magda said. “But he really does have a strange power over womenfolk. He also certainly managed to seduce Frederikke. Still, she had Cilius, and what do I have? I mean, Andres can’t even hold his water.” And in the midst of her grief Tora couldn’t help smiling, because there was of course no denying that Magda had a hard life.

But when Magda got together with the other women, she spoke her mind about Olga point blank. “If you want to know what I think, she should be sentenced to sit in the penitentiary for life,” Magda said. “It would’ve been better if Tora had listened to good advice in time. I warned her, back when Olga was having an affair with the engineer. I said to Tora: watch out for your daughter because she’s too loose, but Tora never wanted to listen. And when she came from Funen, I sure had a feeling something had gone wrong with her.” “Would you please stop your blathering,” Line Seldomglad said. “First put your own house in order.” “You can say what you will,” Magda said. “Olga was, you know, the loose kind, and the pitcher goes to the well till it comes home broken. If you want to know my opinion of Olga, I call her a whore.”

A letter came from Søren, who’d received the bad tidings in Copenhagen. He was very angry about what Olga had done. Fortunately, the matter, of course, hadn’t even gotten into the capital’s newspapers, Søren wrote, otherwise it could certainly do him harm. He’d just applied for a scholarship and gotten it, and he was determined to take a new name. “Søren Jensen is of course too common,” his letter said. “I’ve decided to call myself Søren Alslev. The petition doesn’t cost much—it can be had for four crowns.”

“Now he doesn’t want to have his name in common with us any more,” Tora said, but Marinus was immediately ready with a defense of his learned son. “Alslev of course is the name of his
native town,” he said. “And if he’s going to be a scholar, a fella certainly understands that he has to have a name that’s not like others.” “He can call himself whatever he wants, I won’t respect him until he’s shown what he’s good for,” Tora said. “It’s easy enough to learn Latin with other people’s money, but his brothers and sisters have earned a living almost from when they could walk.”

Marinus was an old hand and he knew that he shouldn’t be contradicting Tora at this time. One evening he’d seen Tora standing with little Vera’s rag doll in her hand, and right then he knew how closely Olga’s fate had touched her, although she never talked about it. Marinus was definitely a cautious man in this world, but he also had eyes in his head.

But now they were going to get serious about the co-operative society, and it was decided that Cilius and Børgesen should go to Færgeby to investigate whether they could get a loan at the savings bank to build a building and begin doing business. They took off from work and bicycled in the morning to Færgeby, and Cilius felt they should probably talk to attorney Schjett. The attorney wasn’t in the office when Cilius and Børgesen came, and they had to wait a while. A piercing woman’s voice and heavy thuds on the floor could be heard from the apartment above, as if somebody were speaking her mind by furiously stamping. The clerk became agitated. “I better fetch the attorney,” he said. “Surely you better not,” Cilius said with a grin. “He’s probably doing his gymnastics, as they call it.” But the clerk ran upstairs, and a moment later Schjett came walking like a crab with his crooked gait. His hair was in disorder and there were a couple of red streaks across one cheek, as if from a woman’s sharp nails. “Good morning, gentlemen,” he said out of breath. “Please, come into my private dwelling—what brings you here?”

Cilius was about to explain that they came as representatives and were seeking a loan, when the door to the private office was torn open and Mrs. Marja stood at the threshold. “You slimy grass snake,” she shouted. “May I ask you to go upstairs, Mrs. Marja, Schjett said in dignified manner. “I’m occupied with
business, as you see.” “Yeah, I’ll go,” Mrs. Schjøtt shouted, and her bosom heaved with agitation. “I’d rather go my way than live one more day with you. But pay attention to what I’m saying: I’m going and I’m taking the revolver with me.” “Marja, now be calm,” the attorney shouted and, losing his temper, stamped on the floor. “I’ll come up right away. Can’t you take a pill and go to bed?”

Mrs. Marja didn’t look as though she needed medicine or bed rest; she resembled an actress who was playing the big scene in the last act. She snatched a revolver from her dress pocket and waved it dramatically. A bang and a bullet whistled past Cilius’s head. “No, I’ll be damned if I’m going to be shot in this war here,” Cilius roared and rushed at the woman. He got hold of her legs and lifted her in the air. The revolver fell onto the floor and Børgesen picked it up.

“This way,” Schjøtt said and walked ahead like a crab up the stairs. “Carry her carefully, she has to be put in bed. Jensen, call the doctor, say he has to come right away—there’s a disaster again.” Cilius carried the lawyer’s wife up into bed in his arms. Mrs. Marja wriggled as if she were being raped, and her screams shrilled through the house. “God damn her,” the lawyer cursed. “What’s keeping the doctor?”

The doctor came, broad-shouldered and calm, with a little leather bag in his hand. He ordered the men out of the bedroom. Schjøtt remained standing right outside with his ear against the door. “Just as long as she doesn’t get convulsions,” he said. “The damn witch.” “Be quiet, Mrs. Schjøtt,” the doctor said and took out a syringe. “He’s tormenting me, doctor, he’s killing the human being in me,” she wailed and held out her hand. “Then get divorced,” the doctor said. “Next time it’ll be the mental hospital. I’m not going to give you any more morphine.”

Mrs. Marja got her injection and fell asleep whimpering. The doctor came out. “What am I going to do, doctor?” the lawyer asked and took him by the arm. “There are only two things that can tame women,” the doctor said. “Give her children or work.” “If that ain’t the truth,” Cilius said. “Womenfolk are like horses—they have to be exercised, otherwise they get stable
"Staggers." "Good lord," the lawyer sighed. "Damn it, it's also true of menfolk," Cilius said. "Truth to tell."

Suddenly attorney Schjøtt was once again a lawyer and businessman. "We were interrupted in our business by my wife's nervous breakdown. Goodbye and thanks, doctor, you'll look in later in the day? And gentlemen, this way." The lawyer led the way into the office, opened a cabinet and took out a bottle of port and glasses. "May I offer you a refreshment after the fright," he said. "The bullet whistled by my head," Cilius said. "I could surely use a sweet drink."

The sweat formed beads on the lawyer's forehead, and his hand was shaking when he lifted the glass. "I regret the incident." "What's that?" Cilius asked. "I mean my wife's behavior," the lawyer explained. "Forget about it," Cilius said. "I mean, the rest of us have an old hag at home too; it's not worth bothering about what they can think up. Well, I'll give you this piece of advice if you ask me: get the womanfolk pregnant, that's their delight, and it'll give the rest of us peace."

Cilius reached for the bottle of port and poured his glass. Then he put the bottle suitably close to himself. "Now in a way they're really alike, that's been my experience, but you have to keep a tight rein on them," he said. "And I'll tell you one thing, counsel, hold the rein tight, but don't ever use the whip. I know womenfolk, if anybody does." Cilius emptied his glass and poured again. "Thanks a lot for your aid and valuable advice," the lawyer said tartly. "I'm usually an adherent of the principle of keeping business and private life separate. Nobody called up there, right?" The men listened, but it was quiet upstairs. "Excuse me, but I'm not quite myself," attorney Schjøtt said and dried his forehead. "But let's get down to business, gentlemen, to business." "If this bullet had come two inches closer, dammit, I'd have been a dead man," Cilius said. "I'm still shaking. Couldn't you send your office boy over for a couple of bottles of lager—I'm getting nauseous with this sweet crap." "Jensen," Schjøtt shouted. "Would you run over to the grocer for six bottles of lager. And so gentlemen, what brings you here?"

Cilius and Børgesen explained their plans for the consumer
co-operative, and now of course they certainly needed to get a loan. Did Schjøtt think they could get five thousand at the savings bank if fifty good, solid men stood surety for a hundred crowns each? The attorney felt that could probably be done. It would be best if they went to the savings bank right away and talked things over. While Cilius and Børgesen drank the last lager, Schjøtt went up to listen at the bedroom door. His wife was sleeping soundly. Schjøtt poured one more glass of port and took his hat.

At the savings bank the three men had to wait a bit before being granted an audience with the president, the former grocer Andersen, who resembled a fierce dog with whiskers. He listened to Schjøtt’s explanation while he stole angry glances at Cilius and Børgesen over his glasses.

“What do you people need with a consumer co-operative?” he said when Schjøtt had finished. “There are enough grocers and half of them have trouble staying alive.”

“We’ve agreed that we want the benefit of a consumer co-operative,” Børgesen said. “But Færgeby Savings Bank isn’t going to risk its money on this sort of tomfoolery,” Andersen said. “If you’re not satisfied with one grocer, you can go to the next one. I mean, there’s practically no way to please people.”

“Excuse me, if I might mention . . .” the attorney said, but Schjøtt wasn’t permitted to mention anything. “There’s nothing more to talk about,” Andersen said. “You’re wasting your time, counsel.”

The attorney was silent; he often had use for the savings bank and didn’t care to get into a quarrel with the president. “There are people from Alslev who put their money in the savings bank here, aren’t there?” Cilius said. “In any event I don’t recall having seen you as a depositor,” Andersen said and shot Cilius a dirty look over his glasses. “And you never will either, damn it” Cilius said. “I’ve never hoarded money. But then it’s better if we go to Havnsø and chat with them about putting a branch of their savings bank in Alslev.” “Why are you making such a fuss?” Andersen asked. “Can you people procure solid guarantors? We’re not going to run any risk because you’ve
come up with the idea of opening a consumer co-operative in Alslev.” "To a man we’ll all stand surety," Cilius said, and now the conversation was on the right track.

“I drove him into a corner,” Cilius said, when they got outside on the street. “I took him by the nose ring like a bull. He didn’t care for us going to Havnso. That’ll teach you, Børge­sen, always answer the big shots back. They can’t stand it. They’re not used to it.” Cilius and Børge­sen brought home the news that the money could certainly be procured and a site was bought for the consumer co-operative and plans worked out. Skifter understood it was serious. People talked about the consumer co-operative in his shop.

“There you really see what people are like,” he said. “I gave them credit and extensions for a great many years and am running a great risk because I also have my own obligations to meet. And when a fella is forced to say stop, they get sore and want to open a consumer co-operative. But it won’t work, boys, because a fella also has to be knowledgeable about business to make it work.” But on this point the farmers standing in the shop didn’t agree with Skifter. They weren’t so sure that a co-op probably wouldn’t work, and it surely didn’t do any harm for competition to come. That was a sound principle.

And it was a hard day for Skifter when his own son-in-law Konrad told him he could easily imagine becoming manager of the consumer co-operative. “So I’ll have to live to see it,” Skifter said. “Yeah, yeah, as long as you don’t come to regret it, little Konrad. Things have ended badly for awfully many co-op managers.” “Things have also ended badly for many grocers,” Konrad said. “But do you think they’ll hire you?” Skifter asked cautiously. Yes, he had an excellent chance. Konrad had talked to Cilius, who felt it was good for them to get a man who knew people and knew how much each one would be good for.

“Okay, I wish you all the luck, Konrad,” Skifter said, but you could see he wasn’t happy. In the last few years it was only rarely that Skifter had gone to meetings of the Pious, but now he got it in his head once again to hear a word for the soul. There was a meeting in Martin Thomsen’s parlor, and Skifter sat down
on the back bench. It was an old missionary who was speaking. He told about the difficult tribulations the Lord’s friends had to endure, and how they were mocked and disparaged by worldly children. He spoke meekly and well about the compensation in the next world that awaited those who led the good life to the end. Afterwards Martin Thomsen said a few words about the Mission house. Things were so far along that the foundation could be dug if only a very small sum could be raised.

After the meeting Martin Thomsen went over to Skifter and took him heartily by the hand. “I was so delighted to see you here once again among God’s children,” he said. “I’ve thought so much about you, Skifter, because it’s as though you had wandered away from the path.” “I’d like to give you a sum for the Mission house,” Skifter said. “You can come one of the next few days and get the money. I’ll just have to get it withdrawn from the savings bank.”

Skifter gave a donation of a thousand crowns and Martin Thomsen was full of thanks and praise. “I knew it, Skifter, I knew exactly that you’d find the way back to grace,” he said. “Praised be the Lord on high because he wants to have you back.” “I’ve always followed the Lord,” Skifter said. “Even if in the last few years I haven’t run around to meetings so much.” “Let’s pray and praise the Lord together,” Martin Thomsen said. “For what were we sinners without him . . . .”

Yes, yes, Skifter nodded and pursed his lips. He who put his trust in God didn’t go wrong. He had the power, and the glory was his. And if they were now creating a consumer cooperative, and his own son-in-law was going to become manager, Skifter had brought his offering to the Lord. Whatever was given to God, was repaid double.
Ulriksen had written to his sister to find out how Olga’s case on Funen was going. And one day a letter came saying that Olga had now received her sentence. She had to go to the house of correction for eighteen months, and the punishment had turned out to be so lenient only because the experts felt that she’d scarcely been completely responsible for her actions, and she was presumably given credit for having confessed her offense. While the men were at work, Ulriksen came to tell Tora what the letter had said. But there was another thing Tora wanted to know: had the child been found and laid in Christian ground?

Yes, Ulriksen said, to be sure there was nothing about it in the letter, but he ventured to vouch for its having happened. Tora sat silently. It would be a meager resting place. In a few years it would be a hillock overgrown with grass. Olga’s deed would surely not be forgotten so easily. Tora lay awake for hours at night and thought about how Olga was doing now. She’d forgotten her bitterness toward her daughter—oh, if she could only visit her in prison and sit a little with her holding hands. That would’ve been solace for her beleaguered heart.

“You’re taking it hard, Tora, and it mustn’t be taken lightly either,” Ulriksen said. “But grief cleanses the heart of pettiness and rancor. What Olga is going through now will make it easier for her to bear her fate. She voluntarily took the burden upon herself, and that’s why she’ll find help in carrying it.” “I hardly know, Ulriksen,” Tora said. “You’re smart, but you don’t know how things are for womenfolk. Surely some day other people will be able to forget what Olga did, but she herself will never get over the fact that she killed her child.”

The minister came to visit and talked to Tora, but he felt himself that he had a hard time finding the right words. Tora sat calmly before him and listened to him. “I was sorry to hear about it,” Pastor Gamst said. “I mean, your daughter was such a lively young girl.” “Whatever will be will be,” Tora said.
guardedly. “And if we have to bear something, presumably we also get the back to bear it on.” “Maybe,” the minister said. “But can you find comfort in the old fatalism? Don’t you need to come into a more personal relationship with God, Tora?” Tora shook her head. “God didn’t consult me;” she said. “I bear responsibility for what I do, he has to bear responsibility for what he does.” “One day you, too, will certainly find the mystery of grace,” Pastor Gamst said. “No,” Tora said. “Never in all my born days will I join the Inner Mission.”

The men didn’t talk about Olga. A girl had been seduced and had killed her child. The same thing could happen with your own daughter. But when the women met, Olga was talked about. Magda was filled with dark horror. “Now she’s sitting behind bars and may God have mercy on her,” she said. “But I’d always feared it, with the life she led.” “How many have you slept with yourself?” Line Seldomglad said. “I’m like a hen you all peck at,” Magda wailed. “But you can say what you will, but I’ve never let anybody make me pregnant.” “That’s surely none of your doing,” Line Seldomglad smiled. “If anybody, surely it’s the men who deserve the credit.” “No, that’s where you go wrong,” Magda said all excited. “If you sleep with them in a seemly way, you won’t get pregnant. It’s only if you get wild and abandon yourself. And I’ve always been chaste—the Almighty can testify to that in his heaven that I’ve trusted people too well. That’s my mistake and I’ve paid for it plenty severely.”

It was well into the harvest and the grain was in the barn. Out in the heath the heather was in bloom. The first August darkness was about to fall and the sky stretched like a huge velvet-black dome over the heathery knolls when Boel-Erik left his property in the heath. As soon as he came from work at the factory and had eaten, he bicycled out there, and it got late before he came back. Boel-Erik had resigned from the union’s executive committee—he had to look after his property in the heath. As soon as he came from work at the factory and had eaten, he bicycled out there, and it got late before he came back. Boel-Erik had resigned from the union’s executive committee—his moorland plot had to be looked after. He’d begun to dig up potatoes—now they were getting a good price. And new heath had to be broken up. Now Boel-Erik was working out there alone; the others had enough work as it was at the
factory. "Why do you want to be a farmer instead of a worker?" Børresen asked, when Erik left the union executive committee. Boel-Erik mumbled something about his also certainly being a worker. Boel-Erik couldn't explain his dream of becoming his own man on his own land to other people.

But Inger no longer complained about its taking a long time before Erik got home. She put the children to bed early in order to have them out of the way before Niels came. Long ago people had begun to talk about their being up to something with each other, and one day Marinus heard about it. He spoke to Niels about it one evening as they were walking home together from work. It came about with a lot of cautious beating around the bush because Marinus wasn't the man to go right to the point if a careful detour could be found. But what Marinus had to say to his son did come to light.

"I don't care what people jabber on about," Niels said suddenly. "Inger and I are grown-up enough to take care of ourselves." "I really don't want you to get Inger into trouble," Marinus said. "There are also definitely plenty of girls—you don't have to go to a married woman. We have to be honest, little Niels, honest in all our dealings." But Niels couldn't be talked to. He obstinately kept silent. "We mustn't do to others what we don't want others to do to us," Marinus said. "And if you were married, you wouldn't like others going to your wife. Find yourself a sweetheart among the girls—you're the right age for it. But we have to be honest, Niels." Niels didn't answer, and Marinus probably sensed that his admonition didn't bear fruit.

Then came clear cool September days. The men bicycled to work in the wet mornings when the dew sparkled in cobwebs in the grass. The factory attracted them—it was the focal point of the area's life. The rotary kilns turned round. Chalk and clay were dug out and washed and burned to cement. Barges and steamers were docked at the wharf and loaded the cement in barrels and sacks. Day and night the rotary kilns turned round, conveyor belts glided along. The machines thumped in the factory. People and machines worked in the same tenacious, steady rhythm. Men went to work and men came home from work.
Two buildings were built in the town of Alslev, the consumer co-operative and the Mission house. Cilius and Børgesen had found a site diagonally across from Skifter’s grocery store, and from his shop Skifter could follow how the walls were rising. It was going to be big, and how did they think they could get a return on such a building? No, Skifter knew what he was talking about: you couldn’t base a business on credit and debt regardless of whether it was called a general store or a consumer co-operative. After Konrad had learned his lesson and ended up in misery as co-op manager, he could return to Skifter. But for the future, Skifter himself would be at the helm because Konrad certainly didn’t have the ability for it.

The Mission house was the first to get a roof. It was a humble little building of ugly machine-made stone with a slate roof. A marble slab was placed on the gable end with girt letters: “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!” Martin Thomsen had paid for the marble tablet out of his own purse, and it was meant as an admonishing word to the workers who bicycled past here every day. Maybe this word in gold and on genuine marble could get one or two to seek the path to mercy and remember that there are greater things in the world than daily bread and the labor union.

The Mission house was consecrated one Sunday in October. Martin Thomsen had written to Pastor Faaborg, who’d come to preach. It was a cold, windy fall day and the moisture streamed down the Mission house’s whitewashed walls. There was a stuffy smell of wet outer garments, whitewash, and smoke from the peat in the tiled stove which wouldn’t burn. Pastor Faaborg was a pale, pudgy man who talked for a long time about Peter’s haul and about the souls who were to be caught here. Pastor Gamst sat together with Martin Thomsen and several others of the leading members in the congregation right by the podium and looked down over the gathering. All of God’s children were there and some of the farmers had also come. But of the workers there were none other than Kresten Bossen and Andres together with their wives, Ida and Magda. On the rear bench he saw a city-clad woman—it was attorney Schjøtt’s wife.
After the sermon there were light refreshments and hymn singing; the friends felt at home in their new house. Martin Thomsen didn’t leave Pastor Faaborg’s side. “I want to thank you for the beautiful talk, Faaborg,” he said. “It was nourishment for the soul.” “And now we’re going to have coffee and food on top of that,” Pastor Gamst thought. “Oh, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!” “I’m not among the great preachers,” Pastor Faaborg said. “But fervor and good will must take the place of our abilities. It’s the will to God that counts, dear Thomsen, the will to God.”

There wasn’t much talking between the hymns, because even though you were having coffee, you were of course so to speak still under a sacred roof. But Pastor Faaborg was fervent and jovial. A man of the Lord and of the people. He had friendly words right and left; a smile had grown firmly around his mouth. He gesticulated a lot with his small, thick hands, and Magda really didn’t like him. He looked as though he was a womanizer, she confided to Ida.

“Not all clergymen are the way they’re supposed to be,” she whispered. “You better believe that I know it, Ida. And even though they have a frock and collar, they’re surely created like other men. There was a curate where I was born, and I can’t bring myself to tell you what he was up to with the girls who were going to confirmation. No, they’re wolves in sheep’s clothing a body can’t easily be on guard against. Now look there!”

Mrs. Marja had come over to greet Pastor Gamst and was introduced to the unfamiliar minister. “See how he’s looking at her,” Magda whispered. “He’s eating her up with his eyes. If anything, it’s certainly scandalous for a minister to look that way at a womanfolk in a Mission house. And she should be ashamed to deck herself out in a fur coat and a hat with feathers. She certainly wants to show that she’s finer than the rest of us.” “I mean, she is married to an attorney,” Ida said. “After all, there have to be differences between people.” “I really don’t like it,” Magda said. “And I’ll tell you what I heard about the attorney’s wife: they say she’s man-crazy.”

“What an experience to be together with all these wonderful
people,” Mrs. Marja said. “Of course it’s something totally new for me.” “I’m glad, madam,” pastor Faaborg said. “After all, we’re just simple people gathered to serve our lord and master.” “It must be beautiful to serve,” Mrs. Marja said and looked at him with soulful enthusiasm. “To abandon oneself in a great, passionate faith. But it’s surely not easy for a poor, fragile person.” “It’s much easier than many people think,” pastor Faaborg said. “It’s the easiest thing of all to confess one’s sins to the savior and place one’s burdens on him.” “I wish I could,” Mrs. Marja sighed. “Pastor Gamst, may I come really soon and have a conversation with you?”

Mrs Marja said goodbye; she had to get to Færgeby before evening, and Martin Thomsen accompanied her to the door. “You ought to look after her, Gamst, Pastor Faaborg said confidentially. “It’s always useful to have people from the better classes in the circle of friends. It gives the faint-hearted self-confidence.” “She’s a high-strung person,” Pastor Gamst said. “Nervous people also have souls, which we really have to look after,” Pastor Faaborg said.

Pastor Gamst had invited those who’d been especially active on behalf of the erection of the Mission house for dinner at the parsonage. They ate and sang hymns and spoke kind words. And Pastor Faaborg was just as jovial and smiling and unctuous when he ate chicken broth as when he gave advice for the salvation of the soul. Pastor Gamst had a headache and wished only that the evening were soon over. He stole away from the company out into the garden where the moon was shining down coldly through the bare branches and formed a delicate shadow pattern in the garden path.

“Is God alive?” he thought in torment. “Have humans found him. Or is he only the shadow of their own thoughts and desire?”

Now in the dark evenings the light shone from the Mission house. But the workers didn’t come. They didn’t hear the summoning words from its gable. Ministers and missionaries spoke, and meetings were announced by posters on the singing telephone poles. But it was the same small circle that sat with dark
faces and bowed heads below the podium and heard about hell’s torments and heaven’s salvation.

— Konrad had had a busy time: all manner of goods had to be stocked for the consumer co-operative. But one afternoon Konrad unlocked the door—now everything was ready to receive the customers. And they flocked in front of the counter. “See, this is a shop, folks,” Cilius said. “It’s good and surely twice as big as Skifter’s. The thing doesn’t exist we can’t get, and we don’t have to stand hat in hand because we own the whole thing ourselves. Damn it, next time we strike there won’t be anybody who’ll deny credit to a solid man.”

Cilius had been in the office with the executive committee and drank a glass because the co-op was now opening up. He stood broad-legged and flushed in front of the counter and showed off for everyone who came. “Damn it, this is finer than what they have in many places in the cities,” Cilius said. “And we carry everything right from feedstuffs to wooden shoes. Just say the word, folks, you can have whatever you want.”

Cilius was becoming drunk, and in his pocket he had along a bottle of schnapps to take home and invited Børgesen and Lars Seldomglad for a bite. “It’s cheaper than going to the inn,” Cilius said. “And I have things I’d like to talk to you about. Damn it, this consumer co-operative isn’t going to be the last thing.”

Frederikke put the food on the table and asked them to make do—it was just plain fare. “We’re also just plain people,” Cilius said. “Sit down at the table, folks, please Børgesen, please Lars Seldomglad. Preserves and potatoes aren’t poor fare if a fella softens it with a drink.”

They ate and afterward they had coffee laced with schnapps, and what kinds of plans Cilius had been hatching out became apparent. Back when they bought land for the consumer co-operative, they’d bought amply. Cilius had had his plans for it. “Damn it, we’re going to have a meeting house,” Cilius said. “They have one in cities smaller than ours.”

“But where’s the money going to come from?” Lars Seldomglad said, but Cilius had also thought this over. If such a
meeting house were sensibly managed, it could easily be profitable. There’d be a restaurant, where people could get non-alcoholic beverages and coffee. “Now I’ve heard everything,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Are you going to build a temperance hotel next? I never thought I’d hear this from you.” “I’ve drunk my share,” Cilius said. “But it’s not certain that other people can tolerate what I’ve been able to tolerate. And if we do a temperance café, then we’ll get support from the temperance people. We have to take that into account.”

“You know a trick or two, Cilius,” Børgesen said. “That’s what people have always said about me,” Cilius said. “But pour yourselves another little cup of black coffee with spirits, folks. Now we’ll appoint ourselves as a committee, as they call it, and afterward we’ll talk to the others about it.” “I don’t know how things are going to turn out with you, Cilius,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Now you’re the chairman of a union and a co-op, and now you’re about to build a temperance hotel. I wonder whether you’re going to end up as a member of parliament.” “They could damn sure get somebody worse,” Cilius said. “But I’m well satisfied with what I’ve got to handle here.”

Konrad was the right man as manager: he knew how to talk to people, and there was a thriving business in his co-op. When he looked out the door, he could nod to Skifter in his shop. There was no hostility between them, but Skifter had become a steady participant in the meetings at the Mission house. Of course, he was also an elderly man who had to think about his soul.

The workers shopped at the co-op, but the old customers among the farmers stayed with Skifter. And when Skifter was in a bad mood, he complained to Martin Thomsen or Mads Lund. “It’s rough: you have to put up with them taking the bread right out of your mouth,” he said. “Surely there’s still a little crumb for you,” Mads Lund felt. “But you haven’t suffered want yet.” “But I’m afraid the last days are fast approaching,” Skifter said. “I think it’s as if everything old has to be toppled over. It’s so to speak a sign in the sun and moon.” “As long as we just have our conscience in order,” Martin Thomsen said with a look at Mads
Lund. “When the time comes, we won’t have any benefit from the earthly mammon.” “Then it’s odd that you watch over yours so well,” Mads Lund said. “I’ve never heard it said about you that you gave a penny away without getting back two.” “I’ve never been a prosperous man,” Martin Thomsen said. “Although the Lord has granted me a living with moderation.”

After knocking off for work, Cilius enrolled co-operative owners of his meeting house. The money had to be raised now in the winter so it could be built in the spring. Every time he ran into a man, he took his list out of his pocket and put his glasses on his nose. “I don’t recall if I have you on the list,” he said. “You can surely manage a share for five crowns. You can pay a penny a week if that suits you best. Then I’ll write you down.”

Olga had now begun to pay her penalty, and she wrote a letter home from prison. Tora read it aloud to Marinus and showed it to Ulriksen. Other people didn’t get to see it. It was a sad letter: Olga repented of her misdeed and felt she’d never get peace of mind. The prison minister visited her often and talked to her, but it would be better if she were permitted to talk to somebody she knew once in a while.

“Yeah, now it aches,” Ulriksen said. “And that’s a good sign. The illness that doesn’t hurt is often the worst.” “Could I get permission to visit her?” Tora said. “But where would we get the money for the expensive trip? After all, the time’s coming when work will be scarce.” “And maybe you wouldn’t get permission at all to go into the prison, Tora,” Ulriksen said. “Don’t be afraid for her. I’m old and I know that life is merciful.”
It was a wet, sleety Christmas. Heavy clouds drifted off over the hills and the rain lashed down in torrential showers. The roads were slush. But the fact that it wasn’t so cold saved on fuel, and they had to save at that time of year when many people didn’t have work. In the winter months there was no work in the chalk pit. So much chalk had been hacked that the operation could be maintained even if there was snow and all the world was covered with drifts.

Marinus was unemployed and every day around the time the mail came he became restless. Mightn’t there be a letter from Søren? Søren still hadn’t written whether he intended to visit the parental home at Christmas. Finally a letter came. Søren sent many regards, but he wasn’t coming home. The trip was expensive and he had to attend to his studies. Besides, he’d been invited to spend Christmas at the house of a company president whose son he was going to university with. There were two pretty daughters, so Søren was looking forward to it.

“He isn’t going to go and be sweethearts with the daughter of a company president, is he?” Marinus laughed. “He surely will,” Tora said. “He’ll never marry one of his own.” But Marinus felt that since Søren had become a man with a university education, it was in fact the daughters of company presidents who were his own. How should a girl of the common people be able to stand at his side if he got a government appointment and post? No, you have to stick to your own class. “And he doesn’t ask about Olga at all,” Tora said. “He doesn’t think about anybody but himself.”

Marinus didn’t reply, but he knew that Tora was doing Søren an injustice. He hadn’t forgotten his home; he was certainly also good about writing. But it was a great disappointment that he wasn’t coming home at Christmas. Marinus had had that great hope.

It was probably the raw, damp weather that caused Matilde
to begin coughing and spitting blood again. The doctor’s opinion was that there was no alternative but to send Matilde to the sanatorium. “Can’t we keep her here at home over Christmas?” Thomas Trilling asked, but Matilde preferred going off right away. The grocer’s daughter she exchanged letters with had also had a relapse, and now they could see each other at the sanatorium. You could see that this seemed very fortunate to Matilde.

“It’s rough for you to have gotten a sickly wife,” Black Anders said. He felt as if he were responsible for his daughter. “She is indeed a poor creature,” Thomas Trilling said. “If only some day she could get completely well.” But Matilde hummed and sang and let her thin, white fingers dance on the keys of the piano. Now she’d play once again for the others at the sanatorium and be honored for her skill.

There were often visitors at Matilde’s: the other women helped her in the house, and of course everyone understood that a wife with tuberculosis couldn’t manage the work alone. She had to lie in bed for a long time in the morning and take walks and rest many times during the day. When Thomas Trilling and Black Anders came from work, Matilde hadn’t made dinner, and often the house hadn’t been cleaned, but who could reproach a sick wife for anything? While Thomas and Anders mixed up food in the kitchen, Matilde sat at the piano with paraffin candles and practiced.

It was especially Frederikke who came. There was friendship between her and Matilde. “You play so beautifully,” Frederikke said. “But I wonder if I shouldn’t put a little more on the tiled stove—it’s much too cold here.” “The cold doesn’t bother me a bit,” Matilde said. “I’m used to that from the sanatorium. Using your fingers on the keys also makes you warm. Now it’s only three days till I’ll be leaving. Yesterday a letter came saying they could definitely admit me.” “I’m going to miss you,” Frederikke said. “There’s nobody else here I can really talk to.” “You’re always pale, Frederikke,” Matilde said. “Are you sure you don’t have tuberculosis too? If you were sick, we could get together at the sanatorium.” “But I mean I have Little-Jep?” Frederikke said, and Matilde admitted that she couldn’t take him
Thomas Trilling went to the assistance fund and they didn’t refuse to outfit Matilde. She got a coat and a warm woollen dress. Of course she’d best be dressed nicely when she went out among strangers. Mads Lund’s women came to visit. “And you’re going . . . you’re going out to travel again,” they said in chorus. “Yes, thank God for that,” Matilde said, and her white face was radiant, as if she were going to the land of paradise. “If you had a child, the illness would probably vanish,” the farmer’s women said. “We had a niece, she got well when she became pregnant.” But the doctor had said to Matilde that a pregnancy would be too much for her. And Matilde didn’t care about carnal love—she disliked that kind of thing. No, the farmer’s women nodded and looked with modesty at the floor. Men were indeed often so brutal—a body surely knew that.

One windy winter day right before Christmas Thomas Trilling accompanied his wife to Færgeby on the steamer and from there she was to go on by train. Matilde had a cloth tied up around the lower part of her face; once in a while she had to push it to the side to cough. They sat in the chilly waiting room till it was time for the train to go. “I hope you’ll soon be able to come home healthy,” Thomas said. “I’ll probably stay there until about summer,” Matilde said. “But it would be nice if you could come and visit me. Then you’d see with your own eyes how good it is to be there.” And Matilde spoke again about the doctors and nurses and nurses’ orderlies—they were the loveliest people in existence.

“Now come back healthy, Matilde,” Thomas Trilling said when Matilde was standing in the train. But his wife scarcely heard it. “Goodbye, Thomas,” she said. “I’ll definitely write about how I am. I’ll write as soon as I arrive down there. Now I’d just like to know whether Miss Johnsen has come already or whether she’s staying home over Christmas.”

Thomas Trilling stood and watched the train as it left. He didn’t move a muscle in his heavy, bony face. He’d come to the area back when the factory was being built and had met Matilde, who was like no other girl he’d ever known. But it was surely a
mistake that he’d gotten her to marry him because he didn’t do her any good. Matilde had found happiness at the sanatorium.

Cilius didn’t have any work and he used the time to get his papers in order, both the union’s and the co-op’s. The meeting house wasn’t forgotten either. Cilius went to the president and got admitted to his office. “What did you come to make a nuisance of yourself over now, Cilius Andersen,” Høpner said. “I don’t want anything to do with your union.” “That’s not what this is about,” Cilius said. “It has to do with a contribution for our new meeting house.” “You’re not going to get a penny,” Høpner said. “I suppose it’s going to be a house where you can stand at the podium and blather on each time there’s a strike.” “We can easily organize a strike without a meeting house,” Cilius said. “We’ll certainly manage that if we have to. But this building here, if anything, is going to be for popular education.” “Well I’ll be damned, Cilius,” Høpner said. “And I thought that since you made a contribution to the Mission house, you’d also give to us. I mean, you’re not a socialist, but you’re not in the Inner Mission either, so far as I can gather from your way of life.”

That was the tone you had to talk to Høpner in—Cilius had experience with that. He gave as good as he got—that’s surely the way they learned it in America. Cilius got a hundred crowns on his list, as a kind of Christmas present amidst strong oaths and curses. “Did the minister like that hymn singing back when you made a contribution to the Mission house?” Cilius said. “Would you please go,” Høpner said. “Make it snappy.”

Now during the quiet Christmas days there was news from Cilius’s house. Frederikke was with child again. She confided to Tora that she was already several months pregnant. “Have you told Cilius?” Tora asked, but Frederikke hadn’t. She turned her head away. “I mean, he has to be told,” Tora said. “And this time you surely have no need to be afraid.” “No,” Frederikke said and didn’t meet Tora’s glance. “So what’s the matter?” Tora asked. Well, the thing was, Frederikke mumbled, that Iver had once again come to Alslev. He hadn’t been near her, but what would Cilius think? “You have to tell him,” Tora said. “If
you’re silent, it’ll look odd. You know, we don’t have to let ourselves be cowed either. Tell him right in his red kisser. Surely he’s the one who’s responsible for your condition.”

Frederikke plucked up her courage and one evening when they were sitting in the living room she said that she’d better look for baby clothes because unless she was mistaken, she was probably with child. “You didn’t see where I put my glasses, did you,” Cilius said and began hunting. “Damn it, I can’t figure out where I put them. By the way, what were you saying?” “I’m afraid I’m going to have a child,” Frederikke said. “So, we’ve gotten to that point again, huh,” Cilius said. “I’m probably going to have to go talk a bit with Børgesen about these papers here from the union.”

Cilius took his jacket and hat and went out into the calm, rain-soaked evening. It was odd Christmas weather. The inn was closed, but he went into the co-op the back way. “I’ve got to have a pint of schnapps, little Konrad,” he said. “I’ve caught a bit of a cold in all this dampness here. It’s a mixture that helps if somebody has taken cold.” Cilius got the schnapps and walked down toward the factory. He went by the Mission house. There was light from the windows and hymn singing could be heard out in the darkness. But that’s not where he was going. He went down to a workmen’s shed by the cliff and kicked the door open. There was a box standing there in a corner among the tools. He sat down there and took a slurp from the bottle and looked through the open door at the illuminated factory.

Iver was working there in the slurry station. Now if tomorrow somebody walked in there and bashed his head in and threw him down into the gray paste of clay and chalk? Then there’d be one less scoundrel in the world and somebody would go to the penitentiary for his deed.

Cilius sat there for a long time and didn’t notice that time was passing. He heard the machines working in the factory while he slowly emptied the bottle. Somebody could take an ax and use it on Iver. But maybe it was best to bash his head in with a clenched fist so that he fell backward into the slurry basin. “I beat a man till he was a cripple,” Cilius mumbled. “And back
then I was drunk if anything. I can certainly do it again with my bare fists when I’m sober.” There was a dull roar of anger in him. “The little red fox,” he thought. “But I can’t take this sitting down. I want my rights, I want to see blood flow.”

Cilius of course could also do something else. He could cut that goat Iver with his pocket knife so he’d never again go near other people’s wives. Cilius Andersen was man enough for that, and it was certainly best that it happen right away. The bottle was empty and Cilius hurled it out the door. Now the terrible thing was going to happen. He heard something rustling outside. Maybe it was lovers who wanted to get into the shed.

He went outside and ran into someone. He realized right away it was Frederikke. “What are you doing here?” Cilius asked. “I was looking for you,” Frederikke said. “I thought maybe you’d gone down here onto the cliff—I got so afraid when you didn’t come.” “Oh, it’s probably other people you’re waiting for,” Cilius said. “I mean, you’re like a bitch, always picking up the scent wherever male dogs are.” Frederikke didn’t answer. But they walked up along the road toward Alslev. After they’d walked a bit, Frederikke said: “Of course, you know it’s always hard for me to say anything. It’s as if it doesn’t want to come out. But can you remember, back then when we first got to know each other. I opened my bedroom door for you.” “You don’t think a fella would ever forget that, do you?” Cilius mumbled. “I’d do it all over again if it happened today,” Frederikke whispered. “I’d let you in and nobody but you. And I haven’t known anybody but you either... it’s been many years now.”

They walked on a little in silence, then Cilius said: “Børge- sen wasn’t there and I felt like a drink. It’s all that salted pork a fella eats at Christmas. I went in the back way at Konrad’s and walked together with one of the stokers down here to the factory. Then I sat down in the shed.” “I got worried about what had become of you,” Frederikke said in such a calm tone, as if every second evening she were in the habit of fetching Cilius home in the darkness of night. “I thought I better go out and look for you.” Cilius breathed easy, freed from his hard hatred. Because this he knew—that Frederikke might keep silent, but a lie
couldn’t cross her lips.

They went into the living room and the lamp was burning. In her fright Frederikke had forgotten to put it out. They avoided looking at each other. Then Cilius went over to Frederikke and stroked her lightly across her cheek with his index finger. She started to cry. “Stop it, Frederikke,” Cilius said harshly. “A fella sure knows the way you people are in that condition. I thought you were sterile, but things just go a little slow with you. Don’t cry because I’ve had a child with you. Damn it, you can have a whole dozen as far as I’m concerned. I still remember when I jumped into bed with you many years ago, I thought you were sterile.”

Now Cilius announced the news far and wide; he said to Marinus, Børgesen, and Lars Seldomglad: “I sure managed to get the wife pregnant again. Damn, I mean a fella had to kill time with something during this strike here.” Cilius’s red puss sparkled with pleasure, while he set forth that actually of course the employers should pay child maintenance. Because it was after all in a way their fault that a new life had come into the world. “I’ll mention that next time we hold a congress: damn it, they should have to pay.”

Magda came to visit at Frederikke’s and sat there in a sorry state. “You say you’re expecting,” she said. “I’m not so far along yet,” Frederikke said. “You know, it may soon be far enough along,” Magda said and sighed. “I don’t understand what you mean,” Frederikke said. “Since we’re alone, I can surely say it,” Magda said. “The two of us have been treated disgracefully and now you’re the one who has to bear the burden.”

But now Frederikke got angry: “I certainly know you were involved with Iver, but that’s no reason for me to get any burden to bear. I didn’t get pregnant because he went to bed with you.” “No, no, that’s not the way I meant it either,” Magda said, confused. “I thought you were still fond of him. I imagined that maybe he too . . . . No, no, don’t get all riled up, I only think well of you, but he’s not a guy a body can rely on. I found that out.” “I don’t know why you come running over with your stupid nonsense about Iver,” Frederikke said. “I don’t know
anything much about that guy and never did.” “Frederikke, Frederikke, I mean well by you from my heart,” Magda cried. “But I’m an unhappy person, I’ve been betrayed and deceived almost from the time I was a child.”

And Magda told about her hard life, how the fellows had been after her from the time she was very young. At the places she’d been a servant, the men had tried to seduce her the moment she’d walked in the door. And Magda had had only that one flaw: she believed all people too much. She had that soft heart, that naive mind.

“But even if they seduced you, you didn’t get pregnant, did you?” Frederikke said, and Magda lifted her tear-stained face. No, that was indeed the misfortune—that she’d never become pregnant. Because if things had ended badly, somebody would surely have been obliged to marry her, and she wouldn’t have been forced to take Andres, who was an older man and cared only about hoarding money. “That’s plenty rough on you,” Frederikke said. “But everybody has their own cross to bear.” And Magda went home in a gentle, almost religious mood. She’d managed to get things off her chest—she’d been consoled.

There was a telephone call to the parsonage right after Christmas: it was attorney Schjøtt. The minister had to come right away: Mrs. Marja was sick and wished to speak with him. The lawyer’s voice shrilled nervously on the telephone. Might he send over a car? No, it wasn’t exactly dangerous, but a serious nervous crisis. “Can’t you send for a doctor?” the minister asked. But the doctor had been there, and now Mrs. Marja needed the consolation of religion.

A taxi came and the minister rode to Færgeby. The little lawyer greeted him and led him into his office. “I beg the pastor’s pardon, but a sick person, right? My wife has recently had some inclination toward religion, and if that could just help.” “What does the doctor say?” the minister asked. “He’s taking it damn calmly, wants her in a sanatorium, but what’s the point if she won’t go?” Schjøtt said. “There are terrible scenes with the most vicious accusations. I can run the risk that while I’m sitting with clients here in my office . . . the damned female. Excuse
me, pastor, it slipped out of my mouth. One ought of course constantly to keep in mind—a poor, sick person."

Mrs. Marja was lying in bed, with her hair beautifully done up, and winsomely powdered. She extended a feeble hand toward the minister. “Thanks for coming, dear Pastor Gamst,” she said. “You’re free to go down to your work, my friend, while I talk to my spiritual advisor. Sit down here, Pastor Gamst.”

The minister sat down next to the bed; he felt a little awkward and didn’t know what to say. “Naturally you believe just like the doctor that I’m just a pampered female who should just be made to scrub my own floors?” Mrs. Marja said. “That’s the terrible thing about these doctors, that they take everything so materialistically. They view the human being as a mechanism and nothing else. But it’s so terribly difficult to be a human being. Don’t you think?” “At times it is,” Pastor Gamst said. “And it becomes more difficult the more we’re occupied with our own little personality and our own little cares.” “How right you are.” Mrs. Marja said. “And you’ll take my hand, as if I were a little girl, and tell me about Our Lord and Jesus, and afterward I’ll ring the maid for tea.” “No, I won’t tell you anything, but I’ll read to you,” the minister said, and took out a pocket bible. He read a part of the sermon on the mount.

“How beautiful and grand it is,” Mrs. Marja whispered. “Is that the way it is when you administer the sacrament to a dying person? Don’t you also sing a hymn? Won’t you sing together with me. These lovely verses:

Now found is the fairest of roses,
‘Mongst briars it sweetly reposes,
My Jesus so precious and holy,
Abode among sinners so lowly.

The world may of all things bereave me,
Its thorns may annoy and aggrieve me,
The foe may afflictions engender,
My rose I will never surrender!”
Mrs. Marja had a beautiful voice and she abandoned herself ecstatically to the song. Afterward she lay quietly with the minister’s hand in hers. “I so need to have a good talk with a human being,” she said. “My husband, no, he’s not a human being. Do you know what he calls himself when he’s angry? The bread-winning beast. And actually it fits: he’s a drudge, who’s occupied only with material things. But of course there’s also something else.” “We have to believe there is,” the minister said.

“Things have always been terribly difficult for me,” Mrs. Marja said. “My home was poor, my father a drunkard. I became an actress, but my talent wasn’t great enough. I couldn’t express the deep things I felt. I was a violin without sound. Then I met engineer Hopner and later my husband. That was at a time when I felt lonely and unhappy. But I’m going to seed in this microcosm where people are interested only in food and drink. It’s as if I can’t breathe here.” “Wherever we are on earth, heaven of course arches over us,” the minister said. “That’s beautifully said,” Mrs. Marja said dreamily. “Heaven arches its infinitude over us. And everywhere the lonely are equally lonely. Listen, now let’s have ourselves a cup of tea, Pastor Gamst.” And Mrs. Marja rang for the maid and gave instructions.

“There’s so much within myself that I don’t understand,” Mrs. Marja said. “Perhaps I should have been a hetaera. I married Schjøtt because I felt sorry for him. He resembled a little ugly duckling, but no woman can make a swan out of him. But you understand me. I feel, as it were, a hollowness in my soul, a yearning for what is great. The great sin or the great humility. I would so much like to be filled by a great, pure feeling.”

As the minister was saying goodbye and was on the way downstairs, the attorney opened his door half-way. “Come right in for a moment, pastor,” he said. “Won’t you have a glass of port? You won’t, but you’ll permit me to take one. My nerves won’t stand it in the long run. So what’s your impression of my wife? I mean, her religiosity, huh?” “Your wife is very overwrought,” Pastor Gamst said. “Exactly,” the attorney said. “Sanatorium, says the doctor and I say sanatorium. That god-
damn—excuse me—female is of course in fact insane. I can’t be having this constant circus. It’s my business that winds up suffering.” “Mightn’t a somewhat greater indulgence and understanding on your part have a beneficial influence on your wife’s nervous system,” the minister said. “Indulgence, hah,” the attorney said and gulped down a glass of port. “Of course, damn it all—excuse me, pastor—I’m obliged to be indulgent. What the dickens are you supposed to do when a woman gets fits of rage and hysterical crying and wants to shoot somebody or commit suicide. What a soulful life, ugh.”

Agitated, the little lawyer walked crab-like around the office. “But if you can help her with religion, then by all means as far as I’m concerned,” he said. “In fact, she’s calmer after she’s been in the Mission house or to something of that kind. I mean, womenfolk need spirituality.” “Now listen, attorney Schjøtt,” the minister said angrily. “Excuse me, excuse me, my own nerves are on edge,” the attorney said. “I’ve always had respect for religion, please don’t misunderstand me. But you have to promise to come back—my wife considers you her spiritual adviser. Won’t you stay here and eat dinner—maybe you’ll play ombre?”

Pastor Gamst didn’t stay till evening at the attorney’s; he rode home right away. The car bumped along the muddy road, and all the way from Færgeby you could see the glare from the factory. “Spiritual adviser,” he jeered at himself. For sick and exhausted souls who desperately sought a cure in faith. The healthy didn’t have a need for a cure. Down there by the fjord the light from the factory’s large, dust-filled space was shining. Machines rumbled, wheels turned round, and dirty and grimy men were busily at work. The work went on day and night; men brought home the bacon. Pastor Gamst thought broodingly that he was outside of this wholesome world. A spiritual adviser on the way home to his parsonage.
Early in the spring the good times began again—everybody
was at work. Now some money had to be earned to pay off the
debt that had been incurred for groceries in the winter when
work had been scarce for many. Cilius was a whiz when it came
to getting a good piece rate. He negotiated with Høpner over the
price for removal of earth from the cliff, for hacking chalk or
unloading or loading the ships that moored at the wharf. Every
penny he got the piece rate raised was earned money, and Cilius
surely did things in a big way, but he knew what small change
was worth. The workers didn’t get the big money—it was the
pennies they had to live on.

Spring came early after the mild winter and the farmers got
cracking on the spring plowing. When Marinus was removing
the earth on the cliff, he often stopped work and looked across
the land where a team of horses was pulling the plow through the
soil, which steamed in the sun. If he were young, he’d probably
do as Boel-Erik was doing—buy a bit of heath and bring it into
cultivation. Because really the best thing of all was to be your
own man.

Boel-Erik had gotten his potatoes sold at a good price and he
could show black on white that he’d gotten something out of his
land. Now in the spring he was going to break up the heath for
real—the rest of the land would be put under the plow. If there
was a strike again, Erik wouldn’t be upset: he had plenty to use
his idle time on. But there was no strike; the factory was operat­
ing at full capacity—there was great demand for cement. Boel-
Erik rented a plow and horses and plowed in the evening and on
Sunday. He was practically so used to it that he could keep the
furrow straight in the black of night.

There was an election for the parish council, and the workers
elected one more man, but they didn’t get the majority as they’d
expected. It was still the large farmers who had the power, and
they’d really have hated to part with it. Now there was the meet-
ing house. Cilius was at Anders Toft’s, who’d been elected chairman of the new parish council, and wanted a subsidy. “I mean, it’s for popular enlightenment,” Cilius said. “Of course they have this kind of meeting house everywhere else.” “Of course you can say it,” Anders Toft said. “But the matter can be viewed from several sides. Now how is such a meeting house going to be run? Of course it’s certainly unacceptable for it to be used for political agitation.” “That isn’t the purpose,” Cilius said. “But you can distinguish between political enlightenment and political agitation, can’t you?”

Of course, Anders Toft could, but Cilius surely had to understand that a parish council chairman had his heavy responsibilities. It was the taxpayers’ money he administered and it mustn’t be used to no purpose. “We don’t have money to give away, Cilius Andersen,” Anders Toft said. “We’re a poor little township and if there’s unemployment, we’ll have heavy outlays for the assistance fund and poor-law system. You better believe there are many considerations. But if I might give you some advice, don’t build a meeting house now. We can surely manage with the banquet hall at the inn as we did before. No, let’s not have more expenses here in the township—we have enough as it is.” “Yeah, yeah,” Cilius said. “If you won’t, then you won’t. But when we get our chance, damn it, we’ll certainly raise you farmers’ taxes. You’re sitting on your big farms and paying less than a poor day laborer.”

Cilius had his list; he’d collected money all winter and put the money in the bank. He got a loan to build with, and as soon as the weather was tolerable, the building began. Skifter stood in the doorway to his shop and saw how the walls were rising. Not so many people came into his shop any more. Even the farmers had begun to shop at the co-op. You could, of course, notice the discounts. Little amounts added up, and every sensible man was duty bound to look after his own interests.

Boel-Erik was out in the heath every evening and Niels was at Inger’s every evening. Tora decided to talk to him and explain to him that Inger was a married woman. “Surely there are enough pretty girls,” she said. “I certainly think you could leave
Erik’s wife alone.” Niels didn’t answer; he sat and stared ahead. “I don’t know what kind of people my children are,” Tora said angrily. “You practically never take into account what I say. But if you can’t stay away from Inger, then you better leave the area and get work some other place.” “That may well be the smartest thing,” Niels said, and Tora understood that it was more serious between him and Inger than she’d hoped. “She’s also not the kind of woman it’s worth fighting over,” Tora said. “She’s never been a good wife to Erik.” “I’d ask you not to say anything about Inger,” Niels said. “After all, we are what we were born to be.”

Now Tora knew that her oldest son had fallen into a woman’s power, and Inger didn’t have gentle hands. Several times she said to Niels that he’d better leave soon. It was easier to find work now in the spring than at any other time of year. And finally Niels left. He was going to try to get work in a city. Tora accompanied him to the steamboat. Niels didn’t say much, and Tora had a feeling that she was chasing him away from his home. But she’d rather that he leave than that he should break up a marriage.

“Now write often, Niels,” Tora said, and Niels nodded: he certainly would write. He stood next to the gangway with his suitcase in hand, a tall workingman with large rough hands and already somewhat worn features. “You have to let us know about everything,” Tora said and made her voice firm. This was the third child she was sending out into the world and it was just as hard each time. “I will,” Niels said, but his eyes looked past his mother, as if he were waiting to see someone. Did he think that Inger would come to say goodbye?

Inger didn’t come, but at the last moment Bregentved came running, and Niels had company for the trip to Færgeby. Bregentved inquired as to where Niels was going, and nodded approvingly when he heard that Niels was going to Copenhagen to try his luck there. “If I were young, I’d go to America,” Bregentved said. “Over there’s where the big prospects are. Here in this country it’s not going to amount to much.” But now Bregentved was out to make his big plan reality. He was going to
try to obtain capital for his concrete block plant. It didn’t pay enough to drive around dealing in fish. “And if you can’t find anything, you can come back home and get work with me,” he said. “I’ll have a need for people who can put in a day’s work, and of course I know you.” But Niels shook his head: he was leaving not to return.

Bregentved treated him to coffee at the hotel and offered him cognac too. After all, it wasn’t every day they were in town. He accompanied Niels to the railway station and got him off well, and then he walked slowly up along the street to attorney Schjøtt’s office. Of course, a fella had to think over what he was going to say. Now the whole enterprise didn’t appear so easy to Bregentved. The attorney was busy and Bregentved had to wait a bit before he got in. “I read a poem in the People’s Gazette, and surely it was written by you,” he said chattily to the clerk. “I remember two lines: By the city there are two beautiful parks, by the road stands a lone goat kicking up sparks.” The clerk nodded modestly: indeed he was the poet. “It’s funny that you can compose it,” Bregentved said. “Of course, I also know there’s both the pleasure park and the temperance grove, and I also noticed that a goat frequently stands there tethered by the road from Alslev. But, really, I’d just never be able to get it to rhyme. But you must get a lot of money for a poem like this, don’t you?” But clerk Jensen really didn’t—he did it for honor’s sake and it came easily to him. He explained to Bregentved that he composed on wrapping paper because ordinary paper wasn’t big enough. It flowed so easily from him, if anything like shit from a new-born calf, if such a metaphor might be used. “It’s a great talent,” Bregentved said. “I don’t understand why I don’t have it. My father was good at writing poetry, but it was mostly funeral poems. Of course, he was deacon, as you perhaps have heard. But I can’t compose two lines.” “Mr. Bregentved, please come in,” the attorney’s voice could be heard.

Bregentved went in to the attorney’s office and explained his plans. He had his eye on a sand pit, cement was easy to get, and labor was right at hand. And it was good times for the building industry in Alslev and environs—it was a town that was develop-
ing. Big money could be earned at a concrete block plant. "That sounds excellent," the lawyer said. "And how much money do you have to put into it?" Yeah, that of course was the difficulty—that Bregentved lacked the capital, and he'd come to attorney Schjeftt to get his help procuring a loan. "Uh huh," the attorney said. "You saw that a sand hill is situated in Alslev, and you noticed that there's also a cement factory. But to start a concrete block plant, one must have capital. It can't be done with other people's gravel pit and cement." "I thought that's what we had lawyers and savings banks for," Bregentved felt.

The attorney politely accompanied him to the door, but he didn't want anything to do with the concrete block plant. "Try it yourself at the savings bank or at the bank," he said, but Bregentved had lost his courage. Surely there was no point. After all, he was only an insignificant man and had no advocates. Next day Bregentved was once again sitting in his fish wagon driving inland with fish.

About a month had passed after Niels's trip, when one evening there was a knock on Marinus and Tora's bedroom window. "What can that be?" Marinus said and got out of bed. "There's got to be a fire." He went out and opened the door. It was Boel-Erik. "Is there something wrong, Erik?" Marinus asked, and Boel-Erik related that Inger hadn't been at home when he came from his property on the heath. There was a letter lying there from her saying she'd left. "And the children?" asked Tora, who'd joined them. The children were safe and sound. Inger had sent them over to Line Seldomglad. Boel-Erik wanted to know where Niels was.

"Did she write that she was going to him?" Tora asked. "No," Erik said. "But I certainly noticed that they've been together a lot. I also spoke to Inger about it, but she just nagged about me begrudging her company when I myself was out on my land. But who else would she've gone to?" No, where else would Inger go?

"It's been a long time since we got a letter from Niels," Tora said, "and you're welcome to see what he wrote. But come in, there are still embers on the stove, I think. You need something
to warm you up. Because Inger hadn’t put out food for you for when you came home, did she?” Boel-Erik went into the living room and sat down at the table. His huge workman’s hands clutched his cap in an oddly helpless way. They were black from the soil and crusted with toil and hadn’t been able to hold on to a woman.

“Now you better go to bed, Marinus, you have to get up for work in the morning,” Tora said. “And you’ll come out into the kitchen with me, Erik, while I butter some sandwiches for you and make coffee.” Marinus went back to bed, because what good would it do for him to lose a night’s sleep. “I must say that’s awful for you to be rooting around on your land till late at night, Erik,” Tora said, while she blew on the embers and put peat in the stove. “Everything has to be in moderation, even work. We’re made for work, but also for rest and amusement, but you feel best when you can slave from morning till late at night.” “I mean it’s this land here . . .” Boel-Erik said. “Of course, but I mean there’s also Inger,” Tora said. “Surely she also had a right to see you once in a while. But eat now, Erik, you’re hungry, and have a drink too. There’s a little in the bottle.”

Boel-Erik ate a plate of open-faced sandwiches—he had a long day’s toil behind him. Tora poured him a few big drinks and poured the rest of the schnapps into his coffee cup. “And so are you going to write to her?” she asked. “I’m going to go fetch her; I’m going to bicycle to Færgeby now, then I can catch the first train.” “I don’t want to say anything bad about Inger,” Tora said. “But she’s never been a good wife to you, and if she’s now gone to Niels, it’ll be the worse for him. Why do you want to fetch her home if she doesn’t want to be with you?” “The husband has a right to his wife, doesn’t he?” Boel-Erik said. “Surely she can be expected to stay with him, can’t she? Otherwise I don’t know why a fella would get married. I’m not demanding anything in the world but my rights.” “But what if she doesn’t want to go back with you?” Tora asked. Boel-Erik remained sitting with the coffee cup in his hand and stared at Tora. That thought certainly hadn’t occurred to him.
“That can’t be legal, can it, for a wife to run away from her husband and children?” he said finally, but Tora was of the opinion that he surely wouldn’t get the authorities to bring Inger home. “I mean, it’s not a heifer that ran away,” Tora said. “You can’t keep her if she doesn’t have a mind to be with you. It’s good she didn’t take the children along. After all, you’d never have gotten her out there on your heath farm anyway, when you got finished building out there.” “Oh, probably she’d have given in,” Erik said. “And I certainly know it’s the law that a husband decides where we’ll live.” “Inger has an obstinate nature,” Tora said. “I think you’ll be better off for her having left you.”

Tora sat down across from Boel-Erik with her coffee cup and began to calm him down. Good lord, what was he losing in Inger? Now she’d gone, and after all there were plenty of women-folk on this earth. He could get a housekeeper who could be of greater use to him. Inger couldn’t even milk a cow, could she? “You’re speaking on behalf of your son, aren’t you?” Boel-Erik said. “If I could talk him away from Inger, I’d have done it,” Tora said. “Because I consider her an awfully bad woman. She never cared about anybody but herself. First myself and then myself and then once again myself—that’s her catechism.”

It was late at night, but Tora wasn’t in a hurry to get Boel-Erik sent home to his empty house. She began talking about the heathland, yes, oh yes, Marinus had said that it could turn into a good farm when he got the buildings erected. Was he inclined to move out there soon? “You’ll probably end up as a farmer before we know anything about it,” Tora said. “But Inger really wasn’t suited to be a farmer’s wife, no, just you let the children stay at Line Seldomglad’s for the time being and get your meals here. You’ll see, Erik, there’s a meaning to what happened.” “But I care for her,” Boel-Erik said. “I can’t do without her, even if she has her flaws.” “Yes you can,” Tora said. “There’s only thing on earth you can’t do without, and that’s work. You have to slave away, then you’ll get over it. You and Inger were too different in temperament.”

Boel-Erik sat and nodded over the coffee cup; he’d become drowsy from the schnapps and Tora’s gentle words. The trip
could surely be put off, and, after all, he didn’t know for certain either where Inger had gone. Maybe she’d come to long for the children and come back voluntarily. In any case, Boel-Erik would now wait till she wrote again.

“How did it go—did he leave for Copenhagen?” Marinus asked when Tora came into the bedroom. The day was already dawning. “No, he’s not going,” Tora said. “I was afraid he’d go wild if he found Inger with Niels, and she’s not worth it. But once Erik begins to think, it takes a while. He’ll surely let Inger go and that’s good for him.” Tora went to bed, but she couldn’t sleep again. Outside the birds began to sing; the daylight filtered in through the curtains. It would be hard for Niels now that he was getting a burden to bear. Because a good woman Inger wasn’t.
Cilius had gotten his meeting house built. An old shoemaker and his wife were managers; the wife could certainly make coffee, Cilius felt, and the husband keep an eye out so everything would proceed properly. And the meeting house got a piano.

Later in the spring a letter came from the sanatorium saying that Matilde had gotten worse and that Thomas Trilling had better come if he wanted to say the last farewell to his wife. Thomas and Black Anders set out. Matilde was very sick. She lay there still and barely recognized them, but when the nurse came in, Matilde smiled weakly. Here at the sanatorium she’d found her home and here she said farewell to the world. Matilde was buried in an unfamiliar cemetery—it was too expensive to get her home.

“Well, she was the way she was,” Black Anders said. “It was the same thing with the wife while she was alive: they couldn’t put up with the inferior conditions.” “I’ll only have good memories of Matilde,” Thomas Trilling said. “The same with me and the wife,” Black Anders said. “They were of a superior kind to the rest of us. I mean, she couldn’t play the piano, but she read the serialized novels in the newspaper. And of course the likes of me couldn’t keep up, but it was about love and such and what the fashionable folks otherwise do. But that kind of womenfolk never live to be old: they can’t live in the world the way it is.” Black Anders shook his head sadly.

They sat in the train on the way home from Matilde’s funeral, and they looked as if they were father and son. A small, fat man in a worn, blue suit sat right across from them listening to their conversation. “Excuse me,” he said all of a sudden. “Might I give you this little book. I hear you’re coming from a funeral, and it’s about the fact that millions now living will never die.” “That sounds strange,” Black Anders said. “It’s nevertheless a fact, sir,” the man said. “You’ll see that this pamphlet is based on irrefutable proofs from the Gospel.” “Is this perhaps
the Mormons?” Black Anders asked. “No, we don’t have anything to do with the Mormons,” the man said. “This polygamy of theirs is an abomination all right,” Black Anders said. “And how is the poor man supposed to support all those womenfolk? No, we’ll stick to what we learned at our mothers’ knees.”

And while the stranger set forth with sound reasons from the holy scripture that millions of people now living would never die, Black Anders looked out the window at the landscape rushing by. These were rich districts, here in the south, and it promised to be a good harvest. Black Anders happened to think about how it was to hunt in the forest north of the fjord in the fall and winter, sneak from tree to tree, on the trail of a goat, or hide behind the fence and lie in wait for a fox. He’d given Matilde a fox fur collar last winter and she certainly didn’t know where the fox had been shot. No, Matilde had been of the superior kind. If she’d known where the fox fur had been obtained, she’d never have put it on her neck. But now Matilde lay in the ground. Black Anders turned to the preachifying man and said: “Would you shut up with your nonsense. It’s best for us to die when we’re called.” Dumbfounded, the man stopped talking.

It was empty at home, even though Matilde hadn’t been there for almost half a year. The piano stood dusty and closed. “Surely nobody will play it now,” Black Anders said. “It was really beautiful to hear and it was Matilde’s delight.” “We could give it to the meeting house,” Thomas said. “Because we’re definitely not going to sell it.” After all, it would have been like selling a little of Matilde. And the piano was presented to the new meeting house and put in the assembly hall. It could be used whenever there was a meeting or dance. But when the piano was carried out of the house, it was as if Thomas Trilling for the first time said goodbye to Matilde for real.

It was a beautiful summer; all the men were at work. It was as if all the world needed cement. Steamers and small barges moored at the pier, and cranes and tackle clattered all day long. Steamers came and went with cement. In the warm summer evenings there was a dance at the inn, the music shrilled, and the girls squealed when the fellows swung them to the ceiling. The
young workers had money in their pockets, they were earning a good weekly wage, and money exists to be spent. Now there was Kresten Bossen’s Andrea. She’d taken a position with a farmer inland, but every time there was a dance at the inn, she was there. Andrea had a lot to make up for; she wanted to have fun while she was young. But all that dancing wasn’t good. By Martin Thomsen’s farm there was a hedge of elder and wild roses. The young people hid there in the hedge, and in the morning Martin Thomsen saw the snug gaps between the bushes where the youth had hidden at night. That gave Martin Thomsen material for a talk at the Mission house on the text: If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. Martin Thomsen cut down the hedge while the wild roses were in bloom.

A letter came from Niels: he’d become a dockworker in Copenhagen. Inger was living with him and they were fine. Niels asked his mother to speak to Boel-Erik about whether Inger couldn’t get a divorce. Because he’d like to make her his wife: she was very dear to him. Tora read the letter aloud to Erik. “I’m not hiding anything from you, Erik,” she said. “Though I’d prefer that it not be Niels and Inger. Now you have to think about what you want.” “Does she want to have the children over there?” Erik asked. “Oh, God help us,” Tora said. “Do you think Inger cares about her children any more than a sow does about its piglets.” But she got heart palpitations—because how had her own daughter dealt with her child? “All right,” Boel-Erik nodded. “If she wants to leave me, I won’t hold her. But I won’t take her back either.”

Søren wrote letters home and told about the elegant houses he’d gone to. Now he’d been at a professor’s for evening coffee. And Olga was sitting in women’s prison paying the penalty for her offense. Now Niels had become a dock worker and lived together with another man’s wife. What did Tora know about her children now that they’d flown from the nest? “I’m like a hen who hatches out ducklings,” Tora said and couldn’t help laughing. Marinus looked at her sadly. It took a toll on her that her oldest son was living in adultery. All his days Marinus had been a clean-living man. But of course there was Karl and Anton and
the three little ones and Vera, who lay in the bowels of the grave and nevertheless lived in Tora's heart. Fate had still not touched five children. "We surely have both good and bad left," Tora said. "We have to take it as fate wills it."

Søren came home for summer vacation; he'd taken an examination, which was called a *philosophicum*, and he'd also passed it with distinction. "Damn it, he's quite a guy," Cilius said and decided that Søren should give a lecture at the meeting house and explain to the common man about all that learning he'd absorbed. "But we have to have a dance afterwards, because otherwise we won't get them to come." Søren gave his lecture before a small gathering; the young people surely didn't care to hear about epistemology. They didn't come until afterward. Marinus sat in the first row: it was a great moment when he saw his son at the lectern. And a fella could surely understand that Søren had mastered the material and had penetrated far into the science. It was about people named Spinoza and Kant, but Marinus really didn't understand much of it. It went over his head.

After Søren's lecture Søren and his parents went home, while Karl and Anton stayed to dance. Søren didn't care about that kind of thing. "That was a lovely talk," Marinus said. "I wish you could get it into your head to become a clergyman. I think you'd be a great preacher. Did you see both Ulriksen and the minister were there? It was a great honor that they came to hear you. Don't you think so, Tora." Yes, Tora had to admit it. For once she was impressed by her son the university student. "But now don't you forget all the same what you learned as a child, little Søren," Marinus admonished him. "Science is fine, but if we lose our faith, that's not good."

Søren told about Niels and Inger: he'd visited them and things weren't good. As far as Søren could get a sense, Niels longed to come back, and Inger . . . Søren spoke hesitatingly—he was a cautious young fellow. But of course Inger was all for amusements, and when she went to a dance, it wasn't always Niels who accompanied her. "I'm not sorry to hear that," Tora said. "The quicker it's over with, the better for Niels." But Ma-
rinus didn’t like that talk. If the two had gotten together, they also ought to stay together. Søren’s vacation wasn’t long—he had to get back to his studies over in Copenhagen.

This was during the hottest summer, a warm summer such as there hadn’t been in years. It was like a baking oven in the factory’s dusty rooms, and the sweat poured in streams from the men who worked with pickaxes on the cliff. Things were best for those out in the fjord who took clay from the bottom. But the glaring sunlight in the water wasn’t good for the eyes. Boel-Erik and Jens Horse, who worked out there, had red, inflamed eyes when they came ashore in the evening. The warm haze shimmmered over the hills—it was so warm that the heather died. It stood there black and withered, and it looked as if it had been ravaged by fire.

During these hot days people read in the newspapers about how war was approaching. Now the Germans probably couldn’t control themselves any more: they wanted to fight—after all, that’s what those people were like. In the canteen there was talk every day about the danger of war, but the ones with brains really didn’t feel things were so bad. “They won’t be allowed to do it,” Børjesen said. “In Germany the workers are strong, they have their organizations. And if the workers don’t want it, there won’t be any war.” Børjesen was a well-read man; he knew what was what. Resolutions against the war had been adopted at socialist congresses, and if all the world’s workers stood together, nobody would be allowed to fight. Børjesen was at the center of a knot of listeners; he talked about the International, which was the workers’ great association, which was supposed to lead the fight against war. All across the world workers stood shoulder to shoulder.

The sun was baking hot, the rye ripened too early this year, and the grain was extraordinarily short in the blade. One day the rumor ran around the factory—that in spite of everything, war was now certainly imminent; now there’d be mobilization in all the big countries. The work stopped, on the cliff, in the factory buildings. The work crews were standing in clusters and chatting in hushed tones. The heat was almost unbearable; it was
like before a storm, and now a storm really did come over the world.

"Well, this can’t possibly be a long war," Cilius said. "The German is strong, the rest of them can’t hold their own against him." But others felt that the Englishman had his fleet and was lord of the seas; it wasn’t good to get at cross purposes with England. But how would things be in this country—would we also join in?

They’d read in the newspapers about everything that had happened, about the murder of the archduke in Sarajevo, about the ultimatum and declarations of war, but it was almost unreal—it was happening so far, far away. After all, it wasn’t so many years ago either that there’d been war between the Russian and the Japanese, and that certainly hadn’t affected Denmark. But if the Germans went into Belgium, which was a peaceful country, then couldn’t they also get it into their heads to take Denmark? After all, they’d taken South Jutland in 1864 and didn’t wish us well.

Hopner went around somber-faced; he saw the workers standing in groups talking, but he didn’t interfere. He was having telephone conversations all the time. Laurids from America had learned from his conversations that a landing of the English in Esbjerg was probably expected. It was said that the English fleet was already on the way. And it was probably the plan that from there the English would march south against the Germans.

Now the danger had drawn near; now war was standing outside the door. Tomorrow maybe Denmark would join in. And how many would have to go to war—maybe mobilization would already take place tonight? On which side would they probably come to fight?

The day was long—it was as if it would never end. Laurids went by a knot of workers. He found a pretext for going to the office. "He’s buying coal now," he said. "He called up the cities, he’s buying what he can get hold of." The workers stood silently. So, Høpner was buying coal! That meant that with certainty he was counting on war. He wanted to keep the factory going.
Yes, the factory, what would happen with it if war broke out for real? How would ordinary people find work and food? Somebody said: “I doubt that they’ll have much use for cement.” But another person explained that it was precisely now there’d be use for cement when of course forts had to be built and overhauled. There’d be more use for cement than there’d ever been before. Yes, yes, then they’d surely have food. But a great misfortune had come over the world.

The wild rumors flew from house to house, from farm to farm. Fellows were called up for guard duty, but there was no fun and games as when the fellows otherwise had to wear the king’s uniform. Who knew whether you’d ever again get to see your home again? From Alslev a whole troop of young workers left, among them Karl, Marinus and Tora’s next-oldest son. Many people were down at the pier when the steamboat sailed off with them in the early morning. The young fellows stood on deck with their suitcases and parcels, and not many words were spoken. Then teacher Ulriksen’s voice resounded: “Now sing, people, join in!” And he led the singing as if it were in his own school room: “A mighty fortress is our God . . . .”

After the song the landing hawser was detached and the little steamboat put out from the pier. Ulriksen waved his hat and shouted: “Behave yourselves, fellows, and come home safe and sound.” The fellows waved their caps. And the steamer glided out into the fjord’s broad waters, while the people remained standing and stared after it until it disappeared behind the nearest promontory.

“Yes, people, we have to take the bad times with the good,” Ulriksen said. “Let’s hope our youth may be spared, and that we’ll succeed in shooing away evil. Of course, we have nothing else to do but wait and pray that all may end well.” There was a hush while teacher Ulriksen bowed his head and in his deep voice began to say the Lord’s Prayer.

Tora walked up to town with Ulriksen. “How long do you think the war will last?” Tora asked. “How should a sorry village deacon be able to prophesy about that?” Ulriksen said. “The world has gotten harsh masters.” “Now I’ve sent Karl off,
and Niels has presumably also been called up,” Tora said. “And by next spring Anton is also supposed to wear the king’s uniform. If it were just over with by then.” “We have to keep up our hopes,” Ulriksen said.

Ulriksen had business at the parsonage; Pastor Gamst was also having a hard time staying hopeful. The minister was sitting in his study reading. “Is there news, Ulriksen?” he asked. “Nothing except that we’ve now sent off our youth,” the teacher said. “How will it end?” the teacher said. “It’s the flood, the great Armageddon. And it’s almost two thousand years since God sent us his son for the salvation of the world.”

“You don’t have a cigar, do you,” Ulriksen said. “I forgot to put my pipe in my pocket.” The minister offered him one from a cigar box and lit it for him. “You should smoke tobacco,” Ulriksen said. “Instead of always nervously stampeding up and down the floor like a colt pulling at its tether. Tobacco is a great gift from God. And so what thoughts have you had about the war, Pastor Gamst?”

The minister sat down, but he was restless; he got up again and began to pace the floor while he talked intermittently and nervously. “The terrible thing is that it smashes to pieces our whole outlook on life, our trust in providence,” he said. “I stand here every Sunday in church and preach about God’s infinite mercy and love for his children. And at the same time God lets thousands upon thousands of innocent young men kill and mutilate. Oh, it’s hopeless, hopeless, all of it.” “Now remember one thing, Pastor Gamst,” the teacher said. “The earth is old. It’s not the first time it’s drunk blood. Surely you know the lines:

Earth in whose bosom there is hatred and murder,
Generation after generation,
Bloody earth with all your sin-burden’s growing weight!
Where can you so easily follow your celestial way
round about that sun, that beholds your wounds,
and so light-green a wave,
Spring after Spring?
We have to walk on earth, even if it burns, and the path of progress is a difficult journey. Human nature has much to struggle against."

“But God’s goodness?” the minister said and stopped in front of him. “How can the almighty, all-merciful God let this happen? I tell my congregation that the Lord is our father, heaven the great, good ancestral home. I preach that we can safely place our fate in his hand, as a small child puts his hand in his father’s. But if we are God’s children, why does God torment us then as if he were a sex murderer?” “Pastor Gamst, now be careful what you say,” the teacher said. “What’s important here is not to be careful,” the minister said. “The important thing here is to get clear about the truth. I’ve lain awake and tormented every night since this insanity began, and I can no longer believe in God. Whether he exists, I don’t know, but I’m withdrawing my allegiance from him. He’s no God of light, but the Old Testament’s bloodthirsty Jehovah.”

“Lord God, Pastor Gamst, aren’t you ever going to find peace of mind,” the teacher said gently. “Why is it so difficult for a person to admit that there’s something that exceeds his understanding? Our Lord didn’t consult either you or me about governing the world. He merely requested in all modesty that we live sensibly and decently according to his words here in Alslev parish. Nothing else is expected of us. We must be faithful in small things.” “But if life itself and faith lose their meaning?” the minister said. He couldn’t keep his hands calm—they clenched and opened as if in a spasm.

“Mankind has a long way to journey, and there are perhaps many, many miles yet before we reach God’s goal,” the teacher said. “And now I’m going to say something heretical: I’m not certain that Our Lord cares that much about all that faith. Don’t you think that he’d rather that we do our best to carry out his good work? That’s what you should preach from your pulpit and in your Mission house, Pastor Gamst. . . .”
Late in the fall Olga came home. Her sentence had been reduced for good behavior in prison. Olga had become gaunt, and her face was white and closed, her eyes avoided meeting people’s looks. Søren had fetched her at the prison gate and had talked with her for a long time before he got her to go home to Alslev. She’d have preferred to be at a place where no one was familiar with her disgrace. But Søren felt she ought to go home for the time being, then later she could always look for a position as a servant. That’s what Søren wrote to his parents, but Tora agreed with Olga. It would probably have been better if she’d stayed for a time among strangers.

Tora welcomed her daughter while the men were at work. “Hello, mother,” Olga said, and her voice was so pitiful that Tora began crying. “Lord God, child, how emaciated you’ve become,” she said. “They weren’t mean to me,” Olga said. “But can we go round the back of town—I’d hate to meet anybody.” “Olga, I mean, you’ve taken your punishment,” Tora said. “Surely the worst is yet to come,” Olga said. “I’ll certainly endure that too, but I’d like to have a little time.”

So Olga had come home, at a rough time, when no one knew when the factory might stop. It was the continual difficulty: Coal! Høpner experimented with setting up new furnace mechanisms that could burn peat litter and spruce, and Laurids from America was his right hand. But no matter how much Høpner swore and cursed the whole world, they couldn’t get the temperature high enough. You had to have coal if you were going to burn cement.

Høpner had made purchases, but much of what he’d bought had been taken back from him. Høpner was traveling and bawling people out in offices and government ministries: he thumped his fist on the table and explained that many people’s welfare depended on him. But the bigwigs shrugged their shoulders. Everyone’s welfare depended on fuel, and of course there was also
other industry in the country besides a small cement factory by a Jutland fjord. Høpner came home and cursed and swore about the damned bureaucrats. No, it was different in America—there were tough, plucky people there.

Olga spent her time at home and helped her mother and didn’t say much about how things had been in prison. When Marinus spoke to her, his voice was cautious, as if he were afraid of wounding her. "Little Olga," he said every other word. "Shouldn’t you show your face a little among people?" Tora said, but Olga didn’t want to. Mostly she sat in her room in the evening, and she was at the Mission house a few times. Tora didn’t say anything about it, though she couldn’t stand the thought that Olga might become an Inner Mission member.

But one person Olga couldn’t avoid and that was Magda. Magda roped her in one evening after both had been at the Mission house, and she didn’t let her go. "I thought about you so much all this time," she said. "Often I laid and cried in my bed at night over how in the world you were doing." And now Magda wanted to know how a woman was treated in prison. Wasn’t it awful with all those prison guards who looked after you. "They were women," Olga said. "Oh, they were womenfolk," Magda said, a bit disappointed. "You know, I once read a story about a girl who was manhandled in prison—they just plain raped her."

Olga hadn’t been raped; nobody had hurt her. "But you’ve really been changed," Magda said. "But I certainly know how it is when somebody has been treated badly. I haven’t had it too easy in my life either, and I can surely say it to you: now Andres can’t sleep at night without wetting his bed. He’s like an infant, and I’m still a woman in my best years." "That’s rough for you," Olga said and couldn’t help smiling. "Yeah, you laugh," Magda said. "But what’s a smile for one person is tears for somebody else, and maybe you’ll have your own lesson to learn, even though now you may think you’ve gone through a lot. I’ll tell you what I think: some are born lucky, and they get everything they want. And others are born unlucky, and everything turns bad for them. And the two of us aren’t destined to have it
good—now that’s what I believe, Olga.”

Magda went home with Olga and Tora was obliged to offer her coffee. They were sitting and drinking when Laurids-American came into the living room. “Hmm, are you here?” he said. “Yes, I’m here,” Magda said and looked humbly at the floor. “But if somebody’s opposed, I can gladly leave.” “Nonsense,” Tora said quickly. “I know full well that Laurids can’t stand seeing me,” Magda said, her cheek wet with bitter tears. “I don’t know as I’ve ever hurt you, Laurids. And if I did, I’d beg your forgiveness, as God’s word demands of us.” Laurids from America didn’t answer, but rushed out and slammed the door after him with a bang. Magda had been at the Mission house and heard a lovely talk about the Christian heart, and she sat there literally in need of somebody who’d strike her on the right cheek so she could turn the left one.

With every passing day it became harder to live. All the world’s goods rose in price, or they weren’t to be had at all. The only thing that didn’t rise was wages. Cilius sat at home in the evenings and studied union wage scales with Børgeesen, but it wasn’t easy to turn up the rates. “This is absurd,” Cilius said, “you can hardly buy cement for money, but we’re living worse and worse.” And it wasn’t only Cilius who felt that way. There’d been good years, now came the hard ones. Everything rose and rose and rose. Now came ration cards and maximum prices and shortages of goods, but the simple unskilled laborer didn’t get any more in wages than before. “We have to pull through,” Børgeesen said. “I mean this stuff here can end in only one way: The working class is going to take power. After the rest of them have gone bust, we’ll take charge. We’re headed toward great times when some day the proletarian will turn the weapons in the right direction.” “But it’s damn tough waiting for it,” Cilius said. “But nobody said it’d be easy, Cilius,” Børgeesen said. “We’re not going to get the power and the kingdom for nothing.” “But everything is going up and up,” Cilius said. “Now they’re saying that the schnapps is going to be raised twenty cents a quart.”

Boel-Erik had managed to put up a house out on his moor-
land. It was only a humble dwelling, but it was easier for Erik to live out there. Agricultural commodities were now fetching a good price, and if the factory were obliged to stop, Erik could live on his land. He moved out there, but he didn’t take his children along; they stayed with Line Seldomglad. They had to go to their school, and Boel-Erik didn’t want a housekeeper. He’d had enough to do with women in his days, he said.

They’d heard news about Inger and it wasn’t good. Niels had been called up for guard duty and Inger had become a waitress in a restaurant. But it was probably a nasty place, Niels wrote home, and he regretted what he’d gotten her into. After all, Inger liked dancing and fun and was easy to tempt. Niels saw her once in a while, and he’d asked her to go home. But Inger didn’t want to go to Alslev.

Pastor Gamst had become oddly taciturn; he preached every Sunday in church, as was his duty, but at the Mission house he didn’t say much. He sat still with his head bowed and listened to traveling missionaries who told about blood punishment and trials, which were on us for our burden of sins. He went for long walks, and once in a while he visited the little people who belonged to the congregation. He almost never set foot in the houses of the pious farmers. Pastor Gamst once again sought the places most lowly.

Now there was Kresten Bossen who’d tempted God and gotten his punishment. He’d drunk cognac, according to the minister’s advice, and drinking agreed with him. Now Kresten Bossen had discovered that schnapps too warmed the soul and made him light and free. Kresten Bossen wasn’t a drunkard, but he took a drink like other Christian folk. But now there was once again trouble in his house. His daughter Andrea was going to have a child and it was Iver who’d seduced her.

Ida discovered how things stood with her daughter and gave her a grilling, and Andrea confessed, weeping, that she and Iver had been lovers for a long time. “Now we’re really wretched,” Ida wailed. “Now we’re going to become the laughing stock of the whole parish. And how could you have anything to do with that middle-aged guy?” “Well, I mean, I was never allowed to
be together with the young ones,” Andrea wept. “So do you care about him?” Ida asked. Yes, Andrea supposed she did.

It was a hard blow for Kresten Bossen. Fornication and sin had invaded his house. “It seems to me we’ve given our children a Christian upbringing,” he said. “The more pious we become, the worse off we get,” Ida said. “And if you can drink in the name of Our Lord, then of course your daughter can engage in fornication in the name of Our Lord.” “Ida, Ida,” Kresten Bossen said. “I’ve really only drunk a single little coffee with schnapps every once in a while.” “Presumably she also pursued her lust only once in a while,” Ida said saucily.

Ida had become such a bitter plum with the years; she had much to struggle with. Things once looked promising for them, but it was as if Kresten’s devoutness had destroyed everything. While he studied the scriptures, everything around them fell into disrepair. And were they respected among other workers? No, Ida certainly knew that the others regarded Kresten as a sourpuss, who was best at rattling off scriptural passages. Kresten Bossen stood there a bit and pondered, as if he hadn’t quite understood how badly things had gotten for Andrea. Then he said: “Hand me the book, little Ida.” And Ida threw the worn-out bible with a smack on the table in front of him.

Kresten Bossen sat down to read about the offense of adultery and the punishment of fornication, and in the meantime Ida went to the minister and poured out her troubles. “Good God, the young girl,” Pastor Gamst said. “Is the fellow going to marry her?” Ida didn’t know, but she’d come to ask the minister to have a word with him. Because in Ida’s opinion he was duty bound to make up for his offense. But he was a rotten guy, Ida explained. He had a bad reputation and it was over her dead body that he had come into their house.

The minister sent a letter to Iver and asked him to come talk and Iver came, though he first cursed that he didn’t have anything to do with the minister. “Wasn’t it you who lived with Andres Johansen and Magda?” the minister asked. Of course, Iver couldn’t deny that. “Back then you had an affair with Magda, and now you’ve made Kresten Bossen’s young daughter
pregnant. I’m not at all going to talk to you about the religious aspect, but do you think it’s proper to harm women this way?” Iver glowered at the minister. This stuff was a damn pain. Now he either had to marry the girl or make compulsory child support contributions for many, many years. “I mean, the womenfolk themselves go along with it,” Iver said. “It surely takes two to do this, I know.” “So what have you thought about doing?” the minister asked. “I don’t know yet,” Iver said. “It surely isn’t certain either that I’m the only one doing this. I mean where there’s been one, others could also have had their turn.”

Flabbergasted, the minister looked at him, and Iver looked down. He knew both that he was lying and that Andrea had never had anything to do with other men. But his life had been hard; from childhood he’d been used to ducking to avoid the blows that threatened him. And he didn’t know whether he wanted to get married. “Do you mean to say that the young girl had several lovers?” the minister asked. “You better ask her about that,” Iver said. “I only have to be accountable for what I myself did. And I’ll certainly pay whatever the law orders.”

“Thanks, that’s all,” the minister said and opened the door. Iver left, but remained standing for a moment out on the road, defiant, but at the same time embarrassed. Should he go back? But the lunch break was about to be over, and if he went back to the minister, he risked coming to work too late. What damn business was it really of the minister’s that he’d made Andrea pregnant?

At dusk Ida came sneaking to the parsonage to find out what Iver had said. “I spoke to him, Ida Bossen,” the minister said. “He’s a rotten rascal, you’re right about that. He hinted that he wasn’t the only one . . .” “Jesus have mercy on us,” Ida wailed. “Just looking at him you could see he was lying,” the minister said. “But if it were my daughter, I’d do anything to prevent her from marrying him. That marriage would never be happy.” “Does the minister mean that?” Ida asked and stared at Pastor Gamst round-eyed. Was this a minister advising against marriage when a girl had been seduced?

“Andrea’s young, she’ll surely find another one,” the minis-
ter said. "But the child?" Ida said. "Who'd want her with that encumbrance?" "Oh, if love is really there, they'll talk it over and reach an understanding about the child," the minister said. "It's wrong to enter into a marriage that will only be the caricature of a true marriage. Andrea went astray, but I know her so well that I know she'll surely find the right way again. If she marries that bandit, she'll become an unhappy person." "But can that be right," Ida said. "After they've sinned with each other?" She was frightened by her own words. Because of course what a minister said had to be right. He knew what was required.

Ida came home in a hot-tempered mood: now she intended to put her house in order. Kresten Bossen and Iver returned home from work; it was meal time, but no plate had been set for Iver. "I wonder where my place is," he asked. "You're not going to be in this house any more," Ida said, and her eyes flashed with anger. "Ida, Ida," Kresten Bossen said. But now Ida couldn't be stopped.

"You came here to the parish as a tramp and you've done nothing but harm," she said. "I won't have you another hour in my house. You spoke ill of Andrea to the minister, but even if she had ten children, she'll never be allowed to marry you. She couldn't possibly get a worse husband. Pack your things and get out. I'll be glad to see the last of you." Iver flushed with anger; it looked as though he'd slug her. "Yeah, you can certainly manage to lay a hand on a woman, you worm," Ida shrilled. "You carefully avoid the guys. How was that at the inn when you got a beating from Cilius? Yeah, we certainly heard about that. Even that old sucker Andres, he'd nearly scared the living daylights out of you. I know what I'm talking about—I know you real good."

"You hear how your wife's talking to me?" Iver asked, and Kresten Bossen could of course hardly avoid hearing it. But he stood there submissive and let the storm rage. When Ida was in that mood, it was best to keep your mouth shut. "Yeah, have it your way, you crazy hag," Iver said, suddenly desperate. "But you'll pay for it dearly. If I'm going to be pushed out the door, I can swear my way out of it." "Yeah, go ahead and swear your-
self down into hell, where you’re going anyway,” Ida shouted. “I’d rather die than see our daughter married to you.”

Iver stood outdoors with a bundle of clothes in his hand on this cold winter day; now once again he was a homeless man. He was black with anger, and at the same time he was on the verge of crying: no one on this earth cared about what became of him. He’d never possessed a more beautiful girl than Andrea, who was so young, gentle, and warm. And the world had separated him from her—that’s the way Iver felt now. But if he was being chased out, then the girl could stay there and be disgraced.

He remained standing for a long time in the biting evening cold and didn’t know what to do. What if he went in and asked for forgiveness and calmed down the angry Ida with talk? He already had his hand on the door latch, but let it go again. He’d been humiliated so much in this world that he couldn’t humiliate himself. He strolled through town. The lights from the factory could be seen dimly, but Iver didn’t give a damn about the factory. There were other places in the country where he could get work, he only had himself to take care of, and could get cracking on whatever life offered. Now Iver longed for life on the road; fate had begrudged him the chance to put down roots. By the next morning the Zealander had wandered southward.
It was a hard winter with much unemployment. Marinus began to talk about the possibility that in the spring he might get a job as herdsman or permanent day laborer on a farm. Because, after all, it looked as though there’d be great times for agriculture. Horses and cattle brought tremendous prices. But Tora said no—never in her life would she work as a servant for the farmers; in that case, they’d better move to a city.

Olga was still home; she’d again taken work at the factory—they were in much need of female labor. The old sacks had to be mended and cleaned and used again till they fell apart. There was no heat in the room where the women worked and they had to wrap themselves up well to keep warm. When they went to the factory in the morning, they resembled walking bundles of clothes in the greyish dawn. With their fingers blue from the cold, they used needle and thread. It was piece work: so and so many sacks mended per day, and it had to be done fast.

But conversation continued during work, and little by little it was as if the room thawed out, and it became quite cozy. Olga sat and listened; she replied only when someone addressed her. Of course, they all knew about Olga—that she’d killed her child and been in the penitentiary. If she hadn’t herself been sitting in the sack workshop, they’d surely have been talking about her—that she knew well.

It was Magda who led the way in gossiping, and she didn’t spare her own affairs. The other women got to hear how things were going with Andres’ infirmity. The old bugger had been so unlucky as to smash to pieces the vase he used as a receptacle, and he’d had a lot of trouble finding a new one that fit. They told many crude jokes, and Magda laughed in a shrill voice. Then she lowered her voice and began talking about Kresten Bossen’s girl. Now it was probably about the time she was expecting and the child’s alleged father had streaked off.

Line Seldomglad and Dagmar Horse were sitting here among
the other women. When the men were unemployed, the wives had to provide the support. "By the way, you knew Iver rather well," Line Seldomglad said unobtrusively. "Yeah, now I can say it like it is," Magda gushed. "He was close to raping me back then when he lived with us. But I scratched him so hard he still has scars on both cheeks. No, you can believe of me whatever you want, but they’ve really never had an easy time getting too close to me. And if Andrea had just guarded her virginity the way I guarded mine when I was her age, she’d be better off now. But what are the girls like nowadays?"

And for once the women couldn’t contradict Magda, because the girls were in a bad way. Even though it was in the midst of wartime, and nobody knew whether they’d be alive and eating tomorrow, the young people went dancing until far into the night. There wasn’t a week when there wasn’t a din from the inn, and in Cilius’s meeting house they danced merrily till daylight.

There was a snowstorm, which snowed the town in with drifts, and the frost was biting. Høpner made sure that a tile stove was set up in the sack workshop, and the women sat there bleary-eyed in the acrid peat smoke. But it was worse for the men, who sat at home and had no work. It was no weather to go out in, and it was chilly in the living room. They had to save on fuel to make it last.

Andrea Bossen gave birth to a son one winter night amid drifting snow, and the midwife could barely get through the snow showers. Andrea had moved into the bedroom and Kresten Bossen slept on the bench in the living room. Of late he’d become even more brooding: it was the world’s fate he was brooding over. It was so strange how John’s revelation fit the times as they were now. It spoke of the four angels who’d been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year and were released to kill a third of mankind. Kresten Bossen read about the heads of the horses that resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. Surely that could only be the cannons that Saint John was prophesying about.

Kresten Bossen sat with his fingers in his ears reading, while
his daughter delivered. It went easily, and when it was over with, Ida came in and took him by his shoulder to attract his attention. She said: “It’s a boy. He weighs eight pounds.” Kresten Bossen awoke as it were from a trance. “So, it’s a boy,” he said. “I think you should go in and look at him, Kresten,” Ida said. “It’ll do Andrea good.” Kresten Bossen got up meekly and went in to see his grandchild. Andrea was lying there pale in bed with the little one at her breast. She smiled anxiously at her father and Kresten Bossen stroked her hair. His thoughts were with the book in there. What could be meant by that big beast in Revelation? Was it the German or was it something that was going to come?

Word got round to the houses that Andrea had pulled through the delivery and women paid a visit after the birth. They were full of gentle forgiveness. After all, Andrea was half a child, and if she’d sinned, that was her problem. But in the Mission house the missionary from Færgeby gave a talk, and it was good that Andrea didn’t hear it. It was about sin and fornication, which had penetrated even where Jesus dwelled, about the archfiend, who was always lying in wait. There was nobody who doubted that he meant Kresten Bossen’s Andrea. But it was right that the truth was told. Because it had, of course, run all around the parish that it was the minister’s fault that Andrea didn’t marry her fornicator, and many were outraged for that reason.

Martin Thomsen had a conversation with the missionary and the next afternoon he turned up at the parsonage. The minister received him coolly, but Martin Thomsen was nothing but humble affability. “It’s almost been ages since a fella has had a chance to talk to the minister,” he said. “I know the friends long to hear you say a word or two at the Mission house.” “Of course,” the minister said. “But it’s hard to say words that comfort in these times.” “Perhaps words of judgment should also be spoken,” the farmer said. “A judgment has come over humanity.” Exhausted, Pastor Gamst sighed and didn’t respond.

But it was something else that Martin Thomsen had on his mind and he played it by ear. Now of course Kresten and Ida
Bossen’s girl had had a child in sin and dishonor—by the way had the minister heard about it? Of course, Pastor Gamst was familiar with the news; after all, it had been reported to the parish register. “Of course, it would have been nice if the poor little creature had had a father,” Martin Thomsen said. “There’s hardly anyone who’d disagree with you about that,” the minister admitted. “I’m obliged to confide to the minister that out there in the parish people say that you advised the girl against marrying the fellow who’d made her pregnant. Well, I really never believed it; I mean, I know the minister’s opinion about this kind of thing—but I think I have to say it.” The minister smiled and said that what people were saying wasn’t that wrong. It would’ve been a calamity if the two had gotten married.

Martin Thomsen looked at the minister as if he didn’t believe what he’d heard. “But isn’t the minister thinking about the offense it would give, and it’s written in the scripture . . .” he said, but the minister interrupted him. “Won’t you please spare me having to hear what’s written in the scripture, Martin Thomsen?” he said. “For one thing, there’s so much written in the scriptures, and for another, I know it better than you do. And there’s more offense from a bad marriage than from an illegitimate child.” Now a strange change came over the farmer. It was as if his round-shouldered figure grew, his face became hard and authoritative. Now Martin Thomsen was a warrior in the Lord’s struggle.

“Those are words I’d never, no never ever expected to hear from your mouth, Pastor Gamst,” he said. “I’ve respected you and considered you one of God’s children, and I didn’t think you’d protect fornication and a scandalous way of life.” “You’re so well-versed in the scriptures that of course you surely remember the Savior’s words: he that is pure let him first cast a stone,” the minister interposed. “But in that respect I am pure—of that you can be assured,” the farmer said. “I’ve always been on guard against fornication, indeed, like the apostle Paul I’ve killed the carnal urges in myself. For many years I’ve not cohabited with my wife, even though it’s permitted in modesty and marriage. But we agreed to be pure in flesh as well as in spirit. I’ve
overcome the thorn in the flesh in me, and I have a right to castigate fornication in others.” “In other words, you yourself have lived in an unhappy marriage and now you think others must be punished with the same rod,” the minister said.

A spiteful gleam blazed in Martin Thomsen’s eyes. “I’m going to tell you something, Pastor Gamst, I believe in my Lord and my Savior,” he said. “That must be a great joy,” the minister said. “But it doesn’t seem to have softened your heart. You swing the gospel like a scourge.” “I do, I readily admit it,” the farmer said. “I’m going to punish sin and aberration wherever I meet it. I’m going to castigate the ungodly as well as I have the ability to do it. And I’ll say it to you straight out, Pastor Gamst, there’s been dissatisfaction with your preaching for a long time. It’s not the Lord’s holy word that’s being preached in Alslev church. I’m going to bring up your attitude in the matter of Andrea Bossen’s illegitimate child in the parish church council, and I’m going to insist uncompromisingly that your view is not worthy of a minister, I’m going to . . . .”

“My God, Martin Thomsen, you’re a worn-out little human being,” the minister said. “You’re crushed and destroyed by existence like a tormented cat one’s tried to tear the life out of. Now you’re scratching with your claws as well as you know how. But in these hard times it remains to be seen whether our faith can hold up. Maybe it can and maybe not. But we have to turn to the sources of faith, to the words that Christ, as it were, whispers to us: forgive thy brother, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “And the burden of sins and atonement and mercy?” Martin Thomsen asked. “And sacraments and dogmas and everything else,” the minister said. “Those are words and words and words.” “What you’re saying now isn’t Christianity,” the farmer said. “But you’ll have to bear the responsibility for it in the parish church council. You can say what you will about me, but you won’t be permitted to touch my Christ.”

The little farmer stood with angry eyes and pursed lips. There was something positively moving about him, and Pastor Gamst went over to him and put his hand on his shoulder. “You’re an unhappy man,” he said. “But before we can find
mercy, we must learn to be merciful. That’s the difficult com-
mandment.”

Martin Thomsen left the parsonage in anger: a man had
abandoned the straight and narrow path, and that man was a
minister. But he swore to himself that in the struggle that was
now drawing nigh, he’d certainly get the upper hand. Martin
Thomsen knew his own weakness: he was inclined to look after
his own interests in a business deal, and he was wont to present
himself as a man without means, although he was tolerably well
off. But he’d laid his weakness at the Lord’s feet; he’d taken the
Savior to his heart.

There was a lot of business in real estate now in the spring,
and there was talk of the high prices people were getting for their
land. Even Boel-Erik had had offers for his wretched property,
but Erik wouldn’t sell. He didn’t have anything to spend money
on since Inger had left him, but he needed the land. Boel-Erik
had bought a cow at an outrageous price, and it was going to
calve soon. He’d also bought piglets at the time when they could
be had for nothing. It was almost a whole herd.

Work at the factory had started up again: Hørner had suc-
ceeded in procuring coal. Steamers were docked at the wharf
with the Danish flag painted on their sides. Seamen went ashore
and drank at the inn, and speakers came to the meeting house and
told about events out in the world. The war was an Armageddon,
but when it was over, everything would be good. But they
couldn’t say when it would be over, and life became harder
month by month. Now coffee also ran out. The workers had a
malt brew in their flasks when they rode to work, and coffee
wasn’t served any more after the meetings at the Mission house.

The farmers gathered every morning in Skifter’s shop and
talked about prices for grain and animals. In these times it was
important to know about what things cost: after all, nothing was
firm. Skifter put in his two cents: he was becoming more and
more certain that the last days were near. The farmers admitted
that it didn’t look good, but incidentally agricultural products
were of course fetching good prices. There wasn’t an old nag
that couldn’t be sold.
These were good times, many people felt, but also strange times. Now there was a man like Bregentved—who'd have considered him before? He'd worked as a day laborer, had sold lots, and dealt in fish. But now Bregentved had become a real businessman, and if he kept it up, the way he'd begun, he'd probably wind up a millionaire.

Bregentved had begun buying up fish from the fjord fishermen and had resold them in town at a big profit. That had produced cash, and he bought a small property from a smallholder who hadn't discovered that the prices for farmland had risen. That produced even better profits when Bregentved resold it, and he rented a room on the road through Alslev and put a cardboard sign in the window saying: M. Bregentved, real estate agent.

Bregentved had big plans, but capital was tight. If you wanted to deal in real estate, you had to have money both for a down payment and for sealing the bargain with a drink, but it was money that was repaid with interest. Bregentved chatted with a few people, but no one was willing to enter into partnership with him. Real estate deals could produce big profits, but also big losses. People had heard plenty about that.

One evening Bregentved came to visit Andres. He sat there respectably and drank ersatz coffee and chatted about the times as they were. Andres took the view that the times accustomed the people to contentment, and it was for their genuine best. Because what hadn't been rife with lavishness and extravagance? No, now people were learning to save. "You're not kidding," Bregentved replied readily. "But I mean we shouldn't bury our talent in the earth either. Then it easily happens that it gets rusty. But presumably you don't do that anyway, Andres—you've got your money well invested, don't you?"

Andres looked at him mistrustfully out of the corner of his eye. "What I have is so little," he said. "Well, good heavens, that's strange," Bregentved said. "Because all your days you've been both a capable and thrifty man." "Andres was glad to hear that. Otherwise people were wont to mock him for his stinginess. But there you have it. Bregentved was certainly not without talent.
"In times like these capital has to be invested, otherwise it'll crumble away," Bregentved said didactically. "If previously you owned a thousand crowns, they were worth so and so many barrels of barley. But now they've turned into fewer barrels of barley because the barley has risen and the money has become worth less. That's easy to understand, isn’t it?"

Andres nodded. He realized that these matters were right up Bregentved's alley. They had of course heard that he'd earned money in a deal for a smallholder's farm. People weren’t always as dumb as they looked—Andres knew that from experience.

"Don’t you think a fella could let his little nest egg stay in the savings bank, Bregentved?" he asked. "Sure, you can certainly do that," Bregentved said. "After all, that’s where we businesspeople borrow our money from. We take the profits, and if there’s a loss, ultimately you take it. Yeah, by all means let your money stay in the savings bank at three-four percent. The rest of us are getting fifty percent on it the way the times are. But don’t ever let me entice you out on to the thin ice," Bregentved said.

Andres sat there, an old man who, his whole life through, had known how to hold on to his money, but who now couldn’t even hold his water. He stole a few pieces of coal from the factory and a couple of handfuls of oats in the stable for his chickens. But what of it? He’d never had a head for big deals, but Bregentved certainly did.

"Now if I went into partnership with you in a business, could you give me a guarantee?" he asked. "I could," Bregentved said. "I can give the best guarantee and that’s my honest face." Andres looked as though he’d imagined a better security, but Bregentved began recounting huge deals, inconceivable sums that had been earned on real estate. But of course they’d barely come here to the area yet. "Yeah, you’re the son of a deacon and presumably something there rubs off," Andres said. At one and the same time he was elated and testy. It was as if Bregentved were making demands of him and he didn’t like that. But there was great wealth to be gained and that was pleasant for Andres.

"I’d like to treat you to a coffee with schnapps," he said. "But the coffee has gotten so bad that it’s a shame to mix
schnapps with it.” “I mean it always softens the taste a bit,” Bregentved said, but Andres didn’t respond. He was absorbed in speculating about how his money could multiply if he took up the deal. “Now what if I went into partnership with you for three thousand crowns?” he said. “Then you’ll be the richest man in the parish before a year’s out,” Bregentved replied. “I don’t have it myself, but maybe I can get it,” Andres added quickly. “Then you’ll get it by tomorrow without fail,” Bregentved said in good spirits. “The two of us, Andres, we’re a good match. You’re an awfully careful man, that has to be said to your credit, and I also think twice before I act. They were going to make me president of a concrete block plant some time ago, it was a cas-sortium, they call it, but I said to them: Money on the table first, folks, we have to have money to get the production going. Without money you people can’t get hold of Bregentved.”

Andres overcame his misgivings and Bregentved got his money to do business with. They bought a farm near Færgeby and it turned into a good deal. Bregentved sold off some of the land and culled out a portion of the cattle from the herd. It was attorney Schjøtt who took care of the papers, and he jovially tapped Bregentved on the shoulder. Now Bregentved was the solid man.

The time had come for Anton, Tora’s favorite, to be drafted as a soldier. There was one less person to support the family. But you had to know how to endure it. Just as long as we didn’t get into the war. Tora prayed for it every evening before she went to sleep. She now had three sons in the army, and if things got serious, Søren would probably also be included. It was as if life had become nothing but grief and worry.

There was a sharp discussion in the church council. Had the minister acted correctly in advising Andrea Bossen not to get married? Martin Thomsen stood up, a little crooked-shouldered, with penetrating, hard eyes, and accused his minister. Pastor Gamst sat calmly and listened to him and mentioned nothing further in his defense. But after the meeting he said to the farmer: “I like you better now, Martin Thomsen. Before it was as if you were dipped in a bucket of honey, and it didn’t become you
to be sweet. Now you’re honest in venom and gall. But remember the slab on the Mission house: O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!”
Now Bregentved built his own house on the main street: its
grandeur was without match. The time was past when Bregent­
ved could be content with a rented room and a cardboard sign in
the window. He had to have an office and telephone and a wom­
an to look after it. He was well versed in big undertakings.

Bregentved had put on weight, had gotten a little belly, and
was becomingly blotchy, and that wasn’t just from wind and
weather. When he was out with other farmland dealers, they ate
well and drank strong spirits, and Bregentved had a lot on the
credit side of life’s pleasures. He’d had many lean years; now
came the fat years.

Bregentved’s property was spacious: there was a shop for a
new dry-goods dealer and a large office and an apartment for real
estate agent Bregentved. There was nothing stopping him from
being able to get money now. Bregentved was received politely
at the bank in Færgeby and at the savings bank, and he was an
esteemed client in attorney Schjøtt’s office. He’d already sub­
divided many of the area’s farms, and now he’d also begun to
deal in peat. He bought peat bricks by the hundreds of thousands
from the small peat farmers inland and resold them to the towns.
That produced good profits. Bregentved had discovered before
the bog owners what peat was now worth.

Bregentved had to have an assistant, and one evening he
called on Marinus. Marinus greeted him a bit self-consciously:
after all, they’d once worked together, but now Bregentved was
the big businessman. Bregentved greeted Marinus and Laurids
from America without haughtiness and asked how things were
going. Did they have work—were they earning a decent day-
wage?

Yeah, there was plenty of work, as long as coal could be
gotten, Marinus explained, and even if the factory was forced to
stop, there’d surely be work for everybody. They were felling
timber and digging peat like never before. “In spite of every-
thing, you should have stuck to farming, Marinus,” Bregentved said. “Because now there’s money in it. I can sell you a good little farm I have an option on.”

Marinus shook his head: his heart had been set on farming for many years, but it was inconceivable to buy at these real estate prices. Because there would surely come times when it would be harder to pay the interest on it. “It certainly won’t happen in your lifetime,” Bregentved said. “When they’re shooting the whole world to pieces, it’ll take many, many years before they get it built up again. No, the prices will hold—you can be certain of that.” And Bregentved continued on about the good little farm he had an option on. It was just right for Marinus.

“But the house here, it isn’t the kind that can be easily sold at a good price, is it?” Marinus objected. “That can be easily taken care of,” Bregentved said. We can take it in exchange instead of a down payment. I’ll definitely find somebody who wants it. Come along tomorrow and look at the property, then we’ll make a quick deal.” It was a tremendous temptation for Marinus, who most of all in this world wanted to be a farmer again. He looked over at Laurids, but Laurids was sitting with an inscrutable face smoking his short pipe. He didn’t meddle in other people’s business; he didn’t give advice to adults. But then Tora came in and heard what they’d been talking about and she became angry.

“You’ll never learn, Marinus,” she said. “Have you totally forgotten how we slaved and drudged and didn’t get anywhere? And now you want to start all over again at your age—you’re not in your right mind. But I don’t have any respect for you Bregentved: you earn your money by enticing people to buy at too high a price.” “I only mean Marinus well,” Bregentved said, offended. “I’m not going to pay any mind to you, even if you’re sitting there with your wallet full of big bills,” Tora said. “You were never worth anything at work, everybody knows that.” Marinus tried to stop Tora, but she was furious for real. “You stamped around and break up farm after farm and sell to people at such prices they have to end up in debt and destitution; yeah, you certainly did turn into a businessman. But we’ve been paying
this house off on instalments for many years, and it’s surely humble, but it’s our own. I’m not going to sit on some property I’ll be chased from some day in disgrace. And I don’t care about your guarantee—I wouldn’t rely on your brains.”

Bregentved had been knocked out; he winked to Marinus and Laurids. That was supposed to be understood this way: that womenfolk, of course, had their moods; there was no point bickering with them. “Then we won’t talk about it any more,” Bregentved said and wasn’t in the least angry. And Bregentved revealed what he’d come for. He’d had two of their boys in his service while he was a fish dealer, and now that he was a real estate agent, he’d like to have Olga in his employ. “As a housekeeper?” Tora asked, but that wasn’t it. Bregentved was mostly out on business and when he was in Alslev, he took his meals at the inn—that suited him best. Olga would be in the office. “She certainly hasn’t had the training for that,” Marinus said, but Bregentved felt it was no big deal. As long as she could write letters for him and take messages on the telephone, that was all that was required. And she’d get a reasonable wage. That would suit her well because Olga wasn’t happy with her work at the factory. She was called down from her room, where she was sitting in solitude, and heard Bregentved’s proposal. Olga accepted—she became a clerk in Bregentved’s new office.

Time passed; people got accustomed to the fact that there was a war. It was as if it had lasted for years, and it would perhaps last many years more. The young fellows came home from the defense force, were permitted to be at home for a time, and were called up again. Niels was visiting, and Karl and Anton came home and had work at the factory. Niels didn’t talk much, and Tora had to interrogate him about Inger. It was a long time ago that he’d seen her, but she’d moved in with a seaman. “So are they going to get married?” Tora asked. “Because I mean Boel-Erik has divorced her now and has gotten sole rights to the children.” Niels didn’t think so. The man had probably been a seaman once, but he didn’t sail any more. He lived off women.

Tora started crying. Things had gone so badly for Inger. She’d had a hard heart and been a bad person. But she hadn’t
deserved such a harsh fate, and it was Tora’s son who was responsible for her misfortune. He’d led her astray. “Did you talk to her, Niels?” she asked. “Didn’t you try to get her to give up that way of life?” Yes, Niels had talked and talked to Inger earlier, because even while they’d been together, she was in a bad way. That’s why they’d broken up. “But you have to tell Boel-Erik,” Tora said. “It’s his right to hear how badly things stand. It was a hard blow to him when she left him.” Niels didn’t much feel like it, but Tora insisted that he couldn’t shirk that obligation, and one Sunday morning Niels went out to the heath to Boel-Erik.

It was a warm summer day, the larks were singing, and in Alslev the bells rang for morning services. There was a sweet and warm scent of hay and heather. Peat smoke rose from the small moorland farms, distant churches shone chalk-white in the sun. It was a poor and peaceful world, and Niels walked more slowly. He didn’t have good news to bring.

Boel-Erik was at work although it was a holiday. He was building a sheep house, while other people were taking a rest. He didn’t move a muscle in his sunburnt face when he caught sight of Niels. “So, you’ve come home,” he said and looked past him. “It’s just a visit,” Niels said. “And how’s Inger,” Boel-Erik asked. Beating around the bush wasn’t his style. Niels recounted what he knew, while Boel-Erik didn’t take his eyes off him. It was as if he wanted to fix every word in his memory. “It would’ve been better if you hadn’t lured her over there,” he finally said. “Her home was here, and if you’d only left us in peace, things probably wouldn’t have gone bad with Inger. Because I’m going to tell you what you don’t know: she fought hard against her own nature. I sensed it many a time even though she never talked about it.”

Boel-Erik stood there with a hammer in his hand, putting up a shed for his sheep. He was large-bodied, with broad, heavy shoulders that were accustomed to carrying big loads. And across from him stood Niels, slighter and lighter, and with that weighty responsibility on him. “I wasn’t responsible for her leaving here,” he said and added: “I never asked her to do it. I’d
have preferred if she’d stayed. I mean, she had the children.”

“Of course you drew her over there,” Boel-Erik said. “And cer­
tainly neither of you gave much thought to the children. Do you
suppose that she’s in the seaman’s power?” Niels didn’t know
anything about that—he didn’t know the man.

Boel-Erik thought it over for a while; he was considering
calmly and slowly—you could see in his face how his thoughts
were working. “So I suppose you know where she’s living?” he
asked, and Niels was able to shed light on that. Somebody had
told him and it had stuck in his memory. Boel-Erik repeated the
address a couple of times, then he got down to work again. The
sheep house was supposed to be finished. Weekdays he had
work in the factory, and the long Sunday had to be made use of.
It looked as though he’d totally forgotten Niels. Niels stood for
a little and looked at him, then he walked home to Alslev.

Several days later Boel-Erik took off from work and made
the long journey to Copenhagen. It was his intention to find
Inger and free her from the way of life she was now leading.
Boel-Erik had decided that he’d take her back as his wife. If
she’d move out to his place in the heath and share his toilsome
life, every sin would be forgotten. But he returned without In­
ger.

Søren was home during his vacation. He was on the verge
of losing his youthfulness. He’d gotten glasses and his hair had
thinned somewhat; it came from all that studying. The girls fol­
lowed him with their eyes—Marinus certainly noticed that. Be­
cause he was far from ugly, though he was, to be sure, sedate for
his age. Søren had a photograph of a young woman he’d gotten
to know in Copenhagen. She was almost all eyes, hair, and
white teeth, it seemed to Marinus, but he praised the girl’s ap­
pearance so as not to wound his son’s feelings. “I mean, she’s
sort of the more delicate kind,” Marinus said. “A fella can really
see by looking at her that she has a good mind. Are you sweet­
hearts, if I might be permitted to ask.”

They weren’t exactly sweethearts, but they were friends,
Søren admitted. And maybe it would become more serious in
the future. Her name was Tove, her father was treasurer of a
bank. She herself was an artist and was learning to paint at a large school called the Art Academy. "You're welcome to tell mother," Søren said. "But don't tell the rest of them. I mean, we're not as such really engaged yet." Marinus promised to be as silent as the grave. He was proud and touched by his son's having shown confidence in him.

Søren was at teacher Ulriksen's and gave an account of how his studies were progressing. Ulriksen listened to him absent-mindedly. "That's good, learned Søren," he said. "You're absorbing learning and that's good. We'll certainly pay for you for the time being, but be industrious, because a fella doesn't know how long it can keep on going in these times." And Ulriksen said to Søren that he needn't go to the minister. Pastor Gamst was very busy at this time and Ulriksen would definitely say hello.

Pastor Gamst was busy defending himself against people who previously had been his friends. The minister no longer went to the Mission house. The last time he was there, a wave of coldness came surging toward him. Pastor Gamst had shielded immorality: he'd advised a girl who'd been seduced not to get married, and the alleged father had skipped town. Now how many girls would Iver make unhappy before he was restrained?

The minister was severely censured in the parish church council, and in the parish council they weren't gentle either. How were they going to collect the compulsory contribution for the maintenance of the illegitimate child? It was, so to speak, the minister's fault if the township were forced to bear the loss. A part of the congregation led by Martin Thomsen had submitted a complaint to the rural dean and bishop. Because a minister had not acted in a seemly fashion.

Pastor Gamst no longer took long walks; he walked in his garden, on the overgrown walkways, where the air was cool, almost as if you were walking on the bottom of a green lake. But he still had friends. Mrs. Marja drove over to the parsonage and was full of comforting words. She'd heard the whole story from the missionary in Færgeby, but she'd also told the man her opin-
ion in plain words. What incredible narrow-mindedness! But it was worth remembering that he was strongest who stood alone.

But it wasn’t the dispute with Martin Thomsen and his people that was preoccupying Pastor Gamst. Good God, the whole world was at war, and of what importance was his little skirmish? But where was God? His heaven was darkened by war planes and his green earth was being poisoned by mustard gas. Where had the Almighty hidden from his children’s prayers?

Here the rich harvest was growing in the field, the grain was reaped and taken into the barn. The cattle stood in the grass in the fjord meadows and stuffed themselves fat for export. Business was transacted and money earned; yesterday’s poor were today’s rich. Farmers built new farmhouses, the large farmers got cars. There was wealth in the country, while the world’s youth went to their deaths, and children wasted away from want in their mother’s womb. Where was God?

Not many people came to church when Pastor Gamst preached. His sermons were hard to understand and there was no warmth in his words. He read the text for the day and spoke briefly. Now and then he stopped short and took a long time to find the thread. Teacher Ulriksen followed him anxiously with his eyes from the bench below the pulpit and sighed with relief when the minister said amen. “How long can he stand it,” Ulriksen thought. “He’s as tight as a kettle the steam can’t escape from.”

The harvest was over with. The farmers began to think a little about the fall plowing. The trees in the parsonage’s garden became darker in color and it was cool in the evenings. Pastor Gamst had had a thought that he was now considering. What if he now went to the bishop and talked about his scruples? Because there was no point talking to the dean unless it was about red wine vintages or Jersey cattle.

The minister went off and obtained an audience with the bishop. He was shown into a study with bookshelves from floor to ceiling. There was a soft carpet on the floor, but only a few spartan chairs and a desk. On the wall between the windows hung a large picture of the Lord’s Supper.
The bishop was a small, white-haired man with sharp features and intelligent, lively eyes. He asked Pastor Gamst to sit down so he had the light in his face. He himself stood with his back to the window. "Lawyer’s trick," the minister thought.

"I’m glad to see you here with me," the bishop said. "For a long time I’ve wanted to have a conversation with you. Of course, we belong to different movements within the church, but . . . ." "I no longer belong to any movement," the minister said, and the bishop knitted his brow slightly. He wasn’t accustomed to being interrupted. Pastor Gamst didn’t pay any attention to it. He’d gotten up and trudged up and down the floor while speaking of his doubts. The bishop grudgingly watched his wild wandering, while he gently nodded once in a while: to be sure, to be sure.

"I don’t understand what’s happening in the world," the minister said. "I’ve begun to doubt God’s supreme goodness. Or rather, I no longer believe in supreme goodness. If God is almighty, why is he letting it happen? Every day millions of burning prayers ascend to him from desperate, helpless human beings; he doesn’t hear them, even though he himself instructed us in prayer. For more than a year now the mass murder has been continuing . . . how are we, who believe we’re God’s servants, supposed to be able to speak to others about him? The God who we were taught was lenient toward his children, is now like an insane despot. If he exists, Bishop, if he exists?" The minister, now stammering chaotically, now violently and urgently, spoke a stream of accusatory words. The thoughts he’d thought over and over again now took form. The bishop’s eyes were constantly directed at him; he looked a little tired. He reached out his hand and pushed a button. A maid came and the bishop asked for tea. "It’s a little sophomoric," he said to himself.

"Now sit down, dear Pastor Gamst," he said. "Now let’s drink a good cup of hot tea. I well understand your scruples; each of us has had times in his life when doubt marches into his soul. The Christian life is a constant struggle. Time and again we’re confronted with the question: why should this or that happen. But I’ll tell you one thing: because Our Lord has permitted
us to be his preachers, doesn’t mean he’s initiated us into his confidence. He doesn’t send a message to your parsonage or my bishop house about how he intends to manage the world’s governance.” The bishop smiled in a friendly way and poured the tea.

“There’s nothing for us to do but surrender to God’s will, to full and complete trust in him,” he continued. “Everything that comes from him serves us for the best. If he punishes us, perhaps we imperfect ones don’t understand why, but we certainly need the most severe punishment. And after all, what do the earthly sufferings mean as against eternity’s splendors.” While the bishop was speaking, Pastor Gamst took a look around the cozy, well-lined room. The screams from the suffering world didn’t penetrate in here. Here a friendly old man sat in undisturbed tranquility with his books and governed his diocese. “But your scruples are human,” the bishop said. “We must constantly wrestle as Jacob wrestled. We must win the faith again and again. I propose that you be relieved of your official duties for a time. I will recommend to the government ministry that you receive half a year’s leave, and that a curate be appointed for you. You’re in a spiritual crisis and must have peace. When that period has passed, we’ll talk about it some time. But I will pray for you that you may regain your trust in our Savior.”

When the minister was going to say goodbye, the bishop’s countenance changed: now he wasn’t the friendly old fellow, but the clerical official. “But just listen, Pastor Gamst.” he said. “You know a complaint or a kind of petition came where they complained about your having dissuaded a girl who was made pregnant outside of marriage from marrying the man who’d seduced her. What’s this all about?” The minister explained that in his opinion Iver was a bad person and that a marriage could never bring happiness to the two of them. “It’s possible that you’re completely correct in your judgment of the man,” the bishop said. “But nevertheless your action was wrong. Under no circumstances can we tolerate these extramarital sexual relations.” “I truly didn’t do that either,” the minister said and began to laugh.
“Well, now don’t laugh,” the bishop said. “Because the matter is plenty serious. If the Christian moral ideal is shattered, more than that will go to pieces. I certainly know that we can’t prevent young girls from having illegitimate children. But we must maintain that it is sinful and that the damage as far as possible must be repaired. If an unlawful sexual relationship has existed between unmarried people, and it’s had consequences, it’s our duty to demand that it be legitimated. Nothing is of greater significance than our maintaining the moral values. If we give free rein, we’ll end up in the ditch.”

The bishop fell silent for a bit and once again became the indulgent old man. He accompanied the minister to the door and patted him in a friendly way on the shoulder. “I’ll write a recommendation to the government ministry this very day,” he said. “And if there’s anything you want of me, just come. While we’re young, things roar and ferment in us. And it’s surely the fermentation that produces the delicious wine. You’re not the first young prelate who’s confided his scruples to me. Oh, there’ve been many through the years. But all of them have lost their fizz and are sitting as good ministers in their parishes.” The bishop fell silent and sighed. Then he continued while he opened the door out to the sunny market square: “But you can’t protect immorality. On that subject I’m very strict.”
Pastor Gamst got half a year’s leave, while a curate attended to his duties, and the bishop was right: his nerves calmed down. But he was no longer in the Inner Mission and Ulriksen wasn’t displeased with that. They were together almost every day while the minister was on leave from his post, and Ulriksen taught Pastor Gamst to smoke tobacco. But scarcely had he managed to learn it before there was no more tobacco to be had. It was a hard blow for Ulriksen. He tried dried cherry leaves and hops, but it tasted worse than nothing. That spring Ulriksen decided to become self-sufficient. He cleared out some flower beds in his garden and began cultivating tobacco. If they could do it on Funen, they could surely also do it in Alslev even if the climate was a tad windier.

There was irregular work at the factory: now it was in full swing, now it stopped completely. It was all about the coal, the coal, which was so hard to procure. It didn’t matter that there were rotary kilns and mills and a hundred fifty men who’d be dying for work if coal couldn’t be procured. Cilius had gotten work in the coal mill; he tended the pyrator and was as black as Satan when he came from work. But this way he knew exactly that there was now coal for so and so many days’ consumption. Many anxious eyes kept a watch out across the fjord when a coal steamer was expected. If it didn’t come, it meant fresh idleness.

It was the hard life once again. Uncertain work and high prices, and a constant anxiety about their daily bread. But Cilius got the worst blow when the big tax on schnapps came, “I’ve lapped up schnapps almost from the time I can remember,” Cilius cursed. “There’ve been times when it meant more to me than house and home. I’ve drunk schnapps when I was cold and when I was warm, and when my bowels screamed in my body from hunger. I’ve drunk like a horse when my luck was against me, and now they’re taking the schnapps from us at a time when we may need a drink. It’s the poor man’s aquavit.”
Cilius held a dirge in the canteen when the new tax became known. He was black with coal dust, and his bloodshot eyes shone in his black face. Now Cilius was angry at his own people. Because the bigwigs had never dared put a tax on the poor man’s aquavit. It was a government of the people that did it and a socialist was sitting in this government. But maybe it was somebody the temperance men had wangled in. “If he’d lived our life, he wouldn’t have taken the schnapps from us,” Cilius said. “Then he’d have gone a different route.” And Cilius put forward his program for indirect taxation to his listeners in the canteen. The rich people would have to pay a premium for all commodities because they had more to pay on. Many agreed with him—it sounded sensible. Everything was expensive enough for the unskilled laborer—the point wasn’t to make anything more expensive.

Now it was around the time that the collective bargaining agreements had to be renewed, and Cilius declared that the big battle would surely be coming. For many years the workers had borne the burden; now they’d be put in the same position they’d been in before. “Are we going to have a strike?” people asked. “Damn right we’re going to have a strike, and we should’ve had it years ago,” Cilius said. “We have to think about our wives and children. I mean, all the bigwigs are earning money left and right—are we getting to see any of it? Have any of you found it in your pay envelope?” And everybody had to admit there wasn’t too much in their pay envelopes. It was touch and go making it last.

“Take it easy, Cilius,” Børgesen said one day as they were walking home from work. “Your problem is that you fly off the handle.” “Why don’t you shove the devil and his great-grandmother up yours,” Cilius said, losing his temper. “What do we have labor unions for? Did I become chairman because we have to achieve something or to sit at a desk and play clerk? No, damn it, if we’re going to get something, we have to take it ourselves. They’re not going to give it to us if they can help it. I was a navvy and thrashed a contractor till blood flowed. My whole life I’ve had to fight with somebody or other over making
a living. Sure, I became a smallholder because I got in Frede-
rikke’s bed, but that was a slave’s life too. Toil and drudgery are
what we have and a song and a dance are what we get. We have
to learn to take for ourselves.”

There was rebelliousness in Cilius, but at home he was a
man of peace. He had it good with Frederikke: in an unobtrusive
way they’d finally worked things out. The little red fox had
begun to go to school, and Ulriksen was all praise. “He’s behav-
ing himself the way he’s supposed to?” Cilius asked, and Ulrik-
sen explained that Little-Jep was gifted, but, of course, he was a
tad wild. “It can’t do any harm for him to be all stirred up,” Cili-
us said. “But if it goes too far, give him a lively thrashing.”
“I’ve never hit children,” Ulriksen said. “I can say the same,”
Cilius said. “The thrashings I’ve given have always fallen on the
right place. A fellow has to hit on the bigwigs and not on the
little people.” Ulriksen laughed good-naturedly, but they agreed
on that.

It turned out that Cilius had done an injustice to the bigwigs
in the union: there was a wage increase, the wage scales were
raised. “There, you see,” Børgesen said. “You’re too quick to
judge.” “But it’s not much,” Cilius said. “We have less in
wages now than we had when we began working at the factory.
Why should we bear the burdens? Is it because we keep the
whole thing going? We do the most important work and we’re
given the least consideration.” “Now take it easy, Cilius, we’ll
definitely accomplish it all,” Børgesen admonished him. He was
a calm man and had great confidence in the strength of the work-
ing class. The important thing was not to get carried away, but
to haul progress ashore with long steady pulls.

But was it easy to take it easy in times like these? The farm-
ers were earning money left and right; the bank notes came fly-
ing at them without their having to make a move. And now take
a look at Bregentved. He’d been an unskilled laborer, but he’d
understood the art of climbing, and he himself felt it resulted
from the fact that he secretly descended from a count and had a
deformed hand as a sign of nobility. Bregentved had become a
big man, he did business with farms in the whole district, he had
credit in banks and savings banks. He strode erect into attorney Schjøtt’s office, and now he was the one who slapped Schjøtt on the shoulder. And one day he had the honor of being introduced to Mrs. Marja.

“This is real estate agent Bregentved, in a way we could actually very well say large farmer Bregentved,” Schjøtt said, and Mrs. Marja smiled her sweet-tempered smile. “That’s strange I’ve never met you before, Mr. Bregentved,” she said. “Because really I’ve been here in the area now for so many years.” Mrs. Marja was no longer interested in the spiritual life: she’d had a disappointment with Pastor Gamst, who’d turned out to be so cold and indifferent. At the moment Mrs. Marja was more inclined to be partial to the great figures of the world of business. The vibrant life, the great decisions, on which many people’s fate depended. And Bregentved was interesting: he’d worked his way up from the lowest stratum of society, and it was so touchingly sweet that he still said “A” instead of “I.” Bregentved was invited to tea in the attorney’s private apartment. Mrs. Marja didn’t drink coffee like the common provincial hen. “And now tell me about your enterprise, Mr. Bregentved,” Mrs. Marja said, but Bregentved sat there mute. He could certainly use his powers of speech, but this attorney’s wife here wasn’t easy to figure out. Bregentved had never seen French drawing room comedies performed at a provincial theater.

Attorney Schjøtt was earning money—there were big real estate deals—and had a reputation for being capable. Mrs. Schjøtt was the most elegant lady in Færgeby; she had the honor of being invited to the count’s at Å Estate and was such a hit that the count suggested to her right off that she go to bed with him. Mrs. Marja turned pale and in bewilderment said: “But Count, really.” And the count said in his rustic, good-natured way: “It wasn’t my intention to be crude. I always speak bluntly and say what I mean. And stop calling me Count, because after all it’s nothing but a large farmer’s farm and I call myself simply von Haller.” Mrs. Schjøtt looked at him in astonishment: that’s not the way she’d imagined a count.

Bregentved still had Andres’ money to work with and that
was a great benefit for Andres. Once in a while Bregentved visited him and made a report, and as time went on those were large sums that Andres had earned in the partnership. Once in a while he was paid out a large banknote, but most of it remained invested in the big transactions. When Bregentved sold a farm, it was necessary that some of the profit remain invested as a mortgage. But Andres certainly understood that there was no risk involved in that because the land prices kept rising.

“Oh boy, oh boy,” Andres said. “All that money—I wouldn’t ever have thought it possible.” “Things are going forward nicely,” Bregentved said. “Now we’ve practically managed to lay down the keel under the old tub. If you feel like it, Andres, by all means you can order a receptacle made of gold instead of the porcelain vase you have in your pants.” But Andres resented that. No one was allowed to poke fun at his infirmity. And he said spitefully: “Then while I’m at it I can order a mitten for your crippled hand.”

Konrad had come home from guard duty; he’d served out his time and was free. He looked after his consumer cooperative, under Cilius’s strict supervision, and from his door Skifter could see how the customers came and went. Skifter had calmed down a bit: the world probably wouldn’t come to an end this time, even though the people were routing one another. He had a good old stock of goods, and he made a profit by raising the prices. But Skifter was an honest man: he faithfully paid ten percent of his profit to the Mission. That way Our Lord got his.

But something new had entered the farmers’ conversation at the counter in the grocer’s shop: they talked about stocks and shares and what could be earned on them. Anders Toft told of a farmer in Havnsø who was probably on the way to becoming a millionaire. It was shipping shares he’d bought and sold with a big profit. A hush came over the shop. “It’s probably not so easy,” Mads Lund felt. “You presumably need big money to buy.” But Anders Toft knew what he was talking about. A fella didn’t need all the money in the world: most of the purchase price was given on credit. And in the evening a party of farm owners got together secretly, and now Alslev was also repre-
sented on the stock exchange. No, that wasn’t the big money, but they certainly wanted to be in the game too.

But what were the rest of them compared to Bregentved? Andres was standing in the factory stable giving the horses a feed when Marinus came in and recounted that now Bregentved had bought Holle Estate. “He did what?” Andres said. “But he’s not all there, is he? That deal is a couple of sizes too big for him.” “You know, I barely understand it,” Marinus said. “But they say it’s true. He bought it including crops and livestock and took possession right away. Back when I applied for a position there as herdsman, I didn’t think Bregentved would ever become the owner.” The two aging men looked at each other. They’d lived long, they’d heard a lot about Holle Estate. Their forefathers had performed compulsory labor services there and ridden the wooden horse. They themselves or their peers had worked there in the field as day laborers. Holle Estate was enmeshed in the life of the district. Lords of the manor who haunted the place, oppressors of the peasantry, immured damsels. And now Bregentved had bought the old farm, day laborer and fishmonger Bregentved with the bad hand.

“It’ll never work,” Andres said. “That big farm is a couple of sizes too big for him.” But Marinus had great confidence in Bregentved’s abilities. “If he’s gotten this far, he can surely also go farther,” he said. “I know him well, I worked with him in the beets at Mads Lund’s. He was awfully nice, and he was smart too. He told about his inventions, and all that stuff certainly wasn’t nonsense. He’s shown it ever since.” “Yeah, yeah,” Andres said. “He’s talented, I’ve got to admit that. But can something like this work?”

Andres filled his pockets with oats and strolled home from his day’s work. Bregentved had come and was sitting in the kitchen talking to Magda. “But is it true what they say,” Andres asked. “Did you buy Holle Estate?” “I bought it yesterday evening,” Bregentved said. “I got it cheap. It’s the biggest one we’ve gotten hold of yet, Andres, because I hope you’re going to be in on it.” “My father was coachman on Holle Estate in his youth, and I recall we often got a visit from the old lady of the
house when I was a boy,” Andres said. “And while I was a stableman at Havnsø inn many, many years ago, one of the sons from Holle Estate was there who fell in love with the innkeeper’s daughter. Of course, they couldn’t have each other, but she had a child by him, and that boy has a small farm over in Holsted parish—I know him really well. But he doesn’t like people to talk about who his father was. Yeah, it was always an awfully big farm.”

Andres sat and rocked his head, while Magda put the food in front of him. Magda’s voice was pleasant and she didn’t nag, as she usually did, when Andres emptied his pocket of oats and put the grain in a little pile in front of him. She was mighty impressed by Bregentved and his big deals. “What did you pay for Holle Estate?” Andres asked and held his breath. “Four hundred thousand,” Bregentved said. “Oh boy, oh boy, it can’t possibly be worth half that,” Andres wailed. “What kinds of times are these and where are you going to get the money from?” But Bregentved already had pencil and paper out and figured it out for Andres. There were so and so many acres of good land and land was at such and such price. Much of the land could be sold off and there’d still be a nice large farm with good outbuildings and a luxury residence. “I could resell today and collect five thousand,” Bregentved said and made a movement with his bad hand as if he were raking big money in. “But in a few months I can get ten. And if we subdivide, then it’ll be big money. Think what somebody can get for the livestock alone on that farm. You have to keep in mind that there’s first-class livestock on that farm. This isn’t the junk we otherwise deal in. I believe we can make a hundred thousand on this deal here—you want a piece of it?” Andres moaned, cold sweat stood on his forehead. So much money, oh, so much money!

Bregentved had always had the gift of gab—it had benefited him a lot in real estate deals. He explained and calculated, while Andres sat there with the little pile of oats in front of him. It was from the factory’s stable. But before Bregentved left, Andres had secretly become co-owner of a manor. Now he himself had a stable with horses and hundreds of barrels of oats in the loft.
With trembling hands Andres had signed a piece of paper. It was a surety for a line of credit at Færgeby Bank. Now they were going to risk everything; now Andres and Bregentved were on the way to the big money.

Word had gotten out about the big farm deal and Bregentved was the man of the day. He came into Skifter’s shop to buy cigars—provided there were any to be had. Mads Lund was standing at the counter. He said in a quite subdued voice: “That was really a big deal, Bregentved. Can it really work out?” Of course, of course, it can easily work out. Bregentved explained all his plans to Mads Lund. “And the money?” the farmer asked. “A fella can get money in Færgeby, and if they say no, they certainly have money elsewhere,” Bregentved said. “At the Havnso Savings Bank last week they refused to accept a deposit of five thousand except at a reduced rate of interest. They don’t know what to do with all the money, and they’re happy to get it put into circulation.” “And what’s your opinion of the stock market?” Mads Lund asked his former day laborer. But Bregentved didn’t know anything about the stock market; the only thing he knew all about was real estate—that’s what he was a specialist in.

Alslev inn became lively because now Bregentved had become the big wheeler-dealer for real. The other businessmen drove over to talk to him, and when Bregentved fed them, no expense was spared. But they could also do with new customers at the inn because now it was rare for working people to go there. They just couldn’t afford to pay those prices for schnapps—no, that was just impossible. Cilius, Lars Seldomglad, and Børgesen were at the inn a single time in a whole month. It was an evening they’d held a meeting of the consumer co-operative’s executive committee. They were going to have coffee with schnapps, but now they didn’t order the bottle of schnapps, as they used to do in the old days when prosperous men went to the inn. They’d pour a glass that was teeny-tiny, almost like a thimble. “Oh, good god,” Cilius said. “Damn it, I never thought I’d live to see the day. Malt coffee and schnapps to fill a hollow tooth, and it costs just as much as a whole liter did in the old
days. Damn it, this’ll end up with us turning into temperance people from pure necessity and misery. It was good that Old-Jep went to his grave in time.”

In the other room there was a din: Bregentved was having a party with two cattle dealers who’d been at Holle Estate to look at the livestock. A huge roar resounded from in there: they were really knocking back the drinks, Lars Seldomglad said, but, of course, they also had the money for it. But Cilius looked toward the door angrily and suddenly he opened it. “Could you tone down the fun, folks,” he said. “There are also other people in the world.” Bregentved turned his blotchy face toward him. “Come in the room, Cilius, and have a round,” he said. “You’re welcome to bring the people you’re sitting with.” But that’s not what Cilius had in mind. “Thanks, but I don’t drink on another man’s money,” he said. “But you people’ve got to be quiet—we can’t stand the noise.”

Cilius went back to the table and gulped down his coffee with schnapps. Then he took his cap. “Damn it, no,” he said. “I’d never have believed it. But if we’ve gotten through this much, we’ll surely get through this stuff here too.”

It turned fall and teacher Ulriksen took in his harvest. His tobacco plants had grown well, and he’d dried and treated the leaves according to all the rules of the art. But the real question was whether you could smoke the tobacco! Pastor Gamst was visiting as Ulriksen with delight was stuffing his long pipe to try out his own crop. “It’ll be good to taste that honest herb again,” Ulriksen said, full of hope, and lit up. He blew a few huge clouds of smoke and took the pipe out of his mouth. “One’s probably just gotten out of the habit,” he said and tried again. Then he put down the pipe; he was pale. “Really, that this should happen to me,” he said. “This tobacco is too damn strong.”

But teacher Ulriksen didn’t give up: if the tobacco was too strong, it could surely be made weaker. He hit upon boiling it and drying it, and now some of the nicotine had been boiled out. And now the herb was smokable: it positively reminded you of tobacco. People have to know how to help themselves.
Søren hadn’t been home to visit for a long time; he slaved away at his studies and it was expensive to travel. Now he’d become properly engaged to his girl. Printed cards had been sent to the people in Alslev whom Søren considered his friends. Søren Alslev, M.A. Candidate, and Tove Faber, it read, and it was printed on the finest paper. Ulriksen brought the card and his congratulations. “What kind of tomfoolery is this to send out something like this?” Tora said, but it was Ulriksen’s opinion that something like that was probably the custom and Søren couldn’t be reproached for it.

Søren came home with his fiancée, who wanted to get to know his parents and the area he was born in. But Søren had written ahead of time that it would be best if they didn’t mention anything to his fiancée about Olga’s misfortune. It was best for everybody concerned if it remained concealed for the time being that his sister had been in prison. Later Søren intended to tell Tove himself. But she’d have a hard time understanding something like that without more careful preparation—after all, she was from a well-to-do family. “Oh, I think the boy is totally crazy,” Tora said. “What difference would it make if she found out that his sister had had bad luck? There aren’t any nicer girls than Olga, are there?” But Marinus felt that Søren was right. It was better to wait until they knew each other better. He could always tell her about it.

They’d made big preparations: Olga had moved out of her room, where Søren’s fiancée was going to stay. Anton was at home and worked at the factory, and he felt that Søren had to have Laurids’s garret because an engaged couple surely had to be near each other at night. Marinus got angry about those words. “Somebody might easily think you wanted to say something about the girl,” he said. “But those kinds of people don’t have anything to do with each other before they get married. I won’t have loose talk in my house.”
The betrothed came by steamboat from Færgeby. They hadn’t written what day they were coming, and there was no one to greet them. On the way up to Marinus’s house they met Cilius, who’d been home for lunch. “Well if it isn’t Søren,” Cilius said. “Welcome to our town.” Søren introduced his fiancée to Cilius, who was black with coal dust. Cilius stared at her and burst out: “But is that there really a human being!” He thought better of it because he didn’t want to be rude to a girl who was a stranger. “Excuse me,” Cilius said. “Of course I know very well you’re a human being, but I’ve really never ever seen your match.”

It wasn’t just Cilius who was astonished by the sight of Søren’s fiancée—many others in the town of Alslev were. The girl was dressed according to the new fashion in short skirts, which showed her nice round legs. She wore makeup and was powdered and decked out like they’d never seen a womanfolk before. And right in the middle while people were talking to her, she’d take out a box with powder and chalk herself up. Her dresses were of a strange cut and in gay colors—that’s what was probably in vogue now among the fashionable people.

“I mean, I could instead ask whether that black man was a human being,” Tove laughed. “But they certainly are very primitive here in your part of the country. I feel as if I were on an expedition to the interior of Africa.” But when they came to Marinus’s house and Tora welcomed them, Tove was kind and friendly. “It’s so nice of you to allow me to come with Søren,” she said. “It’s not everybody who feels that engaged couples should be allowed to travel together.” “Well, we’re not in the Inner Mission,” Tora said with a veiled look at her prospective daughter-in-law. She really pretended to be a bit too virtuous and well-mannered.

But Marinus almost couldn’t take his eyes off her when he came home from work. Søren had gotten such a splendid and fashionable fiancée—she looked as though she were of the most fragile porcelain. The women stole over to see her, Dagmar Horse, Line Seldomglad, Meta, Magda, and others in a group. Tove sat in the middle of the circle and drank coffee and was

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lively. They all had to admit that there was nothing haughty about her. And her father probably had an awful lot of money—Søren was making a good match. But that a girl would deck herself out like that—that was plenty hard to understand.

But Magda was terribly enthusiastic about Søren’s fiancée and took precise measurements of the cut in her dresses. “Is that the way the fashion is now?” Magda asked, and Tove willingly explained how women in the big cities now went dressed. This dress here had come from Paris despite the war. “I’ve been promised a silk dress,” Magda said. “But who can sew this fashionable dress here? I mean, they don’t have the right patterns—those crummy seamstresses we have here in the area.” And Tove promised that she’d send Magda patterns so she, too, could be fashionable. It would happen as soon as she got back to Copenhagen.

“You’ve gotten a daughter-in-law there, Tora,” Magda said, when she was alone with Tora. “But I always knew that something great would certainly become of Søren—he’s also really the best of your children.” “Stop that nonsense,” Tora said. “He’s not better than the others.” “If only I’d had children,” Magda said. “But it didn’t fall to my lot. Maybe they’d have been of the finer type too.”

Søren and his fiancée visited Ulriksen and were offered port. “You’ve gotten yourself a pretty girl, learned Søren,” Ulriksen said. “But she certainly fits in best in the city and no doubt so do you.” Søren recounted how his studies were progressing. He’d been diligent, and before many years had passed he’d be able to sit for his exam. “And then?” Ulriksen asked. “Then of course there’s the possibility of doing a doctoral dissertation,” Søren said. “I’ve already begun collecting material little by little.” “This is a viper I nourished in my bosom,” Ulriksen said good-naturedly. “I’d intended to make you into a man who could go out into the everyday life of the people and make use of your learning, and instead you’re becoming a withered academic. That’s not good for an old Grundtvigian to think about. But so much is happening in these times that I suppose I can’t complain. Good luck with it, Søren.” Ulriksen sucked on his pipe with its
pungent home-grown tobacco and recalled the time when Søren was a little, white-haired rascal. Tora’s bright son. But there wasn’t much of Tora’s nature in him.

“Such a queer old fogey,” Tove said, as they were leaving Ulriksen. “You have to promise me that you’ll never have a beard or smoke a long pipe. But otherwise he was sweet. I’ve always had an appreciation for eccentrics. But your sister is strange; it’s sort of like she can’t stand me. Is she always so quiet?” Yes, Søren informed her, she was not among the most talkative of people, and once years ago she’d had a sorrow, a love affair. “Otherwise I get along terrifically well with all of them,” Tove said. “Surely they like me and they’re sweet. But how primitive they are! And the heavy down quilts here in the middle of the summer. I’m sweating like a pig.”

Søren and his fiancée didn’t stay more than a week—they had to travel on to visit the girl’s uncle, who was president of an engineering works in a town to the south. He was definitely expecting them and it wouldn’t do to put off the trip. Tove hugged her mother-in-law good-bye and kissed Marinus’s bearded cheek.

“She was a pretty girl, so gentle and friendly,” Marinus said. “A baker’s children have white skin from all that white bread, you’ve heard people say, haven’t you,” Tora said, but Marinus didn’t understand her. “She was plain and straightforward,” he said. “She’s from a good family and could easily have looked down on us. But there was never anything of the sort.” “But you’ll get to see Søren even more seldom than you saw him before,” Tora said. “I don’t expect anything else,” Marinus said. “He has to tend to his learning; we’ll certainly hear news from him. He’s a great credit to us, Tora. People even turned around when I accompanied him down the street.”

Søren was a source of comfort to Marinus, Niels of worry to Tora. There was rarely a letter from him, and what he wrote was nothing good. He’d worked most of the time, but he had a hard time forgetting how Inger had been getting on. He’d met her on the street, and there was no doubt as to Inger’s occupation. He’d reasoned with her, but had gotten harsh replies in return. Inger
was satisfied with the way things were; she didn’t desire to get away from the life she was leading. “If he could just find another girl,” Tora thought, but there was nothing about other women in the letters from Niels.

Anton had served his time as a soldier and now he wouldn’t be called up for the time being if everything went well. Now in the summer Anton had become oddly restless, he was never home in the evening, and there were soon rumors about where he was a regular visitor. It was Magda who let the cat out of the bag to Tora. “You know I think you have the nicest children in the parish,” Magda said, and now Tora knew that something was wrong. “I envy you your children and I only wish things go well for them in every way, and I really don’t think Anton is ever going to fall into a bad woman’s clutches.” Tora hoped not either, and in a woebegone voice Magda said that there was surely something between Kresten Bossen’s Andrea and Anton. People were talking about it.

“I don’t blame her for having that child, because, after all, she was young,” Magda said. “And I knew Iver well enough—he was hard to be on your guard against. He got what he wanted. But I think a girl who’s gone astray, she has to be humble. And Andrea really isn’t.” “Oh, if she’s not allowed to do anything else,” Tora laughed. “Then the guy who played the game with her should surely also wear sack cloth and ashes.” “Yeah, I sure know how you look at it,” Magda said cuttingly. “But most people would probably side with me. The girls take all of life like a joke and flirtation. And it definitely isn’t proper for a girl with an illegitimate child to go dancing. We had more honor in us when I was young.”

The child Iver and Andrea had begotten was at Kresten Bossen’s, and Andrea had a position as a servant on a farm. She was still young, about twenty, and she didn’t grieve over Iver. There wasn’t a dance in the area Andrea didn’t go to. She shook a leg in the dance hall, but she didn’t go outside with the fellows—she’d learned to be on her guard. But now Anton had come her way. He was a proud, handsome fellow, and the girls were fond of him.
Tora kept an eye on Anton, and you could sense something was wrong with him. One evening they were alone in the kitchen and Tora turned to him. "I'm going to tell you one thing, Anton," she said. "I'll never forgive you if you seduce Andrea and leave her in the lurch." "What are you talking about?" Anton said and looked sideways. "You know best, but remember what happened with Niels and Inger," Tora said. "Are my children going to have a reputation for being loose and leading women into misfortune? And Andrea is a good girl if she just has somebody to turn to. She's never had that."

They didn't talk about it any more, but the next Sunday Anton accompanied Andrea to her home. Ida received him well. Andrea was going to have a child, and Anton was the guilty party—he didn't deny it. He'd marry Andrea and that could happen soon as far as he was concerned because he had work now. The same day Anton said to his mother: "So we're going to get married as soon as possible." And Tora calmly entered the conversation and talked about where they'd live and how they'd get furniture scraped together. Andrea had a little in her savings bank book and Anton had also put a bit aside.

Then Anton settled down in an apartment he rented in a house right outside town and went to work every morning at the factory. He got the responsibility for a wife and children early on, but he had the shoulders to bear it. That's what Tora felt about him. She was delighted with Andrea—they soon became good friends. But at the same time something happened that Tora couldn't straighten out: Laurids from America was alleged to be the father of an illegitimate child by a middle-aged widow.

It was the bird of ill omen, Magda, who once again brought the news, but it was soon out across the whole town. A few people tried to tease Laurids from America, but they didn't do it more than that one time. Laurids didn't go along with the joke: he cursed horribly and threatened to wring the neck of anyone who dared mention the widow's name in his presence. Then Tora went into action because people had to know whether Laurids acknowledged the child.

To Tora Laurids was submissive, and he acknowledged that
yes, of course, he’d had intercourse with the widow Marie a few times. “You know how it is with me,” Laurids said. “I come when they call, I don’t have the ability to resist. But I really didn’t make her pregnant.” “How can you know that?” Tora asked. Well, there were dates that couldn’t be shaken. He’d asked around as to when Marie was expecting and he’d counted up the months. There had to be another man. It wasn’t Laurids. It was a very long time ago that he’d had to do with her. If he was the father of a child, it would’ve been born long ago.

“Are you going to keep sleeping with all the dirty sluts until one day you fall over?” Tora asked, and Laurids sadly shook his grey head. There was of course the hope that the strong urge would diminish with age, but as of yet there was certainly no prospect of it. That wasn’t very good. Tora made inquiries about Marie and her reputation wasn’t the best. She’d had many lovers, and it could perhaps be difficult for her to name who the alleged father was. “The idea that he wanted anything do with her,” Magda jabbered away. “He surely doesn’t have an ounce of shame in his body. I say that, Tora, even though he’s your own brother-in-law.”

Laurids from America went about looking gloomy and he gave his subordinates a hard time. He’d had much disappointment in love, but he’d never been named the alleged father of a child. When he was alone with Tora, he talked to her about it; with everyone else he was mute. “It’s shameful that I’ve been treated this way,” he said. “The disgusting witch. If I just hadn’t had anything to do with her.” “It’s a little late for you to be thinking of that,” Tora said. “But according to what I hear, she’s not so bad. She’s decent and hard-working; she just can’t say no. If she has flaws, so do you too, little Laurids.” “I don’t deny that, I have nasty flaws in that regard,” Laurids said. “And actually you should be proud that she’s choosing you as the alleged father if she’s got plenty to choose among,” Tora teased. “She respects you more than the others.”

That thought suddenly occurred to Laurids—he hadn’t seen it from that side. “That may well be,” he said. “It’s probably not so easy to provide such a poor kid with a decent father who can
pay.” “No, and who later can sort of keep an eye on the child,” Tora said. “A body knows, after all, that those children are treated no better than dirt.” “That’s possible,” Laurids from America said. “Maybe she didn’t do it out of malice, but on account of distress and need. After all, a fella also has his own conscience.”

Laurids thought the matter through and decided to accept paternity, but he didn’t want to marry the woman. Laurids didn’t protest when he was summoned as the alleged father, but admitted that of course it could possibly be him. He didn’t mention either that it could also be others. It was, after all, lucky fate that Laurids hadn’t had a flock of children, numberless like the sands on the seashore, to pay compulsory maintenance contributions for. That’s why he paid for this child here as a kind of voluntary fine. Once in a while he paid a visit to the widow and inspected the child to make sure it was kept clean and got good food.

The war raged uninterrupted; in Alslev children were born and the dead carried to the grave. The work stopped and reappeared when coal arrived. They’d gotten used to the insecure existence, and it helped that assistance was given to those who remained without work. They didn’t have to go to the assistance fund for every penny. But the uncertain times wore on Høpner. You could see that he was no longer a young man. The sharp furrows around his mouth had become deeper and his eyes a little weary. He lived a lonely life in his large president’s residence and had only one love: the factory that he himself had erected.
Old Povl Bøgh lay sick and had been sick for a long time. It had come in the spring and he himself felt he was going to die. But death didn’t take him, he got out of bed once again, but in the fall it got worse again. Black Anders had to move in with him so someone could be with him at night. Povl Bøgh didn’t want unfamiliar womenfolk in his house. He couldn’t sleep and lay in the dark and chatted with Black Anders hour after hour, even though Anders had to get up the next morning and go to work. But you gladly sacrifice your night’s sleep for a dying man, and the time was surely not far off when Povl Bøgh would have said his last word.

Povl Bøgh wasn’t afraid of dying, no, he longed to get away. A fella had become old and wasn’t good for anything more. And those he’d loved had already been laid in the grave, both Louise and William lay in the cemetery and were waiting. And many more, relatives and friends from old days, lay there. When you became old, you became homeless in the world and longed for the grave as your home.

In the early mornings Povl Bøgh heard the workers going to the factory; at night from his bed he could see the glow from the lights down there, and often he thought he could hear the machines rumbling. The huge machines went round and round and crushed cement, and people came riding their bicycles from miles away and worked and returned home in the evening, gray with the dust. And out in the world they were probably using cement for trenches and fortifications—no good would come of that. Povl Bøgh lay and thought about how the world had changed from when he was in his youth and mature years. It caused no grief to leave the world as it was now.

“I gathered ears of corn on Holle Estate’s field back when I was a child,” he said out into the dark. “And if we kids lost a loaf of bread, we had to kiss it when we picked it up. We were awfully poor and bread was a gift of God. Later I had to slave
hard both for lords of the manor and for farmers, but I thought
the work was always a blessing for me. That’s not the way it
was for Louise, my dear departed wife; she could never be com-
pletely satisfied, but I was happy when I’d performed a good
piece of work. My limbs are exhausted now, but that was a nice
kind of exhaustion when a fella had swung his scythe for twelve
hours in the harvest.” “Yeah, you people worked hard in those
days,” Black Anders said from his bed.

“Once at nightfall on the way home I came with my mother
here right outside of the town of Alslev,” Povl Bøgh said. “From
the field you could hear a moaning, it was like a person in the
most extreme distress. But my dear departed mother held my
mouth so I wouldn’t say anything; she explained it was a bound-
dary mover we’d heard. He’d moved the boundary with the
neighbor’s field, and now he had to haunt that spot forever for
his deed.” “Of course, it could also have been an animal,” Black
Anders said. “When the fox barks, it can sound like a woman in
labor.” “Maybe it was an animal, I don’t know,” Povl Bøgh said.
“But now I hardly think there are any boundaries any more.
They’re so busy getting them shifted. A fella can scarcely tell
the difference between working people and big farmers, and now
they’ve parcelled out Holle Estate. My mother’s father’s father
sat on the wooden horse there as a young man. But they didn’t
get the upper hand on him—he beat the estate bailiff to a pulp
one dark night, according to what they tell. But now they’ve got
the farm split up.” “As long as they don’t destroy the game for
us in the manorial woods north of the fjord, I won’t protest,”
Black Anders laughed sleepily and turned over in bed.

The nights were long for the old man, they wouldn’t come to
an end, but the day went quickly. There were sounds outside: a
fella could lie and listen to them and guess what they might
mean. And people came for a visit and told what was new,
which wasn’t good to hear, but which a fella of course should
hear nevertheless. A couple of times a week the minister came
and sat down by his bed. But he didn’t talk religion, and Povl
Bøgh liked that because there wasn’t much to the modern faith.
“When you deliver the funeral oration over me, just say that I
passed away at peace,” Povl Bøgh said. “I’ve lived a hard life, but I was satisfied with it and don’t blame anybody. Oh, all those hours of work I had, and they weren’t according to union contract, that’s what they call it.” Pastor Gamst sat by the bed and listened to Povl Bøgh without saying much. He thought to himself: “That’s the old era that’s dying. The old, patient era, that got most of the toil and poverty and could live on a stone, but that nevertheless had the intestinal fortitude to be happy. Pass away in peace.” When the minister told teacher Ulriksen about the visits at Povl Bøgh’s sickbed, the teacher said: “It’s precisely that humble contentment that’s the worst. I know Povl Bøgh really well: he was like a tree that stayed where it had been planted and took shape according to the stiff wind. But I think more of the ones who resist and would rather let the trunk crack. With working people like decent old Povl the world will never make headway, even though they are perhaps the reserves. But there we are again. You’re a city man, Pastor Gamst, and fall for the folk-romanticism. You’re always looking for places most lowly and Lord knows there are plenty of them. No, the wild Louise was dearer to me. She put up a fight, she wanted to relive her life.”

Povl Bøgh was lying dead in bed one evening when Black Anders came from work, and he’d escaped from living on in the time that wasn’t his. It was Black Anders who was in charge of the funeral and it was performed according to the old-fashioned ritual. Povl Bøgh would certainly not have liked to be buried without plenty of food and drink for the mourners, and Black Anders bought schnapps with what cash he found among the old man’s things. There were only distant relatives who’d inherit, and Povl Bøgh was going to have a respectable voyage from the place where he’d lived.

But outside the band of unskilled laborers probably no one paid attention to the death of an old day laborer. Povl Bøgh lay in the cemetery in peace next to his wife and his son and didn’t need to worry about the boundaries that were being moved. There were former town and rural people, but now farmers speculated on the stock exchange and knew precisely what Orient and
Burmeister & Wain were quoted at. Mads Lund’s consortium had expanded its business and they were about to become well-to-do people. They got a statement from stockbrokers, but it was too early to sell—everything would go up more; after all, now it looked as though peace was in the offing.

Yes, peace now came to the world, now the German was completely finished. But the big cities in France had to be rebuilt and once again there’d be use for cement. The hungry masses had to have bread and butter and pork—now farm product prices would rise for real. It was in the newspapers; it was the opinion of experts. And now wages had risen, now it was good to have work.

There was revolution in Russia, and the fighting over there was rough. “I believe in those people,” Cilius said, but Børgesen had his doubts. They went about things too violently; it was better to stick to peaceful development, but now Cilius, of course, had never done that. Revolution came in Germany and Børgesen was satisfied. It was the old tried and true socialists who moved to the forefront, the organized working class that took power. “I haven’t had time to read,” Cilius said. “I’m just an uneducated man. I suppose the smartest thing would be to root out all that rich rabble. They have to go by hook or by crook, otherwise we’ll never have peace.” But Børgesen soberly explained that you had to win by the power of the ballot. That was the path of hope and progress. And now the time would also come for the people here at home to take power in their own house. Now the working class would move to the forefront.

Old boundaries had fallen, but new boundaries had been put in place. The farmers studied stock prices and quotations, they had gotten new houses, new furniture, cars. The workers had gotten a wage agreement, which improved their wage, and they had gotten hope. In two large countries the people had taken power. These were great days, great times—you could also sense it in Alslev parish. The schnapps had become expensive, but Cilius liked revolutions more. Cilius put his arm around his son Little-Jep’s neck and said: “What days you’ll be living in, you little red fox!”
But the times were full of difficulties—attorney Schjøtt realized that. They’d done business with farms for large sums; now that wouldn’t work any more. The important thing was to be cautious and consolidate; you couldn’t put mortgages upon mortgages. He had his finger on the pulse of the times and smart people had to say stop. The lawyer had gotten a good name in Færgeby: he’d become a member of the bank’s board of directors. If he had to say so himself, he was surely the bank’s leading personality, because he knew the population a good deal better than the bank clerk who had the title of bank president. Nothing should be smashed to pieces, but no new risk.

The parcelling out of Holle Estate had gone well. Bregentved had sold his lots at high prices, and he could submit a balance sheet that was fine. He still had the principal lot; it was too early to sell, but the stables were empty—Bregentved was operating the farm without cattle. There were still a dozen cows and three teams of horses, but what had been sold he’d been paid well for.

Now Bregentved had gotten a car and learned how to drive, and things went fast. He was part of a consortium that was parcelling out a manor in Vendsyssel, and compared to that, Holle Estate was child’s play. Once in a while Bregentved came to Andres and gave an account of how things were going with Holle Estate, and if Magda wasn’t in the living room, he told about the merry life big businessmen lived. There were huge parties round about the towns where beautiful girls were along, and he’d been invited to farms where there was a girl for every man and she was plenty willing. “That’d be a life for you, Andres, and I could easily take you along,” Bregentved said. “But of course it’s unfortunate that you use a receptacle.” “And your withered hand,” Andres said caustically. “That doesn’t mean a thing in this case—it’s worse when you’re driving a car,” Bregentved said. “But I got my defect because I’m from an aristocratic family, you got yours because you’re a louse.”

Bregentved had gotten a nasty tongue, but, after all, he was a rich man. Andres was too, because on the accounts Bregentved presented to him, the balance due him was increasing more and
more. Andres had put everything he owned in the business and it had truly paid. It was nice to look at the big numbers because it didn’t occur to Andres to spend any of his money. He earned his satisfactory weekly wage as horse driver and stableman at the factory, and he stole a couple of handfuls of oats for his chickens to boot.

But Magda was scarcely as satisfied: she’d gotten ideas into her head and wanted dresses and all manner of finery. “Magda, remember that we have to be content,” Andres admonished her, but reason was wasted on Magda. “You can at least pay me what you still owe me from when I was your housekeeper,” Magda said. “I still have that pattern sitting here that Søren’s fiancée sent me, but did I ever get the silk dress? And I’d also like a new coffee service with the flowery pattern, but I never ever get anything.”

Andres sighed heavily: there were surely no limits to womenfolk’s demands. It was much easier to take care of horses. “Contentment is a gain,” he said. “And do we know what we’ll have tomorrow?” No, Magda didn’t know anything about that, but she also needed to wear her silk dress today. “Surely you must recall that you haven’t been faithful to me,” Andres said. “Surely it can’t be expected that I should pay for the silk dress on your lecherous body.” “You would’ve had to pay for my shroud and coffin if you’d succeeded in getting me into the well,” Magda said, and Andres didn’t care to hear that. He promised Magda she’d get silk fabric for a dress even though he couldn’t afford it.

Olga had sat in Bregentved’s office for many years and there wasn’t much work. Once in a while the telephone rang and someone asked for Bregentved, or Olga, with the neat handwriting she’d learned in school, had to write a letter to one of the real estate agent’s connections. Bregentved paid his office help well. Olga wasn’t dissatisfied being with him. For days at a time he wasn’t at home, but out on business in his new car. Bregentved was constantly expanding his district.

But Olga wasn’t happy, though the work was easy. When she went home in the evening, she mostly sat in her room. Olga
read books, though Marinus didn’t like it because what would reading lead to? It was something else with Søren, who could become a minister or teacher or district magistrate, but for Olga it wasn’t good. It only made her more peculiar. Marinus was inclined to take a strict view of his daughter, who’d gone to work at an office. “I think you have to talk to Olga,” he said to Tora. “She reads and reads instead of making herself useful.” “Let Olga do as she wishes,” Tora said, and Marinus didn’t say anything more. But he thought that womenfolk should really stick to their own business.

Olga had had her sad fate on Funen; she wanted to know about the way the world was. Were the men like wild animals, was life evil? Olga got book after book from the book club in Færgeby. She’d turned pale from her sedentary life. When Tora looked at her, it gave her a pang in her heart. Olga wasn’t happy, but she was a good girl—otherwise she wouldn’t be able to grieve so deeply over her crime.

Bregentved had become a different man. He’d been out too much among the other real estate agents and had heard many stories about how they treated their office girls. Bregentved began eyeing his clerk with an unchaste look, and Olga surely noticed it. It also happened that he invited her out to come along on car trips, but Olga didn’t care to drive in a car. He’d gotten fat, his face flushed; now you could almost see by looking at him that he was secretly descended from a count. When he whizzed off in the car from hotel to hotel, things went fast. On the curves the car stood on two wheels; Bregentved was a man who lived life dangerously. At the next inn, a deal, a couple of dealers and tea with a shot of schnapps were waiting. Bregentved was in a hurry: he’d found out that the whole country was for sale.

Olga was sitting in the office toward evening when Bregentved came home. He asked whether anybody had called, and there was a pig dealer who’d asked about porkers from Holle Estate. Bregentved laughed because there was nothing more to sell on that farm, but if the man called another time, of course he did have other farms. He happened to look at Olga’s round bosom. Then he went closer to her. “You know, we’d make a nice
"couple," he said. Olga didn’t reply; she just sat there and looked out the window: she’d had enough of men and knew them. “By the way, Olga, if you’ll be my girl, I certainly have plenty of money,” Bregentved said, and he felt a profound delight saying it. He’d been a poor devil most of his life; now he had dealt in farms and gave orders to a beautiful girl. If a fellow could just feel her udder, as if she’d been a cow, Bregentved thought.

Olga didn’t say anything and Bregentved became angry. “I’m going to tell you something, Olga: we know very well you killed your child, but you’ll be forgiven for that,” he said. “I don’t have anything against marrying you if something happens. But don’t be so high and mighty, I’m telling you, I’ve had you here in my office long enough. The other businessmen are beginning to talk about us.” “How so?” Olga asked. “They think it’s peculiar that I haven’t had you,” Bregentved said. “I mean, the rest of them have both wives and girlfriends they sleep with. You know, that’s the way it works. I mean you no harm, Olga, you can have whatever you want.” “Nothing,” Olga said. “I just want to be left alone.” Bregentved came closer and wanted to paw her. He smelled of liquor and she shoved him away. But he became ruder—now it was for real. Short of breath, Olga had to defend herself against the violent man: she got the door open and got away from him.

Olga was in a hurry and didn’t watch where she was going. A bicycle without a light grazed her in the sleety dark and she fell. It was Boel-Erik who was coming from work on the way to his farm. He jumped off the bicycle and picked Olga up. “Are you hurt?” he asked. “No,” Olga said. “I’m all right.”

Boel-Erik stood with Olga in his arms; he could easily have let her go—after all, she hadn’t been hurt. Olga was breathing deeply and leaned against him. They remained standing very quiet, they didn’t know for how long. They’d lost their sense of time while they were holding each other in their arms on the dark road. Boel-Erik felt the warm, exotic scent of a woman, and he held on tight.

Someone came by. They let each other go, and Boel-Erik picked up the bicycle. They walked next to each other without
speaking until Olga all of a sudden laughed and said: "But I’m not going this way at all. I have to go home." "Do you have to?" Boel-Erik asked and took her by the hand. They remained standing again for a bit, close together, and then Olga said quietly: "May I stay with you, Erik?" Boel-Erik couldn’t quite find words, but he hugged her.

Olga gave notice to Bregentved and moved out to Boel-Erik’s land. "I think you should get married first," Marinus said, but Olga wouldn’t hear of it. "I can be housekeeper for the time being," she said. "He can certainly use it." And Marinus thought wistfully that his daughter was, after all, far from being a maiden with an unblemished reputation. Olga moved out to Erik and now he could bring the children home.

It was a little house that Boel-Erik had managed to build, two rooms and a kitchen, and it was probably years since he’d had time to clean. Olga scrubbed and scoured, but she sang at the top of her lungs. And when Erik came home from the factory, a change had occurred. He looked around and nodded, but otherwise he didn’t say anything. It was hard for him to express that he was pleased to have Olga in the house. Boel-Erik had lived alone for so long that he’d almost lost his faculty of speech.

Olga and Boel-Erik got married and that day Tora was content. Her son had seduced a wife away from Boel-Erik; now he’d gotten Olga in place of Inger. And it wasn’t a bad trade: Olga was a hardworking girl and she had nothing against living on the heath, away from other people.

Bregentved didn’t get a new clerk at his office. He moved to Færgeby: conditions in Alslev had become too cramped for him. People heard rumors about the big parties he held at the Færgeby hotel. Bregentved had begun associating with the prominent people; he’d had a dress suit sewn, which was the thing to do. He was no longer merely real estate agent, but squire Bregentved of Holle Manor.

Once in a while he came driving over in his car and visited Andres. Andres wasn’t pleased to have the car standing outside his house—people didn’t need to know that he was involved in Bregentved’s ventures. A fella could also get a nasty hike in
taxes, which were high enough as it was. If anybody asked, An­
dres said: “I really hardly know what he comes for. He has a cup of coffee and chats with Magda. I suppose it must be that it’s hard for him to kill time.”

When Bregentved was visiting, Andres rolled down the cur­
tains and locked the door. Then Bregentved took out a greasy notebook and began to give an account. “I received thirty thou­sand from you,” he said. “That’s so to speak the fixed capital. Then there’s your share in the profit, that comes to about another thirty thousand. That means that around sixty thousand is depos­ited in your account with me. That’s quite a sum.” “But what security is there?” Andres asked. “You can have as much security as you want,” Bregentved said. “You can have mort­gages for a hundred thousand crowns on the properties I’ve dealt in. And they’re just as good as credit association bonds on first mortgages. You can easily retire and live high on the hog as a rentier.”

Andres didn’t care about becoming a rentier, but he’d begun to sleep uneasily at night. Was there really security for all that money? Wouldn’t he be risking that some of it would be lost? It wasn’t easy to be part of such big and risky undertakings. “I’d like to have thirty thousand paid out at the next due date,” he said. “It won’t be so easy right now,” Bregentved said. “I’ll tell you, right now it’s hard to obtain money. And I’d really hate to sell out because the prices are going to rise even more. I’ll tell you straight out, Andres, you can easily take the risk of becoming a man worth a hundred thousand.” “But I’m also standing surety,” Andres said, but Bregentved took it lightly. If anything, that surety was a formality—after all, they wanted to have some­body sign. But Bregentved was otherwise deemed all right. “I dare say it,” Bregentved said. “I can get money wherever I want for my honest face. No, you’ll never need to fear that surety, Andres. I’ve never been in debt and I never will be either.”

Bregentved whizzed back to Færgeby, and Magda wanted to know what he’d said. “Oh, it was money matters,” Andres said. “It’s nothing womenfolk can understand.” “Did you people make a profit?” Magda asked. “It’ll probably be a couple of
thousand if all goes well,” Andres said, and Magda got excited. “Then you really also can afford to give me silk for that dress that you promised me a year back,” she said. “Here you are shoveling money in, but I hardly have the clothing to show myself in. I’m a laughing stock for everybody every time I’m in church or the Mission house.” “Don’t make such a fuss,” Andres whined. “You’ll get that silk dress, it won’t take long and then I’ll have collected the money for it. But money doesn’t grow on trees, little Magda, and I have to think twice before running us into unnecessary expenditures.” “Now I’ve had the pattern sitting here ever since Søren’s fiancée sent it to me,” Magda said. “And who knows, maybe by now that style has already gone out of fashion.”
It was the greatest good fortune that could befall Marinus when Søren took his degree summa cum laude and had his picture in the newspaper. Søren sent a clipping from a big newspaper in the capital and there you saw Søren’s features under the headline: M.A. in record time summa cum laude. Søren had finished the race, they’d helped him get on in the world, but he’d been a credit to his benefactors. “It’s a good likeness,” Marinus said when he showed off the picture. “They say it’s the best exam anybody’s taken in many years, but really it’s not me he’s got his talents from. I’ve never been talented.” Marinus painstakingly wrapped the newspaper clipping up in paper and put it away it in the inside pocket of his Sunday best. But it would be taken out many, many times so people could see it.

Søren had finished his studies. But he hadn’t totally finished: he wanted to write a doctoral dissertation. He wrote about this to Ulriksen and the teacher read the letter to the parents. “He writes that he’s studying the ballads of the Virgin Mary,” Ulriksen said. “I’ll be damned if I know what sort of ballads they are.” “Can somebody really get a doctor’s degree in ballads?” Marinus said. “That sounds strange to the common man. But whatever Søren sets his mind on, he’ll certainly go through with, all right, you’ll see. Now I’d prefer if it was a real doctor’s degree he was taking, but after all a fella doesn’t know anything about it.” “He’s been diligent, you can’t take that from him,” Ulriksen said. “We’ve spent our money well.” Those were words that gladdened Marinus’s heart.

Søren finished his studies and was going to get married. An invitation came to Marinus and Tora to come over to the wedding. “I certainly wouldn’t mind doing that,” Marinus said. “But I mean, traveling is so awfully expensive.” “Oh, come on, we can certainly manage it,” Tora said. “I think you should go.” “But you have to come along too,” Marinus said. “It mentions both of us.” “I couldn’t very well be away from home,” Tora
said. “Olga’s expecting soon, and it’s surely not your intention for her to be alone during that time. But I think somebody from Søren’s family should be there so they can see that he comes from a decent family.”

Marinus gave in: he wouldn’t let his son be without his kin on the great day of his life. But that long trip: would a fella be able to find his way? Marinus became all nervous at the thought of all those trains he’d have to take: if a fella got on the wrong one, where would he wind up? If Marinus had had the time for it, he’d really have preferred to walk on his two legs to Copenhagen.

Marinus departed for the wedding celebration and he came home safe and sound. He’d been treated well in all respects and had seen countless sights. He could tell about the big city with its huge houses, about theaters and parks and fine inns. He’d used the week he’d been over there well. But what did all those people live on, how did they make their living?

But Tora was really most interested in hearing about the wedding, and the odd thing was that it hadn’t taken place in church. Søren and his bride had been married at the city hall by a mayor; that was sort of more modern, in Marinus’s opinion, but it was really just as valid as a church wedding. Then there’d been a party at the bride’s home with lots of distinguished people. One of them had a cross in his buttonhole, and he’d been so very friendly to Marinus. But Marinus didn’t care for the food and wine they had. Those were things a fella had never seen the likes of on a table. “Let me just have my normal food,” Marinus said. “They’re welcome to keep their wine and stuff as far as I’m concerned.”

Three of Tora’s children were now married and settled, and Karl was surely on the same path. As far as Tora could sense, he was running after a girl down in the fishing hamlet. And the little ones were growing up and soon wouldn’t be small any more. Tinus was serving with a farmer, and it wouldn’t be long before he could start at the factory.

In the middle of the harvest Olga had her child. Tora was with her and it was a difficult birth. In the end they had to fetch
the doctor and he delivered the baby with forceps. Boel-Erik had come from work while Olga was in labor pains, and he hid from the frightful screams out in the stable. And in between the labor pains Olga said to her mother: “Maybe I’m not going to be allowed to have this child, that’s why I’m being tormented. The last time it went so easy. Maybe I’m not going to be allowed to be entrusted with a child.” “Are you in your right mind, Olga, or are you about to join the Inner Mission?” Tora said. “Won’t you please make sense now and then. I’ve been at many childbirths, I know as much about it as a midwife, there’s a living child in you and it’s going to come out. But we have to get through it.”

But was Tora herself really calm? When the little one came into the world, she ran into the stable where Boel-Erik was sitting on a box with his fingers in his ears. “It’s all over with now, Erik,” she said. “It’s a boy, and no wonder it was so difficult, because he surely weighs his ten pounds.” Boel-Erik gasped a little, as if he couldn’t find his voice, then he said: “I mean, I’m not that small either.” “No, but listen to how he’s screaming,” Tora said. “He’s better at using his voice than you are.” “Yeah, glory be to God,” Boel-Erik said, and Tora started to laugh, because Boel-Erik wasn’t usually pious.

Olga and Boel-Erik got along well together—they suited each other. Before they’d both been taciturn; each had his or her cross to bear. But together they got the power of speech. Boel-Erik wasn’t spoiled, and he was forever astonished by how capable Olga was. She could milk a cow and clip sheep, and she wasn’t afraid of giving him a hand with the hard field work. She kept the house spic and span. “I’d never thought it possible,” Boel-Erik said to Jens Horse. “And to boot she’s cleanly. She washes her legs. And the kids have never had it so good. I didn’t know womenfolk could be so easy to be with.” “You were unlucky the first time,” Jens Horse said, but he didn’t say any more about Inger because Boel-Erik didn’t like it when bad things were said about Inger. “And Olga can have children: it’s a big, beautiful boy,” Jens Horse added. His wife Dagmar was a capable wife in his house, but they hadn’t been blessed with children.
It was a small farm that Boel-Erik had, but he’d put a lot of work and all his earnings into it. And when the big, heavy man bicycled home in the evening from the factory, his heart was filled with calm delight. He was going home to a beautiful wife and to his own farm.

Niels, too, had been invited to Søren’s wedding because he lived in Copenhagen. But he wasn’t comfortable celebrating among the unfamiliar distinguished people and he begged off. Marinus had been with his son over there and on Tora’s behalf asked whether he wouldn’t come home. He was certainly needed at the factory. But Niels didn’t want to go home. And now a letter came from Niels saying that he’d taken Inger back. She’d been in the hospital with a nasty disease and had come out of there cured. But the seaman she lived together with had gotten himself a new one in her absence, and she was standing on the street without friends and without money. So she came to Niels.

“Oh, that shameless female,” Tora said. “But couldn’t she leave him in peace. Why didn’t she go to one of her whores-mongers? What was he supposed to do with her with the kind of life she leads.” Marinus had read on in the letter while Tora was calling her names. “Wait a minute, Tora, there’s more here,” he said. “It looks like she’s getting the upper hand on him. This isn’t good.” Marinus read on. Niels was happy because she’d come to him and they talked things out. Inger herself could certainly understand that she was leading a bad life and would end up in misery. And they’d agreed to get married. “Oh, good God,” Tora said and got tears in her eyes. “That’s definitely the worst calamity for Niels. He’s my oldest boy. I’ll write to him and warn him . . . .”

“It’s surely too late, little Tora,” Marinus said. Niels wrote that they’d gotten married. But he thought it would be hard for Inger to live a decent life when so many people were ready to tempt her. That’s why they were going to Canada where he hoped he could get a piece of land and become a farmer. He’d lived frugally these years he’d been in the city and saved up a little money.
“Scarcely has one affliction let go, before you get a new one,” Tora said bitterly. “You know, he was the one who seduced her first, we have to remember that,” Marinus said. “Oh, it’s easy to seduce the one who’d like to jump,” Tora said. “And now he thinks she’s going to reform! But nobody gets better; we are the way we are. She’s destroying Niels’s life, she’s chasing him out of the country. He was my oldest boy and now am I ever going to get to see him again?” It was an affliction for Tora, and it didn’t get any better when the letter arrived saying that Niels and Inger were setting out on the long journey. “He’ll surely come back home some day,” Marinus consoled her, but Tora replied that if he’d placed himself in a bad woman’s power, then how would he come home? As an unhappy person.

Tora went to the cemetery again and sat by little Vera’s grave. Over the course of the years the gilt letters on Vera’s tombstone had been washed white by rain and sleet, and you could hardly read what it said. Tora bought bronze gilding and regilded the letters. As long as she was alive, Vera wouldn’t be forgotten.

The hard work on the cliff was getting too tough for Marinus: he was on his way to becoming an aging man. He had pains in his back when he came home in the evening, and Laurids from America got him lighter work. Marinus wound up in the warehouse where he was to pack cement from the silo. But it wasn’t good to get cement dust down in your lungs. Marinus coughed when he came home, but he didn’t take it seriously. “I’m too old to get tuberculosis,” he said. “It cares only for young blood. I’m not running any risk.”

Marinus got used to the dust—it didn’t irritate him so much any more. But it was rough being inside the whole workday. From the cliff he’d had a view of the land, he’d been able to follow the farmer’s work spring and autumn. He’d been able to see the fishermen on the fjord and the ships that sailed with coal and cement. But now Marinus had become a factory worker, he was locked inside and no longer had his work in the sun and wind and all manner of weather. It was a greater change than when he’d come from his land, and it wasn’t for the better.
But you shouldn’t complain when you were making a good living. And Marinus thought he was a well-off man. He had house and home and could pay everybody his due. His children behaved themselves well and Olga’s fate had been turned for the best. Marinus could thank fate: it had treated him mercifully.

At the cement silo Marinus worked together with Kresten Bossen. They’d now become in-laws and had a grandchild in common. There was a time when Kresten Bossen had flourished a bit. It was back when he got a taste for hard liquor. But now it’d been years since he’d tasted cognac in his mouth—schnapps had become too expensive. It was only for the rich man. Kresten Bossen had become taciturn, he answered tersely if anybody spoke to him, but he was occupied with heavy thoughts. Now there was Judas who’d betrayed his lord and master. It was prophesied that he’d betray Jesus—he was chosen for evil. Then why was Judas damned and did he have to take his own life? After all, he was destined by God for the evil deed. While Kresten Bossen packed cement or drove sacks and barrels into the warehouse, he brooded over dark passages in the gospels or the prophets.

Once in a while Kresten Bossen came to Pastor Gamst and talked to him about his doubts. Because a minister and a university-educated man could surely clear up what was obscure. But the minister said: “Good God, Kresten, aren’t you ever going to get tired of reading and brooding? I mean, you’re a happy man, you have a good job, a good wife and nice children, why can’t you be happy with it?” “I am, I thank Jesus for his mercy,” Kresten said. “But I want to reach clarity.” “Yes, who doesn’t,” the minister said with a little sigh. “What’s it about this time?” And Pastor Gamst, to the best of his ability, instructed Kresten Bossen as to how the dark passages in Jeremias and Paul were to be interpreted.

But he himself felt it curious that Kresten Bossen’s visit made him nervous. “Am I just as ridiculous as Kresten the seeker?” he thought. “Is my world of problems just as antiquarian? Am I also a man who’s hiding from the living world?” And as a rule it ended up with the minister’s going to visit teacher Ul-
riksen. “It’s strange the way I vacillate,” he said. “There are various tendencies in me. Sometimes I feel like a religious visionary, sometimes like a royal Danish state clergyman.” “Fill your pipe,” the teacher said. “Once a missionary came to me and asked: How do you stand with Jesus. I said to him: really well, from my side there’s no problem, but I really don’t know whether he’ll accept me. But now tell me: how do you stand with women. The man cleared out without answering a word. Maybe it was indignation, but maybe it was also out of honesty. Probably people can live that healthy, vigorous life with many women, Pastor Gamst, but by God you have to have one. In that regard you live too solitary a life. One becomes egocentric in solitude. There are many people who think they’re seeking Christ, while they’re seeking themselves. To hell with ourselves, excuse me for cursing. It’s the abundant life that’s important, the life that ventures forth toward those great, wholesome goals.”

Now Pastor Gamst knew that the teacher couldn’t be stopped. Now the old Grundtvigian sang a song of praise about labor unions, which taught little people to stand up for their rights, about people’s parties, folk high schools, poachers, revolutionaries, everything that taught the common man to straighten his back. Teacher Ulriksen’s pipe went out and he said, a bit of out breath: “I’m getting old, Pastor Gamst, the whole thing will soon be riding on a merry-go-round as far as I’m concerned. But it doesn’t matter because the merry-go-round also has its fixed point everything else revolves around. And that’s the liberty of the people, the free-born, workingman’s right.”
It was rumored that Bregentved was having a hard time meeting his commitments. Andres heard it mentioned and it occurred to him that it had been a long time since the real estate agent had visited him. He was frightened: had something gone wrong?

Andres went to Færgeby and looked for Bregentved at his office. Bregentved wasn’t at home, a clerk said, and nobody knew when he’d be back. “Then I’ll wait,” Andres said. “I won’t be missing anything. I lost a day’s wages coming here anyway.” Andres sat down in the office and sat a bit doubled up leaning on his cane. There were several telephone calls and Andres wasn’t so stupid that he didn’t understand that it was people pressing for their money. So then it was true: Bregentved was in trouble.

Several hours went by, but finally Bregentved came and he wasn’t happy to see Andres sitting there. “This isn’t an opportune moment, Andres,” he said. “I have to go to a meeting with several gentlemen. I can’t talk to you today.” “Never you mind about that,” Andres said. “I don’t have any problem going along to the meeting. I’ve got plenty of time and maybe we can get a little time to talk in between.” “That’ll never do,” Bregentved said. “It’s with the attorney and the president of the bank—people who have no business there can’t butt in. It’s about important matters.” “I’m not butting in any more than I have a right to,” Andres said. “You have to remember that we’re partners.” Bregentved tried to explain that it wasn’t the custom to bring other people along to meetings, but Andres was obstinate. “I’m involved in your business dealings, and now I want to go along to your meeting, and wherever you’re going, I’m going too,” he said.

Shifty-eyed, Bregentved looked around the office, but he couldn’t expect any help from the clerk. He was tending to his scribbling and apparently didn’t hear what the two were talking
about. "I've got a right," Andres said. "I want to know all about it. And if you don't want me along at your meeting, Bregentved, then pay what you owe me." "Then I suppose you better come along," Bregentved said. "But don't get frightened. There are great possibilities. The great times have just now begun."

Andres walked with Bregentved over to the bank, that's where the meeting was to take place, and several bank board members, the president of the bank, and attorney Schjøtt were there. They looked a bit surprised at Andres, but Bregentved quickly explained that he was a man who had an interest in his business, and then the president of the bank got going. He looked at a document, and those were big numbers he mentioned. Andres got a chill because this much he understood: this meeting here was being held about Bregentved's debt and it was large. Andres hadn't thought there was that much money in all of Færgeby.

"Now I've mentioned your liabilities, Bregentved," the president of the bank said. "In part what you owe the bank, and in part what you've borrowed from other banks and savings banks according to your own information and the communications we've received. As far as the statement of your assets is concerned, I'd ask you to take the floor, attorney Schjøtt."

What Schjøtt said wasn't good either. Now to begin with, there was Holle Estate, which was mortgaged for as much as it was worth. Then there was Bregentved's share in the estate consortium in Vendsyssel. You'd be lucky if that item didn't involve a loss. And as far as the bonds were concerned, they were fourth and fifth mortgages and they weren't worth the paper they were written on. But now Bregentved got angry. "You know, it was surely expensive enough to get those papers prepared by your office, attorney Schjøtt," but Schjøtt paid no attention to the interruption. Then there was Bregentved's office equipment, a small account in Færgeby Savings Bank, and finally the car. That's what Bregentved could bring in. Bewildered, Andres got up. "I wonder if there's a place where somebody could get his receptacle emptied," he said. "He means urinate," Bregentved said, and the president of the bank in a rather friendly way
showed Andres into a room where he could attend to his business. And in here Andres had the peace and quiet to reflect a little. There was no doubt about it—Bregentved was a scoundrel and everything was lost.

"These real estate agents are of course completely insane," the president said. "And by your transactions you’ve landed the bank in trouble. The board is in agreement that the whole thing has to be liquidated, we have to take over Holle Estate and your share in the estate in Vendsyssel and see what we can get out of it. The rest of your assets have to be included too." Attorney Schjøtt added to appease him: "You know, Bregentved, that in the business world everything goes up and down. The bank is going to lose a lot of money on you. We have to liquidate now, but who’s to say that you won’t rise again? So we’re proposing to you that you voluntarily convey to the bank what you have. Then we’ll take care of things with the other financial institutions. Otherwise we’re going to have bankruptcy and forced sale, and that’ll be expensive."

Schjøtt looked earnestly at Bregentved, as if he were giving him well-intentioned legal advice. "I won’t go along with that," Bregentved said. "You people can declare me bankrupt, but you can’t force me. I’ll certainly make a living in the future." "Easy does it, easy does it, Bregentved," the lawyer admonished him. "You know, we’re sitting here in order to reach a reasonable arrangement. I mean, you yourself must realize that your business can’t be saved. But surely it must be a comfort for you to get out of this like a decent man. A voluntary liquidation will save money, and truly there’s nothing to spare."

Bregentved sat there trapped. He’d dealt in farms and changed the area’s appearance, had cannibalized large farms, sold stables full of cattle, created new, small farms, and he’d lived the rich man’s life while it lasted. So now it was over with, as Bregentved had long expected. But he was a businessman; he couldn’t accept the deal as such without further ado. They had to haggle and higgle, and Bregentved happened to notice Andres.

"If I’m to go along with these terms, it’ll be only on one condition," he said. "You people will have to pay this man here
next to me five thousand crowns and release him from the surety he’s liable for.” The assembled gentlemen looked at Andres, who sat hunched up and hadn’t gotten over the fact that all his property was lost. “But why, Bregentved?” the lawyer asked. “He supported me and he shouldn’t lose everything because of me,” Bregentved said. “He’s also an elderly man and has an infirmity; he can’t endure losing all his money. That’s the condition I’m laying down.”

The president of the bank rummaged around in a portfolio and produced a surety bond. He cast a sidelong glance at Andres. After all, the man didn’t look to be any real kind of asset. “I suppose we can go along with releasing the surety under the present circumstances,” he said. “But we can hardly pay out money. What do you gentlemen feel?” The members of the bank board didn’t feel it was defensible either—then they’d sooner declare Bregentved bankrupt. “Now listen,” the attorney said. “We have to be able to reach a compromise. I mean, Bregentved isn’t an unreasonable man. If we’re going to agree on a quick resolution, let’s say a thousand crowns.” And addressing the bank board, the lawyer added: “A bankruptcy will be expensive. There are large assets to be sold. And one knows from experience that forced sales . . .” “Four thousand,” Bregentved said. Now he felt on familiar ground: you could do business with your adversary. “Good, we’ll make a final offer,” the president of the bank said. You’ll convey to the bank your assets and we’ll pay your surety two thousand and deliver up the surety bond. That’s our final word.” “Then I’m compelled to accept it,” Bregentved said. “But I want you people here at the bank to know that you’ve smashed to pieces a lot of what I’ve done. I’ve always honestly and decently striven to get everybody his due, and if you had let me in peace, it would have worked too.”

So the matter was settled: documents were put out for Bregentved, which he signed, and Andres got his surety bond and a check for the money they’d agreed on. “Yeah, so that deal is done,” Bregentved said and looked around, but it didn’t look as though there’d be any drink to seal the deal.

“Let’s go, Andres,” Bregentved said, as they stood outside
the bank. "I don’t want to go back to my office; I have nothing more to do with it. But I’ll treat you to a bite to eat at the hotel: I pocketed a little bit of traveling money when I saw where things were headed. Now we’re going to have three sandwiches and a drink." Andres went along without a will of his own. His soul was paralyzed. He’d lost a fortune—he was a poor man.

"Now I’m going to tell you one thing, Andres," Bregentved said, after they’d drunk the first schnapps. "Your money is sitting in a secure place. The money you got today you should just regard as an instalment. Now I’m going to give you a note-of-hand for the rest of the sixty thousand crowns. That’s a lot of money, but I’ve got big things in sight. I’ve got loyal friends among the big businessmen, and my time will come again. I’m the one who bought Holle Estate, and I was a partner in a big estate in Vendsyssel. Don’t forget it."

Bregentved chatted away and drew up a document for Andres in which he acknowledged his large debt. His face was like a boiled lobster: you could definitely see that he’d been drinking a lot recently. But Andres remained strangely calm. After all, it was true that Bregentved had bought Holle Estate and parcelled it out. And he had been co-owner of an estate in Vendsyssel. He’d understood the art of doing business, and he’d surely get on his feet again.

"I’ll get interest, won’t I?" Andres asked. "You can be as certain of that as heavenly salvation," Bregentved said. "You’ll get paid everything down to the last penny, but of course I can hardly promise that it will take place completely regularly on the due date. But you heard yourself how I fought for you. You’re leaving from here with your surety bond and with money in your pocket. But what about me? I’ve taken care of other people so well there’s nothing left for myself."

Andres said goodbye to Bregentved, who wanted to go to another area and do business there. He didn’t say anything spiteful, and he didn’t discuss what he’d lost, because, after all, he had himself witnessed how Bregentved had fought for his cause. He wished Bregentved luck and that he’d be blessed, wherever he went. Then Andres walked on foot to Alslev be-
cause now it was important not to spend money to no purpose. A couple of times he had to stop and empty the receptacle. He’d had hard luck all the same.

“How did it go?” Magda asked him when he came home. “Did you get to talk to Bregentved?” Andres replied that he’d gotten to say what he wanted to, and that Bregentved was now bankrupt. “Good heavens,” Magda said and looked admiringly at Andres. “Did you bankrupt him? So are you going to be allowed to take over Holle Estate?” In a flash Magda saw herself as a large farmer’s wife, but then Andres said: “God have mercy on us, no, it was the bank that took everything he owned.” “And your money?” Magda shouted. “It’s lost,” Andres said. “Every honest penny is gone. We’ll have to go out with a cup and beg the day I get too old to work. And that surely won’t be long now.”

Andres looked old and poor and worn out, and you could certainly feel sorry for him. But Magda didn’t. “Didn’t I always say that there wasn’t a stupider ox on earth,” she screamed. “You’re no good for anything and I should never have taken you. Here you’ve lost all your money while I have to go without clothes on my back. My slip will soon be hanging in shreds and I’ll probably have to go to other men to get a new one.” “Magda, little Magda,” Andres said, pleading, but Magda couldn’t be stopped. “For years you’ve promised me a silk dress, and I didn’t get it—there was no money for it. I have to go dressed like a scarecrow. But you’ve thrown out thousands of crowns on Bregentved.”

“Oh, if it was only the money I’d lost,” Andres whined. “It’s worse with the money I owe—how am I ever going to manage to pay it?” “You also owe money?” Magda said, appalled. Andres reminded her that he had of course signed documents for Bregentved—he’d guaranteed for him and now the bank wanted two thousand crowns. And they had the house as security; so if the money wasn’t paid, they’d take it all.

Now Magda gave up; she sat down quietly to cry. “Yes, Lord have mercy on us,” Andres said. “Now a time of trials is impending, little Magda, and we have to search our hearts to find
who’s to blame. Maybe it wasn’t intended that you should be haughty and go in silk and finery.” “But I never got the silk dress,” Magda cried. “No, but the desire was there,” Andres said mercilessly. “And we know that the Lord searches our hearts and reins. There’s a meaning in what happened; not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the will of the Lord. But we must have the disposition to be able to say: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen.”

Andres stood there, pious and ruined, but quietly with a couple of thousand crowns, his surety bond, and his note-of-hand from Bregentved in his pocket. He’d lost large sums, sixty thousand shiny crowns, but he had confidence in Bregentved—he’d surely rise again. And much would’ve been achieved if he could now get Magda to appreciate that frugality was a delight for God and man. “Yes, little Magda, we’ve been hard hit, no matter whose fault it was,” he said. “But we’ll surely be allowed to keep the house and furniture. They weren’t unreasonable at the bank: they know I’m an honest man who isn’t going to squander anything. I can get permission to pay in instalments, and I’ll be let off paying interest, so if we can just scrimp and save, we’ll surely recover from our heavy debt.” Comforted a bit, Magda dried her eyes. “Oh, thank God, Andres,” she said. “I was afraid they’d sell the house and furniture.”

Andres went to work in the factory’s stable and wasn’t a defeated man. Now he was allowed to scrimp and save and no one could reproach him for being frugal. But Magda sought consolation with good friends. She cried her heart out to Tora. “I don’t know how much Andres lost, but Bregentved managed to lure every penny from him,” she said. “Many a time I said to Andres: watch out for Bregentved, he has evil eyes and he lives a nasty life. But Andres wouldn’t listen.” And Magda became absorbed in conjectures about what Bregentved might have squandered
Andres’ money on. He’d probably kept lots of women, and that had cost money, Magda felt, because surely no one would voluntarily give herself to him with that ugly, crippled hand. It comforted Magda to talk a little about Bregentved’s sinfulness, but when she talked about the silk dress, she started crying again. “I wished for that silk dress for many, many years,” she said. “Now I’ll never get it. I’ll be lucky if I can keep the clothes on my back, that’s how poor we’ve become now.”

It wasn’t only Bregentved who went to the wall: many others had difficulties. You heard about big businessmen who were thrown out of their homes. All the money they’d earned was sitting in mortgages that were worthless. And people who’d bought farms at high prices couldn’t keep their farms. It was said now about one and now about another that he had to give up his farm.

No, it wasn’t easy to carry on farming—the farmers at the counter in Skifter’s shop agreed on that. In bad times you couldn’t pay interest on your debt, and in good times taxes and the number of employees increased, and those who were going to buy a farm would have to pay too insane a price. It was almost the same regardless of whether things went up or down: it was always the farmer who was supposed to carry the load. And his back was surely broad, but there was also a limit to what a broad back could support.

It wasn’t easy to have a stock exchange consortium—Mads Lund and Anders Toft agreed about that. At first things went swimmingly, then the stock prices stagnated, and now they were going down. Of course, they were bound to rally because after the war there were now great possibilities. But the securities wouldn’t go up in price; if you sold them, you took a loss, and if you held them, you ran a great risk. And you had to pay huge interest on loans for speculating at the Færgeby Bank. That’s the way banks were: they plucked a fellow down to his bare skin.

Mads Lund, Anders Toft, and a few of the other farmers were summoned to a meeting at attorney Schjött’s office. It was about the account they had at the bank: it had of course been run up a tad. “Sit down, gents,” the lawyer said. “I can just as well
say it straight away: the books are going to have be closed now. We’ve been skating on thin ice and now we’ve got to backtrack before it ends in disaster.”

“I mean, we’re certainly good for what we owe,” Anders Toft felt. “Yes, today,” the lawyer said. “But what do we know about one another tomorrow? If you gents want to speculate, you’ll have to find another bank. We have to have that account closed.” “It’s not the right time to sell,” Mads Lund said. “I spoke to the stockbroker on the telephone, he advised not to.” “I don’t know the slightest thing about stocks,” the little lawyer said maliciously. “In that area you farmers are far greater authorities. But in all humility, I’ve been assigned the task of winding up certain accounts for the bank. This account has got to go; I have authority from the bank’s board to make an arrangement.”

Mads Lund banged the table and spoke harshly to him. This stuff here was impudent behavior, in fact if anything it was brute force. If they were forced to sell, it’d be with big losses. But attorney Schjøtt refused to budge. “You’re scolding me now, but maybe the day will come when you’ll thank me,” he said. “You should never throw good money after bad.” There was no alternative: the shares had to be sold and there’d be a loss. The farmers would have to give their farms as security—the bank wanted to be on the safe side. “So you see,” Mads Lund said. “No matter how things go, we’re always the ones to pay. We now have more debt than we had before the war and everything has gone up. I almost wish I were rid of the whole thing. Let ’em just come and take it all at once.”

Attorney Schjøtt had made money on the big real estate agents, but during these years he felt even better. He summoned people on the bank’s behalf; he didn’t give advice, but orders. And if they weren’t obeyed, the attorney hit hard—that was his duty. It gave him a feeling of power. You could see by looking at him that he had authority, and Mrs. Marja was closer to admiring him than she’d ever been. Mrs. Marja was no longer religious, and the hectic world of business had lost its attraction; she’d found her true field and that was literature. Secretly Mrs. Marja...
Marja was working on a novel about women’s destinies in which she collected everything she’d experienced, all of her life’s sorrows and disappointments. Every evening she read a chapter aloud to Schjøtt, and often he was troubled. “That just won’t do, damn it,” he said. “That description is too daring. You’ll be convicted of pornography.” But Mrs. Marja wasn’t afraid, and besides, the book would appear under a pseudonym.

Schjøtt had started as a small lawyer—nobody had reckoned with him. But they’d been forced to; he’d brought the world to its knees. He sat on banks’ boards of directors and boards of other firms; he was becoming the big man in Færgeby. He no longer drank port during office hours—those days were gone.
For working people these were good times. Cilius was satisfied and agreed with Børgesen—the great advance was near. The hours of work had been reduced, as the workers had been demanding for many years. Before, a day laborer had toiled from early in the morning till late; now he had to serve only eight hours for his daily bread. And wages had risen: they were higher than ever before. It was going the right way: it had turned out that the bigwigs had to give in when ordinary people stuck together. “And it can get even better,” Cilius said. “We definitely can’t be content. We’re going to have our cake and eat it too. It won’t be many years before we’ll be implementing socialism. That’s the way it’s headed.”

And Cilius wasn’t alone in that belief. Political meetings were held, and the local party organization, which Børgesen was chairman of, was growing nicely. Speakers traveled over and explained the policy that should be followed. Because politics had to be in everything: you had to put your own people in the Parliament and parish councils, in labor unions, yes, even in the parish church councils. “Solidarity,” that was a word Cilius used often. “Damn it, it’s solidarity we need. It’s the same thing like when in the old days we used to say that ordinary people had to stick together. But it’ll be a hot time if you people get me elected to the parish church council. It’s been twenty years since I’ve heard a minister preach, except for a funeral.”

But politics alone wouldn’t do it. Education was also needed. A man traveled over and gave a lecture; he spoke of study circles. “We’re certainly going to be learned folk,” Cilius said. “You know, I’m too old for that. I learned what I could at work and in pubs. The schooling I got was plenty bad. But nobody’s allowed to tread on me—I picked that teaching up but quick.” No, study circles weren’t anything for Cilius; he wasn’t a bookish man. “The book I’m sticking to is the union book,” he said. “It’s of more use to us than the Bible and all the prophets
put together.” But Børgesen got study circles going—he was himself a great reader. And some of the young workers met in the evening and studied politics in Cilius’s meeting house. After all, it was in fact built to promote public education.

But there was something Cilius couldn’t forget and that was that the government had made schnapps expensive. It wasn’t just a political misstep, it was a downright disgraceful deed. Cilius’s face turned somber when it came up. “They took schnapps away from us and gave it to the rich,” he said. “There’s no getting around that for us. And how did it hurt any of us? We were able to hold what we drank. I really lose my temper when I think about what a bottle of schnapps costs now. No, boys, down with indirect taxation and let’s get our schnapps back again.”

On rare occasions it happened that Cilius bought a bottle of schnapps or went to the inn. After all, you couldn’t completely forget how that strong drink tasted. And now Cilius had made a decision: he was going to celebrate his silver wedding anniversary with Frederikke and there’d be beer and schnapps. He’d put aside money a long time beforehand because no expense was to be spared. When Cilius invited you to a party, it wasn’t a meeting with hymn singing in the Mission house followed by coffee.

“I really don’t think there’s that much to celebrate,” Magda said. “Because, I mean, what kind of life have those two had together? I thank my God and maker I haven’t had a husband like Cilius.” “Well that’s good you’re satisfied with the one you’ve got,” Line Seldomglad teased. “Then there can’t ever be any quarreling between you and Frederikke. Because, of course, it’s possible that she doesn’t begrudge you Andres either.” “Surely everybody knows that Little-Jep isn’t Cilius’s child,” Magda said. “That’ll be a strange silver wedding anniversary—you think the lad’ll sit in between them?” “You’re so well informed,” Line said. “Maybe you were there back when Little-Jep was conceived. I certainly wouldn’t put it past you, because the place hasn’t been invented where you don’t stick your nose.” “I’m allowed to have an opinion like other people,” Magda said,
in tears. "But you people are always coming down on me."
Since Andres had lost his money, Magda was even more easily
moved to tears.

Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary celebration was going to
be held in the meeting house because there wasn’t enough room
at home in his and Frederikke’s house. It was an unheard of
piece of arrogance, but that’s just the way Cilius happened to be.
A woman was hired to cook the food and Cilius invited good
friends to the party. He didn’t have relatives and Frederikke
didn’t have any close family in the area either. The cook and
Frederikke decided what they’d have for dinner. Soup, roast,
and cake. And with it they’d drink genuine schnapps, Cilius de­
clared, and not temperance beer and soda water, as had now be­
come the custom even among the farmers.

It didn’t go unnoticed that Cilius had ordered many bottles
of aquavit. “No doubt he can help himself,” Skifter said. “After
all, he’s chairman of the consumer co-operative. I mean, that’s
the way that works.” But Konrad explained that Cilius paid cash
and didn’t owe anything at the co-op. Mads Lund’s women
found a pretext for going to the cook—it was a recipe she’d once
promised them. “And now you’re going to cook . . . indeed, at
Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary,” they said in a chorus. They
were told about the party and came home indignant. “It surely
must be costing several hundred crowns and he’s a common un­
skilled laborer,” they jabbered away. Mads Lund had just fin­
ished his midday nap and reached out for his pipe. “Yeah, that’s
the way times are now,” he said. “I’m sitting here on a good, big
farm and am about to die finding the money for taxes, interest
and principal, and wages and crap. But a worm of an unskilled
worker can invite people to a party with three courses and expen­
sive schnapps. When was the last time we had guests in our
house if I might ask?” “The last time was . . . let’s see . . . yeah,
it was the last time you people held a meeting of the consor­
tium,” his women replied. “You know I don’t want to hear about
that consortium,” Mads Lund said peevishly. “But that’s the
way times are. Working people earn money like dirt and they
don’t think of anything but squandering it. A little while ago I
was out in the stable—the farmhand was there in a new dress shirt . . . ."

Those were good calm days in the fall. Everyone had work and there was a good market for cement. On the cliff the men worked under a pale-blue fall sky; all colors were bright in the cool air and you could see inland for miles. At the factory the machines ran in their confident rhythm, the conveyor belts glided along as if they’d never stop. There was no lack of coal and the silos were filled with cement and never became empty, even though sacks and barrels were filled and wheeled in the warehouse on wheelbarrows. Foreign ships docked and barrels were hoisted aboard—cement for South America or Australia maybe. Everywhere outside and inside people were busily at work, unskilled laborers and stokers, machinists, engineers.

Høpner was sitting in his office, leaning back in his chair. He’d just lit a fresh cigar and the delicate blue smoke snaked around his haggard, energetic head. He was holding a piece of paper in his hand and reading the figures. It was the income statement for the last quarter. Laurids from America came in to give a message, but he remained standing at the door with his cap in hand.

Høpner turned toward him. “Profitability, Laurids,” he said. “Profitability, that’s an infernal word.”

He got up, flung the piece of paper on the table, and went with Laurids. Now Laurids from America knew that Høpner was going to go out and find something to grumble about. That’s the way it usually was when Høpner had that expression on his face. But today Høpner walked absentmindedly next to Laurids through the kiln department, stood a bit and looked at the huge rotary kilns, popped into the slurry station briefly, and then he went back toward the block of offices. Suddenly he stopped and cursed. “It’s going to hell, Laurids,” he said. “We’re operating at a roaring loss. The price of cement is falling every week—there’s got to be a change or else we’ll have to stop.” Høpner walked on into his office and Laurids was left standing with information that didn’t bode well.

Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary was celebrated and it
was a great party. The day laborers were there whom Cilius had worked with from the very beginning, and some of the new people who had come to the factory. There was no lack of schnapps: Andres counted up the bottles and figured out what it had cost. Oh, in all the world, all that money thrown out for no purpose—after all, it was many, many days’ wages. He mentioned it to Marinus, who was sitting across from him, and Marinus didn’t disagree with him. That kind of lavishness made a fella the talk of the town.

Factory worker and union chairman Cilius Andersen sat at the middle of the table with his wife, flushed, as in the old days, with schnapps and irrepressible spirits. “I jumped into bed with Frederikke,” Cilius said. “I came to the farm twenty-five years ago without a shirt on my back, and afterward I drank the farm away. I was a navvy—that’s the way we were back then. But now times are different, folks, now we’ve got it damn good.”

Marinus and Andres nodded: for once they agreed with Cilius. They’d known the old days and knew what the new ones were worth. Now the unskilled laborer was respected and the poor were provided for. “Drink a little schnapps, Marinus,” Cilius said. “I recall back then, you had to give up the farm. Back then we emptied a bottle of schnapps together.” “Yeah, yeah,” Marinus nodded, but he really hadn’t downed much schnapps since that time. Marinus hadn’t been able to afford to drink—he had to provide for his many children. But now that was over with, most of his children had left home and were thriving, and one of them was on the way to becoming a doctor of Virgin Mary ballads. Now Marinus could surely take an extra drink.

The young people were standing outside in the dark autumn evening and waiting. Cilius liked to do things in a big way: he’d hired a musician, and when they’d finished eating in the hall, the young people were going to have it for a dance. Cigarettes glowed in the dark; you could hear affectionate squeals from the girls. Finally they’d slipped in and the music began, while Cilius’s guests gathered in the other rooms of the meeting house.

“Now we’re going to have coffee with schnapps,” Cilius’s voice resounded. “There’s plenty of schnapps, folks, if you’ll
just do Frederikke and me the honor of drinking. We celebrate a silver wedding anniversary only once.” Cilius was getting boozed up, but of course a fellow was allowed to do that on an occasion like this. The rest of them, too, had had a drop too many. Even Marinus’s eyes shone with an unusual sparkle. “Now let’s get the copperware polished up,” Cilius shouted. “Bring that bottle—I want a coffee with schnapps in Frederikke’s honor. When she let me in her bed, she did a damned smart thing.”

“Listen to how he’s humiliating her,” Magda whispered over to the crowd of women. “I’d sink into the ground if somebody spoke about me that way. But I didn’t let any menfolk into my bed either when I was a young maiden.” “Then you’ve learned how since,” Tora laughed. “It seems to me I heard about somebody who was under your down quilt. And as far as anybody can understand, it was warm.” Line Seldomglad and Dagmar Horse laughed, and Magda burst into tears. “You people always have to be pecking at me,” she said. “I can’t ever utter a word before you’re all over me. A body might almost wish she were mute.” The others comforted her, because the point wasn’t for her to be having to grieve on a festive day. But Magda kept crying, very quietly and inconsolably. It wasn’t what Tora had said, because Magda was used to being teased. It was the thought of the silk dress, sewn in a fashionable style, she could have had on today if Andres hadn’t frittered away his money.

You could hear the music and the dancers’ stamping in the hall, and Black Anders and Thomas Trilling looked at each other. Now they were playing Matilde’s piano. “Have a drink, Boel-Erik,” Cilius shouted. “And take one for yourself, Andres, you’re getting it free, it won’t cost you anything.” Andres poured himself a decent portion of schnapps, because although this wastefulness was a disgrace, Cilius was, of course, right that a fella was getting it as a gift. Andres sat by himself for a bit with his eyes half shut, his lips were moving, he was quietly talking to himself. His savings bank book had begun to grow again, and in idle hours it was Andres’ delight to calculate how much there’d be in a year, in two, in ten, if the Lord granted him
such a long life. But once in a while he started up, frightened,
and had to hurry outside to empty his receptacle.

Now Cilius was having a discussion with Børgesen, the big,
calm machinist. “If it was up to me, we’d strike once every
year,” Cilius said. “It’s fine with that tug-of-war stuff, but I’d
rather have a fight.” “But haven’t we gotten far with that tac­
tic?” Børgesen asked. Cilius turned soberly thoughtful. “Of
course, indeed we have, Børgesen, I can’t complain,” he said.
“If things keep up the way they’ve been going, we’ll wind up
with the power. When I was a navvy, we beat up a contractor
who was going to lower our wages. And when he turned up with
strikebreakers, we threw them in the water.” “That was those
methods,” Børgesen said. “Now we make progress by the peace­
ful process of negotiation.” “I trust you, Børgesen,” Cilius said.
“You’re my friend any time.”

“Yeah, Søren is indeed going to be a doctor, that’s what they
call it,” Marinus said to Black Anders. “It’s in something they
call the ballads of the Virgin Mary, and that’s probably like a
kind of old-time hymn, if I understand it right. He’s gone a long
way, that lad, and Ulriksen said: he’s been a credit to us, we’ve
spent our money well. But it’s Tora he has his talents
from—I’ve never been gifted. I’m just an uneducated man.”

Marinus was in a good mood and now he preferred to talk
about Søren. He took out the newspaper clipping with Søren’s
picture and showed it to everybody who’d look. “And his wed­
ding, which I was at, oh boy, what great doings,” he said.
“Yeah, yeah, this one here is certainly a nice party, too, don’t get
me wrong,” he added quickly. “But Søren’s wedding, I mean
that was with the bigwigs.”

Andres sat by himself, but he didn’t forget to drink. He sat
with a sly little smile around his toothless mouth. It occurred to
him that if he’d hung himself, as he’d thought about for a mo­
ment, when he was sitting at the meeting with Bregentved at the
bank, it would’ve been a nasty loss. In a year he could put so
and so much aside, and it would amount to a lot of money in ten
years. Andres felt good—it was as if he’d cheated fate.

“Drink, brothers, drink, it’s not every day we get together
with the bottle on the table,” Cilius shouted. “I’ve been there when people were drinking schnapps, trust me. I beat a man till he was a cripple in my youth. But now I’ve become a well-off man . . . I only wish you well, pour yourselves a coffee with schnapps, boys, and let’s be merry.”

Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary celebration lasted till the small hours; that party was talked about for a long time. It ended up with even Andres’ shaking a leg on the dance floor, but cautiously, because it wasn’t easy with the receptacle. The lights were on all night in the meeting house, but the light was also shining in the roaring factory, and the glow from the smokestacks could be seen far inland.
Notes

The bolded numbers at the left refer to the pages of *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* on which the italicized text appears.

*The Day Laborers*

3 *farmers and smallholders*: Farmers (*bønder*) were classified as farming a farm (*bondegård* or peasant farm) assessed at between 1 and 12 *tønder hartkorn*; smallholders (*husmænd*) farmed land assessed at less than 1 *tønde hartkorn*. Danish statistics on farm size were a by-product of the tax laws, the basis of which was a *tønde hartkorn*, that is, an amount of hard corn (that is, about four bushels of rye or barley); this unit referred to the same productivity of a smaller area of fertile land or a larger area of less fertile land. Though geographically variable, 1 *tønde hartkorn* averaged 25 acres nationally. Einar Jensen, *Danish Agriculture: Its Economic Development* 126 n.4 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1937).

3 *daily bread*: See Matt. 6:11 (The Lord’s Prayer): “Give us this day our daily bread.”

3 *Skifter was in the Inner Mission, one of the few Pious*: The Church Association for the Inner Mission in Denmark, a puritanical, pietistic, revivalist movement within Danish Lutheranism, was founded in 1861. Calling themselves “de hellige” (“the Pious,” “the Holy,” or “the Saintly”), adherents stressed confession, repentance, conversion, and salvation, and rigidly proscribed amusements such as dancing, card playing, and alcohol. See Marc Linder, “Introduction,” in Hans Kirk, *The Fishermen* xii-xiii (2d ed.; Iowa City: Fânpihuà Press, 2000 [1999]).

4 *Lars Seldomglad*: This last name is a literal translation of the Dickensian name (*Sjældenglad*) Kirk gave this character. Although the name is unknown in Denmark, Kirk did use it for someone in his childhood memoirs whose “melancholy” made it “fit splendidly.” Hans Kirk, *Skyggespil* 104 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998 [1953]).

4 *poor-law relief*: Although the Danish constitution (section 84 of
the constitution as amended in 1866) entitled all needy citizens to public assistance, the shame associated with receipt of poor-law relief was linked to the humiliating conditions of acceptance, including compulsory labor and placement in the poor house, the loss of control over any property the recipient owned and, for men, the loss of the freedom to marry without the poor-law authorities’ consent and loss of the right to vote; this disenfranchisement of paupers (who had not paid back or been forgiven their assistance) was retained, despite modernization of the poor law in 1891, because it was enshrined in the Danish constitution (section 30(b) of the constitution as amended in 1866); as late as 1886, one-fourth of male workers were deprived of the right to vote for this reason. Lov af 9de April 1891 om det offentlige Fattigvæsen, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1891, at 199-218, sects. 29, 38 and 42 at 206, 208-209 (Copenhagen: Schultz, n.d.); Jens Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv: En Lærebog i Danmarks statistik 569-75 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1930); Harald Jørgensen, Studier over det offentlige fattigvæsens historiske udvikling i Danmark i det 19. aarhundrede 84-88, 97-111 (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, 1979 [1940]).

4 Klovhusene: A fictitious place name.
4 the last days: Acts 2:17.
5 It’s in the holy scripture that the Lord put a rainbow in the heavens as a sign of the covenant: Genesis 9:12-14.
5 He promised us that from that time and till the end of the world, day and night and the course of nature wouldn’t cease: Gen. 8:22: “While the earth remaineth . . . day and night shall not cease.”
6 Boel-Erik: A boel (an older spelling of bol) was a small farm (see below note to p. 27). Boel was primarily a Jutlandish version of the female name Bodil, but here it doubtless refers to someone who grew up on or owned such a small farm.
6 Bregentved: Kirk gave Bregentved, who purports to be descended from nobility, a name with a somewhat distinguished ring to it. Bregne means “fern,” while -tved is a suffix, which come to mean “place.”
6 Black Anders: His nickname Sorte (Anders being his first name) has been translated throughout as “Black.”
6 Jens Horse: This last name is a literal translation of the Danish word Hest, which is also unknown in Denmark.
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6 Cilius: This very uncommon name, for a very special character, leaves Danish readers somewhat surprised. Kirk may have used the name to point to the fact that in earlier times parents sometimes gave children unusual names of biblical prophets and legendary figures. Whether Kirk was thinking of the Danish painter Cilius Andersen (1865-1913) is unknown. Email from Morten Thing (Oct. 9, 2000).

6 the next due date for mortgage interest payments: In Denmark they are due in semiannual installments on June 11 and December 11 (still popularly known as the “devil’s birthday”).

6 Færgeby: Literally Ferrytown. No Danish town bears this name, but Kirk may have synthesized it from several towns in the vicinity of Assens/Alslev. They include: Mariager, only a few miles west of Assens, which, though somewhat smaller in population than Assens, was much older, an official market town, and possessed of more varied commercial and cultural institutions; Hadsund, where Kirk grew up, which did have ferry service, but was located on the other side of Mariager Fjord; and Hobro, which lies at the extreme inland end of, and is the largest town on, the fjord, and the seat of Onsild Herred (district), where the district magistrate resided, whom Ulriksen and Tora and Olga Jensen seek out (see below p. 371). Although Hobro’s population amounted to only 3,161 in 1901, it was “a large city coming from Mariager’s lonely streets.” C. C. Clausen and J. J. Nielsen, Danmarks land col. 227 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, n.d. [1903]) (part on Jutland separately paginated). Contemporaneous information on these towns is available in volume 4 of J. P. Trap, Kongeriget Danmark (3rd ed.; Copenhagen: Gad, 1901); and Danmark land og folk: Historisk-topografisk-statistisk haandbog, 3:104-105, 615-28, 698-99 (Daniel Bruun ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1920). Bjarne Nielsen Brovst, “De nye tider er forbi,” Jydske Tidende, Oct. 15, 1983, asserts that Færgeby is Kirk’s hometown of Hadsund without explaining how characters in the novel could walk or bicycle there from Assens/Alslev in spite of the fjord separating the towns.


7 unyielding minds: The phrase (tidselgemytter) is taken from Hans
Adolf Brorson's hymn (1732), "Now Found Is the Fairest of Roses" ("Den yndigste rose er funden"). Brorson (1694-1764) was one of Denmark's greatest hymnists.

7 the Lord doesn't let a sparrow fall to earth without his will: See Matt. 10:29-30: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

8 kick against the pricks: Acts 9:5; 26:14. The phrase means "resist the inevitable.”

8 Grundtvigian: Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) was a theologian, clergyman, poet, creator of a new Danish hymnbook, and founder of residential folk high schools for young adults (the first of which was established in 1844). Reacting against pietistic and rationalistic currents in Lutheranism, engaging worldly problems and pleasures, and propagating a common rural folk culture, Grundtvigianism became an optimistic ideology for Denmark’s growth-oriented, prosperous farmers after they had extricated themselves from the control of the large landed proprietors. See A. H. Hollman, The Folk High School, Part II of Democracy in Denmark (Alice Brandeis tr.; Washington, D.C.: National Home Library Foundation, 1936); Kaj Thaning, N.F.S. Grundtvig (David Hohnen tr.; Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1972); Steven Borish, Danish Social Movements in a Time of Global Destabilization: Essays on the Heritage of Reventlow and Grundtvig, the Efterskole, the Postmodern (Vejle: Kroghs Forlag, 1996).

9 wise as serpents: Matt. 10:16.

10 band of friends: Venneflokken is a communal group of adherents of the Inner Mission or religious Grundtvigianism.


11-12 seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you: Matt. 6:33.

12 Pastors' association: Den danske Præsteforening, which became a clergymen's trade union vis-à-vis the Danish state church, was founded in 1896.

12 the Pharisees and the scribes: Luke 15:2 and many other biblical passages discuss them as self-righteous formalists.

13 He’d give them the pure word of the gospel in their face, the way Luther, the man of God, did it to the devil at Wartburg castle: According to legend, while Luther was translating the New Testament
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into German in 1521, he threw an inkpot at the devil, who had wished to interfere with Luther’s work.

14 the blood of the lamb: Rev. 7:14, 12:11.

14 The Mirror of the Human Heart: This short book (54 pages), which was translated from the German (and apparently was originally written in French) and first appeared in Danish in 1842, went through at least seventeen editions, one appearing as late as 1926: Menneskets Hjertes Speil, fremstillet i ti figurer over den indvortes Tilstand og Beskaffenhed, enten det er et Guds tempel, eller at Satans Værksted (Odense 1842; 16th ed.; Odense 1918).

15-16 Oh sili vaasikum: These nonsense words sound funny in Danish because they contain the word vaas, which means “nonsense” and has a Latinate ending. Email from Morten Thing (Aug. 7, 2000).

17 Let not greed fill thy spirit, for to what end is mammon in the miser’s spirit: Despite the presence of several unusual Danish words in this biblical-sounding sentence (Lad ikke begærlighed fylde din and, thi hvortil er mammon i niddingens and), no such biblical passage could be identified. Conceivably Kirk made it up to cast Andres, a miser’s miser, in a ridiculous light.

18 thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: Matt. 25:21.

18 Have to the plough you put your hand, let not your spirit waver: This hymn (“Har hånd du lagt på Herrens plov”), written by N. F. S. Grundtvig in 1836, is based on Luke 9:62: “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” The Danish text is found in Den danske Salmebog, No. 575 at 586 (Copenhagen: Det kgl. Vajsenhus’ Forlag, 1969). For a translation, see Hymnal for Church and Home 212 (Blair, Neb.: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1927).

21 Spourup: A fictitious place name.

22 the works of the Lord: Psalms 77:12 (and other passages).

22 worldly children: Those who, unlike God’s children, have not been saved.

22 First then I could call Him my Master and Savior: This hymn, “I Saw Him in Childhood” (“Jeg saa ham som barn”), was written by Vilhelm Birkedal (1809-92) in 1858 and can be found in Den danske Salmebog, No. 58 at 69; it was translated by P. C. Paulsen in Hymnal for Church and Home at 249.
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23 Take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof: Matt. 6:34. Kirk omitted an intervening sentence.

23 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched: Mark 9:48.

24 Large farmer: Beginning about 1850, the term proprietærer designated larger farmers whose landed estates ranged in size (12 to 30 tønder hartkorn) between peasant farms and manorial farms (godser) and who aligned themselves with the owners of the latter (godsejer). Proprietærer often stemmed from the urban bourgeoisie. Hans Jensen, “Godsejerklassen og herregaardene i historisk belysning,” in Herregaardene og samfundet at 13-92 at 69 (Therkel Mathiassen ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1943); F. Skrubbeltrang, Agricultural Development and Rural Reform in Denmark 93, 119 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1953). In 1905 the total number of farms owned by proprietærer and godsejere was only 2,093 out of a total of 289,130 farms in Denmark, but accounted for about 15 percent of total farmland (by tønder hartkorn). Peasant farms (gårde) numbered 76,610, accounting for 73 percent of farmland, while small-holdings (huse) numbered 212,520 and accounted for only 11 percent of farmland. Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1915, tab. 35 at 36-37, tab. 36 at 38 (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1915); Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv at 192.

24 parish council: The sogneråd was the local governing body in a rural district; its principal task was administering roads, schools, and poor relief. Its activities were supervised by the county council (Amtsråd). Harald Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark: Oprindelse og historisk udvikling indtil 1970, at 320-26 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1985).

27 Smallholder: A bo[e]lsmand was the owner of a farming operation (bolsted) smaller than a gård but larger than a hus.

27 If you've got money, you get ahead, if you've got none, you're as good as dead: This line (Har du penge, går du fram, har du ingen, får du skam) is a variant of a well-known children's rhyme from the song “Der bor en bager på Nørregade” about getting cookies at a bakery: Og har du penge kan du få, men har du ingen kan du gå ("If you have money, you can get, if you don't, you can go").

27-28 the parable that it is just as hard for the rich man to get into heaven as for a camel to get through the eye of a needle: According to Matt. 19:21-26, Mk. 10:23-32, and Luke 18:22-30, Christ said that it
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was easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

28 schnapps: The Danish words brændevin and snaps are derived from the German Branntwein and Schnaps. The former literally means “burned wine” and is etymologically related to “brandy,” while the latter meant a mouthful of a drink of Branntwein. Jakob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, Deutsches Wörterbuch 9:1175 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1899). The word that Kirk generally uses, brændevin, was more common in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, while snaps is more widely used today. Although generally brændevin was alcohol produced by distilling grain or potatoes, an 1857 tax trade license law expressly defined it as including in addition all kinds of distilled spirits. Lov af 29 December 1857 om Haandværks- og Fabrikkdrift samt Handel og Beværtning, § 79, in Samling af endnu gældende Love og Anordninger: 1849-1859, at 405, 425 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1861). Brændevin was also associated with products of simple distillery equipment at smaller distilleries or in households. Both Danish words are generic terms for “distilled spirits,” although they are more colloquial than that English term. Nevertheless, the workers in Kirk’s novels were presumably drinking some cheap version of aquavit, a clear Scandinavian liquor made of ethanol of agricultural origin, with an alcohol concentration of more than 37.5 percent, flavored with distillate of caraway seeds or dill, and containing dry matter (such as sugar) of less than 15 grams per liter. Although the failure to meet one of these criteria today would require selling the product as snaps in Denmark, consumers there generally regard akvavit and snaps as synonymous because they drink both with meals. The turn-of-the-century expression, “schnapps is the poor man’s aquavit” (see below p. 449), suggests that brændevin was cheaper and of lower quality than aquavit at that time. Email from Jette Ostergaard, Danish Distilleries A/S (Nov. 6, 2000). Because aquavit is not widely known in the English-speaking world, “schnapps” has been used here throughout (except on pp. 281 and 496, where Kirk expressly uses akvavit). The novels’ contemporaneous proletarian counterparts in the United States would presumably have been drinking whiskey, but that term would have been misleading in the novels since at the time it was a rich man’s drink in Denmark, even though as a collective term for hard liquor brændevin would have included whiskey.

28 coffee laced with schnapps: Kaffepuns or kaffepunch, which
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apparently originated in Jutland, is schnapps considerably diluted with very strong black coffee.

33 In my cheerless chamber I often sit: Several Danish specialists, including Prof. Sven Hakon Rossel (University of Vienna) and the experts at the Danish Folklore Collection (Dansk Folkemindesamling) in Copenhagen were unable to identify this folk ballad ("Paa mit triste kammer tit jeg sidder"), which was probably a so-called penny or broadsheet ballad (skillingswise), which people could buy. Although several Danish folklorists suggested that perhaps Kirk had himself written the ballad, Prof. Elias Bredsdorff persuasively argues that Kirk, who strove to recreate a milieu, would have considered making up a ballad "cheating." Email from Sven Hakon Rossel to translator, Dec. 14, 2000; telephone interviews with Elias Bredsdorff, autumn 2000. Pastor Frederik V. Jensen translated the ballad.

37 For not a sparrow falls on the ground without your will, and the very hairs of our head are all numbered: See above note to p. 7.

37-38 The Lord shall preserve our going out and our coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore: Psalms 121:8 (in the original "thy" is used instead of "our").

40 I'm no lady with three chimneys on my farmhouse: The number of chimneys on a house was an indicator of wealth because it meant that the owner was rich enough to have several tiled stoves and not just one in the kitchen.

41 Teach Me, Oh Woods, to Wither Gladly: The hymn ("Laer mig, o skov, at visne glad") was written in 1813 by Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850), a romantic poet, and appears in Den danske Salmebog, No. 632 at 642. The hymn on death and rebirth in nature continues: "like late in harvest your golden leaf, a better springtime is forthcoming." The translation is by Pastor Frederik V. Jensen.

41-42 the account in the Old Testament of the rainbow God put in heaven as a sign that night and day shall not deviate: This rather obscure exegesis may mean that the rainbow was the sign that summer and winter, day and night should not deviate from their "set" courses. Presumably Pastor Gamst was referring to Gen. 9:12-14. Pastor Frederik V. Jensen suggested this interpretation. Email to translator (Nov. 27, 2000).

42 this country with its couple of million people: At the census of 1901 and 1911 the population of Denmark was 2,449,540 and
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42 What shall I say when I see that all the woods are teeming!?: Pastor Gamst is quoting this line from the hymn “Arise All Things that God Has Made” (“Op al den ting, som Gud har gjort”), written by Brorson in 1734. It appears in Den danske Salmebog, Nr. 12 at 17.

43 While thus seated under a rustic mulberry tree: The poem from which these verses were taken was written by Sophus Claussen, “Besøget i Himlen (The Visit in Heaven),” in Sophus Claussen, Titania holdt Bryllup: Digte 33-45 at 39 (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1927). Kirk had been a literary secretary to Claussen, one of Denmark’s leading poets, in the mid-1920s and even helped select the poems for this particular collection of Claussen’s poetry. Morten Thing, Hans Kirks mange ansigter: En biografi 100-103 (Copenhagen: Gjyl-dendal, 1997). From the rest of the poem it is clear that “he” is God. Pastor Frederik V. Jensen translated the verses.

44 when the clergyman has spoken, the deacon has the word: A degn denoted both the assistant to a pastor and a village teacher.

46 estate forest: A plantation was a forest on land not previously planted to trees—especially conifers planted in the worst Jutland heath. Much of this plantation work was done in connection with Det danske Hedeselskab (Danish Heath Society), which was founded in 1866 and directed by Enrico Mylius Dalgas (1828-1894).

50-51 assistance fund... poor-law assistance: Poor-relief funds (De fattiges kasse or de frie fattigkasser) were established in 1856 outside of the poor-law system. Initially their main source of revenue was church poor boxes, but gradually the townships and municipalities (kommuner) began subsidizing the funds; beginning in 1904 this support was promoted by statutes requiring the state to subsidize the kommuner. In 1907, the name was changed to assistance funds (hjælpekasser). Every municipality and township was required to have a fund whose purpose was to support the “deserving needy” outside the poor-relief system. Despite the constitutional entitlement of all needy citizens to public assistance, the funds’ capacities were limited by the amounts appropriated by the kommuner, and their chief beneficiaries were the temporarily unemployed. Lov af 29. Marts om Tilskud til “de fattiges kasser,” in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1904, sect. 1 at 278 (Copenhagen: Schultz, n.d.); Lov af 4. Maj om Hjælpe-
kasser, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1907, at 452-56 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1908); Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv at 569-75; Jørgensen, Studier over det offentlige fattigvæsens historiske udvikling i Danmark i det 19. aarhundrede at 84-88, 97-111; Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark at 323-24.

52 man who moved boundary markers: A skelflytter secretly and fraudulently moved boundary markers to increase the extent of his own property.

53 Midsummer’s Eve: Sankthansaften, June 23, is named after Saint John the Baptist.

53 Lystrup: A small village a couple of miles east of Assens.

56 It’s the bigwigs that sit in the parish council and the assistance fund: The parish council did not directly control the assistance fund, but could make contributions (not to exceed 30 øre per inhabitant), one-third of which could be refunded by the state. The fund was managed by a board consisting of at least five members, who were elected by the voters of the township or municipality. Lov af 4. Maj om Hjælpekasser, sects. 3, 6, 7, and 14, at 452-55; Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark at 324.

57 ride the wooden horse: A punishment/torture, especially in the military and for peasants, in which a person was made to sit astride a narrow plank supported by two or four legs for extended periods of time with his hands tied behind him and weights tied to his feet. It went out of use at the end of the eighteenth century. Ordbog over det danske Sprog 24:782 (5th ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1996 [1948]).

57 secondary school: A realskole, following a reform of 1903, was a one-year program following a four-year middle school; it was not oriented, like a gymnasiu m, at preparing students for the university. Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark at 388-89.

57 a school that taught Latin: En lærde skole was also called a Latin school, which focused on teaching classical languages. Its original nineteenth-century purpose was to prepare pupils to enter Copenhagen University, until 1928 the country’s only university. Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark at 384-89.

58 We also saw, didn’t we, a school teacher as minister to the king: Jens Christian Christensen (1856-1930) was the Liberal (Venstre) prime minister (konseilspresident) from 1905 to 1908. He had been a village schoolmaster in western Jutland, but school teachers were often also
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deacons.

62 "A Babe Is Born in Bethlehem": "Et Barn er født i Betlehem" was written by N. F. S. Grundtvig in 1820, but can be traced back to a Latin hymn from the Middle Ages, "Puer natus in Bethlehem." The text is found in Den danske Salmebog, No. 85 at 96.

64 Vindblæs: A small community and a parish near Assens.

65 awakened: To be vakt involves recognition of one's sinfulness and readiness for repentance.

65 a little backyard apartment: Though not a slum outright, it conjures up image of a dwelling squeezed between larger buildings and lacking sun and air.

67 the good way: See 1 Kings 8:36: "Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk . . . ."

68 you know what's written about Martha and Mary: one thing is needful: Luke 10:41-42.

69 the eternal fire where there's groaning and gnashing of teeth: See Matt. 13:42: "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." See also Matt. 13:50. Kirk uses the Danish word suk, which means "sighing" or "groaning," although the Danish translations of the Bible use gråd, which means "weeping."

71 Mission Tidings: Indre Missions Tidende is a weekly that has been published by the Inner Mission since 1854.

71 schnapps-devil: Brændevisbjævel was apparently coined by Carl Moe, a fire-and-brimstone Inner Mission preacher, in a sermon he delivered in Harboør—an Inner Mission stronghold from which the fishermen in Kirk’s The Fishermen came and where Kirk’s paternal grandparents lived—in the 1880s. Later the expression spread to circles outside of the Inner Mission in the anti-alcoholism movement. The prevalence of working-class consumption of schnapps at the time is underscored by Martin Andersen Nexø’s memoirs of his experiences as a farm servant in the 1880s when it was customary for farmers to give farmhands a pint of schnapps a day. Even after some farmers had begun to do away with the custom and to pay their servants instead an additional eight crowns per half year, the farmer for whom Nexø worked refused to pay the amount, even though he did not himself drink schnapps and thought it made people into slaves. Martin Andersen Nexø, For lud og koldt vand 23 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1969
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[1937]). He also reported that in the Copenhagen of his youth it was customary for distilleries to pay their employees one-fourth of their weekly wage in schnapps. Martin Andersen Nexo, *Et lille kræ* 68 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1969 [1932]).

72 *the works of the devil*: 1 John 3:8.

72 *the last is worse than the first*: Matt. 12:45 (“the last state of that man is worse than the first”).

73 *wherewith shall it be salted if the salt have lost his savour?*: See Matt. 5:13.

74 *overseer of snow removal*: Each parish council appointed several *snefogder*, who summoned those subject to an obligation to work. Farm servants had to do this work as part of their service—landowners were the legally responsible parties—but for the rural unemployed in the winter it was a chance to earn a day-wage from the parish. Lov af 9. April om snekastning, in *Lovtidende... for Aaret 1891*, at 219-24.

74 *I really don’t understand what’s written in the scriptures about work being a curse*: Cf. God’s message to Adam on driving him out of the Garden of Eden in Gen. 3:17-19.

78 *Old-Jep*: Jep is short for Jeppe, which is derived from Jacob (and is the equivalent of “Jake”), and may remind some Danish readers of the title character Jeppe of the Hill in *Jeppe paa Bierget Eller Den forvandlede Bonde* (*Jeppe of the Hill or the Transformation of a Peasant*) (1722), a famous satiric comedy by Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), the leading figure of the Danish enlightenment. Jeppe was a drunk, who was whipped by his wife and cuckolded by the parish deacon.

80 *peppernut cookies*: Peppernut cookies are customarily eaten at Christmastime and also used as the stakes in card games.

81 *the knave and the geezer and the guardsman*: According to an editor of the *Jysk Ordbog*, these Jutlandish words (*svissi, pjolter, gardist*) are not known to be names of cards and may be idiosyncratic jargon of Kirk’s figures. Email from Viggo Sorensen to Morten Thing (Aug. 7, 2000). *Svissi* can also mean a vagabond, while *pjolter* can also mean whiskey and soda water. Danish card enthusiasts were also unable to identify the cards that the words might designate. According to two East Jutland card enthusiasts (Knud Sorensen and Knud Erik Pedersen) consulted by Elias Bredsdorff, such card names varied from parish to parish in Jutland and would have been mutually unintelligible among neighbors. They did, however, believe that the game itself was called
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81 be my guest, as the deacon said when the clergyman kissed his wife: The deacon was traditionally a comic figure or one of ridicule in Danish literature. See, e.g., H. C. Andersen, “Lille Claus og Store Claus,” in H. C. Andersen, *Samlede eventyr og historier* 1:14-25 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962 [1835]).

84 fourteen acres of heath: The one tønde of land in the Danish text is about 13.6 acres.

89 Lovely is the earth: “Dejlig er jorden” is one of Denmark’s best-known hymns. It was written by Bernhard Severin Ingemann (1789-1862) in 1850 following the battle of Isted—the bloodiest ever until then on Danish soil—in the course of the war over Schleswig-Holstein. The text may be found in *Den danske Salmebog*, Nr. 111 at 125.

89 Goethe-harmony: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s classical ideal of harmony, as presented in *Wilhelm Meister*, was based on educating a harmoniously free humanity, in whom all human capacities would be developed into a beautiful equilibrium.

90 good gifts: Matt. 7:11. Other biblical passages use “good things.”

94 yoke: The yoke (klaptræerne) Marinus has in mind is not the kind used to couple two animals (especially oxen) together for pulling a plow, but a simple self-fashioned wooden frame, consisting of sticks tied together, around the neck of a cow or other animal to prevent it from pushing through a fence. Both the object and the word have largely disappeared in Denmark and the United States. *Ordbog over det danske sprog* 10:477-78 (5th ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1994 [1928]); *Oxford English Dictionary* 20:756, col. 1 (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989 [1933]). Marinus’s insult conveys the sentiment that the drunken man needs to be restrained from leaving the precincts in which he usually roams.

94 With an “Our Father” in your sight, you shall not be trembling: The line is taken from the hymn “Always Carefree When You Stroll” (“Altid frejdig, når du går”) written by Christian Richardt in 1867. The text appears in *Den danske Salmebog*, No. 727 at 736. It was also much used by the Danish Resistance during World War II. The translation here is by Pastor Frederik V. Jensen: “Always carefree when you stroll/on ways of God’s own knowing,/even if you reach the goal,/only at this
world's ending./ Never fear the darkest might/ look, the stars are shining,/ with an 'Our Father' in your sight,/ you shall not be trembling!/ Fight for all that you hold dear!/ Die, if that's what's called for,/ then life isn’t so severe,/ and death is then not quite so sore!”

94 *governess-cart*: a light two-wheeled vehicle with two seats on the sides facing each other.

97 *nag*: The Danish word, *klaphingst*, means a horse that has been imperfectly castrated or one of whose testicles failed to descend properly. Most Danes, while not knowing this precise meaning, would know that the word refers to a horse that is not in good condition. The English equivalent, “ridgeling,” is so obscure that it would not only be unintelligible and fail to convey any sense of the word, but would sound inauthentic in context.

98 *meat of dead cattle*: Meat from animals that were not slaughtered, but that died of disease or accidents, and is not fit for human consumption.

99 *herdsman*: Herdsmen (or cattlemen), whose confining work required them to take care of the dairy herd every day, were paid considerably more than farmhands, their positions were often for life, and their wives typically had to milk. Danmarks Statistik, *Tyende- og Daglejerlønnen i Landbruget 1915*, at tab. 5 at 21, 23 (Statistiske Meddelelser, 4th ser., vol. 51, fasc. 2; Copenhagen: Bianco Luno, 1916); Jensen, *Danish Agriculture* at 142 n.8.

102 *And I’m supposed to fatten them up with whole milk!:* This scene may go back to Kirk’s childhood experiences, contemporaneous with the action in the novel set in the first decade of the twentieth century. Driving around the Mariager Fjord area with his father, a country doctor, Kirk reported in his memoirs witnessing his father telling one of the district’s largest farmers that he should give his herdsman whole milk because his children were undernourished: “Children can’t manage on skim milk, potatoes, and tough meat. You can afford it.” The farmer replied that the doctor didn’t know what he was talking about: these people bred like rats and did nothing but stuff themselves and whore. When the farmer turned his back on them, Kirk saw an “ugly, fat, blotchy neck. Oh well, father says, after all he’s not an evil person, he’s just stupid. But it’s a high price [to pay] when stupid people have too much to say.” Kirk, *Skyggespil* at 77.

102 *nobody’s going to bamboozle me*: The cryptic comment by the
owner of Holle Estate (mig skal ingen rende ladeporte ind med: nobody’s going to run in my barn doors) is a curtailed and inverted version of an idiom (vi kan rende gennem en lukket ladeporte uden at han kan mærke det: we can run through a closed barn door without his noticing it) meaning that someone is stupid.

103 we put our trust in him who dresses the lily in all its glory: Cf. Matt. 6:28-30.

108 It was her inheritance they were bargaining over, but no one asked her what she thought: By the early twentieth century, “the antiquated provisions of the Danish marriage law were the source of repeated pleas for . . . reform . . . .” The Danish Statute Book of 1683 had provided for community property between husband and wife, but only the husband “was entitled to dispose of the joint estate, married women being under a legal disability in matters of property.” Johannes Faurholt and Per Federspiel, Recent Danish Legislation on the Relation of Husband and Wife 3, 9 (Copenhagen: Nielsen & Lydiche, 1927). According to the Married Women’s Property Act of 1899, the husband had control over the joint estate; however, he was forbidden, without the wife’s consent, to sell any real property which, according to the title deeds, the wife had contributed to the joint estate. Lov nr. 75 af 7 April 1899 om Formueforholdet imellem Ægtefeller, § 11, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1899, at 323-29 at 325 (Copenhagen: Schultz, n.d.). Thus, if the title deed revealed that Frederikke owned the farm, Cilius would have needed her consent to sell it. It was not until 1925 that a wife became entitled, during her lifetime, to dispose freely of all property she brought into the joint estate. Lov nr. 56 af 18. marts 1925 om ægteskabets retsvirkninger, § 16, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1925, at 209-19 at 211 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1926). Thus the reader is left with the suspicion that the physically and psychologically overpowering Cilius, if he sold the farm without Frederikke’s consent, would not have been acting in a wholly lawful manner. As the holder of a law degree who had practiced law, Kirk was almost certainly familiar with these legal nuances.

108 agricultural consultant: Consulting agronomists were largely employed by farmers’ and smallholders’ associations and their salaries were subsidized by the state. They performed services roughly similar to those of county agents in the United States. Jensen, Danish Agriculture at 180.
111 the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests: Matt. 8:20.

116 According to the words of the scripture, we shall be to one another as brothers: Cf. 1 John 4:21: “And this commandment we have from him, That he who loveth God loveth his brother also.”

116 a good example to the uncircumcised: Cf. Rom. 4:9-12; Eph. 2:11-22.

116 Seek not your own: 1 Cor. 13:5: Charity (or love) “seeketh not its own.” Cf. also Philippians 2:4.”

116 Ye are the salt, and if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted: Matt. 5:13 (“Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted”).

120 market town: A købstad was a town either having a significant population whose livelihood was dependent on trade and industry or one on which the king had historically conferred special municipal trading or manufacturing privileges.

121 lay not up for yourselves treasures where moth and rust doth corrupt . . . .: Matt. 6:19.

122 the woman shall be a helpmate to the man: Gen. 2:18.

122 It’s written: be meek: Cf. Matt. 5:5: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

127 How the cement was actually manufactured, they weren’t clear about. Maybe you dug it right out of the cliff and poured it into sacks: Even in the much larger industrial city of Aalborg, when the first cement factory was being built there around 1890, a large part of the local population was unfamiliar with cement. Jesper Nielsen, Cementarbejdernes Fagforening 1896-1996, at 93 (Aalborg: Cementarbejdernes Fagforening, 1996).

130 in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread: Genesis 3:19.

130 thou shalt not worship the golden calf: See Ex. 32.

131 ultimately it was the farmers and the big taxpayers who had to pay for them in their old age: In 1891 Denmark became one of the first countries to enact an old-age assistance system. The Law on Old-Age Assistance for Worthy Needy Outside the Poor-Law System (Lov om alderdomsunderstøttelse til verdige trængende uden for fattigvæsenet), which was viewed as a supplement to the new poor law enacted the same day, covered all needy persons over the age of sixty who had not received poor-law assistance in the previous ten years (initially only 30
percent of the population received the benefit). The benefit was financed from general taxation—initially a tax on beer, largely consumed by workers—but the law did not specify its amount, which was set by municipalities and townships and subsidized by the state. Jørgensen, *Studier over det offentlige fattigvæsens historiske udvikling i Danmark i det 19. aarhundrede* at 208-17; *Danmark som foregangsland: Et bæredygtigt pensionssystem* 25 (Copenhagen: Ministry of Economics, 2000). For an analysis of the transitional regime between the poor law and universal pensions stressing the perceived need to support farm-workers without imposing the costs on farmers, see Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875-1975*, at 65-76 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

134 *let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil*: Matt. 5:37.

136 *ready to seize the opportunity*: This literary phrase in Danish is taken from Luke 19:44: “thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

137 *Jens Horse*: From the first edition on, this character in this one passage only is called “Niels Horse”; on the assumption that Kirk overlooked this inconsistency, the name has been corrected.

140 *The foxes have holes . . . and the birds of the air have nests*: See above note to p. 111.

143 *Can someone even take to the road in Denmark? I bummed my way in America*: Perhaps Hopner asks because at the time most states in the United States criminalized vagrancy. In California, for example, “Every person . . . without visible means of living who has the physical ability to work, and who does not seek employment, nor labor when employment is offered him . . . or who roams about from place to place without any lawful business . . . is a vagrant, and is punishable by a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars, or by imprisonment . . . not exceeding six months . . . .” 1903 Cal. Stat. at 96.

145 *hard*: This word has been translated according to the text of the last edition to appear in Kirk’s lifetime (*svært*). The text of the first edition reads “strange” (*sært*). Both words are possible in this context, but the former has been adopted because it seems somewhat more fitting, although it may merely be a typo.

145 *farm-pensioner’s house*: An *afhægtshus* is a house for lifetime occupancy of which a retiring farmer who has sold his farm contracts with the person to whom he has sold the house.
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151 a dredger, which was meant to make the fjord deeper so big ships could enter to pick up cement: The fact that the entrance to the Limfjord east of Aalborg was made deeper than that of Mariager Fjord was an important factor in establishing the preeminence of the cement industry at Aalborg. Henning Bender, Aalborgs industrielle udvikling fra 1735 til 1940, at 374 (Aalborg: Aalborg Kommune, 1987).

153 Some were from the west, and others lived on the islands: The navvies were from western Jutland and the many Danish islands.

154 salvation was prepared: Luke 2:30-31: “mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared . . .”

158 Suffer the little children to come unto me: Mk. 10:14.

160 Moloch: A biblical idol to which children were sacrificed. Lev. 18:21.

161 islander: Iver came from one of the Danish islands (Zealand) rather than the Jutland mainland.

164 jamb stoves: A bilæggerovn was a tile stove set into the wall and fired from the fireplace of an adjoining room.

166 In reality there’s no social class that’s worse off than agriculture’s smallholders: On Kirk’s similar views, see above “Introduction” at pp. xix-xxi.

167 let the car drive: The Danish phrase (lod bilen køre) leaves even some Danish literature and language experts puzzled because it makes grammatical sense only if Schjøtt has a driver; yet there is no indication that he has a chauffeur and, given the ridicule to which Kirk otherwise exposes him, Kirk would certainly have highlighted Schjøtt’s having a chauffeur. Kirk may have chosen this rather subtle way of mocking Schjøtt’s desire to give himself a majestic appearance by ‘letting the car drive’ rather than driving it himself.

169 warm the tiles and put them in the bed so they could get some warmth in their bodies: It was customary, especially in clay-rich mid-Jutland, to heat up clay tiles and put them under down quilts to warm up the bed.

176 But Marinus didn’t think much of soil if rye couldn’t grow on it: Although rye was far from being the most important crop at the time in Denmark or Jutland, it was the basic bread grain in the countryside, where people ate wheat bread only on Sundays. Marinus may therefore have meant that if Boel-Erik as a day laborer did not cultivate rye, he would not be able to survive.
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179 *election*: 2 Pet. 1:10: “brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”

180 *For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known*. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops: Luke 12:2-3.


181 *whited sepulchers*: Matt. 23:27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”

182 *If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also*: Cf. Matt. 5:39.

182 *borne false witness against her neighbor*: Cf. Ex. 20:16.

185 *stories on high*: Amos 9:6: “It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven . . . .”

187 *put his house in order*: 2 Kings 20:1: “Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order . . . .”

194 *I’ve wrestled like Jacob with the Lord*: Gen. 32:24-28.

206 *Mrs. Marja*: In Danish (as in English) it is not common to call a married woman “Mrs.” followed by her first name alone. The familiar tone evoked by “Mrs. Marja” conjures up a false intimacy in the style of the sensationalist weekly press and exposes her as a public female with a touch of upper-class frivolity. Marja itself, which is Finnish for Mary, would have been very uncommon as a Danish name. To Danish ears it sounds exotic and yet, by association with Mariager Fjord, perhaps also familiar. Email from Morten Thing (Oct. 9-10, 2000); email from Helli Skærbak (Oct. 9, 2000).

206 *The farmers didn’t want to know anything about unions: the man who joined wouldn’t get work on the farms*: On Kirk’s view of the difficulties in organizing farmworkers, see above “Introduction” at p. xx-xxi.

207 *it’s written that we must love our enemies*: Luke 6:27: “Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.”

211 *But now at least he had joined a union, an association of Christian workers and employers*: In 1899 the Kristeligt dansk Fællesforbund for Arbejdsgivere og Arbejdere (KdF) was formed, which had
its origins in the Inner Mission and the latter’s view of employers and employees as having common interests. By 1907 the KdF’s by-laws guaranteed that the group’s Christian line was not inconsistent with the Inner Mission’s. The chairman of the Inner Mission, Vilhelm Beck, who criticized the socialist unions’ class-struggle ideology, warmly recommended the organization. The organization rejected such an ideology, which viewed employers as enemies; the KdF also rejected strikes and lockouts. By 1901 the KdF, which had its greatest strength in smaller towns in Jutland, had gained about 4,000 members, but it failed to achieve any prominence. Bent Honoré, Den kristelige fagbevægelse 16-34 (Randers: Kristeligt dansk Fællesforbund, 1985); Henry Bruun, Den faglige arbejderbevægelse i Danmark indtil aar 1900, Pt. I: Til ca. 1880, at 279 (Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1977 [1938]); Axel Nielsen, Dänische Wirtschaftsgeschichte 560 (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1933).

213 Judge not: See Matt. 7:1: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”
213 called . . . unto him: Matt. 10:1 and numerous other passages.
214 true life: This phrase may be taken from 1 Tim. 6:19 and is variously translated as the real, true, or eternal life.
215 Boel-Erik pointed out a farm . . . where he'd been placed in service by the parish council when he was a boy: Under the old poor-law system, the parish invited bids for farming out paupers’ children and accepted the lowest bid; after finishing school, they were placed as farm or domestic servants. Even after termination of farming out, such children continued to be placed as servants until they were eighteen years old. Jorgensen, Studier over det offentlige fattigvæsens historiske udvikling i Danmark i det 19. aarhundrede at 189, 247-49, 254-57; Lov af den 9de April 1891 om det offentlige Fattigvæsen, sect. 30 at 206.
215 the Socialist March: Written in 1871 by Ulrik Peter Overby (1819-1879), “Snart dages det, brodre” (“Soon the Day Is Dawning, Brothers”) is one of the labor movement’s most important songs and still a fixed feature at May Day parades.
215 a member of parliament . . . making a speech . . . with a flaming red beard and a tremendous voice: The description fits the Social Democratic orator and leader Frederik Borgbjerg (1866-1936).
216 you've got children to support: Since Cilius has only one child, the phrase may be used here as a fixed figure of speech with the plural applied even to a parent of a single child.
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216 farmhands who were observing the day on which their term of service ended and started again: According to the law governing master-servant relations then in effect for agriculture and domestic service, the general times for hiring for service entered into for more than a half-year were May 1st and November 1st (skiftedag); in other words, servants who contracted to work for at least a half-year were not permitted to leave before the expiration of that period. Tyendelov for Kongeriget Danmark, 10 Mai 1854, sect. 11, in Samling af endnu gældende Love at 238, 239. This provision remained in effect even after the statute was replaced by a less coercive regime. Lov af 6. Maj 1921 om Retsforhold mellem Husbond og Medhjælpere, sect. 3. Pelle the Conqueror opens on May 1, 1877, as Pelle and his father arrive on Bornholm with other Swedish workers who are met at the boat by farmers seeking to hire farmhands. Martin Andersen Nexø, Pelle Erobreren 1:11 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996 [1906]). In his memoirs of his youth as a farm servant, Andersen Nexø characterized it as a “slave law, which the farmers faithfully helped one another enforce literally against us.” Martin Andersen Nexø, For lud og koldt vand at 23. The struggle against the much disliked 1854 law was initiated by socialist groups in 1871. Ulf Torlyn and Keld Thomsen, Det opsætsige tyende: Kvindearbejde og organisering, 1870-1920, at 70 (Århus: Brøndenælæn, n.d. [1979]). The harsh and oppressive conditions of domestic service are also reflected in Pelle the Conqueror, which is set a bit earlier than the events in Kirk’s novels. In it a class-conscious bricklayer in Copenhagen expresses his anger over a daughter’s working as a domestic servant by calling the work “nice slavery [et kønt slaveri].” Martin Andersen Nexø, Pelle Erobreren 2:101 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996 [1909]). The title character of Ditte Menneskebarn, after having worked as a domestic servant in Copenhagen, decides that she will give it up for “free labor [frit arbejde].” Martin Andersen Nexø, Ditte Menneskebarn 2:127 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1995 [1919]).

219 contract note: A document establishing the main points of a deal that has been concluded; it is usually superseded by a detailed contract.


224 the factory worker—he’s . . . achieved so much in material welfare that all that nonsense about suffering and renunciation appears foolish to him: For Kirk’s views of these issues at the time he was writ-

225 He knows a little about where things are headed: The Danish verb *snerpe hen* comes from an idiom about the fictitious town of Snerpe: *han ved at byen hedder Snerpe, men han ved ikke hvor den snerper hen* (he knows the town is called Snerpe, but he doesn’t know what it’s about); it means that one knows something about a matter, but not its whole context.

228 *union*: The Cement Workers Union (*Cementarbejdernes Fagforening*) was organized at the Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory at Rørdal in 1896; in turn, that same year it joined the Laborers’ Union for Jutland and Funen (as of 1897 called the Danish Laborers’ Union (*Dansk Arbejdsmands Forbund*)), which included unskilled workers from almost every industry. The Cement Workers Union’s membership rose from 122 in 1896 to 600 by 1920. Nielsen, *Cementarbejdernes Fagforening 1896-1996*, at 17, 21, 30; Walter Galenson, *The Danish System of Labor Relations: A Study in Industrial Peace* 22-24 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952)

231 *credit association*: An organization of property-owning borrowers whose joint and several liability enable them to obtain cheaper and larger loans. This type of financial institution began in Denmark in 1850. Warming, *Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv* at 425-28.

232 Cilius went to Høpner and explained that they couldn’t work together with Kresten Bosse, who had to be regarded as nonunion. "What’s that supposed to mean?" Høpner asked. "We’ll be obliged to strike," Cilius said. Labor unions sought to combat the *Kristeligt dansk Fællesforbund for Arbejdsgivere og Arbejdere* by prohibiting their members from working at places of employment where KdF-members worked. Honoré, *Den kristelige fagbevægelse* at 31.

233 *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*: See above note to p. 130.

233 *Render therefore unto God the things which be God’s, and unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s*: Luke 20:25 (and other passages). Kirk has inverted the order in which God and Caesar are mentioned in these biblical passages.

235 *rotary kiln*: See below note to p. 269.

241 *poor farm*: Beginning in the 1860s, at a time of severe strain for agricultural workers, many townships established poor farms to
which they referred most of the parish’s poor. Originally the inmates furnished their own subsistence by cultivating the plots or gardens attached to the farm. Poor people generally regarded the poor farm as the most frightful prospect and engaged in “heroic” struggles to avoid being sent there; the parish councils successfully used the threat of the poor farm as a means of discouraging the poor from seeking poor relief. The poor-farm movement peaked in the 1880s. Other parish councils established special poorhouses, whose primary object was to provide shelter especially for the elderly destitute. Jørgensen, *Lokaladministrationen i Danmark* at 320-21; Jørgensen, *Studier over det offentlige fattigvæsens historiske udvikling i Danmark i det 19. aarhundrede* at 184 (quote), 270-312.

245 *the wide world:* This phrase has been translated according to the text of the last edition to appear in Kirk’s lifetime (*den vide verden*). The text of the first edition reads “the wild world” (*den vilde verden*). Although both phrases are possible in this context, the former has been adopted because it seems somewhat more fitting.

247 *Now they were laborers and in a labor union:* The former agricultural day laborers had become industrial unskilled laborers (*arbejds mænd*); cement workers were organized in the *Arbejdsmands Forbund*, an organization of unskilled laborers. See above note to p. 228.


249 *Funen:* The Danish island immediately adjacent to south Jutland.

249 *Is she going to change jobs in November?:* See above note to p. 216.

250 *Zealand:* The major Danish island, on which Copenhagen is located.
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250 Bornholm: A Danish island in the Baltic Sea south of Sweden and north of Germany and Poland.

251 Well: Laurids uses this English word.

255 thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: See above note to p. 18.

258 I almost think she uses bank notes where other people can make do with a newspaper: Presumably Andres has in mind such uses as wrapping fish and toilet paper.

258 a town next to a factory: The Danish censuses of 1911 and 1921 referred to it as Assens Factory Town and Assens Cement Town. See above “Introduction” at p. xv.

262 farm lodgers: An indsider was a farm laborer who rented a place to live on a farm without having full-time employment there (especially in the winter).

264 The new life: Kirk had tentatively titled the second volume of the trilogy The New Life. Thing, Hans Kirks mange ansigter at 173.
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The New Times

269 the cement factory: Following the excavation or quarrying of the two principal raw materials, chalk (or elsewhere limestone) and clay, the main processes in the manufacture of cement are: (1) crushing, grinding, and mixing; (2) burning (at 2,600 to 3,000 degrees F.) to incipient fusion or calcination resulting in the production of clinker; (3) cooling and grinding of clinker into clinker powder in rotary coolers. William Brown, *The Portland Cement Industry: A Practical Treatise on the Building, Equipping and Economical Running of a Portland Cement Plant* 10 (New York: Van Nostrand, 1917).

269 the huge rotary kilns: The slurry is fed into the higher end of the kiln, whose axis is inclined slightly from the horizontal, and burned at the lower end. The rotary kiln was viewed as revolutionizing the cement industry because it reduced both capital expenditures and the number of workers, simplified manufacturing, and improved the quality and uniformity of cement. In Europe, kiln technology in the nineteenth century had been driven by the relative expensiveness of fuel and the relative cheapness of labor. Because coal was relatively cheap in the United States and oil had just been discovered and was also cheap there, while wages were higher than in Europe, the practical development of the rotary kiln, which had been patented in Britain in 1885 and required huge amounts of fuel, was stymied in Europe and brought to fruition in the United States, where technicians focused on the most labor-saving burning methods regardless of the impact on fuel economy. Use of rotary kilns in the United States proliferated in the latter part of the 1890s. It was only when rising oil prices forced firms to accommodate the use of pulverized coal as a fuel that rotary kilns became profitable to use in Europe, where the Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory was the first to adopt it in 1898. The rotary kiln reduced the number of workers at a cement plant by 80 percent; its introduction at the Aalborg plant prompted the discharge of about 100 workers, which was "extremely unpleasant for those concerned," but in the long run a "blessing." Knudåge Riisager, *F. L. Smith & Co.: 1882-1922*, at 100-106, 259-60 (quote) (Copenhagen: Langkjaer, 1921); S. B. Newberry, "Portland Cement—Sketch of Materials and Process," in *The Cement Industry: Descriptions of Portland and Natural Cement Plants in the United States and Europe, with Notes on Materials and Processes in Portland Cement*
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269 tube mills: Cylindrical rotating mills that grind raw materials.


269 sanatorium for tuberculosis: The Nationalforening til Tuberkuloseens Bekæmpelse, founded at the turn of the century, which aspired to afford treatment to patients too poor to pay for it, helped build numerous sanatoriums, at least one of which (at Skørping, which opened in 1906) was not far from Assens. The Danish state began to play a major part in combating tuberculosis in 1905 with the enactment of a statute providing state subsidies for sanatoriums and treatment of patients outside the poor-law system. To insure that personal economic circumstances did not interfere with tracking and treating the disease, the Danish state and local governments heavily subsidized the sanatoriums’ operation and poor patients’ stays. Lov om Statsstøtte til Sygehuse for Tuberkulose samt til Patienters Behandling paa saadane af 14de April 1905, in *Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1905*, at 299-302 (Copenhagen: Schultz, n.d.); Warming, *Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv* at 537; National Association for the Fight Against Tuberculosis, *The Fight Against Tuberculosis in Denmark* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1950); Ole Horwitz, “Bekæmpelsen af lungentuberkulose i det 20. århundrede,” *Ugeskrift for læger*, 128:127-31 at 129 (Jan. 27, 1966); Ida Blom, “Frivillige organisasjoner i kamp mot tuberkulose 1900-1940: En norsk-dansk sammenlikning,” in *Den privat-offentliga gränsen: Det sociala arbets strategier och aktörer i Norden 1860-1940*, at 209-40 (Monika Janfelt ed.; Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd, 1999).

270 or maybe they give notice at this time of year on Funen?: See above note to p. 216.

270 You have a singsong intonation as fine as the way the deacon sings the offertory: Danes outside of Funen perceive natives of Funen as having a charming melody to their speech.

273 bought the Færgeby station master’s furniture at an estate auc-
tion: The Danish phrase *efter stationsforstanderen* is ambiguous: it probably means that the station master died, but could also mean that he had retired or moved to a smaller dwelling or to a station in another town.

273-74 *I certainly understand you'd prefer to get away from that place:* What is translated here as “place” in the original is *land*, which means “country”; it is an abbreviated form of *Fynsland*, a common term for Funen, which Danes would perceive as a place and not a country.

274 *kick against the pricks:* See above note to p. 8.

275 *good doctrine:* Prov. 4:2: “I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.”

277 *Zealander:* Iver was from the Danish island of Zealand.

280 "I mean you've got a real gift for it." *Cilius said:* This sentence is in the first and second editions, but was omitted in the 1959 and paperback editions. The omission appears to be erroneous because leaving out Cilius’s name makes the flow of the dialog awkward.

281 *poor farm:* See above note to p. 241.

281 *the Socialist March:* See above note to p. 215.

281 *Brønderslev:* A town about fifty miles north of Assens, where the Great Brønderslev Fair had been a tradition since 1843.

285 *thorn in the flesh:* 2 Cor. 12:7: “lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me . . . .”

286 *Be content in all things:* Cf. Phil. 4:11: “for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

287 *I've been faithful over the few things that were entrusted to me by the gospel’s sacred word:* See above note to p. 18.

289-90 *the learned college in Copenhagen:* This *lærde kursus* was probably a so-called Latin or learned school. See above note to p. 57.

292 *assistance fund:* See above note to pp. 50-51.

293 *mockery will be smitten on one’s own mouth:* For similar sentiments, see Prov. 9:12 (“if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it”) and 30:17 (“The eye that mocketh at his father . . . the ravens of the valley shall pick it out”).

295 *strike:* In 1910 the cement workers at Denmark’s biggest cement plant, Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory, threatened to strike if the firm did not agree to their demand for an increase in their hourly wage from 30 to 35 øre. Management refused and a lockout was de-
clared for the whole industry. The strike was settled after six weeks on the basis that the hourly wage would rise to 32 øre in 1910, 33 øre in 1911, and 34 øre in 1912. Another strike took place in 1912 when the Cement Workers Union demanded an hourly wage increase of 10 øre and management made a counter-demand of a 5-øre wage decrease. Following an eight-week lockout, a four-year agreement was reached providing for a 2-øre increase in 1912, and 1-øre increases in 1913 and 1914. Nielsen, *Cementarbejdernes Fagforening 1896-1996*, at 34-35.

295 **final strike notice:** Under the basic agreement regulating labor relations between the Federation of Trade Unions and the Danish Employers’ Association entered into in 1899, each side is required to give the other side’s executive committee notice of the intent to bring a proposal for a work stoppage to a vote at an authorized meeting at least fourteen days before the stoppage is to take effect and notice of the result of the vote at least seven days before the stoppage is to take effect. “Overenskomst mellem Dansk Arbejdsgiver- og Mesterforening og De samvirkende Fagforbund,” reproduced in *100-året for Septemberforliget: Det offentlige arbejdsmarked på vej ind i et nyt århundrede—et festskrift* 5-7 at 5 (Copenhagen: Finance Ministry, 1999).

295 **It seems to me we’ve got an outrageously good wage:** At the outset it was difficult to organize cement factory workers around the issue of wages because many of them had worked on farms where wages had been even lower. Nielsen, *Cementarbejdernes Fagforening* at 30-31.

295 **In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread:** See above note to p. 130.

296 **we have to compete with cement on the world market:** In 1913, 52 percent of the cement produced in Denmark was exported. Betænkning vedrørende Cementbranchens konkurrenceforhold og F. L. Smidth-Koncernen afgivet af den i henhold til lov nr. 128 af 31. marts 1949 nedsatte trustkommission, tab. 2 at 12 (Betænkning nr. 243; Copenhagen: Statens trykningskontor, 1959).

296 **But in the years before Hopner had had his own war to conduct with the big cement trust, and there he’d become the little guy. He’d been compelled to enter into the cartel, and had been barely allowed to keep on being president:** By 1914, the Kongsdal cement factory had been taken over by the cement ring led by the quasi-monopoly Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory and its major owner, F. L. Smidth &
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297 exilor: Trade name for a packing and filling machine for bags and barrels: the cement was sucked from silos into this closed machine, which eliminated the formation of dust associated with hand-packing. It was in use in the Danish cement industry by 1909. Riisager, F. L. Smidth & Co. at 248-49. Whereas sacks were used for the domestic market, at the beginning of the twentieth century barrels were used for exporting cement. Nielsen, Cementarbejdernes Fagforening at 96.

299 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters: Eph. 6:5.
299 Servants, be subject to your masters: 1 Pet. 2:18.
299 Whoever humbles himself will be exalted: Matt. 23:12

300 strike assistance: During the strike of 1910, cement workers received ten crowns per week in strike assistance at a time when their hourly wage was 30 øre; the assistance thus amounted to about 33 hours’ worth of hourly wages for workers whose workweek alternated between 72 and 96 hours. The replacement rate was further reduced by the fact that cement workers were also paid a piece rate, which increased their daily wage by about 50 percent. Nielsen, Cementarbejdernes Fagforening at 31-35.

300 reporting to the union: Workers were required to show up at the union hall or unemployment office with their union card to get it stamped as proof that they were on strike.

304 Well, I mean it’s a water closet, the equal of the one that was installed in Høpner’s president’s residence: In the first, second, special 1959, and paperback editions this sentence begins with quotation marks that never close. It has been assumed that the quotation ends at the end of the sentence.

304 Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil: See above note to p. 134.

306 ether drops: Named for a German physician, Fr. Hoffmann (1660-1742), and consisting of one part ether and three parts alcohol, Hoffmannsdråber were used as a remedy for nausea.

307 concrete block plant: Concrete block plants, which produced such cement products as bricks and roofing tiles, were much smaller and more numerous than cement factories. In 1905 (1914), there were
225 (499) foundries employing a total of 948 (1,354) production workers; 31 (85) had no employees and 176 (358) only one to five workers. Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1919, tab. 55 at 68-69 (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1920); Ole Hyldtoft, Københavns industrialisering 1840-1914, at 364 (Herning: Systime, 1984).

307 Banks and savings banks: Danish banks lent primarily to industry and trade, whereas savings banks’ loans went largely to real estate and housing. Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv at 404-408.

his grandmother had been a servant girl in a castle called Bregentved on Zealand: A large estate and castle on Zealand about 25 miles from Sørå Academy, the elite private secondary school that Kirk attended from 1909 to 1916, overlapping with the years the novels take place, bear this name. At the time Kirk was writing the two novels, Bregentved was the largest estate in Denmark. Therkel Mathiassen, “Herregaardes og godsers udbredelse og fordeling i Danmark,” in Herregaardene og samfundet at 93-118 and 104.

count: In the first and second editions Kirk had used “baron.” The change to “count” appeared for the first time in a special edition published three years before Kirk’s death. Hans Kirk, De ny tider 41 (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1959). The copyright page states that “this edition has appeared on the initiative of the New Danish Literature Society.” The Nyt Dansk Litteraturselskab reissues books that are missing from public libraries, which are its members. According to the Society’s chairman, its archives do not reveal that Kirk proofread the edition or made any changes. Email from Morten Bagger to translator (Feb. 5, 2001). The change from “baron” to count was retained in the Gyldendal paperback edition that appeared six years after Kirk’s death, although that edition contains typographical errors not in the 1959 edition. According to Kirk’s biographer, Kirk’s correspondence with Gyldendal contains no instructions concerning changes for future editions. Email from Morten Thing to translator (Jan. 22, 2001). “Count” eliminates the inconsistency that arose later in The New Times when Bregentved looks as though he were descended from a count (see above p. 472). The owners of Bregentved estate (the heads of the Moltke family) were counts; a count is a higher-ranking aristocrat than a baron.

old-age assistance: See above note to p. 131.

from over there: From the union headquarters in Copenhagen.
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308 wife: It is assumed that the substitution of “women” (kvinder) in the 1959 and paperback editions for “wife” (kone) in the first and second editions was in error.

313 And we can’t let them say we weren’t able to hold out just as long as the others: Cilius is referring to the cement workers in the other factories in the industry-wide strike.

314 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad!: Acts 26:24.

315 one thing is needful: See above note to p. 68.

315 And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover: Mark 16:17-18.

315 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned: Mark 16:16.

316 and not like the doubting Thomas put our finger in Christ’s stigmata: See John 26:25: “But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

316 have faith like a grain of mustard seed: Matt. 17:20


317 You’re arrogant about your fear of God the way a rich man is about his money: See 1 Tim. 6:17: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (New International Version).

317 the servant of the Lord: 2 Tim. 2:24. Both Kirk’s text and the Danish bible use “a servant of the Lord.”

317 folk-theology: The notion of folkelig expresses the entire Grundtvigian program of cultivating the roots of Danish national culture and identity.

318 Paul, who can shake off a poisonous snake the way the rest of us can a caterpillar: See Acts 28:3-6.

318 Down to earth, down to earth, that’s where life has summoned you: Written in 1872 by Hans Vilhelm Kaalund (1818-1885), a lyric po-
et best known for his children’s stories, the first lines of “Paa det jevne, paa det jevne!” read: “Down to earth! Down to earth!/—not into the blue sky—/That’s where life has summoned you,/that’s where you shall be tested.” For the full text, see H. V. Kaalund, *Samlede digte* 335-37 (Otto Borchsenius ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1898). Generations of Danish schoolchildren have learned the song, the title and first line of which has become a Danish idiom.

319 *Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities:* 1 Tim. 5:23.

319 *our Lord transformed water into wine when he was invited to a wedding in Canaan:* See John 2:1-12.

319 *God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector:* Luke 18:11.

322 *I scarcely understand how they can bring themselves to say work is a curse:* See above note to p. 74.

324 *Jens Glud, you should change your name to Jens Klud:* Klud means “wash cloth” or (in language post-dating Kirk’s novels) “wimp.”

324 *pay the price:* The Danish text refers to the kapiteltakst, which was the average annual price of the most important varieties of grain, which was set for the assessment of tithes.

326 *Yet not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the will of the Lord:* See above note to p. 7.

326 *There shall not one hair of a person’s head fall to the ground:* 1 Sam. 14:45 (which uses “his” rather than “a person’s”).

332 *We have to be content with little, as the scripture says:* See above note to p. 286.

335 *fornication . . . adultery:* In the Danish text, Andres wants to report his wife for hor, which is the word used in the ten commandments for “adultery.” Ex. 20:14. It is also the older legal term, but can mean “fornication” as well. It is obviously linked to hore, which means both “adulteress” and “whore.” Pastor Gamst responds by shifting to the modern, non-biblical, juridical, and morally less freighted word for “adultery” (ægteskabsbrud). Later in the conversation, Gamst himself uses hor. Because uniform use of “adultery” here would make Gamst’s question nonsensical, two different terms have been used. Whereas according to the Kings James translation of Matt. 5:32, “whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery,” the Danish translation of 1907 uses hor for “for-
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nication” and “adultery”; the New International Version, in turn, uses “marital unfaithfulness” instead of “fornication.”

336 afterward perhaps you’ll want to divorce her? That’s permitted on account of fornication: This ancient right had been codified in 1683 in Kong Christian den Femtis Danske Lov 3-16-15-1 (V. A. Secher ed.; 2d ed.; Copenhagen: Gad, 1911 [1683]).

336 thorn in the flesh: See above note to p. 285.

338 Forgive one another: Col. 3:13.

339: Ida . . . to: These four sentences appear as a separate paragraph in the 1959 and paperback editions.

339 Let all your things be done with charity: 1 Cor. 16:14

341 meeting of friends: The venmøde was an institution associated with Grundtvigians and the Inner Mission.

341 we children of God must be the yeast that leavens the bread: Cf. Matt. 13:33: “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

341 but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?: See above note to p. 73.


344 1500 degrees of heat: Centigrade, or about 2700 degrees Fahrenheit.


345 Did you come to conduct exams, Pastor Gamst?: Part of the parish minister’s duties was examining children and teachers; failure to pass could lead to a pupil’s being left back. These ancient powers of the parish minister were reinforced by the introduction (by a regulation of Jan. 13, 1736) of a system of compulsory confirmation of all children through the schools in a country with a state religion, and persisted until 1933-34. Christian den Femtis Danske Lov 2-18-14; Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark at 237, 250-51, 513. Perhaps the most famous literary example of such an examination occurs in Pelle the Conqueror, in which Pelle gets an A+ in religion because, after reciting the story of God’s condemning the serpent to crawl on its belly and being asked what a limb is and told that it is a body part that can move
independently, Pelle offers the ears as an example; when he astonishes
the minister by actually being able to move his ears, the minister, school
committee, and parents laugh, thus assuring him his grade. Andersen

346 *folk-culture and folk-identity*: The term *folkelighed* cannot be
translated in a word or a phrase. It expresses the entire Grundtvigian
program of cultivating the roots of Danish national culture and identity.
See Steven Borish, *Danish Social Movements* at 104-41.

346 *Seek ye the places most lowly*: A line (“Ak søger de ydmyge
steder”) from Hans Adolf Brorson’s hymn from 1732, “Now Found Is
the Fairest of Roses” (“Den yndigste rose er funden”), appears in *Den
danske Salmebog*, No. 98, at 111, and was translated by J. C. Aaberg in
*Hymnal for Church and Home* 105 (Blair, Neb.: Danish Lutheran Pub­
lishing House, 1927).

346 *land*: On the term Kirk uses here, Hartkorn, see above the note
to p. 3.

346 *If I were just a capable teacher, too*: The omission of this
sentence, which is in the first and second editions, in the 1959 and pa­
perback editions is clearly erroneous because Ulriksen’s reply makes
little sense without it.

346 *kick against the pricks*: See above note to p. 8.

347 *Central executive committee with authorization concluded
agreement*: Already by the beginning of the twentieth century na­tion­
wide, industrywide collective bargaining was common in Denmark,
where labor relations were centralized and controlled by national labor
and employers organizations. The so-called September Agreement
(*Septemberforliget*) of September 5, 1899 between the Federation of
Trade Unions (*De samvirkende Fagforbund*) and the Danish Employ­
ers’ Association (*Dansk Arbejdsgiver- og Mesterforeningen*) followed
a four-month lockout that put 40,000 workers out of work as the newly
formed employers’ organization sought to punish the newly formed
labor federation for its failure to prevent a subordinate union from strik­
ing after the national organizations had reached a contract agreement.
See Galenson, *The Danish System of Labor Relations* at 1, 97-102; Erik
Stig Jørgensen, “Tilblivelsen af Septemberforliget, Den faste Vold­
giftsret og Forligsmandsinstitutionen,” in *100-året for Septemberfor­
liget* at 11-30. Although the September Agreement, which created the
framework for regulating the labor market during the twentieth century,
largely reflected employers’ aims, it also recognized workers’ right to self-organization. Chief among the Agreement’s provisions were: (1) the mutual recognition of the other organization’s right to initiate a strike or lockout, which, however, must be approved by at least three-fourths of the votes by a representative union or employer association; (2) each side’s obligation to give the other side’s executive committee notice of the intent to bring such a proposal to a vote at least fourteen days before the stoppage is to take effect and notice of the result of the vote at least seven days before the stoppage is to take effect; (3) each side’s obligation not to recognize or support any strike or lockout contrary to the foregoing provisions; (4) a mutual agreement not to support an unaffiliated workers’ or employers’ organization in a dispute with the other side; (5) union acknowledgment of the employer’s right to direct and distribute the work and to use what labor in its judgment is suitable; and (6) a “self-explanatory” presumption that the Federation of Trade Unions would be willing to act with the Employers’ Association on behalf of peaceful, stable, and good labor relations and that under no circumstances would either side interfere with any worker’s “exercising his natural right to perform as much work and as good work as his abilities and training permit him . . . .” “Overenskomst mellem Dansk Arbejdsgiver- og Mesterforening og De samvirkende Fagforbund,” reprinted in 100-året for Septemberforliget at 5-7. See also Galenson, The Danish System of Labor Relations at 291-93 (translation of the text of the Agreement).

349 “If I were the one deciding, the strike would never have begun or it would’ve been carried out to the bitter end.” Høpner was angry and Cilius understood that he definitely didn’t have much to say when decisions were made about big issues: Høpner’s subordinate role in the strike is a reflection of the power of the cement ring, led by the quasi-monopoly Aalborg Portland-Cement-Factory and its major owner, F. L. Smidth & Co., the leading producer of cement factory machinery. See Betænkning vedrørende Cementbranchens konkurrenceforhold og F. L. Smidth-Koncernen.

350 consumer co-operative society store: This Danish institution, which dates back to 1866, was designed to reduce prices for working-class consumers by eliminating the exploitation and shoddy goods associated with middlemen. See The Danish Co-Operative Movement (Clemens Pedersen ed.; Patricia Hansen tr.; Copenhagen: Det Danske
Selskab, 1977). Until about 1907-1908, the Social Democratic party had maintained a negative attitude toward co-ops as diverting workers’ attention from political and union activity. This lack of official support had been reinforced by the fact that in some districts small store owners made up a significant proportion of the party’s voters. Vagn Dybdahl, *Danmarks historie*, vol. 12: *De nye klasser: 1870-1913*, at 252 (John Danstrup and Hal Koch eds.; Copenhagen: Politiken, 1965).

351 *Let the good times roll*: A loose translation of the common phrase, *Her er liv og glade dage* (literally: Here are life and happy days), which was popularized by Axel Breidahl’s use of it as the refrain in a song in a 1928 theater piece, *Stamherren*. Breidahl, in turn, had taken it from a song sung in servicemen’s associations, “Kammeratens røde næse,” in which the reply to the question as to why the sun never set there was: “Because it’s good to be here.” T. Vogel-Jørgensen, *Bevingede ord* 262 (2d ed.; Copenhagen: Gad, 1945 [1940]).

353 *clinker storage*: Clinker is stored or aged (often in silos) before grinding.

354 *Vendsyssel*: The northeasternmost part of Jutland, separated from the rest of the peninsula by the Limfjord. “Syssel” is a district.

357 *Ranum, my old teacher’s college*: Ranum seminarium, located near the Limfjord about forty miles north of Assens, had been founded in 1848, at which time it was one of five state institutions for teacher education. Jørgensen, *Lokaladministrationen i Danmark* at 253.

357 *estate bailiff’s whip*: The ridefoged, who was in charge of the villein service (*hoveriarbejde*) on manorial estates, was a much detested figure from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

357 *Grundtvig*: See above note to p. 9.

358 *But it’s not grades that count, little Soren, but character*: Ulriksen is making an irreproducible pun: the Danish word for report card “grades” is “karakterer.”

359 *gifts of love*: Charitable gifts given to the needy.

359 *tombola*: A charity lottery.

360 *Viborg*: A middle-sized and old Danish city about 30 miles southwest of Assens. It had been a garrison town since at least the eighteenth century. See *Danmark land og folk: Historisk-topografisk-statistisk haandbog* 3:244-63.

361 *Ajs*: Jutlandish for Anders.

365 *Nobody discovered I was with child*: Under the Master-Servant...
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Law, a master was entitled to fire an unmarried servant immediately and without notice for being pregnant. Tyendelov for Kongeriget Dan­mark, sect. 41, subsect. 13, in Samling af endnu gjældende Love at 244. In his epic novel Ditte Menneskebarn, Andersen Nexø includes a scene in which a (female) farmer looking like someone conducting legal pro­ceedings held a book in her hand and “solemnly spoke bookish language” as she cited by number and quoted this very subsection to her servant to justify firing her on the spot (because she was pregnant by the farmer’s son). Martin Andersen Nexø, Ditte Menneskebarn 1:365 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1995 [1919]).

365 I laced myself up tight: The expression used here (jeg snørede mig ind) typically refers to the wearing of a corset; because corsets were in such widespread use at the time, working-class women could buy them cheap used. It was not uncommon for women to use them, just as Olga did, to conceal their pregnancies. Email from Niels Senius Clausen, Roskilde University Centre (Nov. 28, 2000).

369 God’s purpose is in every storm: Mogens Lemvig Hansen translated these verses, the sixth through eighth stanzas of Grundtvig’s hymn, “Er Du Modfalden, Kære Ven, (“Are You Downhearted, Dearest Friend”), which he wrote in 1850-51 and appears in the Den danske Salmebog, No. 511, at 520.

371 district magistrate: A herredsfoged was an ancient office dating back to the Viking period combining the functions of chief constable and judicial officer. This fusion of local administration and judicial system also prevailed in urban areas, where the corresponding official was called a byfoged. Rural magistrates were, from the end of the eighteenth century on, assisted by parish sheriffs (sognefogeder). With enactment of the Lov om Rettens Pleje (Administration of Justice Act) of April 11, 1916 (which was not enforced until 1919), the separation of the judicial and executive powers, promised by the Constitution of 1849, and the creation of independent prosecutory and police powers were finally implemented. Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Dan­mark at 157-60, 296-99, 419-29; Lorenz Rerup, Danmarks Historie, Vol. 6: Tiden 1864-1914, at 259-60 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1989). A herred (or hundred) was a relatively small administrative district of which there were more than a hundred; each county (amt) consisted of numerous herreder, which in turn were divided into still more numer-

373 we’ve had a deacon as prime minister: See above note to p. 58.

373 Concealment of birth and infanticide: From 1909 through 1917, 56 criminal sentences were handed down against women for infanticide in Denmark, while 98 were handed down for concealment of birth. Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1915, tab. 126 at 157; Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1919, tab. 128 at 167.

373 to whomever God gives a government post he also gives a head clerk: This saying, which was imported to Denmark from Germany, is an abbreviated version of a slightly longer one: “To whomever God gives a government post he also gives reason . . . or in any case a head clerk.” Vogel-Jørgensen, Bevingede ord at 89.

373 The constitutionally guaranteed arraignment before a magistrate: This arraignment is known as a Grundlovsforhor or constitutional hearing because the Danish constitution mandates it within 24 hours of arrest. The right has been anchored in the Danish constitution since its adoption in 1849 and at the time of the events in the book it was embodied in article 80 of the constitution as amended in 1866.

374 As the days grow longer, the winter grows stronger: The second stanza of a hymn by one of Denmark’s greatest hymnists, H.A. Brorson, “Her vil ties, her vil bies,” published in 1765, a year after his death. The song, which is learned in school, is very well known in Denmark, and the line quoted here is itself a Danish saying, which antedated Brorson’s use of it (as did its English equivalent: “As the days lengthen, the cold strengthens”). Vogel-Jørgensen, Bevingede ord at 450. The hymn text appears in Den danske Salmebog, No. 642 at 651.

376 too wild: The modifier “too” was omitted from the 1959 and paperback editions.

380 Staggers: An infectious brain disease in horses that causes
uncertain gait as well irritability; it may be associated with boarding in a muggy and stifling stable.

381 Havnse: There is no town in the Assens vicinity by this name, though towns elsewhere in Denmark do bear the name.

383 For what were we sinners without him: Cf. 1 Cor. 15:17: “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.”

383 power . . . glory: From the Lord’s Prayer.

383 brought his offering to the Lord: Gen. 4:3: “Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.”

383 Whatever was given to God, was repaid double: Cf. Luke 6:38: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.”

387 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord: Jeremiah 22:29.

387 Peter’s haul: In John 21:6-11, after the disciple Simon Peter had been unable to catch any fish, Jesus appeared and the disciple found 153 fish in his net.

389 circle of friends: See above note to p. 10.

390 meeting house: Meeting (or assembly) houses, the first of which was built in 1867, were an integral part of the rural adult education movement and contributed to democratic local self-government. Skrubbeltrang, Agricultural Development and Rural Reform in Denmark at 172-74.

395 Thomas Trilling accompanied his wife to Færgeby on the steamer and from there she was to go on by train: Mariager, which had a reputation for its “sleeping-beauty sleep,” was the last market town in Jutland to be connected to the rail network, the railway connection there not being inaugurated until the 1920s; at the beginning of the twentieth century passengers still had to ride there in a yellow royal mail coach. Residents of Assens would presumably have taken the steamer to Hobro (which had been connected to a trunk line in 1869) to catch a train going north or south. There was also a quasi-privately owned railway from Randers to Hadsund (and points north), which passed only a mile or so east of Assens, but the latter’s residents would not have needed to take a steamer to reach it. Clausen and Jensen, Danmarks land at 219, 226; http://www.jernbaner.dk/mhvj/Historie.html.

399 child maintenance: Alimentation is the compulsory contribution made by the father of a child born outside of marriage.
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399 *maybe*: This word was omitted from the 1959 and paperback editions.

401 *Now found is the fairest of roses*: The two verses are the first and last of Brorson’s hymn, on which see above note to p. 346. Kirk also used this hymn in his childhood memoirs; when a woman with a viper-voice recited the first two lines, the young Kirk thought they had a concealed meaning. Kirk, *Skyggespil* at 139.

402 *hetaera*: A cultivated courtesan in ancient Greece.

403 *ombre*: A three-handed card game.

404 *election for the parish council*: In 1908 a local election law had been enacted introducing so-called universal suffrage for men and women of good character, twenty-five years and older, who had paid taxes the previous year and had not received (unrefunded) poor relief. Jørgensen, *Lokaladministrationen i Danmark* at 316.

407 *People’s Gazette*: *Folketidende* was a not uncommon generic name of newspapers including one for which Kirk had worked (*Lolland-Falsters Folketidende*).

407 *pleasure park*: Woods designed for excursions for the urban population’s summertime pleasures.

412 *millions now living will never die*: On February 24, 1918, Joseph Rutherford, who had recently become president of Jehovah’s Witnesses, gave a lecture in Los Angeles titled, “Millions Now Living Will Never Die.” In late 1920 he published a book by the same title, which was translated into many languages including Dano-Norwegian. In August 1920 he began a European tour, which inaugurated a campaign, lasting several years, which included emblazoning this slogan on large billboards in all the large cities and in newspaper advertisements, thus elevating it to a byword. The campaign was linked to the prophecy that the millennium would arrive in 1925. See Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* 76, 98 (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1959); Alan Rogerson, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die: A Study of Jehovah’s Witnesses* 53 (London: Constable, 1969); M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah’s Witnesses* 57-58 (2d ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997 [1985]). Since the scene in the train takes place in the late spring of 1914, Kirk either misremembered when this campaign had taken place or intentionally compressed the chronology.
414 if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out: Matt. 5:29.

415 philosophicum: This philosophy exam (examen philosophicum) given at the end of the first year’s course in philosophy at Copenhagen University.

416 the International: The so-called Second International, an organization of socialist Social Democratic parties formed in 1889, collapsed in 1914 when those parties, instead of preventing World War I, supported their respective governments.

417 South Jutland: Also known as North Schleswig. Denmark was forced to surrender this territory after it lost a war over it against Prussia and Austria in 1864.

417 Esbjerg: Denmark’s leading western port, located on the west coast of Jutland a few miles north of the then German border. Its population grew at a uniquely explosive rate in the last three decades of the nineteenth century following construction, at state expense, between 1868 and 1874, of a large harbor—prompted by the disruption of southern trade routes associated with the territorial losses to Germany in 1864—which served the export of Danish agricultural commodities, especially to Britain. Villads Christensen, “De danske købstæders Op­rindelse og Udvikling,” in Danmark Land og Folk: Historisk-topografisk-statistisk haandbog 2:3-33 at 29 (Daniel Bruun ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1919); Danmark Land og Folk: Historisk-topografisk-statistisk haandbog 4:80-82 (Daniel Bruun ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1922).

418 guard duty: The function of the Sikringstjeneste was to protect troops from enemy intervention.

418 A mighty fortress is our God: Original text by Luther and music by J. S. Bach (“Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott”).

418 broad waters: Those parts of Mariager Fjord where the fjord broadens out.

419 Earth in whose bosom there is hatred and murder: A poem written by Christian Richardt (1831-1892), a theologian and post-romantic lyric poet. It is significant that Kirk has the Grundtvigian teacher Ulriksen recite the poem because that movement included a Christian, antimilitarist wing. The full text of the poem, which is titled, “Ved Kirkenødet” (“At the Synod”) and was written in September 1871, is found in Chr. Richardt, Samlede Digte 1:328-29 (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1895). Frederik V. Jensen translated it.
Coal: Because Denmark produced no coal, it had to import all of its requirements; coal supplies were limited by wartime blockades despite Denmark’s neutrality. As in other countries during World War I, the Danish government was quickly empowered to regulate the economy in great detail. Denmark imported almost all of its coal from the two chief belligerents, Great Britain and Germany. Imports of coal (and coke) from Britain, by far the largest supplier, increased slightly in 1914 and 1915, but by 1917 they amounted to only one-fourth of the level of 1915; despite the quadrupling of German imports, total imports fell by almost half between 1915 and 1917. The allocation of coal between production and heating placed tight restrictions on those industries such as cement production that were large users of coal. The production of peat as an alternative fuel rose dramatically during the war. Einar Cohn, Danmark under den store krig: En økonomisk oversigt 76-79, 148-50 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1928); Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv at 129-30; Svend Aage Hansen, Økonomisk vækst i Danmark, Vol. II: 1914-1970 at 9-18 (Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag, 1974).

strike her on the right cheek: Matt. 5:39.

The only thing that didn’t rise was wages: Real hourly wages in the trades and industry fell by 12 percent from 1914 to 1915 and by 14 percent from 1914 to 1917. Cohn, Danmark under den store krig at 284.

ration cards and maximum prices and shortages of goods: As World War I began, the Danish parliament empowered the government to regulate prices; early on rationing was imposed on such important elements of the diet as bread, butter, sugar, and bacon. Hansen, Økonomisk vækst i Danmark, Vol. II: 1914-1970 at 15. See generally, Einar Cohn, “Denmark in the Great War,” in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland in the World War 409-558 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

the power and the kingdom: Taken from the Lord’s Prayer.

Pastor Gamst once again sought the places most lowly: Another reference to the line from Brorson’s hymn. See above note to p. 346.

such a bitter plum: The phrase så besk en blomme goes back to two ballads in which Queen Dagmar on her deathbed in 1212 unsuccessfully tries to persuade King Valdemar the Victorious not to
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430 the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year and were released to kill a third of mankind: Rev. 9:15.

430 the heads of the horses that resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur: Rev. 9:17.

431 big beast in Revelation: According to Rev. 13:1-2: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.”

432 *he that is pure let him first cast a stone*: John 8:7. Both the Danish and English translations of the Bible use “without sin” rather than “pure,” but since Martin Thomsen picks up on that word, it has been retained here.

432 like the apostle Paul I’ve killed the carnal urges in myself: Rom. 7:4-6

433 forgive thy brother: See Luke 17:3: “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent forgive him.”


435 bury our talent in the earth: Matt. 25:25.

437 *cassortium*: Bregentved’s malapropism for “consortium.”

438 *O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord*: See above note to p. 387.

439 peat bricks by the hundreds of thousands: Kirk does not specify the unit of measurement, but small bricks—the form in which peat is dug up—seems more plausible than other units such as cubic meters, kilograms, tons, or loads. Demand for peat, which had already been widely used as a fuel in Denmark, rose dramatically during World War I, when coals imports declined sharply. See above note to p. 421.
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441 The young fellows came home from the defense force, were permitted to be at home for a time and were called up again: The *Sikringsstyrke*, which was designed primarily to defend fortifications in Copenhagen, was unpopular in neutral Denmark and call-ups and demobilizations led to conflicts within the all-party government and with the military in 1916-17. Although the term had been used before, *Sikringsstyrke* has come to be associated specifically with the forces drafted during World War I. The number of troops declined from 50,000 on Aug. 1, 1914, to 35,000 in 1915 and 23,000 in 1917. Niels Finn Christiansen, Karl Lammers, and Henrik Nissen, *Danmarks Historie*, Vol. 7: *Tiden 1914-1945*, at 84, 86 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal: 1988); Cohn, *Danmark under den store Krig* at 260, 263-65.

444 Art Academy: The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1754.

444 parish church council: After a half-century’s existence on a voluntary basis, the *Menighedsråd* became statutorily mandatory in all parishes beginning in 1904. In addition to the parish minister, who was chairman, it consisted of at least four representatives—all men and women at least twenty-five years old were eligible—elected by the congregation for six- (and, after 1912, four-) year terms. It had to meet at least four times annually, and it had to be consulted with regard to all questions decisively affecting the congregation’s religious life. It also gained control over the church’s collections for the poor. Jørgensen, *Lokaladministrationen i Danmark* at 379-81.

445 he was strongest who stood alone: Dr. Stockmann’s final line in Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* (1882) was his “great discovery”: “The thing is, you see, the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.” Henrik Ibsen, *En Folkefiende*, in *Ibsens samlede verker* 3:157-216 at 216 (13th ed.; Oslo: Gyldendal, 1962). The Grundtvigian pastor Brink quotes the same line in Kirk, *The Fishermen* at 93.

445 yesterday’s poor were today’s rich: A reference to the so-called *gullaschbaroner*—nouveaux-riches wartime profiteers and speculators, of whom Bregentved is an example, who made fortunes by means of shady deals.

445 there was no point talking to the dean: There were about sixty deaneries and a dean (*provst*) both acted as a parish minister and carried out administrative duties under the bishop. Jørgensen, *Lokaladministrationen i Danmark* at 378.
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445 The minister went off and obtained an audience with the bishop: The parishes to the south of Mariager Fjord belonged to the Aarhus diocese, where the bishop had his seat.

446 we belong to different movements within the church: The bishop refers to the split in the Lutheran Church between the Inner Mission and Grundtvigianism; Pastor Gamst signals that he no longer belongs to the former. P. Lindhardt, Vækkelsers og kirkelige retninger i Danmark (Copenhagen: Det Danske Forlag, 1951). A similar conversation occurs in Kirk, The Fishermen at 23-24, between the Grundtvigian pastor Brink and the Inner Mission fisherman Thomas Jensen.

447 We must constantly wrestle as Jacob wrestled: See above note to p. 194.

447 government ministry: The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs (Kirkeministeriet) administers the tax-based state-financing of the salaries of the clergy of Evangelical Lutheran Church (Den danske Folkekirke), the official state religion, which the constitution requires the state to support. Ecclesiastical Affairs had just become a separate ministry on April 29, 1916; until then, it had been a department within the Kultusministerium (Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs and Education).

447 that a curate be appointed: A kapellan was an assistant minister in a larger parish with one or several curates. Jørgensen, Lokaladministrationen i Danmark at 378.


449 schnapps . . . is the poor man’s aquavit: The commonly used expression, den fattige mands snaps, gained currency around 1890 as part of political agitation against taxation of distilled spirits. Ordbog over det danske sprog 20:1031 (5th ed.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1995 [1941]). The phrase was imported from Germany, where Chancellor Bismarck had apparently coined it. During a debate over indirect taxes in the Reichstag in 1881, he referred to Branntwein, to the legislators’ amusement, as “the drink of the famous poor man” and went on to praise schnapps for its productivity-enhancing impact on manual workers, who at times could not do without it. Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags: IV. Legislaturperiode: IV. Session 1881, 1:562 (Berlin: Verlag der Norddeutschen Buchdruckerei,

450 Because the bigwigs had never dared put a tax on the poor man’s aquavit: Before 1908, the tax on a liter of spirits (at 200 proof, while the usual brændevin was 80 proof) was 18.5 øre; the tax rose to 60 øre in 1912, and leaped to 20 crowns during the war. Production also declined sharply because the government prohibited the processing of certain crops (e.g., grain and potatoes) for alcohol that were needed for food production. The high taxation, which also embodied a legislative temperance policy, was retained after the war and resulted in a two-thirds decline in consumption of aquavit, the mainstay of hard liquor, by the 1920s. Lov Nr. 636 af 21de December 1917 om Ændringer i Lov Nr. 137 af 17de Marts 1917 om Tillægsafgift paa Spiritus og i Lov. Nr. 119 af 8de Juni 1912 om Beskatning af Spiritus, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1917, at 1414 (Copenhagen 1918); Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og samfundsliv at 641-42; Christiansen, Lammers, and Nissen, Danmarks Historie, Vol. 7: Tiden 1914-1945, at 61-62; Sven Røgind, Alkoholbeskatningen i nordens lande 108-17, 138-44, 154-63 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1933).

450 It was a government of the people that did it and a socialist was sitting in this government: The government during World War I was controlled by Det radikale Venstre (Social or Radical Liberals) and supported by the Social Democrats (in 1916 the latter entered the government for the first time when their leader Thorvald Stauning became a so-called control minister without portfolio); these parties’ chief voters were small farmers, civil servants, and workers, and they were understood to represent the interests of consumers and workers. Cohn, Danmark under den store krig at 8.

450 Now it was around the time that the collective bargaining agreements had to be renewed: Trade unions had signed five-year agreements with employers in 1911 that expired in February 1916. Many workers criticized their unions’ failure to alleviate the impact of
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inflation on wages during the war; this criticism intensified once the Social Democrats entered the government in 1916 and the union leaders, who were allied with the Social Democrats, sought to subordinate wage policy to the government's economic policy as a whole. These criticisms fostered the growth of a union opposition. Erling Olsen, Danmarks økonomiske historie siden 1750, at 192-93 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1962).

450 the devil and his great-grandmother: The phrase "The devil and his dam" is of ancient lineage in English, Danish, German, and other languages. Vogel-Jørgensen, Bevingede ord at 179 (Fanden og hans Oldemor).

452 it was so touchingly sweet that he still said "A" instead of "I": Much of the population in northern Jutland pronounced the standard Danish "jeg" as "a." See H. F. Feilberg, Bidrag til en Ordbog over Jyske Almuesmaal 1:1-2 (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1886-1893).

454 Their forefathers had performed compulsory labor services there: Peasants' performance of such compulsory labor for lords of the manor had been partially abolished by law in 1850, reduced to insignificance by 1880, and virtually disappeared by 1900. F. Skrubbeltrang, Agricultural Development and Rural Reform in Denmark at 116; Olsen, Danmarks økonomiske historie siden 1750, at 52.

454 ridden the wooden horse: See above note to p. 57.

454 immured damsels: In using these catchwords to evoke a negative picture of Denmark's feudal manors, Kirk alludes to stories of noblemen's daughters' having been walled up for refusing to comply with their fathers' plans for arranged marriages.

455 Holsted parish: It is situated in south Jutland a little more than 100 miles from Assens.

455 Think what somebody can get for the livestock alone on that farm: The question mark ending this sentence in the first and second (but not in the 1959 and paperback) editions has been disregarded as a typographical error, although Kirk sometimes uses question marks in unusual ways.

455 You have to keep in mind that there's first-class livestock on that farm: This sentence was omitted from the 1959 and paperback editions.

458 M.A. Candidate: As a stud. mag. (studiosus magisterii), Søren is studying at Copenhagen University for a degree — cand. mag. (can-
didatus magisterii)—that requires him to pass an examination (embeds-eksamen) entitling him to teach in secondary schools. The degree falls somewhere between a U.S. master’s and doctoral degree.

465 The work stopped and reappeared when coal arrived: By 1917, the lack of coal caused cement production (which required half a kilogram of coal to produce a kilogram of cement) to stop or be cut back and led to coal rationing. Cohn, Danmark under den store krig at 164-65, 190.

465 assistance was given to those who remained without work: The Danish state liberalized the eligibility of and expanded financial assistance to the increased number of unemployed during the war by means of subsidies to trade union unemployment funds. Midlertidig lov angaaende overordentlig Hjælp til arbejdsløse, Nr. 531 af 27. Okt. 1917, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1917, at 1243; Cohn, Danmark under den store krig at 174-79. Such state subsidies had first been authorized in 1907. Lov om anerkendte Arbejdsløshedskasser, Nr. 88 af 9de April 1907, in Lovtidende for Kongeriget Danmark for Aaret 1907, at 322-29 (Copenhagen: Schultz, 1908).

467 boundary mover: See above note to p. 52.

468 according to the stiff wind: Trees in western Jutland are bent eastward by the strong North Sea wind.

468-69 what Orient and Burmeister & Wain were quoted at: Dampskibsselskabet (Steamship Company) Orient was a large Danish shipping company, while Burmeister & Wain was a large Danish and world pioneer in motor shipbuilding and engineering company (until its collapse in 1996). Shipping company shares were a favorite object of wartime stock speculation.

469 Revolution came in Germany and Børgesen was satisfied. It was the old tried and true socialists who moved to the forefront, the organized working class that took power: In the wake of impending German military collapse in the summer of 1918, worker and soldier soviets were formed, the kaiser fled the country, and a republic was declared by the Social Democratic Party. Agreements between the Social Democrats and the military and between the unions and employers frustrated the establishment of a more radical soviet system.

471 Contentment is a gain: According to 1 Tim. 6:6: “But Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

472 could become: In the 1959 and paperback editions “could”
(kunde) was changed to “was going to” (skulle).

477 ballads of the Virgin Mary: Søren’s choice of such a trivial and antiquarian dissertation topic may have been dictated by Kirk’s desire to mock Ernst Frandsen—who had written his dissertation on medieval ballads of the Virgin Mary—Sophus Claussen’s son-in-law, with whom Kirk had had a dispute in the 1920s while both were working for Claussen’s newspaper, Lolland-Falsters Folkeblad. Thing, Hans Kirks mange ansigter at 103.

478 mayor: In addition to the chief mayor, there are five mayors in Copenhagen elected by the city council. Kenneth Miller, Government and Politics in Denmark 193-94 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

478 cross: The Cross of the Order of the Dannebrog; the order, which was instituted in 1671, is divided into several classes and is headed by the Danish monarch. It is designed as a reward for meritorious civil or military service, or contributions to the arts, sciences, or business.

481 “I’m too old to get tuberculosis,” he said. “It cares only for young blood”: An old-fashioned way of referring to tuberculosis, especially among less educated people, was to speak of “getting the tubercles.” Here and elsewhere in the novels characters use this locution.

481 follow the farmer’s work spring and autumn. He’d been able to: The omission of this whole line from the 1959 and paperback editions is clearly in error.

483 people’s parties: Although a people’s party originally designated a political party that championed popular control of the government, by World War I it took on the meaning of a party that sought to represent not a class, but the whole people. At the end of 1915, the Right (Højre) party, whose main constituents had been businessmen and higher civil servants, was renamed the Conservative People’s Party so that the party could hold its own in the wake of the new constitution, which gave women the right to vote and otherwise expanded and democratized suffrage and representation. It was not until 1934 that the Social Democratic Party programmatically ceased being a working-class party and became a mass party of the people (under the slogan “Denmark for the People”) in an effort to obtain fifty percent of the vote.

483 folk high schools: These residential schools, attended largely by rural young adults and inspired by Grundtvig’s conception of popular enlightenment, which focused on Danish history, language, and
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490 the Lord searches our hearts and reins: Rev. 2:23: “I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.”

490 The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord: Job 1:21.

491 stock prices . . . were going down: Share prices dropped sharply beginning in August-September 1918. Cohn, Danmark under den store krig at 242, 314. For example, Burmeister & Wain shares fell from 270 in July 1918 to 148 by October 1919. Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog 1919 tab. 92 at 118.

494 The hours of work had been reduced, as the workers had been demanding for many years. Before, a day laborer had toiled from early in the morning till late; now he had to serve only eight hours for his daily bread: On February 12, 1919, the Danish parliament enacted an “Act to Introduce the Eight-Hour Working Day in Factories Working Continuously Day and Night (Lov om indførelse af 8-Timers Arbejdsdagen i Fabrikvirksomheder med Døgndrift).” It prohibited workers in such plants from working more than eight hours in a 24-hour day. Thus, although the statute was of limited applicability, it did apply to cement workers. Even here, however, the eight-hour day was not absolute. The law permitted employers, when shifts were changed, to extend the period of employment to no more than sixteen hours, providing that no worker’s total hours exceeded 160 during three consecutive weeks. At the same time, under pressure from the radical syndicalist opposition within the labor movement, national collective bargaining between the Danish Employers’ Association and the Danish Federation of Labor achieved an eight-hour day for most workers (but excluding, for example, agriculture) beginning January 1, 1920, which was, however, associated with the introduction of forced overtime work. Steen Busck, Jens Christensen, and Asger Jepsen, “Klassestrukturen i Danmark 1870-1920 med særligt henblik på en fremstilling af arbejder-
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bevægelsens historie i dette tidsrum,” Den jyske Historiker: Historie-

494 And wages had risen: they were higher than ever before: Com-
pared to the last prewar year, 1913, nominal wages in all industry and
trades rose by 168 percent by 1919 and 231 percent by 1920; the cor-
responding real wage increases were 25 percent and 27 percent, re-
spectively. Cohn, Danmark under den store krig at 284. Hourly wages
of cement factory workers rose from 46.0 øre in 1914 to 77.4 øre in
1918 and 120.3 øre in 1919. Danmarks Statistik, Statistisk Aarbog
1919, tab. 107 at 147.

494 local party organization: Børgesen is doubtless a member of
the Social Democratic party. Its “voter association” (vælgerforening),
which had been formed before the party was represented in the par-
liament, was organized by election districts; these local groups, in turn,
had their own national organization and expressed their views at na-
tional congresses. As with the other parties, the Social Democrats’ par-
liamentary group took the lead in day-to-day politics, but had to pay
considerable attention to the association’s views in questions of prin-
ciple. Erik Rasmussen, Danmarks historie, vol. 13: Velfærdstaten på
vej: 1913-1939, at 19 (John Danstrup and Hal Koch eds.; Copenhagen:
Politiken, 1965).

494 Education was also needed. A man traveled over and gave a
lecture; he spoke of study circle: Worker education carried on by travel-
ing lecturers and in study circles began around the turn of the century;
it developed into a systematic nationwide format under the auspices of
the Arbejdernes Oplysningsforbund (Workers Education Federation),
which was founded by the Social Democratic Party and the union

494 union book: Cilius is referring to a union membership book
(medlemsbog), which some unions in the United States, especially in
the building trades, also call a “union book,” though it is better known
as a “union card.” The Danish union book, which pertained to member-
ship in the union and its unemployment fund, contained the union’s by-
laws as well as stamps documenting the member’s payment of dues and
receipt of unemployment and strike assistance. In the meantime, the
book has been replaced by a card in Denmark.

496 temperance beer: Temperance inns were permitted to sell beer
with a 2.25 percent alcohol content. Warming, Danmarks erhvervs- og
cement for South America or Australia: As a result of the German blockade of the Baltic during World War I, the Danish cement industry lost Russia as its major export destination, but continued to export significant quantities to South America and Australia until the Danish government prohibited the export of cement from Mar. 17, 1917 to Dec. 3, 1920. Bender, Aalborgs industrielle udvikling fra 1735 til 1940, at 386.

Now let’s get the copperware polished up: The meaning of this sentence in Danish (Lad os nu få kobbertojet poleret) is a puzzle even to Danes. While some suggest a possible sexual connotation, others believe that Cilius’s inebriated state might account for the seeming meaninglessness. According to another speculation, since Cilius and his guests are drinking coffee with schnapps, the reference may be to the custom in olden days of polishing copper with coffee grounds. Yet another interpretation notes that schnapps was burned in copperware in the first half of the nineteenth century. The most likely meaning seems to be that Cilius is simply underscoring the festive nature of the occasion, one on which some Danes might in fact have polished the copper pots and pans hanging on their wall for decoration.

almost: This word (snart) was omitted from the 1959 and paperback editions.

“When I was a navvy, we beat up a contractor who was going to lower our wages. And when he turned up with strikebreakers, we threw them in the water.” “That was those methods,” Børgesen said. “Now we make progress by the peaceful process of negotiation”: Although Cilius is referring to an earlier roughneck mentality, Børgesen, a loyal Social Democratic trade unionist, is alluding to the emergence between 1910 and 1920 of a syndicalist opposition (Fagoppositionens Sammenslutning) to the rigidly centralized system of labor relations cultivated by the Danish labor movement. Anti-parliamentarian and anti-reformist, the syndicalists advocated direct economic action and general strikes. The building of the Danish railway system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had created a new group of casual workers, navvies (børster), who moved from site to site, living in sheds and dugouts along the tracks, to the “horror of decent people.” Dybdahl, De nye klasser at 234.
Hans Kirk, author of *The Fishermen*, Denmark's all-time best-selling novel, wrote *The Day Laborers* and *The New Times* during the 1930s, and is considered by many to be that decade's greatest Danish novelist. Conceived as the first two parts of a trilogy, the novels offer a vivid holistic account of the transformation of an agricultural community into an industrial society during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The central characters are a group of day laborers who escape the domination of the area's large farmers and their low wages and intermittent work. The novels trace the rise of a cement factory, run by a progressive capitalist back from a long stay in the U.S., and its impact on the workers, who become union members and are thrust into a long strike. The cast of sympathetic characters leaves readers wishing this epic would never have to end.

Kirk (1898-1962), who spent his childhood in the eastern Jutland community on Mariager Fjord at the time of events there depicted in the novels, wrote the manuscript for the last volume of the trilogy while interned by the Danish government at the demand of the Nazi occupying forces. After his escape from the detention camp, the Gestapo destroyed his papers, and Kirk never managed to reconstruct the novel.

Translator Marc Linder, a professor of labor law at the University of Iowa who taught for three years at Roskilde University Centre in Denmark, also translated Kirk's *The Fishermen* and *The Slave*. His Introduction and Notes place the book and the author in the context of twentieth-century Denmark. "I have profound admiration for the excellent translation and important apparatus of notes, undoubtedly the best and most useful work any translator of Danish literature has done." From the Foreword by Elias Bredsdorff, Professor Emeritus of Danish, Cambridge University.

*The Day Laborers* and *The New Times*, like *The Fishermen* and *The Slave*, can be ordered from Iowa Book & Supply at (319) 337-4188 or iowabook@iowabook.com or Prairie Lights Books at (800) 295-BOOK or info@prairielights.com.