Hans Kirk

The Day Laborers

and

The New Times

Translated and
with an Introduction and Notes by
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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,” Skifiter 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.”

Skifiter 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,” Skifiter 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 are 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,” Skifiter 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 consideraton 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.”

“But 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 brothers 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
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 formal 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 somewhat 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,
forge 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 who 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.

“No 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."

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 peppermuts. 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 shovelers shoveling 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 coffee. 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 certainly 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 Sel-
domglad 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 stick-
ing 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.” An-
ton 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 busi-
ness,” 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.

“No 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 tom-foolery,” 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
country 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 vaaskum. 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, Fre­
derikke, bring coffee,” he shouted. “A man comes here to do
business and you let him sit there without food or drink. Pre­
sumably 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 cof­
fee 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 anguish; 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 shrilled. “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 Færgeby, 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 rum­
maging about for on the cliff. They were supposed to be investi­
gating 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 of­
fered 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 tem­
perate 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 prop­
erty 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 keep­
ing 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.”

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“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-
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 Bogh 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 Seldomgład 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 Seldomgład 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 Seldomgład 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 Faergeby; 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 made 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 laborers 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,” Marinus 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 shoulders 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 har­
vest 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 expendi­
tures.

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 Als­
lev once a week, visited the friends, and ate dinner at Skifter’s.
He spoke a lot and earnestly to Meta when the opportunity pre­
sented itself, but the girl was stubborn. She wouldn’t yield her­
self 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 cer­
tainly 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 Lou­
sie—things were still the same with her. She lay in bed and
could neither live nor die, and Karlsen depicted for her the heav­
enly 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 always 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 go.”

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 Karlsen. 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 minister 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 respect 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. “Otherwise 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 moment 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 repellent 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,
good buddy."

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 Faergeby 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 Hop­ner 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 Hopner 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 Hopner?" he said. "Thanks, it’s progressing," Hopner 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," Hopner 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 Hopner," 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 smelled 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 Frederikkke 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 shriited. 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.

“Who 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 supposed 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,” Høp-
ner 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 him-
self 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 Søren the way they should. He’d gotten behind in high school—he was having a hard time keeping up.

“Oh 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 Søren to live. It was at the home of a wheelwright in Færgeby, and now Søren 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. Søren 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, Karlssen," he said in a friendly way. "You’re going through a spiritual 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."

"Of course," Pastor Gamst said, embarrassed. "I definitely understand . . . . You fell in love with her."

"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 arti­
sans, 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 dis­
cussion. 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. Høpner 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—after 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 sili 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 over-estimated 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 Sel-domglad 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. Pedlars 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.”
“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
Faargeby, 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 quarrelosomeness. 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-
geby,” 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 discretely 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 Al selv—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 Høpner,” 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
youth.

“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 Færgby. 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 si... 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 born 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
thousand things lacking.

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 jostled 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.