Hans Kirk

The Day Laborers

and

The New Times

Translated and
with an Introduction and Notes by
Marc Linder

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THE NEW TIMES
It still froze at night, and every morning the fields were white with hoar frost. In the early dawn the unskilled laborers bicycled to the cement factory, whose rooms were all lit up. They drooped over the handlebars in the cold and raw morning, with their lunch boxes flapping on their backs. Some came from far inland. The night shift went home. The glow of fire from the smokestacks slowly faded. On the other side of the gray mother-of-pearl fjord the woods were still dark. The gulls screeched over the fjord’s seine netting. The fishermen were tending to the herring nets. On the farms it was light. A farmhand led a team of horses from the stable. The servant girls rattled milk pails.

At night there was a steady boom from the factory; now it rose to a heavy din. You could hear the workers’ shouts and the sound of their picks against the wall of the chalk pit. Dump cars rumbled along the tracks, fully loaded with chalk and clay, to the slurry station. The huge rotary kilns turned slowly round with the fire roaring in their interior. The tube mills droned in the cement grinding plant. The pyrator crushed the large lumps of coal to dust. Heavy wheels, glistening with oil, turned round steadily in the engine room, hot motors sparkled. The conveyor belt glided from room to room. Small and large wheelbarrows clattered on the cement floor of the storehouse.

From the cliff the factory resembled a pile of gigantic toy building blocks that had been dumped out there, but you knew that everything had been precisely thought out. Everything was gray with cement dust. It drifted invisibly down like ashes from a distant volcanic eruption. It settled over fields and roads, trees and roofs of houses. Even the coats of the red cows grazing on the fields in the vicinity turned gray. You got it in your throat, in your lungs, and it was doubtless the dust that was responsible for the fact that Black Anders’ daughter Matilde, who was married to Thomas Trilling, began coughing and spitting blood and had to go to the sanatorium for tuberculosis.
Everywhere people were at work. They clung to the cliff and hacked the chalk loose, and their shapes were cloaked in a white cloud when the large pieces of chalk crashed down through the funnel. The dump cars drove forward and were filled one after the other; heavy horses hauled the wagons along tracks shiny from use. And the chalk proceeded to the wash mill, was washed and mixed with clay, burned to clinker and ground to cement in the cement mill. A hundred and fifty men were at work, in the power house, the slurry station, in the mills, in the storehouse, in the workshops, and on the chalk-white cliff. Steamer and small craft lay at the wharf and loaded cement. And the cement dust settled over everything. It drifted in the wind, and when it rained the roads turned into a gray slush.

It was early spring and the world shone bright and new like polished brass. The moist topsoil had a violet gleam and the first flowers that came out of the ground were yellow and blue and hard in their color like enamel. One day in March, Olga, the daughter of unskilled laborer Marinus Jensen, came home. There was no one to greet her as the little fjord steamer moored at the wharf. With her suitcase in hand, Olga walked up past the factory to the little working class district where Marinus had bought a lot and built. Right next to the house she met a haggard, pot-bellied woman. It was Magda.

"But it’s you, Olga, and we haven’t heard the slightest thing about you having come home," Magda said, almost bowled over with curiosity and surprise. "Did you get off from your job or maybe they give notice at this time of year on Funen?" "I didn’t write, it was decided so suddenly," Olga said and shook her hand. "You have a singsong intonation as fine as the way the deacon sings the offertory," Magda said. "Your mother will sure be happy. I mean it’s almost a year since you were last home. And are you going to stay now?"

Olga didn’t know exactly; she stood and shuffled her feet to get away. But Magda took her sweet time, and her vigilant eyes glided up and down the girl’s figure. But Olga was in a long coat, and Magda couldn’t judge whether she’d come home because she’d gotten in the family way. "Otherwise things aren’t
all that great here," Magda said. "The men have become totally nutty over the big weekly wage they’re earning. They want to strike to get more. That’s what Andres says. They won’t get their mouths full enough until they get them full of dirt at the bottom of their grave. And they don’t ask us womenfolk, but it’s the old story, little Olga, we’re asked by a manfolk only that one time, when he wants to get into our bed, and afterward he never asks again about this world’s things. But I won’t keep you, little Olga, you’re longing to go home.”

Magda said goodbye, but a little ways off she turned and looked again at Olga’s figure. But you couldn’t make out whether her back had become broader.

Marinus’s house was a solid and spacious dwelling of yellow stone with a slate roof. In front was a little yard. Olga slipped around to the kitchen door. Her mother was standing by the stove and baking.

“But Olga, you’ve come without letting us know the slightest thing,” Tora said, and Olga explained, a bit out of breath, that she’d given notice to her employer. The woman was an unreasonable person, nobody could please her. Olga’s voice turned shrill while she recounted how hot-tempered her mistress had been. She bossed the folks about and carried on like quite the mistress of the manor, even though it was nothing but an ordinary farm.

“Now take off your coat,” her mother interrupted. “You’ve got to be hungry after the long trip, and now I’ll take care of you a bit.”

Olga took off her outer garments and Tora cast a covert glance at her figure. Olga’s breasts had become rounder and her hips fuller: you could see she was now a fully mature young woman. But she was slim and lissome, the way a girl should be, and as far as Tora could see in all haste, she hadn’t come home because she was going to have a baby.

Olga went on to tell about her experiences while she ate. One day the woman had become totally ridiculous and had said she wished Olga were long gone from the farm. You can soon get that wish fulfilled, Olga said, and that very evening she
packed up her things and left. "A body doesn’t have to put up
with everything," Olga said and blushed. "It was she herself
who chased me away, and now she can’t complain that I ran off.
She won’t get other girls to stay in that job either."

Tora stole a glance at her daughter. "What were the other
people on the farm like?" she asked. "There was a farmhand, he
was very nice, but he was engaged to the girl on the neighboring
farm, so I didn’t see much of him," Olga said. "And the hus­
band?" Tora asked. "It was the wife who controlled everything
and they couldn’t keep people," Olga said. "You know, it’s not
nice for a girl to leave her job early," Tora said. "You should
have talked to Ulriksen’s sister when you were first on Funen;
she’s supposed to be a terribly sensible woman." But Olga
hadn’t talked to teacher Ulriksen’s sister before she left the farm.
She lived in a totally different district, and besides, she was old-
fashioned in her way of thinking. "Unless you’re the one who’s
a little bit too modern," Tora said. "I’ll say it straight out, Olga,
I don’t like your running away from your job. You should have
given notice on time." "Maybe you’d prefer for me to go on my
way again?" Olga flew into a temper. "My, how you’re carrying
on," Tora said. "If there’s something wrong, you better speak
your piece. It’ll make things easier." Olga passionately threw
herself into her mother’s arms and cried. "It’s just that I’ve been
at a strict workplace," she said. "And now I’d like to be at home
for a while."

Olga cried a little at her mother’s breast and calmed down.
And then she heard how things were at home. Marinus and Niels
were working in the chalk pit, that was piece work, and they
could take home a good day’s wage. Karl was in the cement mill
and Anton in the slurry station, and when their weekly wage was
put in the pile, it added up to one heck of a heap of money. Then
there was also Laurids, who lived in a room in the attic and paid
well for room and board. The smallest ones, of course, still went
to school and behaved themselves.

"I appreciate what we have," Tora said. "But I surely know
that it can’t keep up. Some day the boys will of course have
their own families to support and then it may be hard enough for

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Marinus to live up to his responsibilities. Before we earned less, but we also had fewer expenses. The man got board where he was working and we got milk and potatoes cheap. Now we have to pay dear for everything we buy, and this house here, you know, costs almost as much in interest and principal as the place we moved out of. But you’ll never hear me say a word, because joyous days don’t come back to haunt us.

Tora had no reason to complain. Five upright menfolk went to the factory every day and brought home the bacon. “Have another cup of coffee, little Olga, you’ve had a long trip,” she said. “I’m glad you’ve come home. Soon I won’t be able to manage any more; you know, I’m not young and taking care of cooking and cleaning for all the menfolk is a lot of work. I scarcely know how things would work out if I didn’t have Sofie. She’s a hard little worker for an eleven-year-old.” While Tora kept chatting on, she didn’t take her eyes off her daughter. There was just something odd about Olga. Maybe she’d been heartbroken on Funen and that’s why she’d come home. A body surely knew that much could happen in the wide wide world.

Tora took Olga through the house: she had to see what was new. Here was the bedroom and next to it the three oldest sons had their rooms. They were in the parlor, which smelled stuffy because it was seldom used. They had gotten fine new green plush walnut furniture. Tora’s big worn-out hand glided gently across the soft upholstery. Niels and Karl and Anton had bought the Færgeby station master’s furniture at an estate auction. That’s the kind of sons Tora had—they didn’t waste their money at the inn. Then Magda came to visit. “I thought I had to come in and give Olga a real welcome,” she said. “That was surely a great pleasure for you, Tora, to get your daughter home again unexpectedly.” Again Magda scrutinized Olga’s figure. Now Olga didn’t have her coat on and Magda could see that she hadn’t come home a sinner.

“I also served on Funen in my younger days,” she said. “But I really didn’t like the natives of Funen—it was nasty serving together with the farmhands. If a body wouldn’t submit to them, she could scarcely get on among them. I certainly understand
you’d prefer to get away from that place, Olga.” “Nobody did anything to me,” Olga said. “So maybe you want to go back to Funen?” Magda asked. No, Olga didn’t. “I didn’t think so,” Magda said. “You’re a decent girl and can’t put up with their loose way of life. They almost require all servant girls to leave their bedroom doors ajar.”

And then Magda recounted the most terrible things she’d experienced when she was young and a servant girl on Funen. On the farm where she was the farm foreman tried to force his way into her room at night and Magda had to shout for help to save her young innocence. “I’ve never been able to stand a lewd way of life,” Magda said. “And I don’t think you can either, Olga, because you’ve seen here in your home what good and Christian mean.” Magda became absorbed in how low morals had sunk since the factory had been built. The young people earned money and thought about nothing else but running to dances to get their money used up, and the girls! Magda sighed with a sorrowful heart. They certainly didn’t know, like the girls in the old days, how to keep the menfolk at arm’s length.

“Did you remember that trick back when you were Andres’ housekeeper?” Tora teased. “I lived with Andres in all decency, even though we didn’t get married till late,” Magda said. “You know better than anybody, Tora, that he lured me by promising me marriage. I never had anything to do with anybody before him.” “But you sure got Laurids into bed after you were married,” Tora said. “I’d sure hate to say how your brother-in-law Laurids treated me,” Magda said somberly. “But I’ve learned that where there’s sinning, Adam shifts the blame to Eve. If Laurids ever says I lured him, then I’ll swear by living God that Laurids was responsible for my fall. How is a poor simple womanfolk supposed to resist somebody who’s seduced maybe more than a hundred girls over in America? But Andres and my savior have forgiven me my offense, and so I hardly think it’s right of you, Tora, to mention it, especially when your daughter is listening.” “I don’t respect your sanctimoniousness, Magda,” Tora said. “No, you’re one of those who kick against the pricks,” Magda said. “But surely you see that Laurids has such
a bad conscience that he walks out when I come into a room. He
certainly knows how he’s sinned and was on the verge of leading
me into misfortune and that’s why he can’t stand to see me. But
now you’ll surely stay here, won’t you Olga—I mean you can
easily get work at the factory? After all, you know the director
from old times.”

That’s the way Magda was, full of venom and bile, and nev­
evertheless Tora accompanied her to the door in a friendly way. “I
don’t respect her,” she said. “But she’s always had a hard life.
We become the bread we’re kneaded into. She came to see if
you’re with child. Then she’d have that to spread around.” Olga
blushed. “Let me tell you there’s nothing wrong with me: I’m
not going to have a child.” “It really doesn’t matter,” Tora said.
“I’ve known many an honest girl who got into trouble. But I’m
satisfied it hasn’t happened to you.”

The children came home and the men returned from work,
and Tora was busy preparing the food. Marinus was filled with
wonder that his daughter had come home. “The idea that you
just came all of a sudden,” he said. “I mean, it’s a long trip.”
“We almost thought you’d stayed on Funen and gotten married
there,” Niels said. “But there wasn’t anybody who wanted you,
was there?” Olga assured him that the man didn’t exist who’d be
allowed to touch her with his pinky. “Surely we could also
imagine him wanting to touch you with something else,” Niels
teased, but Olga declared: “I’ll never get married. A body is
really stupid if she gets married. A body should enjoy life while
she’s young.”

It sounded odd here in the kitchen where Marinus and his
sons were sitting, tired after a long day’s work, white with dust
from the chalk pit, their skin gray from the cement. Marinus
looked at her and gently shook his head. “That isn’t any kind of
good doctrine, little Olga,” he said. “But I’ve surely heard tell
that they’re a bit frivolous about such things on Funen.”

In the evening Tora accompanied her daughter up to the gar­
ret where she’d be living. “I’m happy you’ve come home,
Olga,” she said, and touched Olga’s shoulder lightly. Olga lis­
tened to her slow, heavy steps as she went down the stairs. Then
she threw herself on the bed and bit the pillow so no one could hear her crying.

— The same day Olga returned home, a navvy came to the town of Alslev. It was the Zealander Iver, who’d been Frederikke’s lover and abandoned her in deep distress. He’d worked many places and wandered the roads homeless, and it was a long time since he’d taken a woman in his arms.

Line Seldomglad was standing at her side of the house washing clothes, and Boel-Erik’s Inger had been at the grocer’s and was standing for a bit and talking to her. Line glistened with soap and water and it was a rare sight. But in the clear sunlight you could also see that her wash wasn’t clean. It was downright exasperating to see how gray the clothes were. Inger felt totally ashamed that she’d hang her wash out to dry here facing a public highway.

“I really don’t care about that at all,” Line said as if she’d guessed Inger’s thoughts. “You shouldn’t wear the flesh off your knuckles, because once it’s worn off, it won’t grow back. And no matter how much we scrub the clothes, you know, they’ll get filthy dirty right away once we’ve got them on our bodies.”

She smacked a piece of linen against the wash cart and her wet, round face smiled at Inger. But Inger just looked sullenly at her and didn’t smile back. At the same moment Iver walked by out on the road.

“Who could that man be?” Line Seldomglad said. “I’m sure I’ve seen him before.” Inger turned and followed Iver with her eyes. “It couldn’t possibly be anybody but that Zealand guy, the one who’s the father of Frederikke’s child,” she said after having pondered it a bit. “You’d be well advised to assume it was Cilius who fathered Little-Jep,” Line said. “Oh, I say it like it is,” Inger said. “Frederikke’s always been arrogant, she looks down on the rest of us because she comes from a farmer’s family. But if Iver is coming here, she’ll surely have her own troubles. Because, you know, she can’t possibly get around the fact that she let him get her pregnant. Whatever you hide in the snow, will turn up after the thaw.” “You shouldn’t be so hard, Inger,” Line said. “It could happen to all of us. Presumably you’re a woman-
folk, too.” Inger didn’t answer, but nodded a sullen goodbye and walked on.

The Zealander didn’t notice the two women at Line’s side of the house. He was a traveling journeyman and was used to people looking back at him. He walked on down the desolate village street. He didn’t recognize the town. He’d come to the area by chance and had heard about the cement factory—maybe there was work to be had. Without giving it any further thought, he returned to the place where he hadn’t done the right thing.

Iver had gone out to the cliff and looked out over the factory with all its buildings and sheds. He flung himself on the grass—it had rained in the morning and a moist warmth rose from the sunlit earth. Iver took a bottle out of his pocket. He’d met a girl he wanted to marry, but she didn’t want anything to do with him, and from that time on he’d turned somewhat seedy. He’d knocked about on the bum and taken to drinking.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he’d also had a woman here. Luckily he’d gotten away with it when she got pregnant. He recalled her now as something secure and trusting while he was lying here drinking in solitude. He was just about to cry over being so lonely in the world. But of course there was Frederikke, who’d become pregnant and who’d earnestly begged him not to abandon her. Maybe she still thought about him, maybe she’d take him back in her arms.

The bottle was empty and he sauntered down to the factory. The office building was a low, white house by the wharf. He went in and stood in front of the counter with his dirty cap in his hands. There was only a clerk in the room and he didn’t think there was any work to be had. Now the president himself came in from a room at the back. Iver definitely recognized him although he’d put on weight. Iver explained that he was looking for work. “Are you from the area here?” Høpner asked. No, Iver had worked all around the country, but he’d been there back when the factory was being built. “Then you should’ve stuck around when the getting was good,” the president said. “Now we hire only local labor. Can’t do anything about it.”

Høpner went back into his office and closed the door after
him. The schnapps was raising havoc in Iver’s head—he was becoming violent. “What the hell, a guy can’t even get work,” he said. “Well, you can try on the farms,” the clerk suggested.

“No, I’ll be damned if I’ll go serve with the lousy farmers,” Iver said. “Here you are sitting on your ass in a chair all day and getting money for doing nothing. Look at my hands, huh? But there’s no work here, you people say, just go out into the highway ditch and drop dead of starvation.” Iver put his cap on and left. He slammed the door with a bang behind him.

He’d hoped he could hit the engineer up for an advance on his weekly wage. He had to have more schnapps and a bed. For months he’d slept in barns and on threshing floors and had crept frozen stiff out of the straw at the crack of dawn. Now there was nothing to do but beg. Schnapps, it sang inside him, schnapps for hot, goddamn hell, I have to have money for a new bottle of schnapps. He began down in the working class district; most places the women were home alone and he’d soon collected a crown. Iver stood humbly at the kitchen door and begged for a penny for a night’s lodging.

At one of the last houses he had to wait a little till the door was opened. Finally a frail, middle-aged woman came to the door. “You don’t have a penny for a traveling journeyman, do you?” Iver said, and at that very moment they recognized each other. Iver had come to Frederikke’s door.

Frederikke stood stiff and stared at Iver’s blotchy face and his mouth, which was black from snuff. “What do you want?” she asked. “I didn’t know you lived here,” Iver said and added: “So you folks have moved.” He stood with his cap in hand, in rags, and with flabby features, and was no longer the dashing fellow Frederikke had once loved. “Why did you come?” she asked. “I felt like seeing the kid,” Iver said defiantly. “I’m its father, aren’t I? Frederikke looked him in the eye firmly and full of hate. “I thank my maker that I didn’t have any more to do with you,” she said. “But that wasn’t why you came to the door either. I mean, you didn’t even know who lived here.” She looked at his clothes, his cracked shoes. “Surely you’ve seen a man in work clothes before,” Iver said. “I’ve also had a beggar
on my stone doorstep before,” Frederikke said mercilessly. “Wait a second, let me see if I can find a penny in my purse.”

Frederikke went in and Iver, humiliated, hurried on. He’d trudged for a long time on the roads and needed a woman’s gentleness. But Frederikke, who’d been like a spineless willow in his hands, had now become a spitfire, and no mercy could be expected from her. He stopped and counted the money he’d collected begging. It might well be enough for a night’s lodging at the inn and a couple of coffees laced with schnapps. He didn’t miss food—he need schnapps in his body.

The taproom was filled with people. It was pay day and many had gone to the inn. Iver sat down in a corner and ordered coffee with schnapps. More people came into the taproom and tables were moved together. People were sitting at the big table in the middle of the room whom Iver recognized. It was Cilius and Lars Seldomglad, Boel-Erik and Jens Horse. They were flush with money and were ordering.

“It seems to me I know that man,” Cilius shouted and turned his flushed face toward the corner where the Zealander was sitting. “My name’s Iver and I worked here as a navvy back when we dug the foundation,” Iver said. The schnapps had given him new self-confidence. Even if Frederikke had scorned him, nobody should think he was afraid of her husband. No, Iver didn’t give a damn about anything. He looked Cilius defiantly in the eye. “It kind of seemed to me that we were old acquaintances,” Cilius said. “I was a navvy myself, and back then my throat was always parched. Sit down next to the rest of us. I’ll stand you a drink.”

Iver moved over to them. The others at the table turned silent and stole glances at one another. Of course they knew all right what had gone on between Iver and Frederikke back then, and it was odd to see him now in Cilius’s company. “You were here back when we laid the foundation for the factory,” Cilius said. “It was also back then that the foundation for Little-Jep was laid.” “Of course you surely know that Cilius here had a son,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Yeah, I had a son and he’s getting redder and redder the older he gets. He’ll surely end up as the
reddest socialist. Otherwise I almost began to think Frederikke was barren. Surely you know my wife Frederikke from the time you worked here.” Iver mumbled that he supposed he remembered Frederikke. “If a fella doesn’t want kids, they come if he just tickles a girl between the ribs. But if a fella wants them, it won’t work. Isn’t that your experience, Zealander?” “Well, but I’m not married,” Iver said. “But you’re a navvy. I know that life as well as anybody,” Cilius said. “I mean I fathered a child with a girl in the south. Then I came to this parish here and jumped into bed with Frederikke. I drank the farm away, but they couldn’t get the better of me. My name’s Cilius Andersen, and people know me all right.”

Music could be heard outside in the dark. It was Frands the musician. He was called in. He was together with a gaunt, lame woman, who accompanied Frands’s accordion with her shrill voice:

My Frands whom I love and will ever think of fondly,  
’cause he plays his accordion ever so lovely,  
he plays the sweetest tunes for me,  
and declares, my Hanne, I love only thee!

My Frands, he can sing, believe me it’s neat,  
my Frands, he can dance, whatever the beat,  
my Frands, he sings tenor so very sweetly,  
his voice is strong, he knows things so greatly.

I knit! I crochet! I sew and embroider,  
I milk the hardest cow and never avoid her,  
I cook and prepare the finest of meals,  
for my Frands, when home he comes, dragging his heels.

Afterwards Hanne went from table to table collecting change while Frands was standing small and stooping by the door with the accordion in his arms. “Come over into the taproom, Frands,” Cilius shouted. “Did you write that ballad yourself?” “I sure did.” “I mean you’ve got a real gift for it,” Cilius said. “If you’d had a better education, who knows how far you’d have
gone.” “Oh, I can’t complain if only I can keep away from the poor farm,” Frands said. “When we get our chance, nobody will be sent to the poor farm—you can count on that. You’ll live with your dearest in pleasure and delight.”

Cilius was drunk now. His red hair was wet with sweat, his voice boomed through the rooms at the inn. “Let’s get more in the vats, boys,” he shouted. “Hand me the schnapps bottle, Boel-Erik. It’s the same with schnapps like with water—it runs easiest downhill.” Many voices made a din; you could hardly make yourself heard. Some spoke the language of the city and not the flat speech of the area. They were workers who’d come from the cities, stokers, mechanics, kiln attendants. But Cilius sat as the focal point in the group. He was a reliable man and elected by the labor union.

Cilius snorted like a horse and let the beer trickle down. He demanded more on the table, beer and aquavit. Cilius was a solid man and it was seldom that he went to the inn. But when he went there, things had to happen fast. “Let’s have more from the strong tit,” he said. “Don’t worry about paying, Zealander, it’s on me. I walked many a mile bumming it without soles on my shoes and with a bottle in my pocket. But now I’ve got a deed to my own house, and it may also end up that way for you if you behave yourself.”

The inn was bubbling with noise and discussion. Was there going to be a strike or would an agreement be reached amicably? Somebody began to sing the Socialist March and Cilius joined in with his thundering voice. “They should be thrashed, the big capitalists, if they don’t take the bait,” he roared. “Isn’t it time that we found our way home,” Lars Seldomglad said, but Cilius’s time hadn’t come yet. “The old hag in bed isn’t going to run away from us,” he said. “Don’t you think so, Zealander?” He looked at Iver with bloodshot eyes. Iver kept his mouth shut: Cilius was dangerous now and the important thing was not to provoke him. “In my youth I beat a man till he was a cripple,” he said. “The man hasn’t been born who’s a match for me. I’ll show you you’re dealing with a navvy. I was a match for four men at Brønderslev fair.”
Cilius had gotten up—he was wild. His figure swelled with a dangerous energy; his huge fists were clenched in fury. Now Cilius would take revenge for Frederikke. Iver grabbed a chair and was ready to brandish it. “I didn’t insult you,” he shouted. “Don’t count on it, little man,” Cilius said. “I can see you’re looking for it. So let’s see you come on out onto the floor.” Lars Seldomglad and Boel-Erik grabbed hold of Cilius, but he shook them off. “Don’t use violence, Cilius, come to your senses, little Cilius,” Lars Seldomglad moaned. “I’m not going to use violence,” Cilius grinned fiercely. “If I used violence, you people could carry him to the grave like a bloody sack of meat. I want a trial of strength with the Zealander.” “I don’t like it,” Lars Seldomglad sighed. “A fella should be allowed to drink without blood having to flow. Boys, now let’s be reasonable and go home.”

The rest of the inn’s patrons had crowded together and suddenly the fight was on. Cilius turned over the big table with a crash so the bottles and glasses shattered. Iver brandished the chair over his head, but Cilius grabbed it and took it away from him by force. He slung it over into a corner and grabbed hold of the Zealander. They lurched back and forth, breathing heavily and gasping, they hit up against tables and chairs and against the people who were standing around. The innkeeper came running. “If you’re going to fight, you’ll have to go outside,” she shrilled. “Oh, God help me, is that Cilius?” She stood and wailed about the destruction. Drunken voices shouted out. Lars Seldomglad repeated over and over: “This is just tomfoolery, come to your senses, Cilius, be reasonable.”

Now Cilius had overpowered the Zealander. Slowly he bent him backwards, while Iver, gasping, tried to slip from the hold. He braced himself till his back was about to break; then he couldn’t go on, and with a thud tumbled over onto the floor with Cilius over him. Cilius pressed his body down. Iver had his adversary’s red face over him. Cilius grinned like a wolf. Then he freed one hand and put his hand almost caressingly around Iver’s throat. He squeezed hard, very carefully, but the hold became firmer, and the Zealander’s throat gurgled nastily. The men sud-
denly became very quiet. No one intervened; they stared with strangely tense faces at Cilius and Iver. Only Lars Seldomglad said, whiningly: "Cilius, little Cilius, now don't kill him—come to your senses."

The Zealander had been in fights before; he'd fought with knives and with knuckle-dusters and looked danger in the eye. But now for the first time in his life he felt real fear. It wasn't so much Cilius he was afraid of as the cold, tense mood in the room. It was as if he was going to be slaughtered. There was no mercy here; he was like a sheep that was tied to the slaughterhouse bench and inevitable death steadily approached. He writhed and breathed, wheezing heavily, under Cilius's huge paw. The innkeeper was suddenly beside herself. "People, you can't just stand and watch him murder him," she shrilled. "Tear him away, for Christ's sake." But no one moved.

Cilius's hold around Iver's throat became hard, then it loosened again, and Iver gasped for breath. "Now you can say you've met somebody you're no match for," Cilius said. "I can beat you till you're a cripple, I can mess you up so they'll have to carry you away in a shroud, even if I am ten years older than you. I could break every bone in your body and wring your neck like a young cock's. You're worthless, you stupid Zealander. You should've stayed home tied to your mother's apron strings instead of taking to the road as a navvy."

Cilius's voice was sinister and short of breath while he was lying on top of the Zealander and explaining how he could have dealt with him. His broad hard hands opened and closed around Iver's throat; he pressed hard, just a little bit, and Iver gurgled and squirmed in mortal dread. But suddenly he released his grip and got up. Iver got on his feet and stood a bit and tottered. "I can lap up schnapps like a thirsty dog," Cilius said. "I can beat a man till he's a cripple if he gets too close to me. Give him a glass of schnapps—I mean him no harm."

A man brought a bottle of schnapps and glasses and Cilius poured and handed Iver a glass filled to the brim. He'd conquered the Zealander and magnanimously granted him his wretched life. "Drink, I won't hurt you," Cilius said. "Now you
know that Cilius Andersen is your superior in life and death.”

Tables and chairs were put upright and broken glass swept up. More beer was brought to the table. “You can have it whichever way you want with me,” Cilius said. “I can give you schnapps and I can give you a sound thrashing.” Cilius was now inordinately calm and polite and he asked the Zealander where he was headed. Iver recounted that he’d looked for work at the factory, but hadn’t gotten any. “They’re short a man in the slurry station—I know that for sure,” Cilius said. “Go to Laurids-American and say I sent you. Then he’ll definitely give you work. But once you’re hired, you have to come to me and get your union book in order. You’re my friend in life and death: I can get you work and I can bash your brains in, my good friend.”
For the first time in a long time Iver slept off his intoxication in a bed and the next morning he went to the factory and found Laurids from America. Was he from the area here? Yes indeed he was. He’d had work on a large farm a little south of Alslev, but he was tired of being a farmworker. So Laurids thought there was work for a man in the slurry station—now he’d see about it. Iver got work. The first time Høpner came into the wet mill, Iver was afraid he’d be fired, but the president didn’t recognize him.

Iver lived at the inn for a few days, but he had to look for lodging. American-Laurids thought he could probably go live at Andres and Magda’s. “I don’t know how you stand with women,” Laurids said. “But I’m warning you about Magda—if you don’t watch out, you’ll have her in bed right away.” “The only thing I go to bed with is my schnapps bottle,” Iver said cockily. “It gives me the pleasure I need.” “Yeah, you’re young and you talk, but you’ll learn,” Laurids said. “It’s easy to take up with womenfolk, but it’s harder to get away from them. And I’ll tell you, it doesn’t get any easier when you get older. Oh, damn it, if we just knew how to keep away from womenfolk.”

Laurids was almost an aging man, but he had his thorn in the flesh. Now it was a woman who was married to one of the stokers. Her name was Minna and Laurids visited her when her husband was on the night shift. He was a decent man and a good worker, and he could certainly have deserved a wife who was faithful to him. But women aren’t to be trusted, and when Laurids stole home to his room in Marinus’s attic in the late-night hours, he didn’t think well of the woman whose bed he came from.

The work in the wash mill, where clay and chalk were washed together into a thin paste, was child’s play for a navvy who was used to hard excavating work. After a few days had passed, Iver was once again cocky. He had work and sensed
how his muscles gradually gained strength—what did he care if there was a girl somewhere who didn’t want anything to do with him? And Frederikke? No, Iver wasn’t that down in the dumps that he’d have his nose rubbed in her. Frederikke was forgotten and over with, and besides, Iver wasn’t going to get in Cilius’s way.

From work he accompanied a man who showed him where Andres’ house was. Although it was only a few years ago that it had been built, it was already dilapidated. The plaster had fallen from the walls in big flakes and many windows lacked panes. Andres came from work just as Iver was arriving. Although he was an elderly man and had what he needed, he couldn’t give himself any rest. He was a driver in the factory and drove the coupled dump cars from the chalk pit. He came stumbling, tired, and round-shouldered, and got to hear what had brought the Zealander there.

“I hardly know if you can live here,” he said. “We’ll have to talk to Magda about it.” Magda gasped when she saw who the stranger was. “He says he wants room and board with us,” Andres said. “But I really don’t know if it pays. It’s unchristian the way people can stuff themselves when they get it for a fixed price.” “Fiddlesticks, you know we’ve got the room empty,” Magda said and mentioned what Iver would have to pay per week. “But you’ll have to take the same food like the rest of us—I’m not going to treat you to dainties. Why in the world are you doing that?”

Andres was emptying the contents of his pockets out onto the kitchen table. In one there were small pieces of coal, in the other a couple of handfuls of oats. “Why are you lugging that home?” Magda asked. “Half a loaf is better than nothing,” Andres said. “Now that’s what I call petty larceny,” Magda said. “No, no, little Magda, don’t ever use that word,” Andres said. “I pick up little bits of coal so they won’t be wasted. And the oats—I only took a little handful in the stable for the chickens. The horses get much more to eat than’s good for them. Be content in all things, as the scripture says. Our Lord doesn’t like for any of his gifts to be wasted.”
Iver had no belongings to fetch—he moved into the room right away. The room was simple enough, a bed, a table and chair, but Iver wasn’t spoiled. In the evening they ate in the kitchen, and as to the food there was nothing to complain about. The kettle sang on the peat embers and a cat purred on the peat box. Magda pumped Iver as to where he’d been in the world, and he replied that he’d been in practically every part of the country. “And the womenfolk everywhere were probably sorry you left them,” Magda said. “Then they hid it well,” Iver said. “Of course you were well acquainted with Cilius and Frederikke when you were here last,” Magda said. “I suppose you heard Frederikke had a child a little after you left?” “Mind what you say,” Andres said. “I’m not saying anything my creator isn’t permitted to hear,” Magda said. “Surely we’re allowed to talk about well-known people.”

Andres ran outside every quarter of an hour and Iver asked whether something was wrong. “Oh yes, oh yes,” Andres sighed. “May the Lord in his mercy look kindly upon my sins. I can’t hold my water, I keep feeling I’ve got to go, and it never amounts to anything but drips and drops.” And Andres explained that as long as he was working, he didn’t feel anything. But as soon as he sat down comfortably and was going to enjoy his well-deserved rest, he had to go. “It’s a nasty affliction,” Iver said, and Magda said disapprovingly: “Surely there’s a meaning to it.” “Magda, little Magda, I don’t like what you’re saying,” Andres complained, and his gaunt old man’s face became miserably twisted. “Self-inflicted is well-deserved,” Magda said. “It’s punishment because you’ve always been so tight.” “I’ve been faithful over the few things that were entrusted to me by the gospel’s sacred word,” Andres said. “You hoarded and penny-pinched all your days, and that’s the punishment—that you can’t get rid of your water,” Magda said. “Oh, little Magda, you mustn’t make complaints about me, I can’t stand it,” Andres cried, and he had to go outside again.

The next day after quitting time Iver went to Cilius to join the union. Cilius was standing in the mudroom washing himself. He snorted and scrubbed his red face with the coarse burlap
cloth. He took his sweet time and Iver didn’t feel comfortable. He didn’t care much to see Frederikke again.

Finally Cilius had washed up and they went into the living room. In the corner was a desk with drawers and shelves. Cilius sat down, pulled out a drawer and rooted around in some papers; then he looked for his glasses on the shelf. “I don’t know where I put them,” he said. “I have trouble reading if I don’t have them.” Finally he found the glasses and put them on. Here at the desk Cilius was a different man. He sat with dignity with his glasses on and conducted an interrogation as if he were officialdom itself. “When were you born and where’s your place of birth?” he asked. “Have you been in a union before? There’s a lot of scribbling, but it’s necessary. Yeah, so you’ll get the book when we’ve gotten it filled out, and behave yourself, Zealander, now that you’re a member of a labor union.”

Yes, of course, Iver nodded, he certainly knew it carried obligations with it. “And if a strike comes, you’ll stand with the rest of us,” Cilius said. “I bet that must be Frederikke who just came. You knew her, right, back when you were working here as a navvy?” Cilius went out into the kitchen and got Frederikke and the boy. “Here you have my wife and Little-Jep, and this is a man who worked here when we were building the factory. Maybe you remember him, Frederikke?”

“I think so, I seem to recall you,” Frederikke said and shook hands with him. Her handshake was hostile—it was as if he were touching a piece of wood. “And there’s the little red fox,” Cilius said, pointing to his son. But Frederikke took the boy hard by the arm and pulled him over to her. “He has to run an errand for me right now at the neighbor’s and borrow a cup of sugar. I forgot to buy some.” She quickly went out into the kitchen with Little-Jep.

“So you absolutely have to come if there’s anything you’re in doubt about,” Cilius said when they were out of the living room. “You’re a new man in the place and can’t be up on everything. And watch out that you don’t report for work drunk. Laurids from America doesn’t like that, and if you’re fired for that reason, the union can’t help you.”
— It was decided that Olga wouldn’t look for a new position as a servant for the time being, but would instead help Tora in the house. Tora could certainly need help: she had five adult menfolk and three children to take care of, and the food had to be on the table before they went to work, and be ready when they came home. Tora was the first one up in the morning and the last to go to bed in the evening, and she didn’t sit down for many minutes all day long.

In the evening the sons drifted out, and it was wisest not to ask where Laurids from America went off to. In the starry spring evenings you could glimpse the glow from the factory and hear the weak roar of machines. Once in a while Laurids came home early and sat for a bit in the living room. “Have you got a drop of schnapps in the bottle, Tora,” he said. “I need something bracing.” “Then you’ll get a drink, Laurids,” Tora said and brought a bottle and glass. “It’d be better if you stayed home in the evening.” The wrinkles in Laurids’s beardless face became even deeper with melancholy. “I’ve always been able to manage at work,” he said. “But womenfolk have been my misfortune—I could never resist.”

Marinus sat half-dozed over his newspaper and didn’t get involved in the women’s chatter and Laurids’s complaint. But if the talk turned to Søren, he woke up. Of course, they heard from Søren often, and only good news came from that quarter. Beginning in the summer he was going to be a university student, and so it all depended on whether money could be obtained to let him keep studying. It cost a whole lot of money. Marinus’s speech remained solemn while he mentioned the least it would cost to keep Søren in school. In any event, it far exceeded Marinus’s capacity.

“Just so long as his greatness doesn’t go to his head,” Tora said. “It hardly seems right to me to make distinctions between brothers and sisters, but after all it’s Ulriksen who decided it that way.” Marinus fetched his son’s letters from the bureau in the parlor and read them aloud, even though they were all familiar with them—Søren wrote about his studies, he was making good progress and was in the good graces of his teachers at the learned
college in Copenhagen. "That lad is not going to disgrace us," Marinus said and carefully folded up the tattered letters. "Last time he was home he spoke Latin like a priest."

"We've got to go to bed, we've got to get up early in the morning," Tora said. "There's no point in waiting for the lads—a body never knows when they'll be coming home." "I don't rightly like them gallivanting about so much," Marinus said. "In my youth we had more to do and less time for flirting."

"Oh, youth is for the young," Tora said. "As long as they don't drink, I'll never complain."

She chased the children into bed and Marinus was out at door to the mudroom to look at the weather. "I think it'll be nice weather tomorrow," he said when he came back in. "And now it's about the time where they get going with the spring plowing." No one responded; they hardly paid attention to his words. But Marinus remained sitting for a bit sunk in his own thoughts and recalled the days when he'd been a farmer and driven the plow through the moist spring soil.

Tora was surprised that Olga stayed home for the most part and that she never got it into her head at all to visit old acquaintances. "Aren't you going to visit Ulriksen," she said. "It seems to me you owe it to him to let him know you've come home."

"All right," Olga said, and one afternoon she went to the school. Ulriksen had aged, his shaggy hair was now completely white. "But if it isn't Olga," he said. "I really didn't think you'd ever say hello to your old teacher." "It's not very long ago that I came home," Olga said, and felt like a little girl who'd missed school. "You got tired of being on Funen," Ulriksen said. "Yeah, I longed for home," Olga said. "Yeah, yeah, I know, I heard this and that from my sister," Ulriksen said. "The farm where you happened to serve probably wasn't a good one. The man doesn't have a good reputation . . . . Well, but surely you can hardly recognize your home town. The factory has changed everything, even the school. I've gotten an auxiliary teacher and now the children go to school every day. And that's the way it should be." Ulriksen talked about the factory, which had made the day laborers into workers and socialists, about the
union, where Cilius ruled, and about the parish council, which three workers now sat on. "They've straightened their backs," Ulriksen said. "That's the good thing about the new times—that people become conscious of their human worth; they no longer stand with their hat in hand. But I'm getting old, Olga, I talk too much." "So long as what you say is wise," Olga said. "That was well said," Ulriksen said. "But I'm going to tell you one thing, my girl: despite everything, now it's easier to be old in the new times than it was to be young in the old times."

And now Olga also visited the other day laborers she'd known from childhood. They'd all gotten new houses except for the Lars Seldomglads, who still lived in their old hovel. "I'll tell you, Olga, we've gotten accustomed to it," Line Seldomglad said. "And the lice that thrive here are our own." But Olga became most closely attached to Inger, Boel-Erik's wife. She now had two children, a boy and a girl, and Boel-Erik brought home the bacon. He worked on the dredge that dug clay in the fjord and earned good money. When he came from work, he didn't say much, Boel-Erik had always been a man of few words, and he became more and more taciturn with the years.

"I'll tell you this, Olga, don't ever get married," Inger said. "As long as a body has her freedom, she doesn't appreciate it. But if I could leave Erik and the children today, I'd do it. But where should I go?" "He's good to you, isn't he?" Olga asked. "Yes, he doesn't harm me," Inger said. "And he isn't taken to drinking more than other men; and surely he's more good-natured to boot. But, you know, one day goes by like the next." "But you love your children, don't you?" Olga asked. "I really don't know myself," Inger said. "Of course I've had them now, but often I wish they'd never been born."

Whenever there was a dance at the inn, Inger was in a bad mood. She was annoyed that she couldn't be there too. "I think it's totally wrong that a married woman can't go dancing," she said. "If I were you, Olga, you can bet I'd shake a leg. And no fellow would get me as a sweetheart for more than that same evening. Why don't you ever go dancing?" "I don't care for it," Olga said curtly. "Surely you danced when you were on Funen,"
Inger said. "A body should go some place where nobody knows her. But I can’t get Erik to move to a city."

Inger wanted to go to a city, even though Alslev could practically be regarded as a little market town. There was the factory with its complex of buildings and sheds, president’s residence, and salaried workers’ houses. There was the working-class district, and in the village there were new houses, large two-story buildings with cement ornaments and shops. A dry-goods dealer had moved in right across from grocer Skifter, a footwear store had arrived, a couple of butchers, a midwife, several artisans.

In Skifter’s shop the farmers stood in front of the counter; they were still the ones who ruled in the parish council and assistance fund. But farming deteriorated more and more: it became more difficult to raise money for interest, principal, and taxes, and a fella got nothing for his products. It was Mads Lund, the biggest farmer in town, who complained most, while Anders Toft and Martin Thomsen and the other farm owners listened and once in a while interjected an affirming word. Indeed he was right. Only the person wearing the shoe knows where it pinches.

Konrad was standing behind the counter offering cigars. He’d relieved his father-in-law of control: now he ran the grocery business and was considered a prosperous man. Yes, oh yes, Konrad was inclined to agree with the big customers. Little people think only of demanding and demanding and never give a thought to who has to pay. The shop had been modernized: there were large windowpanes and a counter with display cases. "Skifter & Co." was written in gold letters on the glass of the shop door. Skifter for the most part went out into the store room and weighed out the goods in bags—the modern business conditions were too much for him. He couldn’t keep up.

"But let ’em take it all," Mads Lund said. "The rest of us can surely earn a day-wage too if we give up our farms. Let’s see if others can run the farm better. And how’s it all going to end? I mean, there’s got to be somebody to put the bread on the table. A way sure hasn’t been invented yet so we can live from
eating cement.”

The others in the shop agreed with him about that. And now, to boot, it looked as though the workers at the cement factory were going to strike. Martin Thomsen felt it came from all that newfangled ungodliness. “But if they won’t work for a good wage, surely there are others who’ll buckle down,” Anders Toft said. “No siree, that’s where you’re wrong, little Anders,” Mads Lund said. “The ones who want to get some work done aren’t allowed to by the labor union.” “Oh dear God, things are going more and more downhill on this sinful earth,” Martin Thomsen sighed.

It was lunchtime and the workers came into the shop to buy tobacco, schnapps, or chewing tobacco. The farmers stopped their chatting and Konrad got busy serving the customers. Andres came and was supposed to shop for Magda, who didn’t have time. While Konrad was packing up his items, Andres had to run out of the shop and into the yard. “You’ve become so light on your feet in your old age, Andres,” Mads Lund said when he came back in. “Oh, God help,” Andres said. “I keep feeling like I’ve got to go and sometimes it comes without warning.” “Don’t you think you should go around with a diaper,” Mads Lund asked, and the whole shop laughed. “Yeah, you people mock,” Andres said, offended. “But mockery will be smitten on one’s own mouth.”

Now there was talk of Andres’ affliction and many a coarse word was said. “You should have a pair of pants made of oilskin,” Konrad said. “But now let’s see, Andres, if this isn’t something for you.” Konrad brought a bathing cap. It was green with yellow stripes. “What in the world kind of device is that?” Andres asked. “It’s a bathing cap, which women put on when they don’t want their hair to get wet,” Konrad explained. “But if it can keep the water out, it can surely also keep it in. What if you tied it around you?” “It looks water-tight,” Andres admitted, and examined the rubber cap. “I wonder if it’s possible a fella can get it into position. And surely it’s simply too expensive?” “Just get Magda to sew long tapes in and tie them around you,” Konrad said. “It won’t cost you in the slightest—you can’t say
I'm taking advantage of your infirmity.” Sure, sure, then Andres could try it after all and he took the bathing cap home with him.
When the workers sat with their lunch boxes and coffee thermoses in the canteen, it was the strike they talked about. The final strike notice had been given, but negotiations were still going on between the organizations, and of course it could happen that the strike would be called off at the last moment. Marinus and Andres were among those who hoped that the negotiators would reach an agreement peaceably. “It seems to me we’ve got an outrageously good wage,” Marinus said. “I’d never imagined we’d become so prosperous.” “But, you know, they’re the ones that can never get enough,” Andres said. “They want to get the day-wage up and the working hours down. As if the scripture didn’t say: In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.”

But it was no use talking to the other workers about it. Most of them thought the earnings were too low. They’d forgotten what it was like to serve with the farmers, but Marinus recalled the hard times. When he came home and sat among his family, he expressed his opinion. “If only they could come to terms,” he said. “We surely can’t expect to have it better than we’ve got it.” But his views weren’t accepted here either. Niels was a member of the union executive committee and adamantly insisted that if the capitalists wouldn’t pay of their own free will, they’d do it when faced with harsh measures. And Tora felt that a few cents an hour also added up to real money.

“I’d be tremendously upset about a strike,” Laurids said. “Yeah, you see.” Marinus said. But Laurids explained that he regarded the strike as reasonable enough, but it wasn’t easy for him as foreman. “If they demand that I work during the strike, I’ll say no,” Laurids said. “In America I was involved when they beat up people with nightsticks and shot at them with revolvers. But a strikebreaker—that I’ll never be.” And Laurids recounted how things had been in the mines and factories in America where he’d earned his bread. Now he had a trusted position, and Høpner respected him highly because they’d both been abroad and...
could swear the same nasty, incomprehensible curses. But a
strikebreaker—now that’s something he wouldn’t be. “It seems
to me we should watch out for making unreasonable demands,”
Marinus said stubbornly. “And I’m afraid it’s Cilius that’s fast-
talked them in the union in Copenhagen. He’s always been so
wild.”

Marinus shook his head; he was surprised that the other
workers dared put their trust in Cilius, who’d never feared God
or the devil. He was very organized as chairman of the
union—everybody knew that. He’d been to congresses and ne-
gotiations in Copenhagen; he was in the thick of the big game.
But Cilius was one of those who bet everything on one card.
That’s the way it seemed to Marinus, but he was a meek man and
kept his opinion to himself.

Høpner didn’t say anything about what he was thinking. He
went around looking like a mad bull. But it just happened that
he was talking to Laurids from America. “It’s those damned or-
ganizations,” he said. “You people let yourselves be ordered
about by them. It ought to be a crime to stop the wheels. You
people don’t think about the fact that we have to compete with
cement on the world market, we have to get the goods
sold—otherwise we can just as well close the whole shop, and
then what?” “You know, they’re not making big demands,”
Laurids said. “No, for the individual worker an hour less a day
and a few cents more an hour don’t mean anything, but for the
industry it amounts to millions. That’s what you people don’t
think about. We’re in the same boat, but the union directors
want to be chief officers. But here in this factory I’m the one
who rules.”

Laurids didn’t answer because when Høpner was in that
mood, he didn’t brook contradiction. But otherwise Laurids was,
after all, a man who believed that if it was Høpner who ruled,
there’d certainly be an amicable settlement. But in the years
before, Høpner had had his own war to conduct with the big ce-
ment trust, and there he’d become the little guy. He’d been comp-
pelled to enter into the cartel and had been barely allowed to
keep on being president.
The fire was still burning in the rotary kilns, the cement mills were grinding, sack after sack was filled with cement from the exilor. The factory was working and the fine dust settled everywhere. But Høpner was restless: every hour he was in telephonic communication with Copenhagen. Anything new? No prospect of a settlement of the conflict at the last moment? Høpner slammed down the receiver and nervously roamed up and down the floor. His broad lower jaw jutted out. Now if he’d just been his own master, he’d surely have straightened things out with the men. If you yielded a little, the others also gave way a little, and the machines were kept going. But he had nothing to say; now he was only the manager of the factory he himself had built.

The excavator was out in the fjord taking the clay from the bottom of the fjord. The workers hacked chalk on the cliff, dump trucks were slowly hauled along the rails, the smoke rose steadily from the smokestacks, the machines boomed. At the pier the tackles squealed; three small craft were loading cement. It was a rainy spring day with low clouds and showers. There was a spicy odor from topsoil and manure from the spring-plowed fields. The work proceeded at its steady pace, each man in his place. A violent thunderstorm came, and the workshift on the cliff crawled into shelter. “Do you think we’ll be coming to work tomorrow?” Lars Seldomglad asked in a low voice, but nobody responded. They were all thinking about the fact that when they got their weekly wage today, it might be a long time till they had a weekly wage in their pockets again.

“Of course, it may well be that they’ll cave in,” Lars Seldomglad said. “And if they don’t, it’s not the worst time to go on strike. We don’t need fuel and there may be work on the farms.” “The farmers will begrudge us that,” Boel-Erik said. “They won’t give us work—we’ll be forced to rely on ourselves.” “Well, then we’ll have the fjord,” Lars Seldomglad said. “It’s never denied little people a meal. And of course we’ll also get help from the strike fund as long as there’s money in it. All of us have surely been without work before today.”

The others nodded confidently: they’d been poor before and
they could surely endure being poor again for a while. Most of
them had been farmworkers and knew how to stick together, and
that was what was demanded of them now. "When they see it's
for real, they'll surely have to cave in," Boel-Erik said. "And
you can be sure it'll be no use trying to keep the factory going."

The work day was over and the men were slowly walking
home from work. They stood in clusters on the road from the
factory. Now it had been decided—now they would strike.
They stood there in the dusk, hundreds of men, and down below
was the factory, where the fire was about to go out in the rotary
kilns, under the boilers and furnaces. There were dusty unskilled
laborers, sooty stokers, workers from the coal mill, mechanics,
coopers, coachmen, women from the workshop where the sacks
were mended. The clerks and salaried workers came by. They
cast a sidelong glance at the workers. Laurids from America
joined them. "How's it going, Laurids?" Cilius shouted. "Hold
your head high, you were in the war before, over there among the
Americans." Things weren't going well with Laurids. Hopner
wanted to have a new lining in the rotary kilns now that the work
had come to a halt, and foremen and salaried employees were
supposed to take care of it. But Laurids had said no. When the
work had ceased, he wouldn't lift a hand. "That's the way it's
got to be," Cilius said. "You've always been a helluva guy."

Cilius was in high spirits and the circle around him grew.
He was chairman of the union and was talking to his people. "If
we just stand together, they won't get the upper hand on us," he
said. "We've lived on skim milk and potatoes before and we can
do it again for a time. You can bank on it that dancing this dance
won't be roughest on us. I've been involved in this kind of thing
before."

And Cilius told stories from his youth, how the navvies had
struck and forced the big contractors to raise the piece rates. If
strikebreakers came, they were thrown into the nearest body of
water so their passion could be cooled off, or treated to a sound
beating. "You'll definitely have to remember that," Cilius said.
"That's the way we gain ground. We don't get something for
nothing. We have to give as good as we get because if the high
and mighty had their way, they’d begrudge us dry bread.”

Cilius sparkled with fighting spirit. He stood compact and thickset, radiating strength and confidence. One man cut loose from the crowd; little by little the workers began to scatter. But that happened slowly: this evening they were in no hurry to get home. As long as they were together, they felt strong. Now there was Kresten Bossen—he had the words of the scripture to stick to. “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters,” it was written in plain words. “Servants, be subject to your masters. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” And weren’t the workers to be regarded as servants—weren’t they the ones who were supposed to be humble? Kresten had lain awake many hours at night pondering what his Christian duty was, and he’d talked to Ida about it. What should a child of God do if a strike was declared? Ida felt he should do as the others did, but Kresten Bossen couldn’t be persuaded by her talk. The words he cared about were from the Lord’s own mouth.

Kresten Bossen didn’t like Cilius, who was an unbeliever and a mocker. The path he wanted to go down wasn’t the right one. He’d stood on the fringe of the crowd and listened, and now he knew what he had to do. Cilius wanted struggle, but the Lord wanted submission, and God’s commandment takes precedence over man’s. He went back to the factory and there was still a light on in Høpner’s private office. Kresten Bossen knocked on the door and entered. He stopped just inside the door with his hat in his large hands.

“What do you want?” Høpner asked. “I came to say I don’t feel it’s right to strike,” Kresten Bossen said. “I’ll keep working if the engineer requests it.” “If I had fifty men of your kind, I’d certainly be able to keep the operation going,” Høpner said. “But damn it, surely you can understand that I have no use for you as a man all by yourself. Do you think you alone can keep the rotary kilns going, are you able to stoke the boilers, to watch the tube mills? No, you see.” Kresten Bossen understood that the president wasn’t demanding of him that he work during the strike, and his mind was eased. He’d done what his Christian faith enjoined, he’d subordinated himself to the one the Lord had
placed above him. And now Kresten Bossen entered the strike with the others.

The lights went out under the furnace; a glow no longer rose from the smokestacks in the dark spring night. People out in the heath went outside their farmhouses to see whether the glare was there, and now they knew the workers were on strike. Old people shook their heads: what kind of people were the workers anyway? They had their good wages, but instead of thanking providence’s mercy, they demanded more. The world was out of joint: it wasn’t like in the old days, when people took their modest wage with a grateful disposition.

It was odd not to have to go to work in the morning. No factory whistle called people out of their houses. But it was unbearable to lie on your eiderdown and enjoy the rest; you had to get in your clothes and go out and speak to other people. Maybe something new had already happened. Perhaps the employers had climbed down now that they saw it was for real. You looked in on your neighbor or found a pretext for going to the grocer. It was dead all over town. A sound was missing in daily life. The noise from the factory at work.

Cilius had called a meeting for the afternoon in the banquet hall at the inn, and here the workers found out that the fight would probably be long and hard. Cilius stood on the dais and explained about strike assistance and reporting to the union and about strike pickets in case the employers thought of putting other people to work. “And no drinking now, boys,” Cilius admonished them. “We’ll let the schnapps be till all this is over with—you hear that?” The men nodded. “And then we’ll surely get through this, be certain of that,” Cilius said. “We’ve got all the rest of the workers in the country behind us.”

Cilius clenched his fist with its freckles and bristly red hair and let it fall on the lectern with a bang. “If we don’t fight for it, we’ll never get better conditions,” he shouted. “You know that as well as I do. We’ve got to get tough and stand firm.” Cilius had beaten a man till he was a cripple and been in countless brawls, but this one here was a bigger struggle. Now the big shots would get to know Cilius for real.
A strike committee was elected. Cilius, a stoker Karl Børgesen, and Marinus’s Niels and Boel-Erik. There was a leadership now and their word had to be obeyed in all points. “I mean, do I know anything about that kind of thing?” Boel-Erik said uneasily. “Sure you do,” Cilius said. “We have to elect people who aren’t scared.” And Boel-Erik wasn’t afraid—he knew that.

The farmers gathered in Skifter’s shop to hear news about the strike. Were the workers fools? they asked one another. “Now you’re probably going to have to sell on credit, Konrad,” Mads Lund said. “Make sure you’re not the one who winds up paying for the whole party. If it drags on, they’ll run up a bill they’ll never in the world be able to pay.” “Oh, they’re honest people,” Konrad said evasively. “And of course a fella knows how much he can give to each one.” “Doubtless there aren’t many of them that have put anything aside,” Anders Toft said. “It’s only by the skin of their teeth they can manage to make do no matter how much they earn.” There was a little pause and then Martin Thomsen said: “And if it gets long and drawn out, then we can surely get cheap labor for weeding the beets.” The rest of the farmers didn’t reply, but sucked thoughtfully on their pipes.
It was as if the area had died after the factory had come to a standstill. You heard the lark’s song, and for every day the fields were greening, the weather turned warmer. But the factory was silent, and the large smokestacks rose menacingly over the cliff. Høpner was busy lining the rotary kilns. It was engineers and office workers who were doing the work, and Cilius had nothing to object to. He just made sure that no worker lent a hand.

The workers had trouble making time pass. They dug in their gardens, sowed, and planted, and some borrowed a skiff and were out in the fjord spearing eel and jigging cod. Strike pay was paid out, but they had to look at every penny twice before spending it. Skim milk and potatoes were daily fare, and a fish course was a luxury. The worst thing was to be idle, but of course they knew that the crucial thing was to wait and hold out. For every day they waited and held out, the employers lost money, and that was doubtless what those people disliked most of all. That’s what Cilius and his strike committee said, and they were familiar with these matters. The workers’ confidence in them was great.

It wasn’t easy for Boel-Erik to be at home because Inger was becoming more and more unreasonable. She bossed him around and often Boel-Erik clenched his big fists and felt like giving her a beating like the last time. “Why don’t we move to a city,” Inger said. “I mean, living in a hole like this is impossible.” “Because here’s where our work is,” uttered Boel-Erik. “Now you people can’t even be bothered to do any work—you’re striking for two cents: in the city a fella can practically earn as much as he wants.” But Boel-Erik wasn’t going to any city; he felt fine where he was, and womenfolk weren’t going to get the upper hand on him.

Boel-Erik embarked on a deal and bought a piece of heathland of fourteen acres. But now he’d learned his lesson: he went to a lawyer and made sure that the papers were in order so no
one could take the land from him after it was plowed up. No big
down payment was necessary, a hundred crowns, which Erik had
put aside in case sickness or unemployment struck. Inger got
angry when she heard about the deal. “Are you crazy,” she said.
“T’ll never move to the heath.” “I just want to raise potatoes,”
Boel-Erik said. “They’ll probably say that that land is no good.
But the work a fella puts into it is sure to pay in the long run.”
Boel-Erik rented a horse and plow for the money he could spare
and began to plow the heath. He was up early in the morning
and came home late. Boel-Erik had once again gotten land.

Every day Hopner took a walk through town from the dead
factory. The workers touched their hats when he went by and
Hopner put his finger close to his hat brim without looking at
those he met. Now they’d finished with the rotary kilns and all
work came to a halt. One day Hopner met Olga on the road—he
was just about to run into her. “I think I know you,” he said. “I
don’t know anything about that,” Olga said, and, frightened,
stood aside. She knew that women were sitting behind the win-
dows and paying attention to what was going on on the road.
Many eyes followed Hopner when he took a walk.

Hopner walked on, but Olga stood there for a moment,
breathing deeply. Olga’s face had become bony, her eyes sat
deep in her head, but her mouth was big and red. After she’d
done her work in the house, she went up to her garret and sat
there with her hand under her chin and stared out the window.
There was so much bustle in Marinus’s house. Niels and Karl
and Anton were up to something in the mudroom. They’d
locked the door—no one was allowed to go out there. But they
dug a kind of well outside in the yard and lowered a huge pipe
down there; they were laying brick and pipe. Indeed, it was a
kind of modern sewer they were putting up, they explained. But
what use it could be, they wouldn’t say. That would definitely
be revealed when they were done. Tora was annoyed about all
that mess—she couldn’t get into her own mudroom. A water
main had been laid from the factory’s waterworks to the work-
ers’ houses so it couldn’t be a pump. It was mostly Anton she
interrogated, but he just bit into a fresh piece of chewing tobacco
and repeated that it was just a kind of modern sewer.

One afternoon they were finished and the door to the mudroom was thrown open. In a corner a little room had been walled up with a flowery porcelain bowl. "What in the world is that for?" Tora asked. "Well, I mean, it’s a water closet, the equal of the one that was installed in Høpner’s president’s residence." Anton had been involved in setting it up back when the president’s villa was being built, and he’d learned the art there. "But boys, a body gets totally frightened the way it rushes and roars," Tora said. "It seems to me we can certainly keep managing the old-fashioned way."

But Anton was for what was new. It had to be tried even if it cost money. Now word spread over the whole district that Marinus had gotten a water closet in the middle of the strike. They didn’t even have any on the big farms. "I’m afraid that arrogance is too blatant," Marinus said. "That kind of thing isn’t for ordinary folk." "Surely we’re created like the fancy people at both ends," Anton said. "Now you watch your mouth, little Anton," Marinus said. "There are many people who get into trouble because they don’t watch their language. That’s why the scripture says: Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." But Anton was a grown fellow and didn’t care for his father’s admonition. He bit himself off a piece of chewing tobacco, spit into the bowl, and flushed. "Goddamn, how that thing does foam," he said.

Marinus was an experienced man and knew that you prosper more in humility than in arrogance. They were on strike now and it was totally absurd to withdraw money from the savings account book and waste it on tomfoolery. "Oh, we’ll make ends meet," Niels felt. "I mean, we have to have something to do. Idleness is the worst thing." But the rest of the day laborers thought it was arrogance. "Can that really be possible?" Lars Seldomglad said. "You know that surely cost an awful lot of money. I mean, otherwise you’ve always been a sensible man, Marinus." "A fella should definitely have given the children a better upbringing," Marinus said and, ashamed, bowed his greying head. He knew very well that the business with the water
closet was too blatantly arrogant.

But of course it was always a change to visit Marinus’s house and see the miracle. The women came and were preoccupied with the new thing. They had coffee, which wasn’t as strong as usual because Tora wanted the strike pay to last. It was Magda, Line Seldomglad, Dagmar Horse, Boel-Erik’s Inger, yes, even Meta, who was to be regarded as a grocer’s wife and otherwise didn’t mix with workers’ wives. “A body should have made several more lads while there was time,” Line Seldomglad said. “Your children are truly a blessing for you.” “Yeah, this thing here is not for the rest of us common people,” Magda said. “It roars like the wild ocean when you pull the chain,” Line said. “You know what, little Tora, if it was me who had this in my house, I’d have my ass gilded. I mean, you’re sitting on shiny polished mahogany.”

The women were frisky like young girls: they pulled up their skirts and tried out what it was like to sit on the seat. Suddenly Line Seldomglad gave a squeal and it turned deathly still in the mudroom. Magda, who was trying out the seat, remained seated as stiff as a stick. Pastor Gamst was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. “Excuse me,” he said. “There was no one in the living room, but I heard voices from out here. I profusely beg your pardon.” Magda didn’t move, but remained seated where she was sitting, and the minister caught sight of her and stared in confusion. Tora quickly slammed the door to the toilet. “Wouldn’t the minister prefer to go into the living room?” she asked.

“I’ll come back another day,” Pastor Gamst said. “I’m very sorry, I really didn’t know . . . .” The minister was very red and quickly turned and left. Line Seldomglad opened the door for Magda. “Oh Lord Jesus, now I’m really wretched,” Magda wailed. “Fiddlesticks,” Line Seldomglad said. “That the minister himself had to see me sitting here,” Magda cried. “Now I’ll never again dare go to church or to the meetings because what must he think of me for fooling around with that kind of thing.” “It’s really nothing to take to heart, Magda,” Line Seldomglad said, comforting her. “I mean, he’s got to know that once in a
while all of us sit in that position in such a place.” “But it was me it had to happen to,” Magda said. “I mean, it could just as well have been one of the rest of you. But misfortune always has to strike me. That’s the way it’s been for as long as I can remember. He looked at me all the way up my thighs. Oh little Tora, you have ether drops in your house, don’t you? I’m sick, and I mean I’m very sick.”

A couple of the women took Magda by the arm and led her into Marinus and Tora’s bedroom. They put her on the bed and Olga ran over to Cilius to get some ether drops. They were poured out into a spoon and after Magda had taken them, she calmed down a little. “Still and all it’s odd that a minister comes tearing along like that,” she said. “I mean, he might have knocked on the door before he came out into the mudroom.” “But of course the door to the kitchen was open,” Olga said. “Well, then he didn’t need to be standing there for so long,” Magda said. “But maybe that was precisely his intention—clergymen are surely just like other menfolk. It seems to me you’re putting on weight, little Olga. You’re definitely thriving on your mother’s cooking.”

But actually Olga wasn’t thriving whatever else was the matter with her. She’d surely had her unhappy love-affair troubles on Funen, and when she talked about looking for a new position, Tora pooh-poohed it. Even though there was no abundance in the house now during the strike, Tora didn’t care to send her daughter out into the world before she’d regained her cheerful disposition.

Little-Laurids, Marinus’s youngest, had become assistant to Bregentved, who drove out into the heath to deal in fish. As they struggled along the sandy roads, Bregentved’s gift of gab rarely failed. He initiated Little-Laurids into his plans. In the long run it was a humble life for an enterprising man to deal in fish. And Bregentved had tried the real estate business: he’d earned good money and lost it again, and now he wanted to try a factory. “Is it going to be next to the factory we have?” Little-Laurids asked. In any case it wouldn’t be far from there, Bregentved informed him, but it really wasn’t a cement factory Bregentved wanted to
establish—that surpassed his powers. No, he was going to equip a concrete block plant. The cement was at hand and there was plenty of sand in the localities here. Bregentved already had his eye on a suitable sand pit.

Little-Laurids was skeptical. “Where are you going to get the money from to get this organized?” he asked, but Bregentved had taken that into account too. Banks and savings banks would be more than happy to lend their money—after all, that’s what they lived on. “So you’ll be president just like Høpner?” Little-Laurids asked. “Of course I will,” Bregentved said. “An egg is an egg no matter whether it’s big or small.” “And lice also lay eggs,” Little-Laurids said. “But do you think you can cast cement with your bad hand?” “Oh, it’ll be all right; I’ve been able to perform all my other work with it,” Bregentved said.

Bregentved had two fingers on one hand that had grown together and they’d always filled Little-Laurids with profound wonderment. “Has your hand always been that way ever since you were born, Bregentved?” he asked. Yes indeed it had, Bregentved nodded. “How can something like that happen?” Little-Laurids asked. “I’ll tell you,” Bregentved said. “Degeneration is what they call it. It’s something the aristocrats have. That’s because new blood didn’t get into the stock.” And now Bregentved confided to him the deep secret that his grandmother had been a servant girl in a castle called Bregentved on Zealand, and so everyone could draw his own conclusions. “I’m only a fish dealer,” Bregentved said. “But who knows, maybe I should’ve been a count and driven in a carriage and four.” And Laurids looked with respect at Bregentved’s deformed hand. “But the womenfolk don’t like it,” Bregentved said. “I always have to hide that hand when I caress them.”

Bregentved had rented a room at Povl Bøgh’s, who had an extra room after Louise’s death. Povl Bøgh was bent from arthritis; he couldn’t work any more, but lived on his old-age assistance. When it was warm in the evening, he’d sit for hours on a bench in front of the house. Often someone would stop to talk to him, but Povl Bøgh had only one thing to talk about: how much he’d toiled. Thirty years ago things were just crazy with
the harvest: it rained and rained, and when the weather finally made it time to harvest, they had to work five days nonstop. But that was before people thought of striking; yes, indeed, back then people knew how to use their hands. Povl Bøgh’s face was moved when he recalled the hard work, the tough life.

The new people, who’d moved here from distant areas, were no concern of his. But when Black Anders came and sat with him on the bench, Povl Bøgh talked about days of old. “We got up at daybreak and toiled till late in the evening,” he said. “And the first years I was married many was the time we had nothing but horse grease to spread on our bread. But we were allowed to get some work done and people thrive on that. I don’t know what good labor unions and socialism and strikes are. I really don’t like it.”

A young girl stopped near the bench where the two men were sitting. She was waiting for someone and Povl Bøgh asked her whose daughter she might be. It was Andrea, Kresten Bos- sen’s oldest girl, a slim, pretty lass of sixteen. “I certainly know him,” Povl Bøgh said. “He’s the one who bought Marinus’s farm and sold it again to the factory. You’re a pretty little girl. Now mind you, don’t ever let yourself be seduced.” But Black Anders quietly added: “Of course that’ll happen some day.”

Strike assistance was paid out at the inn, and here Cilius gave out information. There was no sign that the employers would give in, but with time they’d probably wise up. “Every hour the factory stands still costs them money,” Cilius said. “They have to pay interest and taxes and they’re getting no return on their money. We just need to hold out, boys. Those people also wrote us that from over there.” The big heavy stoker Børjesen nodded: you’re not kidding. Cilius talked and paid out money and gave good advice in all directions. “We just have to stay away from the schnapps and then the money will easily last,” he said. “We don’t need coffee every day either: we drank a brew of roasted rye before. Hold your heads high, fellows, we’ll certainly get the upper hand.”

Man after man got a word of encouragement from Cilius and several crowns in his pocket for food for wife and children. Ci-
lius kept his army together and wrote reports to Copenhagen. The permanent salaried employees had placed new lining in the rotary kilns: they couldn’t be forbidden to do that. And Cilius had permitted one man to remain at work—that was Andres, who took care of the factory’s horses. The animals shouldn’t have to suffer hardship. We’re in good spirits and send greetings in the struggle for socialism. Cilius Andersen, chairman of Alslev local. That was written in Cilius’s rough, stiff handwriting and wasn’t always easy to decipher. When Cilius sat at his desk with his glasses on and wrote a report, Frederikke went easy with the doors and shushed Little-Jep.

People got their money paid out at the inn, but nobody indulged in schnapps or beer. They went home with the few crowns in their pocket—they had to last. “Take care of the children first,” Cilius said, and his words were listened to.
Early summer was approaching now and work hadn’t started up. The strike had been going on for six weeks and there was still no prospect of its ending. The rich employers presumably didn’t calculate the losses they were suffering by letting the factory stand idle, but in Alslev it was noticeable that no wages were being paid out. Konrad no longer smiled when customers came into the shop because most of them had to have credit. The strike pay had been reduced and those who had many mouths to feed had to ask Konrad to write it in the book until work started up again. Skifter went around with a worried look and many times a day he looked through the account books. The numbers grew and grew, and how would the large debit items ever be paid?

“This will never do, little Konrad,” Skifter said. “You’ll truly be obliged to say stop.” “That’s not so easy,” Konrad felt. “But if things keep up this way, we’ll go bankrupt,” Skifter said. “I mean, almost no cash is coming in because once they discover they can get the merchandise by putting it on their account, they won’t pay.” “But all they have is their strike pay,” Konrad said. “I can understand that you think we should pay for their strike,” Skifter said. “I wish everybody well, but why can’t they be content with their good wages? Now they’re getting into debt and destitution and can’t pay what they have to.”

Konrad disregarded that, but every day Skifter started all over again. Meta sided with her father. It was unreasonable for them to bankrupt themselves by giving too much credit. And Skifter began dropping hints that, after all, he was the one who actually owned the business, even if to some extent he’d let Konrad take the helm.

“Otherwise I’ve done a good job driving the business forward from the little shop it once was,” Konrad said, offended. “Of course many people have come to town,” Skifter said. “And I’m really not totally certain that they moved here to do business
with you. I mean, there’s never been a shop that could last if a fella doesn’t get money for his goods.” Konrad didn’t reply. But next time Skifter started talking about these things again, Konrad got angry. “I mean, the shop is yours and you can operate it the way you want,” he said. “Now don’t make such a fuss,” Skifter said. “But you can’t forget that I have the experience.” “Then for the future you’ll be the one who’ll attend to the customers,” Konrad said. “Then you can decide yourself who you’ll give credit to.”

Konrad kept to the back of the shop and the storeroom, while Skifter dealt with the customers. But Konrad kept nearby when people came into the shop. He surely wanted to see whether Skifter would let anyone leave without goods because they didn’t have money in their pocket to pay with. Nothing happened the first day, although there were about a dozen workers who asked to have the goods put on their account. But the next morning Cilius entered and wanted flour and meal and sugar and chewing tobacco. Skifter put the goods on the counter. You’ll put them on my account?” Cilius said.

Skifter’s face became deeply troubled and he scratched his neck. “Cilius, I hardly know if I can keep doing it,” he said. “I mean you’ve built up a pretty big account.” “I’ve sure done that before,” Cilius said. “I’d never deny that,” Skifter admitted. “But you have to remember we can’t know when this strike here will be over, and if it continues, how will you ever get this debt paid?” “That’s my business,” Cilius said. “I’ve never owed anything, neither money nor a beating.” “No, you’ve always been lucky,” Skifter said. “But earthly luck is a fragile thing and it’s rare that it lasts.”

Cilius stood for a while and thought it over while Skifter looked past him through the shop window out onto the road. “So I assume it’s not just me you’re denying credit?” Cilius asked. “No, I’ll be forced to cut it back across the board,” Skifter said. “I myself have obligations I have to meet and how can I do that if no money comes into the cash register? I can’t pay bills and trade charges with a song and a dance.” “You know, we have house and home, most of us,” Cilius said. “And there
shouldn’t be any risk in giving us an extension.” “I can’t extend myself any further, Cilius,” Skifter said. “It also seems to me there’s got to be an end to this strike soon. How long are you people going keep it up?”

Cilius didn’t answer; he turned and left. The goods remained lying on the counter. Konrad had heard the conversation from the back of the shop; now he went over to his father-in-law. “Cilius really got mad,” he said. “I don’t care,” Skifter said. “He’ll get over it.” “He’s worst when he doesn’t flare up,” Konrad said. “But he’ll certainly remember it. Yeah, of course, it’s your grocery store and you can do whatever you want. But it really wasn’t smart to begin with him.” “The rest of them will definitely get the same answer,” Skifter said. “Nobody can possibly expect us to keep doing business till we become destitute.”

Word got round town that Skifter had shut off the credit and it was a bad blow. Line Seldomglad visited Konrad and Meta in the evening and asked whether what she’d been told was true. Yes, it was true all right. “We can’t keep it up,” Meta said. “It’s a lot of money we’ve got outstanding.” “You know, I thought your father was a prosperous man,” Line said. “I don’t know anything about it,” Meta said. “But of course it may be that he doesn’t care to get rid of it all.” “You know, he earned a lot off of us for many years,” Line said. “His wares were never cheap. I really didn’t regard you as the kind of people who’d deny us support.”

You couldn’t easily upset Line Seldomglad, but now she was angry. “But of course you people have become big shots, you hang around with the farmers and like to ignore the rest of us. And it’s your fault, Meta, because Konrad’s never been arrogant.” “But I mean it’s neither Konrad nor me that decides,” Meta said. “It wouldn’t have happened if I’d decided,” Konrad said. “I’ve been standing in the shop so long I certainly know who’ll pay and who won’t.”

Line Seldomglad wouldn’t have coffee. “We’ve almost weaned ourselves of that drink,” she said. “And now we surely won’t be having it until the strike is over. No, drink your coffee yourselves.” She hardly looked over where the twins were. “I’d
never expected that,” she said. “But now we’re going to be dis­
graced by our children.” “It’s strange that you’re making such a fuss,” Meta said. “No, fancy people just can’t understand that ordinary folks also have some honor,” Line said.

Konrad spoke to Skifter again, but the grocer stuck to his guns. For the future, credit would be curtailed—otherwise he’d end up destitute. “But your parents can have what they need,” Skifter said. “They won’t accept it,” Konrad said. “They don’t want to be made any better off than the others. But after all this, there’s probably nothing else for me to do but begin on the fjord.” “I mean, there’s a real need for you in the shop,” Skifter said. But Konrad wanted to fish again. Now there wouldn’t be much business, he felt, and Skifter could easily manage alone.

Cilius called a meeting at the inn and made a report. If they could no longer get groceries on credit, they’d have to manage without groceries. And there was no doubt either that they could. Cilius explained how little people needed in a pinch. “First we take care of the children,” Cilius said. “The rest of us will certainly manage. They’re writing from Copenhagen now that there are good prospects if we just hold out a little while yet. And we can’t let them say we weren’t able to hold out just as long as the others.” Other speakers agreed with him. The strike had to be carried out—they’d hold out. The workers had become skinny: just looking at them you could see they weren’t getting as nourishing food as they were accustomed to. “And we have to remember who helped and who opposed us,” Cilius said. “The day will certainly come when we can express gratitude for both good and bad.” People left the meeting in silence. There weren’t many who asked for credit at Skifter’s.

Kresten Bossen hadn’t been at the meeting. He didn’t get involved with the rest of them, but mostly sat at home and read the Bible. Once in a while Ida chased him out to work in the garden, but the work progressed slowly for Kresten Bossen. He became lost in thought over the manure fork and the rake. “It doesn’t look as though we’re going to have our garden sown this year,” Ida said, but Kresten didn’t hear her. A moment later he was again sitting by his Bible. It would also happen that he’d get up
in the night and sit down to read although they couldn’t afford to waste the expensive kerosene. But Ida’s scolding didn’t help.

Pastor Gamst was sitting in his study when Ida came one afternoon and wanted to talk to the minister. “I’d urgently beg the minister to come with me: there’s something all wrong with Kresten,” she said out of breath. “What’s going on,” the minister asked. “He’s lost his mind,” Ida said and began to cry. “He’s never been totally right in his head, but he’s surely become totally unhinged since the strike began. I can’t stand it any more. Now he’s been out in the heath and caught two vipers, which he’s sitting and playing with.” “What does he want with vipers?” the minister asked, astonished. “Yeah, don’t ask me,” Ida said. “I’m at the end of my tether. I want to get divorced from that crazy man.”

The minister took his hat and cane and went with Ida to bring Kresten to reason. When they got to the house, Kresten Bossen was sitting peacefully in the living room reading. “Hello, Kresten Bossen,” the minister said. “It’s your wife who fetched me. She says you caught a couple of vipers. What are you going to do with the vipers, Kresten Bossen?” “I want to test whether I’m a Christian man,” Kresten said and looked up from his book.

It was plain that Kresten was possessed by a wild impulse and Pastor Gamst said: “You shouldn’t read so much, all that reading isn’t doing you any good.” Kresten looked broodingly at him. “The procurator Festus used roughly the same words to the holy apostle Paul: And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad!” “But I mean, after all, you’re no Paul,” the minister said. “No,” Kresten Bossen said. “But it’s a human being’s duty to work day and night toward his own sanctification.”

There was a preoccupied expression on Kresten Bossen’s face, and Ida stole a glance at him as if she were afraid. But the minister’s presence gave her courage. “I’d never object in the least to your sanctifying yourself,” she said. “But the garden has scarcely been put in order even though it’s almost summer, and
the house is so dilapidated that it’s probably going to fall over on our heads. It seems to me you’re obligated to think about your family.” “Little Ida, the scripture says: one thing is needful,” Kresten Bossen said gently.

“But what about the vipers, Kresten Bossen?” the minister interrupted. “The minister knows what it says in Mark the evangelist chapter sixteen,” Kresten Bossen said. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” “But surely you’re not going to let yourself be bitten by the vipers, are you?” Ida shouted. “Yes I am,” Kresten Bossen replied. “Because the important thing for the cause of salvation is to know whether somebody believes. Right before in Mark chapter sixteen our savior says: ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.’ And now I’m going to do a test on myself according to the words of our lord Jesus Christ.”

Ida looked at Pastor Gamst; now it was plain to everyone that Kresten had read himself out of his mind. “Where do you have the vipers?” the minister asked. “I’ve got them in a box,” Kresten Bossen said. “They can’t escape and I put it away from the children.” Pastor Gamst thought it over. What was he going to do with this stupid man? He felt Ida’s gaze on him and knew that she expected him to bring her husband to reason. “Kresten Bossen, it’s tempting God,” he said. But Kresten Bossen shook his head: he was acquainted with the words of the scripture and knew better.

“It’s not tempting the Lord,” he said. “You know that perfectly well—otherwise you couldn’t be a minister. I’m also not doing it to be haughty on account of my faith. I just want to be convinced that my faith is as the Lord demands of me. If with full confidence in my savior I can stick out my hand and let it be bitten by a viper, then it won’t injure me and my faith is as it should be. It’s not the Lord, but myself I’m testing.” “But that word in Mark has to be taken with reservations,” the minister
said. “We have to remember that Mark was a simple man and lived in times that were superstitious and in many ways be­nighted. That passage has to be taken in a spiritual sense, Kresten Bossen. We must never forget that our lord Jesus, in order to be understood in the time he lived in, had to use the language of the time.”

Kresten Bossen smiled and it struck the minister that it was the first time he’d seen a smile on his face. You could also see that Kresten’s features were not accustomed to smiling. It turned into a crooked and sick grimace; his face refused to come out of its heavy folds.

“It’s strange to hear these words from a minister,” he said.

“You mustn’t be self-righteous and feel that your view is the only conceivable one,” the minister said.

“No, but I have to believe every jot written in the Lord’s gospel,” Kresten Bossen said, and his otherwise so cautious voice began to screech. “I have to believe every word according to its obvious meaning; I’m not permitted to reinterpret it as I please. If the scripture says we must believe, then we must believe and not like the doubting Thomas put our finger in Christ’s stigmata. I’ve tried in accordance with my slight abilities to do God’s works, but it’s faith and only faith that saves, and now I’m going to see whether I have faith like a grain of mustard seed.”

“We won’t find peace of mind by continuing to brood and brood,” the minister said. “I advise you to follow your wife Ida’s advice. Go out into your garden—take care of the day’s work. The only thing God expects of us is that with full confidence we place our fate in his hands.”

Ida stood up straight and cried, and the two smallest ones had come in and hid in her skirts. There was a heavy, stuffy atmosphere in the little living room and the minister felt an intense urge to get outside into the fresh air.

“Now you’re going to go out and kill the vipers,” the minister said authoritatively. “What you’re planning isn’t God’s, but the devil’s work. And then look after your house as is first and foremost your duty.”

The two children burst into tears and Kresten Bossen bent
down and took the younger one in his arms. “Since you’re so versed in the scripture, surely you’ve also read Luke chapter eighteen,” the minister said. “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. We don’t gain the kingdom of God by brooding and speculating, but by abandoning ourselves to God’s will, like the child who places his hand in his father’s. And you should know that all this reading in the scripture is arrogance. One must live, not read, one’s way close to God. One shouldn’t study the scripture the way an attorney reads his lawbook, and if the Lord wants to test our faith, he will himself determine which way that has to happen. But in your heart of hearts, underneath all your humbleness, you’re an opinionated know-it-all, Kresten Bossen.”

“May the Lord have mercy on me, what is the minister saying,” Kresten said, terrified. “You want to be better than others, you want to have, so to speak, God’s signature that your faith is as it should be,” the minister said. “You’re arrogant about your fear of God the way a rich man is about his money. You’re humble the same way a millionaire can be content with little. But that’s not fear of God. Now I’m speaking to you as the servant of the Lord, Kresten Bossen, and I’m enjoining you to abandon your blasphemous idea. Go out and kill your vermin. Have you understood me?”

“Yes,” Kresten Bossen mumbled, and the minister quickly took his leave. He slowly walked homeward toward Alslev in the mild spring weather. It had recently rained and the air was scented and heavy with growth. Tadpoles were quivering about in a water hole. Pastor Gamst stood still and looked down into the green deep. He smiled. Oh, these childish scruples, this folk-theology, which is nourished by misty scriptural passages. He sat in the warm spring and was amused by his own authority. A boy came scurrying toward him and he recognized Kresten Bossen’s youngest. The boy stopped, out of breath, where the minister was sitting. “I was told to ask the minister to come back,” he said. “Father was bitten by the viper.”

So the semi-lunatic had tested his Christian faith anyway!
Pastor Gamst got up and ran back to Bossen’s house. Ida was standing at the door crying. “I knew it would end in disaster,” she said. “He’s gotten out of hand. I’d rather be married to a heathen than keep putting up with this stuff here.” The minister walked by her into the living room. Kresten Bossen was sitting there. “You did it anyway?” the minister asked. “No, but one of them managed to get a tooth into my leg as I was going to kill it,” Kresten Bossen said.

The minister examined the leg: there were a couple of small pricks and the flesh had already begun to swell up. “Oh, dear me,” Kresten Bossen groaned. “Do you think I’ll escape with my life?” The minister took out his pocket knife, struck a match and singed the blade and drove the knife into the wounded leg. Bossen screamed, but the minister knelt and sucked the wound out. After it had been done, he sent Ida for a cord and tied the leg. And Andrea, the oldest daughter, was sent to the grocer for a bottle of cognac. In the meantime Kresten Bossen sat and moaned: “Oh, Jesus have mercy on me.”

Pastor Gamst got him into bed and poured cognac into a beer glass. “Drink,” he ordered. “I’ve never tasted schnapps in my mouth,” Kresten Bossen said. “Drink,” the minister repeated,” and Kresten Bossen emptied the glass. Now the sweat stood on his forehead. “So I got proof that my faith wasn’t strong enough,” he said. “You got punished because you tempted the Almighty,” the minister said. “You wanted to be bitten by the viper and God let it bite you. Now you know that the Lord hasn’t designated you a Paul, who can shake off a poisonous snake the way the rest of us can a caterpillar. Remember the words, Kresten Bossen: Down to earth, down to earth, that’s where life has summoned you.”

Pastor Gamst went home and Kresten Bossen lay and stared straight ahead. His leg thumped and ached—he wondered whether he was going to die now. He called Ida and she poured another glass to the top with cognac. “I’m burning all the way down into my bones,” he said. “I don’t understand—people drink this kind of stuff for enjoyment. But we’re allowed to when our health is at stake. Saint Paul writes in his epistle to
Timothy: Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities. It seems to me too right away there’s relief in my leg. We mustn’t forget either, Ida, that our Lord transformed water into wine when he was invited to a wedding in Canaan.”

Kresten Bossen had yet another and it did him well. He no longer felt the pains in his leg and soon fell asleep. The leg was black and swollen for another couple of days and yet another bottle of cognac was sent for. Then Kresten Bossen was once again on his feet, but Ida had hidden away the Bible. Kresten asked for it, but Ida said: “You certainly heard what the minister said, that you overdid your reading. We have to take everything in moderation, even God’s word. There’s no use in your wanting to be as book-learned as a clergyman. You learned from what happened, didn’t you? And thank God on your knees that your foolishness didn’t get out to people. Then we would’ve been ridiculed by the whole parish.”

Kresten Bossen bowed his head. The minister had said that in his heart of hearts he was an opinionated know-it-all who wanted to be better than others. And even though Kresten Bossen didn’t have his Bible, he mumbled to himself the parable about the Pharisee who went up to the sanctuary to pray. He stood and prayed to himself this way: God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I tithe all my income. No, Kresten Bossen understood that there was a long way to go yet before he received God’s spirit.
It wasn’t easy for Tora to have all the menfolk in the house. They didn’t know what to do. After all, they couldn’t sit and play cards all day long, and nothing comes of idleness. Tora didn’t like it when she realized that Niels was killing time at Boel-Erik’s house. It wouldn’t have mattered if Boel-Erik had been home, but he was out on his moorland plot from early in the morning till late in the evening. The whole thing had to be plowed up and trenched now during the strike.

“It doesn’t seem to me you should be hanging out at Inger’s all day,” Tora said. “I don’t respect her. Erik is much too good a man for her.” But Niels explained that, after all, he had to be somewhere and surely nobody would be harmed if he stuck his head in once in a while and chatted with Inger, who was lonely, while her husband was in the heath. “Watch out, Niels,” said Laurids, who was sitting in the living room smoking his short pipe. “All of us share the same weakness, and the important thing is to beware in time.” Tora went out into the kitchen and Laurids explained to his nephew that you had to deal cautiously with womenfolk. “I could have been a well-to-do man if womenfolk didn’t exist,” he said. “I hate to do them an injustice, but it seems to me their greatest pleasure is to lure us into their snares. Watch out that the same thing doesn’t happen to you that happened to me. The nasty witch doesn’t exist who wasn’t able to get me into bed.”

Niels didn’t feel there was anything to worry about. Laurids was in a bad mood during the strike. He’d worked his whole life and he couldn’t take being idle very well. And to boot he couldn’t even visit Minna. Her husband, of course, was home now and there wasn’t any place ready for him in her bed as there was when her husband went to work.

Laurids was out in the heath to see how things were progressing with Boel-Erik’s farming. Erik had gotten a big piece of heath broken up, and even if it wasn’t the best soil, surely po-
tatoes could always grow. Erik had planted potatoes on an acre of land, and now he was trenching a piece of acidic, peaty soil that could become a pretty meadow. He explained in detail what the whole thing was going to be like. The buildings would be there once he got money to build with. Laurids sucked on his pipe. “You should’ve gone to America in time—you could’ve gotten good land there,” he said. “I’m satisfied with this here,” Boel-Erik said. “It can turn into a pretty little property if a fella will just put some work into it.” Boel-Erik had flung off his jacket and shirt and the sweat moistened his back with its tough muscles, while he toiled in the heavy, sticky earth. “I can easily have a go at it with the hoe,” Laurids said, and then he was at work too.

In the evening Laurids came home tired and was in a better mood than he usually was. “It does me good to get the lazy sweat out,” he said. “If you give me a couple of slices of bread to take along in the morning, Tora, I’ll go out to Boel-Erik and give him a hand.” And early next morning Laurids bicycled out into the heath. He’d gotten an idea. If Erik was going to build anyway, he could just as well begin right away building a well. Laurids had done every kind of work over there in America; it was a snap for him to provide water for Boel-Erik.

And after several evenings of hearing Laurids tell what they’d accomplished, Marinus got it into his head one morning to bicycle with him. Marinus wouldn’t ordinarily have been familiar with a modern vehicle like a bicycle. They hadn’t known about that kind of thing in his youth, but he did know how to ride the animal—his sons had taught him that. Marinus borrowed Niels’s bicycle and struggled behind Laurids along the sandy heath road. Boel-Erik had already arrived and he showed Marinus his property and where the stable and the dwelling house would be located. Marinus admitted that it might become a nice little farm. And if in the beginning Boel-Erik would just be content with little, it would be an easy matter after a while for him to get cattle and machines. Oh boy, if Marinus had been younger, he’d really have done the same.

Laurids had reached a ways down into the well and he was
bracing it. The loose sand easily gave way, and Laurids was not
the man to deal rashly with his life. While he was working with
beams and rope, which he’d borrowed at one of the moorland
farms, he cursed in American English, and then you knew he felt
well. “Now how can you know there’s water?” Marinus asked.
Of course, Laurids had found the vein of water with a divining
rod; that was an art he understood. And the water wasn’t far
down either, because the rod had downright wriggled about in
his hand. “I’m not so sure you’ll find water here,” Marinus said.
“And that’s dangerous work when you get farther down—the
whole thing can slip real easy.”

But Laurids didn’t accept good advice. Water had to be
found even if he had to go to the center of the earth. Marinus
didn’t like it, but he did make up his mind to give his brother a
hand, and if the well collapsed, it would also be better if people
were around who could dig Laurids-American out. And while
Laurids stood at the bottom of the deep hole in the ground, Ma­
rinus hoisted the dirt up. Many times a day they inspected the
supports—they weren’t imprudent men.

And Marinus had to attest that it was nice to get working
again. During the long strike all his limbs had positively hurt
with longing to get cracking again. Marinus had toiled for as
long as he could remember, and he wasn’t made to walk with his
hands in his pockets and do nothing. “I scarcely understand how
they can bring themselves to say work is a curse,” he said. “It al­
most seems to me it’s the greatest pleasure there is.” “That’s for
sure,” Laurids said from the depth of the well. “And while
you’re working, you’re not sinning.”

From day to day the well went deeper and deeper; there was
still no water. Lars Seldomglad was out to view the well and
spat down into the dark deep. “There’ll never be more water in
there than you yourselves can piss,” he said, and Laurids from
America became furious and cursed as never before. “You’re
digging yourselves down into glowing hell,” Lars Seldomglad
said. “But the way you can curse, you’ll be going there anyway
some time.” Laurids again told about the divining rod, which
had writhed in his hand like an eel. And it was a well-known
fact that the rod was never wrong. "There's water here," Laurids said. "And it will turn up no matter how far down we have to go." And Laurids once again climbed down into the deep with boards and poles to brace the well.

Would the strike never stop? Høpner took a walk through town: his face was sullen and he didn't greet anyone. There was probably not much money in the strike fund. The benefits had been reduced again. Cilius called the workers together at the inn and explained that now it was a matter of one final tug. Cilius had a piece of paper in his hand which said how much the strike was costing the employers per week. They were colossal sums, but the crazy thing was of course that these people had money like dirt, and what did the workers have? They hardly had that much that they could get their fill on rye bread and margarine.

"But we've got the fighting spirit," Cilius said. "We can keep striking for as long as it's necessary. And we're not used to anything better than rye bread and margarine anyway." Cilius frowned and smashed his fist on the table. He looked like an ascetic, though everyone knew he'd drunk his farm away and lived like a spendthrift.

One of the workers from out in the heath, Jens Glud, stood up and asked to speak. "I'm not used to speaking and you folks'll have to excuse me." "Just speak your mind," Cilius said. "It's what you have to say that matters." And the tall man, who was stooped from toil, gave his opinion that it was wisest to stop in time. "It seems to me we should try to come to terms with them even if we don't get any more in daily wages," he said. "I mean, we can't get around the fact that they're the big shots and we're the little people. And before we were able to exist on the wage we got at the factory and doubtless we can do it again. It seems to me the strike should be over with." Jens Glud stood a bit as if there were more he wanted to say, then he popped down from the dais. Some down in the hall shouted: "That's honest enough. It can't go on." But then Cilius was on the dais once again, and now he'd forgotten that he was the union chairman and was supposed to take the parliamentary road.

Suddenly Cilius had become a different man, a ruffian, a
navvy. His red hair bristled, his eyes were red with rage. He stood for a bit at the lectern snorting and couldn’t catch his breath because he was agitated. His big hands, clenched, rested on the lectern, and they twitched as if he felt like hitting somebody or something.

“Now, dammit, I’m going to tell you, Jens Glud, you should change your name to Jens Klud,” Cilius said. “You’re an old woman and can’t be regarded as a real man. What were you before you became a cement worker? A miserable day laborer every farmer could kick around. But I took to the road, I’ve been a navvy, and I’ve been in a strike before. I can also become a navvy again. And if the rest of you feel the same way the milk-sop there does and want to come to heel, then I’ll take to the road. We’d agreed we were going to hold out and stand shoulder to shoulder, and if you have a different opinion now, then I don’t care about you.” “Hear! Hear!” they shouted down in the hall. Cilius noticed that his supporters were in the majority and he became calmer. “We’re not old women, are we?” he asked. “You don’t want people to say, do you, that it was us here in Alslev who gave in first? No, we’ll show them that we can strike for as long as necessary. We haven’t lost yet and we’ll certainly get the upper hand. And now listen to what they’ve written from the central executive committee.”

Cilius put his glasses on his nose and once again he was the sober-minded union man. Look, this is what they wrote from the central executive committee. There was every prospect that the employers would give in before long. The important thing was just to hold out a little bit yet. That’s what the people wrote who were in the know and had the main responsibility, and presumably Jens Glud didn’t think he could shake that. Cilius pushed his glasses up onto his forehead and looked out over the meeting. “And if there’s no one else who wants to speak, we’ll adjourn the meeting,” he said.

While the hall was emptying, Cilius called Jens Glud into a little room behind the taproom. “I just want to have a word with you,” he said. “If you ever talk such nonsense again, you’ll also get to pay the price.” And Cilius gave his critic a couple of re-
sounding boxes on his ear.

When the men left the inn and had gotten their benefit paid out, it happened that a band of them strolled out to the cliff and stared down at the dead factory. It was very quiet, only the lark’s song could be heard, and a strip of smoke wreathed from the chimney of the president’s villa. A couple of small cement tubs lay in the harbor. The crews had presumably gone ashore. Suddenly the weather had turned warm and out in the northwest a thunderstorm was rumbling. “It’s following the fjord,” Jens Horse said. “It can’t be long before it’ll be over us. We need a decent downpour, too.” The thunder broke out and flashes of lightning blazed under the dark sky. The men had sought shelter in a work shed now that the storm was directly overhead. A bolt of lightning made everything swim before their eyes: it had a strange metallic crack to it, and the thunder came rumbling right after it. It produced a booming echo under the hills. “It struck something,” Lars Seldomglad said and went out to see. “Yes, it’s Kresten Bossen’s farm that’s burning.” The others came out to look. The straw roof on Kresten Bossen’s house stood in flames.

Before the rain-soaked men reached the house, the fire had such a firm grip that it couldn’t be put out. Heavy, suffocating clouds of smoke drifted along the ground from the wet roof. The thundershowers had drifted over, and out over the fjord a huge, glittering rainbow hung from one shore to the other. A little motor-schooner came gliding slowly through it as if through a gate to paradise. The air was fresh and spicy, and the house’s timber calmly crackled like a huge bonfire.

People stood calmly and watched it burn. Everything living had been saved, but Kresten Bossen had been struck when the lightning touched down. He had a red stripe down across his chest and had fallen down lifeless. But Ida and the children had dragged him out and now he was lying at the neighboring farm and the doctor was sent for.

The fire engine from Alslev came. The fire warden ordered men to the pump handles and a hose was laid down into the well. It took time before the preparations were completed, but finally
a thin stream of water did hiss into the fire. “That’s not going to be a big help,” Lars Seldomglad said. “No, but it has to be done,” the fire warden said. “The law says we have to try to put it out.”

The doctor had been there and it turned out that Kresten Bos­sen hadn’t been killed by lightning. He was a little burned and the doctor gave him an injection. Ida sat by the bed and cried with her children around her. All their furniture had been burned; they hadn’t managed to save anything. How would they now get a roof over their heads and new household utensils? She thought about the beautiful plush furniture in the parlor which had been her pride. Now when would Ida ever again get a living room with plush furniture? Now they were to be regarded as nothing but homeless tramps.

Good friends came to see Kresten Bossen and one day the minister came and sat down by his bed. “That was a tragic ac­cident,” he said. “Yes, so I was struck by the Lord’s wrath,” Kresten Bossen said. The minister looked at him in wonder­ment, and Kresten Bossen explained that God had struck him with his thunderbolt on account of his sins. Hadn’t Kresten Bos­sen tempted the Lord and hadn’t he wanted to play with snakes. Hadn’t he believed himself to be so pious that the lizards’ venom wouldn’t harm him? Hadn’t he put himself on an equal footing with the Lord’s own apostles?

“But please be reasonable, Kresten Bossen,” the minister said. “You can’t possibly mean that the Lord let the storm rage for your sake?” “Yet not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the will of the Lord,” Kresten Bossen said. “There shall not one hair of a person’s head fall to the ground without God’s willing it. I offended grievously and I got to feel the Lord’s scourge. Now I’m lying here and perhaps will never become a real person again. But I want to praise and extol the Almighty, hallelujah, the Lord’s power is great.” There was no use in the minister’s explaining that the elements in their dominion followed the laws that had been fixed by God. Didn’t the Lord rule over gale-wind and lightning and storm? Kresten Bossen asked. Why, then, did people pray in church for tolerable harvest weath-
er, and why did shipwrecked men implore the Lord to calm down the wild gale? But it wasn’t intended that Kresten Bossen should long suffer for his transgression. After a week had passed, he was up again and he rented part of a house in Alslev for himself and his family.

During the strike Thomas Trilling’s wife Matilde came home from the sanatorium. She’d become fat and pale and had put up her hair in a different way. She looked like a city woman and had also acquired a prim way of speaking among the sanatorium’s patients. Black Anders was concerned: how was Thomas Trilling going to provide her the food she needed for her illness? Matilde wasn’t permitted to lose weight; she was supposed to be spared work and have milk and butter and thick cream. But Matilde didn’t care much for food; she nibbled at what her father and husband put in front of her and talked about the people she’d been together with at the sanatorium. There were both merchants’ daughters and ministers’ sons, but none could play the sanatorium’s piano like Matilde.

Thomas Trilling went to see the chairman of the assistance fund to get money for nourishing food for Matilde. But it wasn’t to be had. As long as they were striking, the assistance fund was closed. “But go to the poor-law fund: they probably won’t deny you a little there,” the chairman said. “Surely you can also sell your piano. Such a thing costs a lot of money, and it’s a luxury for people who’re applying for public assistance.” Thomas went home. “Don’t you think we should sell the piano, Matilde?” he asked. “It’s the best thing I’ve ever owned, and if we sell it, I’ll never get one again,” Matilde said. “I won’t care about living if you people take the piano.”

Thomas cut back on his own food so Matilde could get nourishing food, and anyway he realized that she was getting too little. Black Anders had moved over to his daughter and son-in-law’s—it always saved a little to be able to have one household. Most of the day Black Anders sat in his boat in the fjord. But Matilde didn’t like fish. It nauseated her to eat the flounder and codlings that Black Anders brought home. “But it doesn’t matter,” Matilde said. “Because if I get sick, I’ll go back to the san-
atorium.” And Matilde became lost in remembrances of the wonderful people she’d been together with. They’d read books together and taken long walks, and Matilde wrote letters to many of them. But the stamps cost money.

Matilde lost weight. Her flesh had come easily and it would probably go away easily. Black Anders and Thomas Trilling didn’t talk about it, but they both noticed it. One day Black Anders was cleaning his rifle. “What are you going to do with the gun?” Thomas said. “You know that all game is protected—it’ll never do for you to be shooting.” “I’ve never asked permission when we lacked food in the house,” Black Anders said. “I learned from my father that the game in the field belongs to the one who takes it, and I’m sticking to that doctrine.”

In the evening Black Anders rowed out to spear eel. But he had the rifle along in the boat. The next morning when Thomas Trilling got up, he found his father-in-law in the mudroom where he was flaying an animal. “It’s a billy goat,” Black Anders said, “and it’s very fat. I was out most of the night picking up its scent.” Matilde came out. “But where did that animal come from?” she asked. “I thought we needed a roast in the pot, Matilde,” Black Anders said. “I don’t think the lord of the manor over there will miss it.” “But you know it’s not legal,” Matilde said. Black Anders let go of the bloody hide and looked at her. But Matilde quietly began crying. What would they say at the sanatorium if they knew that her father went poaching and to boot during closed season? “I mean I just wanted your best, Matilde,” Black Anders said. “I won’t eat that animal,” Matilde cried. “We have to bury it—I’ll get sick if I put it in my mouth.”

Black Anders didn’t understand his daughter since she’d been at the sanatorium and gotten to know fancy people. While she was in his house, she’d certainly been able to eat the game he brought home, even if he hadn’t come by it legally. But the good meat couldn’t go to waste, and Black Anders cut up the animal and gave it away to the neighbors. Line Seldomglad clapped her hands. “My, that was a nice roast you got on your eel fork, Anders,” she said. “Yeah, it jumped up into the dinghy to me and I didn’t have the heart to let it drown,” Black Anders said. “But
meat doesn’t agree with Matilde.” Jens Horse and Boel-Erik
didn’t say no either to the gift Anders brought. You can’t tell
from the pot where the roast comes from.

Out in the heath the well got deeper and deeper, but still
there was no water. Laurids cursed and swore up a blue-flamed
storm, and he insisted there was water there. The divining rod
had never deceived him, neither here nor in America. Marinus
asked him to stop because if the well collapsed while Laurids
was digging at its bottom, he was a dead man. “Let’s call the
well-digger,” Marinus said. “If there’s water, he’ll soon find it
with his drill. This here will never work out.” But Laurids
swore that when he braced a well, it didn’t collapse. He climbed
down again into the dark deep on the ladders that had been tied
together, while Marinus and Boel-Erik stood ready at the tackle
to hoist the dirt in buckets. “He won’t listen to reason,” Marinus
said. “I’d wish this was over and done with.”

There was a roar from Boel-Erik: “It’s falling down!” “Oh,
Jesus have mercy on us,” Marinus wailed, but Boel-Erik was
already on the way down the flimsy ladder. “Stand by with the
hoist,” he shouted to Marinus. “And if I say so, you have to run
for help.” But Boel-Erik hadn’t gotten far down into the well
before he realized that there was indeed still life in Laurids from
America. Half-smothered incantations could be heard from the
deep. “Are you all right, Laurids?” Boel-Erik shouted. “I’m
stuck in the dirt up to my neck,” he heard Laurids answer. “You
people will have to brace it better—otherwise the whole well
will come down. It’s just about to fall down over my head.”

Boel-Erik crawled up out of the well again, and now he and
Marinus ran to the nearest farm for help. People brought lad­
ers, ropes, and timber, and they began rescuing Laurids.
Women and children had arrived and stood at a distance, while
the men worked. The side of the well was braced where the
earth threatened to slide, and with his big hands Boel-Erik
shoveled the earth loose around Laurids’s head. About an hour
went by before they managed to dig Laurids free, and they clam­
bered up out of the well.

“Did anything happen to you—are you hurt internally?”
Marinus asked. “I certainly am not. It would have to take more than that. But I did reach water—that’s how much the rest of you know. I was standing with my feet in water. With my toes I could feel the water come trickling out.” And Laurids wasn’t so worn out that he couldn’t get cracking again with the digging. He was right: the well had reached down to an aquifer. “I knew it,” Laurids said. “The divining rod was dancing in my hand. And now after we get the well set up, Erik, you’ll have good water on your property.”
Workers rarely came into Skifter’s shop and they had little to buy with. But following old custom the farmers met in front of the polished mahogany counter to hear what was new. They asked about Konrad. Yeah, of course, he’d figured out that he’d be going out fishing again and he’d bought a boat and tools. That was, after all, reasonable enough because during this strike period, of course, there wasn’t any more to do than one man alone could manage. Otherwise it looked as though there’d be a good crop this year.

Yeah, Mads Lund admitted, it didn’t look so bad, but you shouldn’t hold a harvest party until the harvest was in the barn. And with the prices for grain and meat and everything that agriculture produced, it was almost the same whether anything grew in the field or not. The farmer cast a sidelong glance up to the shelf where the cigar box was standing. But you could sense it was no longer Konrad who was serving the customers. Cigars weren’t offered as before, and Mads Lund slowly filled his pipe.

“And they’re still striking, those stupid people,” he said. “They deserve never to get work again. All the money they’ve let slip away. But if people like Cilius are going to be running the show, a fella can certainly understand that they’ll end up destitute.” “Yeah, it’s terrible that such a person has to have power,” Martin Thomsen said. “I often think about how things will end up if some day they get the majority on the parish council.” Mads Lund blew out a cloud of smoke. “They’re surely not going to get that in your lifetime, little Martin,” he said. “There’s surely still a tiny bit of sense in people. And there’s nobody, neither smallholders nor day laborers here in the parish, that would vote for the socialists.” “Oh, please Lord, if you were right after all,” Martin Thomsen sighed. “But I’m afraid we’re headed for hard times.” “You said it,” Mads Lund said. “But we farmers have a broad back to bear it.”

Andres was at work: he took care of the factory’s horses and
got his wages. He had money and could show up in the shop without asking for credit. Andres came to the grocer for goods, and Mads Lund asked how things were going with his infirmity. Could he hold his water now? “I can’t complain,” Andres said. “The water still gets away from me, but I’ve found a way out.” “Then it’s surely that bathing cap Konrad gave you,” the farmer said. But the bathing cap didn’t keep the promise Konrad had made. It wasn’t water-tight and water leaked from it. No, now Andres had found a better way—now he had nothing to worry about. He winked and gave Skifter the list with the things he needed to take home.

“That’s certainly good that you got the upper hand on your infirmity, Andres,” Martin Thomsen. “Maybe they operated on you?” No, no, Andres wouldn’t dare let himself in for such a venture. He didn’t like them cutting him and especially not in that place. But he’d found a receptacle that could take the water, indeed every drop that got away from him. Andres cautiously looked out the door to see whether there were any womenfolk nearby, then he opened his pants and displayed the invention. It was a porcelain vase, embellished with roses, which he had tied on in front. “It’s one that Magda once got as a gift,” he explained. “And the shape really fits so well. All I have to do is strap it on and empty it once in a while—then I never notice the wetness in the least. It’s a real relief to get rid of all that crap.”

Andres had found relief for his infirmity, but he had other troubles. It was totally unchristian how his lodger Iver could stuff himself. You’d think the man hadn’t had food in years, and it was certainly also imaginable that he’d starved when he took to the road. But was it fair for Andres positively to have to fatten him up? Andres didn’t think so and he talked to Magda about it. “It seems to me we have to tell him to exercise moderation,” he said. “I mean, he gobbles down almost half a rye bread for his dinner with both margarine and cold cuts on it. And you know, he isn’t paying what we agreed on.” “Of course he can’t pay as long as he’s on strike,” Magda said. “That’s not a reason to gorge himself,” Andres said. “We have to be content with little, as the scripture says. But he’s a sot and a glutton.”
Magda didn’t respond; instead she peevishly turned her back on Andres. It was true that Iver had a good appetite and no money to pay with. But he was welcome to it. When Andres was in his stable at the factory, Magda gave Iver extra treats and poured him another drink. The Zealander was stout—he was becoming downright fat. You couldn’t tell with him, as with the others, that the strike had lasted for months. He was thriving.

Iver no longer thought about Frederikke. What did he care about that middle-aged hag. He’d gotten her pregnant and gotten off scot-free, and now he was having new love affairs. The world was full of women, and if one didn’t want to have anything to do with a fella, the next one was willing. Of course Magda wasn’t among the youngest and prettiest, but she sure was shaped like a womanfolk.

One evening Andres came home from the factory stable and Iver and Magda had fallen asleep in Magda’s bed. Andres found them there. He stood in the doorway and Magda awoke and stared at him bewildered. “Where do you get off creeping in?” she said. “Perhaps you want me to send a message ahead of time, you shameless whore,” Andres said. “You’re lying here with your fornicator and wallowing in fornication, while I have to support the both of you.” Iver pretended he was asleep. He didn’t wake up till after Andres had gone.

“Why didn’t you lock the door?” he asked crossly. “There’s surely no point in you letting him run right in. Of course now he’ll go crazy.” “Oh, I don’t care,” Magda said. “I never cared for Andres. He was too old for me even when we got married, and if he’s no good, I have a right to take another man.” “But if he throws you out, that’s his right?” Iver said. “You know, we’ll never be able to deny this.” “Then we can move in together,” Magda said. “You’ll certainly be earning a day-wage again, and I won’t let him make me go naked—he can rest assured of that. I want the money he owed me back when I was his housekeeper.” Iver didn’t say anything. “It’ll amount to so much that we can get our own house,” Magda continued. “I wasn’t thinking of getting married,” Iver said.

Wailing, Magda collapsed at the edge of the bed. “I’d never
have thought you'd leave me in the lurch," she cried. "What will people say if they find out about this. Before I met you I was a woman of unblemished reputation." "You were certainly keen enough on getting it started," Iver said. "Surely you can understand, can't you, that we can't get married: you're almost twice as old as me. And surely we can have fun together without it having to be forever." "I'll never again trust a manfolk as far as I can throw him," Magda said. "Oh, you'll certainly get someone else into bed," Iver replied. "Yeah, now you're cocky after you managed to seduce me," Magda said. "But you were a poor wretch back then when you first came into the house. And I should have known the way you were since even Frederikke refuses to acknowledge you."

Magda was indignant, her cheeks flushed, and she shrilled like a savage. "Out of my house," she shouted. "I don't want anything to do with you any more. Go back where you came from—I don't want to have anything to do with you." "It's a little late for you to be thinking of that," the Zealander said. "But I'll be more than happy to go. Your kind is a dime a dozen." Magda gasped for breath, then she flew at him like a cat. She dug her nails into his face and scratched deep. Iver roared with pain and hit her so hard she fell. The blood streamed down his face from the gashes she had made in her righteous anger.

Iver went up to his room to collect his things and find shelter under another roof. Magda heard him going downstairs and out through the kitchen and she thought about whether she should jump him and stab him to death. But he was already gone and she lay down across the bed and sobbed. Somebody went into the kitchen and she thought it was Andres, who'd come back. "Little Andres," she whispered. "You have to make allowances for me. I don't know how he got control over me."

But it was Tora who came to visit. "Are you sick?" she asked. "Yeah, I wish I were," Magda replied. "If only I were lying in my grave and had peace forever." "You know, we'll achieve that in due time," Tora said. Magda told of her fall from grace and how Andres had caught her and Iver in the evil act. "You'll never learn," Tora said. "The brute hasn't been invented
who can't talk you into it. You certainly knew that the Zealander
was a lousy rascal." "He buttered me up and caressed and swore
me eternal faithfulness," Magda sobbed. "But now I've learned
for real that faithfulness lasts only as long as it takes them to get
their way. But I scratched him in the face," Magda laughed
through tears. "People can really see that it wasn't just sweet
things he got." "That was very good," Tora said. "Then he got
what he's deserved for a long time."

Tora went out and made coffee; she brewed it strong because
what was going on here was lover's grief. Then she brought
cups and coffee into Magda's sinful bed. "For God's sake, now
don't take it so hard," she said. "You're not the first woman
who's lifted her sheets high and you won't be the last either. But
what became of Andres?" "He cleared out, he literally ran out
the door," Magda said. "I do hope he hasn't done away with
himself." "I'm sure he hasn't," Tora said. "Now just drink your
coffee; there's no danger with Andres. He'll certainly come af¬

ter he's walked off his fury." Magda emptied her cup and was
poured another, while she explained that Andres was different
than Tora thought. He could become violent and then he was
more dangerous than a raging bull looking for a man. Magda's
voice turned hoarse with horror: maybe he killed the Zealander.
But Tora didn't think so. "We've become old women, little
Magda," she said. "And there's nobody who'd commit acts of
madness for our sake." "You mustn't get angry for me saying
so," Magda said in an offended voice. "But I'm scarcely as high
up in years as you are. And I really do know Andres, and when
he flies into a rage, he's worse than a wild animal."

Andres went straight to the parsonage and demanded to
speak to Pastor Gamst. He was shown into the minister's living
room. "Is there something wrong, Andres Johansen?" the minis¬
ter asked. "You look so upset." "I've come to report my wife
Magda for fornication," Andres said. He'd remained standing
just inside the doorway and crumpled his hat in his hand. "You
mean your wife has committed adultery?" the minister said. "I
found her in bed with our lodger," Andres explained. "And now
I want to have her punished. She was my housekeeper and I
made her my wife, and she grossly sinned against holy matrimony."

The minister offered him a chair. "That is of course a serious matter," he said. "Is it your intention to have your wife prosecuted under the law?" "That’s what I want," Andres said. "And afterward perhaps you’ll want to divorce her? That’s permitted on account of fornication." "No, I don’t want to get divorced," Andres said. "That which God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. But the woman must get her rightful punishment for her fornication, and if I can get her fornicator in prison, I’ll be satisfied. But I don’t want to get divorced—I know the scripture’s words about that matter."

"I have nothing to do with secular punishment," Pastor Gamst said. "If you really want your wife in jail, you’ll have to approach the authorities. You have the right according to the law, but the provision in question hasn’t been applied in many years to my knowledge. Think twice before you act, Andres Johansen; is it really your intention to use the criminal code against the one whom you promised to share with for better and for worse?" "She promised to be faithful to me, and I’m not sure this is the first time," Andres said.

The minister got up and paced the floor, while he spoke friendly words of reconciliation to Andres. Andres sat and rocked on the chair and suddenly he said: "The pastor will have to excuse me, but I have to get this emptied." "What do you have to do?" the minister asked. "I’ll truly be obliged to empty the vase, otherwise I’m afraid it’ll run over" Andres explained. He got up and with mincing steps ran out through the entrance hall. From the window the minister saw him hurry over to a corner in the yard where he opened his trousers and emptied the vase with the rose decoration.

"The pastor will have to excuse me once again," Andres said. "A fella has his weakness, as the scripture says, a thorn in the flesh, as the apostle says." "You ought to keep in mind that your wife also has her weakness, her thorn in the flesh," Pastor Gamst said. "Now as your spiritual advisor I’m going to give you a word of advice: You’re going to go home to your wife and
forgive her the sin she committed. Because if you carry out your intention, you’ll be the talk of the town. It will be discussed all across the country that you demanded that your wife be punished for adultery.” “The pastor thinks perhaps that it will be in the newspapers?” Andres said. “That’s quite certain,” Pastor Gamst said. “Then I’ll forgive her this one time if the minister will promise to speak an earnest word to her.”

When Andres came home, Magda was lying in bed. “Is that you, Andres,” she said. “Can’t you get me the red drops in the cabinet—I’m so sick, so sick.” “I suppose you also took him into bed to relieve the pains,” Andres said and laughed maliciously. “You’re a damned whore, that’s what I know.” “If you mention that again, I’ll jump in the fjord,” Magda screamed. “Wasn’t it you who seduced me the first time? Didn’t I come as an innocent girl to your farm? And year after year you kept me here without making good on marrying me. I became overstrung from that and I haven’t been in control of myself since that time you were on the verge of pushing me over into the well. Thank your God, Andres, you’re not sitting in prison at this very moment.” Magda moaned, and it looked as if the convulsions were about to take hold of her. Andres quickly fetched her drops and gave them to her in a spoon. “Where’ve you been, Andres?” she whimpered. “I went to the minister,” Andres said. “And you told him what you’d seen? I’d never have believed I’d be so wretched. Now you’ve made us the talk of the town for all eternity.”

Magda poured out her troubles. Now her offense had been revealed, making her the laughing stock of the whole parish, and she’d be regarded as a harlot. And it was her own husband who’d betrayed her error and brought disgrace down on her. “I’ll go jump in the fjord,” Magda said. “I can’t stand this wretched life any more. But I’d never have expected that from you, Andres, back then when I let myself be seduced by you as a young girl.” Andres had no idea what to do. He poured her a new dose of drops, but it didn’t have a calming effect. “Oh, Andres, Andres, you’ve brought us such misery.”

By and by Andres was almost convinced that it was he and
not Magda who’d committed an offense. “You’re making much
too big a fuss,” he said. “I allowed myself to get carried away by
running to the minister, but you’re the one who offended first.
There are mistakes on both sides and so let the whole thing be
forgotten. Forgive one another, as the scripture says.” “If you’re
not so mad at me, I won’t reproach you for anything either,”
Magda said, comforted. “And I don’t care about Iver in the least.
I scratched him till his face bled and I threw him out of the
house.” “But then how are we going to collect the money he
owes us for room and board?” Andres said. “Oh he’ll certainly
pay it—even he can’t be that impudent,” Magda said. “Other-
wise everybody will find out how he treated us.”

Next day Magda was well, and she and Andres didn’t talk
about what had happened. But in the afternoon she went visiting
at Frederikke’s. Cilius wasn’t home; she knew he was at the inn
to pay out the strike assistance. Frederikke was making coffee.
“I don’t know if you recall Iver,” Magda said. “What about
him?” Frederikke asked and happened to spill coffee on the
table. “I can surely tell you how he treated me,” Magda said sad-
ly. “The whole time he was living with us he tried to seduce me,
and after he got nowhere, he crept into my bed while I was lying
and sleeping after lunch. I scratched and tore at him, but what
can a poor womanfolk do against a fellow when sexual desire
takes control. I can get him punished, and you mustn’t get
angry, but was that the way he treated you?”

“No,” Frederikke said, and her mouth with its thin, pale lips
was like a line.

“You mustn’t be angry,” Magda implored her. “It was an
ugly experience when a woman has otherwise kept decent and I
didn’t know anyone to talk to except you. I never gave him
cause and still he came into my bed. Do you think I should
charge him with rape—next time maybe somebody will be with
child by him?” Frederikke smiled a bitter, little sneer. “I truly
don’t know, Magda; if he raped you, you should surely do it,”
she said. “But who can prove it’s rape, because of course he
won’t admit it, we know,” Magda said. “But if it could be
proved that he’s done it before.” “I don’t know anything about
his way of life,” Frederikke said and sat mute.

Magda, too, turned silent with anger. How good it would’ve been if Frederikke had lightened her heart and told about her love for Iver and how ill he’d rewarded her. Then Magda could’ve tearfully reported how he’d forsaken her in her misery so she’d nearly jumped in the fjord. They could’ve cried together and found relief in their hard fate. But Frederikke sat there stubborn and stiff, and Magda felt bitterly disappointed. She was always outside. That’s the way she’d been since she was young—that was her hard lot now.

Iver was not well respected, and who cared to have one more man in the house in times when food was tight. Iver inquired of people he knew best. “I mean, you were living well enough at Andres’ house,” Lars Seldomglad said. “I couldn’t get along with the wife,” Iver said. “It’s not going to be easy to get board with anybody now,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Even the mice are moving because there’s too little to eat in the pantry.” At night Iver was sleeping in a barn and happened to think about the pious Kresten Bossen. He found Ida in the kitchen, but she didn’t think they had room.

“I’ll ask my husband,” she said and Kresten Bossen came out. “You’ve got nowhere to stay?” he asked. “No, I had a falling out with Andres and his wife,” Iver said, as was true. “I suppose we can house you,” Kresten said. “But things are tight for us, and I don’t know how we’ll get food for one more person.” “I can certainly pay a little for myself,” Iver said. “After all, I am getting strike pay.” “It’ll be all right,” Kresten Bossen said. “But let’s get this straight first,” Ida said. “If you want to live here, you’ll have to pay me with the money you’re getting.” “I’d certainly like to have a little bit for tobacco and whatever comes along,” Iver said. “I don’t know anything about that,” Ida said. “But if Kresten wants to have boarders, even though everything just burned and things are pure misery for us, you’ll also have to pay whatever you can.” “Ida, Ida,” Kresten Bossen said. “The scripture says: Let all your things be done with charity.” “Oh get away from me with your scriptural passages,” Ida grumbled. “Now you yourself have seen what piety has led to.”
There was little room where Kresten Bossen and his family had rented, but a bed was made ready for Iver under the straw roof in the bare attic. But he had to hand over to Ida the benefit he got at the inn when Cilius made disbursements. She knew to the penny how much it was, and Iver wasn’t allowed to pocket anything for chewing tobacco or half a pint of schnapps. And it was no use in his putting his arm around her waist and trying to hug her. “Keep your hands to yourself,” Ida said and tore herself loose. “You’re wrong if you think I’m one of that kind. Try that again, and you’ll get the dishcloth across your ears.” Kresten Bossen’s Christian mildness had not rubbed off on Ida.
Pastor Gamst worked for a couple of hours in the garden every morning before he went in for coffee. After missionary Karlsen’s suicide his friends had set up Kristine, his widow, in a little yarn business in Alslev, but it didn’t work out, and the minister had taken her in his house as housekeeper. Samuel was an apprentice in a business in Færgeby, and her daughter Johanne lent her mother a hand in the large parsonage. While the minister was weeding the hazel walk, someone cleared his throat behind him. It was Martin Thomsen.

“Upon my word,” the farmer said, and Pastor Gamst let go of the hoe and dried his sweaty forehead. Martin Thomsen commented thoroughly about weather and harvest prospects and then he came to the point. He’d been to a meeting of friends north of the fjord, and the friends there had been surprised that a big town, which Alslev had become, still didn’t have its Mission house. “And it seems to me we have to agree with them,” Martin Thomsen said.

“I mean, you yourself are the treasurer of the building fund,” the minister said. “And you know how things stand here in the parish.” “Truly I do,” the farmer said. “There aren’t many who’ve found grace. But the scripture says that we children of God must be the yeast that leavens the bread. I’m only an unlettered man, but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” “Don’t you think you could speak your mind without all the biblical language,” the minister said, irritated. Martin Thomsen blinked his small, sneaky eyes. “I’m a simple man, and the minister must bear with me if I express myself improperly, though a fella thinks that surely the words of the scripture . . . And I don’t think we’ll get started with salvation until we get an abode for the holy spirit here in the parish.”

What Martin Thomsen had talked to the children of God about came to light. They needed to step up the collection and hold a bazaar, and good friends in Færgeby would certainly con-
tribute their help, both in money and gifts. And they’d surely get a site gratis. “Of course, the Mission house could be situated on your land,” the minister said. “I’d thought about that.” Martin Thomsen replied. “But it seems to me it would look too small if we placed it here. But it could have a nice location on the hill on the road to the factory. The workers go by there when they go to and from their work. And I suppose we can get a site as a gift from the president.” “As far as I know, he’s an atheist.” “He denies God!” Martin Thomsen said. “Then he ought to know that the Lord will also deny him when the last trump resounds.”

It was agreed that the minister would try to talk to Høpner, but Martin Thomsen remained standing there even though he’d taken care of his business. “Is there anything else?” the minister asked. “Oh no,” Martin Thomsen said. “The pastor really likes the garden work, I can understand. Pastor Faaborg did too, I correspond regularly with him, you know, he was the parish minister over in Spourup at one time and a really splendid preacher. But he said many a time: A minister must be the very last to give offense. And I might mention it, there are indeed those who are offended when the pastor hauls a wheelbarrowful of dung to the garden from the parsonage’s tenant’s dunghill. They certainly don’t think that’s work for a minister.” “You can say hello to the offended and say that even parsonage gardens have to be manured,” the minister said. “Christ was a carpenter and presumably he handled saw and ax once in a while.” “Of course,” Martin Thomsen said. “Please don’t take it amiss—I just wanted to mention what people are saying.”

The peace and equilibrium that the minister felt in his heart when he worked in the garden in the fresh-as-dew summer mornings had deserted him. Fatigued, he went in for his morning coffee. In the first period after his conversion he’d lived fervently and ecstatically. He’d felt the warmth flow toward him from the friends’ trusting hearts. But slowly he’d simmered down. “If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” he mumbled and at that very moment he remembered that was the phrase that insufferable sourpuss Martin Thomsen had used. A Mission house. Worn out, he sighed. In the small
meetings of the Pious he could sense the acrid smell of the stable and the moldy Sunday best and unwashed bodies, the bleating hymn singing, the wailing prayers.

He decided to talk to Høpner right away about the site for the mission house. In the past years the two men had exchanged words only now and then. Høpner never went to church and it was seldom they met in public. He walked through the dead factory to the large white president’s villa on the cliff. Høpner was at home; the minister was shown into the library. The engineer was sitting at his desk with a book. The minister went right to the point: would the factory donate a lot for a Mission house. “Is it the Mission house again?” Høpner said. “At one time you wouldn’t accept a contribution because I’m not Christian. You’ve mellowed with the years, Pastor Gamst.”

The minister didn’t respond and the engineer continued. “By all means, you can have a lot on the road up to Alslev. It’ll take a couple of hundred years before we’ve eaten our way all the way up to town. And by then Christianity won’t exist—take my word for it.” “Christianity is old and it’s tough,” the minister said. “But it won’t survive modern industrialism,” the engineer said. “You want your Mission house and for all I care, be my guest. Let the old women also get their lust curbed. Unfortunately, you’ll never get hold of the workers. Coal, clay, and chalk are the simple things that provide him a living and they are the basis for his outlook on life. Coal, clay, and chalk, they’re also a kind of trinity.”

The engineer was sitting and playing with a letter opener; his fingers were thin and nervous. “As far as I can remember, Christ always used parables from daily life,” he said. “He lived in the reality that surrounded him. The clergymen don’t. They can give a sermon off the cuff on Peter’s haul in Gennesaret Sea, but they’ve never seen a rotary kiln even though half of their congregation lives from it. How can you propagandize for religion among people whose daily work you’re not familiar with? But let’s go right now and look at the site for your Mission house.”

They walked through the factory complex. The large buildings stood there desolate and everywhere there was a trace of di-
lapidation. There'd been a shower and the air was pure and clear. Høpner walked ahead into the kiln department. Høpner pointed with his hand to the huge rotary kilns. It was very quiet in the room, like in a church, and they instinctively lowered their voices. “These kilns are a masterpiece of human ingenuity,” Høpner said. “There’s more delicate calculation in them than in all the world’s finest cathedral architecture. When they’re burning, 1500 degrees of heat is given off. Is it hotter in your hell? But now they’re standing cold. The chairmen of a few organizations have extinguished the fire in them. And not until they’ve talked their way to an agreement, will they be turned on again. That’s the tragedy of our time, that stupid workers and stupid capitalists can stop the wheel of technology. It’s technology that supports our whole culture and clumsy fingers shouldn’t be permitted to fiddle with it. Explain that to the workers in your Mission house.”

They walked on through the factory and stood now up on the cliff, where they looked out across the silent factory. “It’s a sad sight to see a factory lying idle,” the minister said. “Yeah, damn it,” the engineer said. “It gets on my nerves to come here day in and day out, while the whole thing is standing idle. It’s like a cemetery. But good God, when the wheels are going! People say that industry has robbed us of the old pleasure in our work, but that’s nonsense. There’s nothing as glorious as a large modern factory with its tremendous latent forces roaring to be let loose. Don’t bother me with all that sentimental drivel about the old artisan culture. Modern technology is the world’s mightiest wonder.”

“But is there room for man?” the minister asked.

“I once worked in a mining camp in America. There was nothing to read but old magazines and the Bible, so I’m well-versed in the Scriptures,” Høpner said. “You know, the Devil suggested to Christ that he should make stones into bread. It was a good, practical suggestion and Jesus’s reply was a sophism: Man does not live by bread alone. No, but man lives first and foremost on bread. And we carry out the miracle. The factory down there transforms stone into bread. That’s man’s first need,
and the rest will take care of itself.” “Just listen,” the minister said, and they heard a frail sound on the mild day, a lark’s song. “The soul, too, demands its food,” the minister said. Høpner cleared his throat, but didn’t reply.

“You regard the universe as a watchmaker’s workshop, where the important thing is to get the clocks to go right,” the minister said. “If I didn’t believe that the world had a soul, I couldn’t bear to live. I’d freeze to death in the cold from the dead stars.” “Precisely,” Høpner said, drily. “Your religion is a wish-dream. If one is afraid of dying, one invents a life after death. Eternity makes you freeze and you animate it with God. But I have only one task: I have to manufacture cement. I have enough to do here on the planet. I have to provide people with their daily bread.” “You regard me as a social parasite, President Høpner?” the minister asked. “No, I know others who are social parasites,” Høpner said and angrily struck the ground with his stick. “I view you as a friendly tradition. From a primitive period, a primitive society.”

They walked toward Alslev without speaking to each other. Then the engineer stopped. “Here’s where the boundary of the factory’s area runs,” he said. “We can have the surveyor divide out a thousand square yards, which you’ll get a deed for. I’ll take care of it. Damn it all, I certainly still have that much of a say so, in spite of the big shots in there.”

On the way home to the parsonage Pastor Gamst came by the school. It was recess and teacher Ulriksen was standing on the stairs puffing on his long pipe. He waved to the minister. “Did you come to conduct exams, Pastor Gamst?” he shouted. The minister crossed the playground diagonally among the children who were playing. “No, actually I’ve just been out begging for a site for the Mission house,” he said. Ulriksen took out a whistle and whistled. “You’re allowed to play till I call you in,” he shouted to the children. “Let’s go for a walk in the garden. You have to see my roses,” he turned to the minister.”

“So now it’s in earnest about the Mission house,” he said. “Otherwise I thought that idea was dead and buried. Instead build a church meeting hall—that’s what’s needed here.” “I
know your view of the Inner Mission,” the minister said. “And I can agree with you in many respects,” the minister said. “I don’t like all that scriptural text hairsplitting, but your cheerful folk-culture and folk-identity is really more alien to me. When I sit in a poor cottage, where people in fear and humility are trying to find the path to the truth, I feel an inner joy. Seek ye the places most lowly . . . .”

“Confound you,” the teacher grumbled and stopped to light his pipe. “You have a rare gift for always falling in love with the wrong thing. You better believe that I know the humble, trusting little people, who stand with hat in hand not just before Our Lord, but before everybody who’s got more land. It’s precisely the humble man’s temperament we have to get rid of. Humility doesn’t work—it’s a bad inheritance from the past. No, the free, wholesome folk-temperament makes the people straighten their backs and look even Our Lord right in the eye. For all I care, you’re free to call it socialism.”

“It was the roses we were going to look at,” the minister said. “They’re already in bud. You’re a capable gardener, Ulriksen.” “If I were just a capable teacher, too. But the teaching has been going so sluggishly these past months. And I’ll tell you why: many of the children are getting too little to eat. It’s the strike.” “That’s not so good,” the minister said. “It’s not all bad, either. Now I really like poverty that kicks against the pricks. The people with their unions and organizations have learned to stick together and hold out. I’m telling you straight out, Pastor Gamst, that the day they win their strike, I’ll run up my flag here at the school. But I don’t think much of your Mission house—I’m old enough to be allowed to say it. . . .”
A messenger came on bicycle from Færgeby with a telegram for Cilius Andersen. Cilius wasn’t at home and Frederikke accepted it, but she didn’t dare open it. She ran over to Marinus’s to ask Niels whether he knew where Cilius was. A telegram had come.

Niels and Anton ran out into town to find Cilius and finally it was discovered that he was sitting at Børgesen’s together with a couple of others playing cards. Niels was, after all, in the union’s executive committee and he’d put the telegram in his pocket. “Is Cilius here?” Niels asked, and Cilius was there to be seen. He was sitting in shirt-sleeves at the head of the table thumping his cards on the table.

“There’s a telegram for you,” Niels said. Cilius took the telegram with calm dignity as if he were accustomed to receiving that kind of message every day. “That’s certainly a shame, I forgot my glasses,” he said. “I can’t read writing well without them. But this here looks to be print, and suitably large-type. So let’s see what it says.” Slowly Cilius read the address aloud: Union Chairman Cilius Andersen, Alslev near Færgeby. That was all right: the telegram had landed where it was supposed to. “Now hurry up,” Børgesen said. “Presumably it’s news about the strike.”

“I suppose that’s what’s can be presumed,” Cilius said and gave himself plenty of time to open the telegram. He moved his lips while making out the content. “Now get a move on,” Børgesen said. “Presumably it’s not a telegram from your sweetheart. Let’s hear what it says.”

“So we won the strike,” Cilius said. “In spite of everything, they were forced to give in.” And Cilius read the telegram aloud: “Central executive committee with authorization concluded agreement. Essential demands met. Work to be resumed as soon as practicable.” The living room turned quiet. For months they’d struck, been on rations, scarcely had the absolute
necessities. Lots of times they’d thought that the employers surely would get the upper hand after all because they had the money. And now the hard times were over, the strike had ended.

“It’ll be good to go to work,” Niels said, and the rest of them agreed with him. Nothing was worse than idleness. The days were without end, the weeks were like months, yes, it was good to go to work. “Damn it,” Cilius said. “We gained the upper hand after all. I haven’t been this happy since the little fox was born. We danced a polka with the big shots and they got a little bit winded. And Niels, now we’ve got to get people out and call a meeting this evening. This is big news.”

Word soon got round in Alslev as to what Cilius’s telegram said. People stood and talked in clusters on the road and the topic was the same: Now when can we get started. How many days would pass before the factory was again ready to admit them? If they could decide it themselves, they’d have gone back to work immediately. The men shouted to one another; it was a great day. They’d held out and won a victory, and what it cost meant nothing. “So Cilius was right after all,” said Lars Seldomglad, who was standing in a cluster outside the grocer’s. “It’ll be good to have a drink again. A fella’s almost forgotten what it tastes like.”

The women too had emerged in the doorways; it was as if there was a party in town. It would be nice to get the men to work and get rid of having them loaf at home. They were of no use and became hot-tempered and unreasonable and nothing suited them. Some played cards from morning till evening for a few pennies, others lay on the sofa and loafed. They needed to get cracking again.

Cilius had gone to the factory right away to talk to Høpner, and it turned out that Høpner had been informed by telephone. And here Cilius found out how the settlement had turned out. The workers had gotten most of what they’d demanded. “What do you know,” Cilius said. “Damn, that’s not so bad.” “No, you can say that again,” Høpner replied. “We certainly wouldn’t have needed to have a tug-of-war over that for months. But, of course, there are certain people who have to demonstrate their
absolute power. If we can pay today, we could surely have paid back then too. If I were the one deciding, the strike would never have begun or it would’ve been carried on to the bitter end.” 

Høpner was angry and Cilius understood that he definitely didn’t have much to say when decisions were made about big issues. “Yeah, damn it, they’re not very bright,” Cilius said. “Would you finally shut your trap, and keep it shut,” Høpner said, and Cilius grinned. “Now take it easy,” he said. “I came to find out when we’re going to get the work going.” “We’ll light the fires tomorrow,” Høpner said. “Have the crews talk to the foremen and stand by. “And look here . . . .” Furiously he grabbed his wallet and pulled out a hundred-crown bill. “Go get yourselves drunk to the gills. Since you people won the battle, you should also have the party.” Høpner pushed Cilius out the door and slammed it behind him. “Damn it, he was mad,” Cilius grinned.

A messenger had gone out to the heath where Boel-Erik, Marinus, and Laurids were working on the well. It was Tinus who rushed off on a borrowed bicycle. “You have to come home,” he shouted from a great distance. “The strike’s over.” Laurids from America swung himself up over the rim of the well. “So we’ll get to do something else,” he said, “but we’re really almost done now.” “That was good news,” Marinus said. Boel-Erik didn’t say anything. He cast a glance out across his land, then he nodded. He’d gotten a good piece of work done. He’d ditched and dug and planted potatoes, and now it was just a matter of whether the dry land got rain. “I mean, after all I can certainly also get out here in the bright summer evenings,” he said. “What do you mean?” Laurids said. “It’s almost time for the potatoes to be hoed,” Boel-Erik said. “But now the nights are getting bright.” “You have a young wife, little man,” Laurids said. “And it’s surely smartest for you to use the nights for something else than hoeing potatoes.”

Anton was sent round to the smallholders in the heath who worked at the factory. Laurids wanted for them to hear the big news too. The three men walked home toward Alslev. Boel-Erik turned around many times and looked back. “It can become a really good farm if a fella can just get time to put the work into
the soil,” he said. But the others were not inclined to hear more about Erik’s moorland. They talked about how the strike had presumably wound up. Who’d won? Marinus felt they couldn’t expect to have achieved a wage increase because, after all, they were the little people. But it was good that they’d be going back to work again. “Yes, thanks and praise be to God,” Marinus said as solemnly as if he were at a burial.

The banquet hall at the inn was packed full: all the workers had come to the meeting. Cilius stood on the podium explaining what he’d managed to get clarified about the peace terms. It didn’t look so bad after all, and Cilius was greeted with applause and cheers. “You shouldn’t clap for me,” Cilius said. “Because it was you yourselves who held out. Is there otherwise anybody who wants the floor?” But no one had anything to say. So Cilius went at it again. “There’s one thing we can just as well talk about now that we’ve all gathered together,” he said. “All of us know that the grocer denied us credit. He was well within his rights to do that, we’d never deny that, but we’re also within our rights in starting our own general store. I propose that we start a consumer co-operative society store.”

Everything in its time. Now the strike was over and now it was Skifter’s turn. “Since the grocer denies us credit, surely he can’t have anything either against us going somewhere else with our trade. And in order for us to get clear on how such a co-operative store is set up, I’ve asked the co-op manager from Færgeby to come.” A tall withered man stood up at the podium and explained about shares and joint and several liability, about the co-operative movement and the consumers who’d be their own suppliers. With dry numbers he proved how much the grocers cost society and how much cheaper it was to get the goods through the co-operative enterprises. “That’s taking things pretty far,” Lars Seldomglad whispered to Børgesen. “But I definitely thought it was a gross mistake for Skifter to deny Cilius goods. Now Cilius’ll take the whole business from him.”

A committee was appointed to found the consumer co-operative, and then Cilius invited them for coffee. “You can also have pastries or schnapps, whatever each of you wants,” he said.
"And it won’t ever cost you a penny. Damn it, we sure could do with wetting our gills. I don’t think I’ve ever used my mouth as much as during this strike, and I otherwise certainly never spared myself in that regard.” There was a throng in the rooms at the inn. But Cilius had arranged it ahead of time with the innkeeper, and the coffee was ready to be served. “Where I got the money from?” Cilius said. “You don’t need to bother about that, boys, just you drink as long as there’s schnapps in the bottles. It’s the bigwigs who’re paying.”

The mood quickly soared. It had been months since people had last been at the inn. “Drink boys,” Cilius shouted. His head was boiling red from the coffee laced with schnapps. “Let the good times roll, and the schnapps is paid for. We deserve to take ourselves a drink.”

Cilius gulped it down and there were others who were polishing them off. But there were also temperate people, who were cautious with hard liquor. “Who’s going to pay,” Marinus said. “Where did Cilius get the money from?” “Don’t ever bother yourself about that,” Lars Seldomglad said. “What you don’t know won’t hurt you. And Cilius is a fellow who knows what he’s doing.” The young workers had gotten hold of the musician Frands, who struck up his accordion. Word was sent out into town for the girls, and some of the young wives also came. Inger came. Did you leave the children?” Boel-Erik asked. “Surely they can sleep by themselves, and otherwise you’ve certainly got the same right to take care of them.” And Inger shook a leg dancing. Mostly she danced with Niels and Marinus didn’t like that. Because of course everyone could see that Niels was all too preoccupied with Inger, who was a married woman.

More young people came and the hall was packed. Now it wasn’t just the young workers from the factory and their women, but hands from the farms and young farmworkers and fishermen. The floor rumbled with heavy boots and the tune from the accordion could barely make itself heard. Kresten Bossen had come to the meeting. Afterward, of course, he should have gone home, because Kresten Bossen wasn’t in the habit of sitting in an inn. But one single little coffee with schnapps presumably
couldn’t hurt. He had one, and he had more, and Kresten Bossen didn’t tolerate much. He became drunk. While sitting in the taproom he saw his daughter Andrea getting together with Iver. “What are you doing here?” he asked. “I’m just going to dance,” Andrea said. “But little Andrea, did I have to live to see you dancing,” Kresten Bossen complained. “If you’re sitting here drinking, then I’m certainly allowed to dance,” Andrea replied cheekily, and now Kresten Bossen realized that he’d set his child a bad example.

He got up and left the coffee laced with schnapps standing. “Come on home with me,” he said. “Why do I have to go home now,” Andrea said sullenly. “Everybody else is allowed to be here.” “Come on, Andrea,” Kresten Bossen said. “We know all right what dances and dancing lead to. It’s not good for a young woman to go to an inn.” “You know, I’ll certainly make sure she gets home all right,” Iver said. “I thank you for your kind intention,” Kresten Bossen said. “But Andrea’s coming with me now.”

They’d gone outside in the warm summer evening and Andrea began to cry. “Why am I never allowed to have fun with the rest of them?” she said. “I never have a happy moment.” “The time will certainly come when you’ll thank me for having taken you home,” Kresten Bossen said. “There’s many a girl who danced straight into hell’s fire.”

In the still evening they heard the noise from the inn and the faint sound of the accordion’s strains. The others were now having fun, while Andrea was being hustled home. But in November she wanted to go out into service; she wanted a position far away from home. Andrea had made up her mind.
The factory was in operation again. The rotary kilns revolved day and night like worms in eternal torment with a sea of fire inside them. The smoke rose like a plumed fan from the smokestacks, the machines boomed, and a fine layer of cement dust fell softly on roofs and trees. Ships came sailing in and docked at the wharf: they unloaded coal and loaded cement. Men came home from work exhausted, gray with cement dust, sooty with coal and oil. At night the factory gave off a glow for miles around. If you went outside the house, you saw the reflection of the fire, and it was good to know there was food to be had.

People shouted and gave orders; shiny with sweat, they stood and slung coal into a fiery kiln or hung like bank swallows under the white cliff and hacked pieces of chalk loose. A bucket-ladder dredger and barges were out in the fjord, a little factory in the deep blue. The steam hissed from the safety valves, heavy horses pulled dump cars to the slurry station. The cement mill thundered, the burned clinker glided on the conveyor to the clinker storage area. In the cement storage area they worked for dear life. Sacks and barrels had to be filled; now cement had to be sold. The factory had stood idle all too long.

The factory was operating; everywhere people were toiling for their daily bread. The workers on the cliff had flung off their jackets and shirts; their naked bodies were scorched by the sun and shone like copper. They toiled like the devil—they were working on a piece rate. And they were in need of money: money had to be found for many things now that the strike was over. In the cooper’s workshop the coopers collected barrels that had to be filled with cement. In the sack-cleaning shop women sat and repaired sacks. The sunshine sparkled through the dirty windows. Olga sat there together with Line Seldomglad, Dagmar Horse, and a couple of other women. Olga had grown tired of spending her time in the house—she’d taken work at the factory.
Gossip passed among the women while they mended the sacks. Olga sat silently and listened. She learned who was sweethearts with whom and which girls were expecting. When she came from work, she went up to her room early and stared listlessly out the window. Such were Olga’s spirits: sometimes she was wild and had to fly and rush, sometimes she didn’t feel like doing anything, but sat with her hands in her lap.

The haze from the heath shimmered over the hills—it looked to be a plentiful year. The early summer had brought rain to the dry regions and the rye was promising. On the hot days there was an odor of putrid seaweed, and the cattle walked almost to their bellies in the meadow grass. The sweethearts whispered in the haystacks; the young people came home late at night. But Tora wished that her two oldest children had been among those who went out. Olga sat in her room in the evening, and Niels went about oddly restless. Now Boel-Erik was at home in the evening and he couldn’t visit Inger too often.

A letter came from Søren with big news. With splendid grades Søren had now become a university student and had done his parents credit. He was soon coming to visit, but they shouldn’t expect him to stay at home the whole vacation. Søren had been invited to visit one of his fellow students whose father was a district magistrate up in Vendsyssel.

Marinus first read the letter to Tora and afterward it was read aloud to the whole family. “May the Lord be praised that he brought it to a happy end,” Marinus said and had tears in his eyes. “He’s always been an awfully gifted lad, but there are many who squander their talents, and of course a lot of reading is necessary—we know that. And now we get to see him before he’s going to visit a district magistrate.”

“The rest of them could surely have passed their exams, too, if they’d been kept in school,” Tora said. “Søren has really always been good at learning,” Marinus said. “Now what I respect most is that people can earn their living by honest labor. Let’s wait and see what becomes of Søren,” Tora said. “The Lord decides in his wisdom which station in life we’ll be put in,” Marinus said. “Really, if anyone it’s teacher Ulriksen who decided
for Søren,” Tora said. “And really I hardly know if I’m that grateful to him for it.”

That’s the way it was every time Søren was mentioned. Tora was jealous, as it were, on behalf of her other children. She pretended as if she weren’t pleased that Søren had become a scholar, who was now going to visit a district magistrate’s house. “I was also once a guest at a district magistrate’s,” Marinus said. “I was a farmhand and drove a load of peat to him and was invited into his kitchen for coffee. While I was sitting there, he himself came through the kitchen and he nodded in an extraordinarily friendly way to me, though he otherwise had the reputation of being very crusty.”

About a week later Sofie and Little-Laurids were walking to meet Marinus, who was coming from work. Søren’s come! Søren’s come! they shouted from far off. Marinus really felt like starting to run, but of course it would never do to show how delighted he was over Søren’s coming home. “So, he’s really come,” he said and took the children by the hand.

Søren was sitting in the living room and Marinus shook his hand, with a little bit of deference, because Søren, after all, was now a university student. And there was also something dignified about Søren, as if he were already in a government post. He was squat and a bit stooping, as if he’d sat too much over his books. Søren had come with the steamer from Copenhagen to Færgeby; there was no cabin, but walking on deck on a warm summer night wasn’t so bad. He’d traveled together with a young man who was studying for the priesthood and was going to visit his uncle, the large farmer at Holle Estate. “That’s where I applied for a job as herdsman,” Marinus said. “I didn’t get the position, but the farmer was such a very nice man. And now his nephew was going to be a clergyman. So you see.” And Søren explained that after graduation it was the young man’s intention to go to India as a missionary.

In Søren’s honor Tora had set the table in the living room—otherwise they ate in the kitchen. “That’s an odd way you’re eating,” Anton said, and Søren informed them that in the city you didn’t touch the food with your hands, but cut your
open-faced sandwich in pieces with knife and fork. “You should be happy you don’t have to use your hands to get anything done—I mean, they’re as thin as a girl’s,” Anton said. “Søren also has to work hard with his brain,” Marinus said. “Now you watch your mouth, Anton, some day you’re going to get in trouble with your big mouth.”

Marinus couldn’t get to know enough about everything Søren had learned. “Excuse me, little Søren, now have you also studied Latin?” he asked. Yes, Søren had learned a little Latin, and if it could be arranged so he could keep being a student, then he would indeed come to learn more of that learned tongue. “I’ve heard that the learned folk have to debate with one another only in Latin or Greek,” Marinus said. “I don’t understand how they can keep it all straight in their heads.” But that wasn’t really true. The students spoke Danish among themselves just like other people.

There was a question Marinus had been preoccupied with from the first moment, and now he spat it out: “So what do you think you want to be, Søren, which road will you take? It seems to me it would be lovely if you could become a clergyman.” Marinus’s face was earnest and he looked at his son in suspense. That was a thought he’d brooded over during the long nights. If Søren became a clergyman, he’d get a parsonage, and then it was certainly possible that he could offer his own father the position of managing the parsonage’s farming. Marinus had a dream about getting a plow in his hand again and once more moving about in the cozy semi-darkness of the stable. “No, I don’t want to be a clergyman,” Søren said. “I mean, I don’t know at all whether I can keep studying at the university; it depends on money matters, but a clergyman—in any event that’s one thing I’ll never be.” Marinus sighed quietly. It was probably not intended for him to become a farmer again.

Next day Søren visited Ulriksen. The teacher had a cold and was sitting with a woolen blanket around his legs and a steaming glass of elderberry syrup in front of him. But he wasn’t so sick that he couldn’t smoke tobacco. The smoke rose in dense clouds around him. “Sit down, learned Søren, and get yourself a glass
of port," he said, but Søren neither smoked nor drank. Ulriksen grimaced—his pipe was acidic. "A person has to have some vices—otherwise he’ll become inhuman," he said. "The morally perfect person of course has to resemble a skeleton, a polished skeleton. I’ll confide one thing to you, Søren: now that I’ve become old and will soon depart, I’m damned annoyed that I don’t have more and hotter sins on my conscience. By god, I can risk Our Lord’s putting me at a lectern and letting me teach little angels morals. But as far as tobacco is concerned, I haven’t had my pipe out of my mouth in the last forty years, except when there was a burial or an episcopal visitation. So what have you been thinking of studying if we can get the money?"

“I’m most inclined to something pedagogical,” Søren said. "Excellent, my boy," Ulriksen said. "Out among the people with the youngsters who are good for something. I’d recommend to you Ranum, my old teacher’s college." But that wasn’t what Søren had been thinking about. Blushing, he stammered that if anything it was the study of philology he’d meant. He wanted to be a high school teacher and above all go in for an academic career.

“That’s a damn rotten idea, Søren,” Ulriksen said. “Your father’s a day laborer, your mother a splendid woman, your brothers are unskilled laborers, you have the whole people’s destiny with you as your marching kit. What do you mean by sitting and cramming lessons with better people’s children. The rich will definitely get their information, but how will the little people get their share of the knowledge of the times?”

Ulriksen had gotten excited, he hobbled around in the living room, while he held the blanket around himself with his broad, hairy hand. “Ask your father whether he ever got a rap from the overseer’s stick back when he was a farmhand,” he said. “Whether he didn’t have to stand hat in hand and let himself be reprimanded by the lord of the manor. Can’t you feel the whistling of the estate bailiff’s whip? We don’t need stupid academics, because we have enough of them, but people who’ve seen a glimpse of the free, open sky that Grundtvig beheld. The people’s freedom, my son, that’s what you should be fighting for."
The bread of life and the bread of the spirit for every living person on earth, that’s the program of progress—and they can call it socialism as much as they want.”

Søren stood there, an overworked village boy sent to the university, with his stiff collar, which still made his neck feel uncomfortable, and thick clumsy shoes. He had slaved his way to a degree and had found good friends from nice homes where they respected his iron discipline. He’d been a guest in living rooms where there was shiny furniture, refined manners, and pretty, carefree girls. And in two weeks he’d be a guest at a district magistrate’s house. Søren didn’t intend to let his future be determined by an old Grundtvigian school teacher.

“Of course people have different talents,” he said. “I don’t think I could cope with work to enlighten the general public.” It came with a droll earnestness and Ulriksen smiled. “Yes, yes, you’re young and I’m old, and you have to find your own path. You’ve always had a head for books, you have a good memory. But it’s not grades that count, little Søren, but character.”

Ulriksen hobbled over to the tobacco table and filled his pipe while he shot a glance over at Søren. Was that Tora’s boy? But what had been begun had to be carried through. “Well, don’t be discouraged, it’ll work out,” he said. “For the time being a solution will be found so you can continue your studies. Pastor Gamst is willing and I’ll contribute what I can. But promise me this, Søren, don’t forget where you come from when you keep company with the big shots.”

Søren went on to the parsonage. He was a little afraid of the minister, who, after all, was in the Inner Mission. But Pastor Gamst seemed not to be interested in Søren’s salvation; he trotted out neither admonitions nor scriptural passages. He spoke calmly and gently as an educated man, and Søren looked at the many books in his study. That’s the way he wanted to have it some day. He’d certainly attain erudition and a good position.

Pastor Gamst didn’t have time for long conversations: a bazaar was to be held in the parsonage for the benefit of the Mission house. Kristine’s baking could be smelled in all the rooms; it was as if the whole parish were going to be fed. But the min-
ister certainly knew that not many came there from the parish. Instead it was the friends from Færgeby who attended to buy the gifts of love they themselves had donated, drink coffee, and sing hymns. Whether it was all right to hold the bazaar on a Sunday had been much discussed. But Martin Thomsen had maintained that Sunday trade was, after all, Sunday trade and a sinful deed, even if it took place in a parsonage with a god-fearing purpose. So it was decided to hold the bazaar on a Saturday.

On Saturday the minister had a good mind to pretend that he was sick and to shut himself up in his bedroom. By late in the afternoon the yard was full of cars and wagons. In the big garden room, which was used only for meetings of the Pious, booths had been set up where the Inner Mission women from Færgeby sold doilies and sofa cushions, devout pictures and framed scriptural passages. There was tombola and serving of lemonade, but the coffee table, which was permanently standing ready in the dining room, was gratis. It was on Pastor Gamst.

There was a throng of people in the garden room, but there wasn’t any merriment. Black-clad women went from booth to booth inspecting the fine things, but there weren’t many who had money to buy with. All heads turned toward the door: a lady in an elegant cape strode in. “Who’s she?” the minister asked. “That’s attorney Schjøtt’s wife,” the man standing next to him whispered, and now Pastor Gamst recognized Mrs. Marja. “She’s been in the Mission house in Færgeby a couple of times,” a woman whispered. “And she cried during the missionary’s talk, but she probably hasn’t overcome the world yet.”

Mrs. Marja strode through the crowd with genial nods in all directions and went over to Pastor Gamst. “You’re not angry because I came, are you?” she said. “I read the advertisement about the bazaar and I so much wanted to be allowed to be there too.” “You’re welcome, madam,” the minister said. “There’s something endearing about these earnest people,” Mrs. Marja chirped softly. “I admire them because they have a philosophy of life. They are striving for something greater than money, money, and money once again. But I have to buy, I have to shop and play tombola—that’s why I came.”
The attorney's wife flitted from one booth to the next and bought cushions and doilies. Her manner was smiling and modest, and none of the women could have anything to object to about her, even though she certainly could have dressed a bit less stylishly on such an occasion. Mrs. Marja bought almost half of the tombola tickets, and people had to help her carry purchases and prizes out to the car. She didn't want to drink coffee, didn't want to consume the least bit—she had to go home right away. “But won’t you visit us if you come to Færgeby one day, Pastor Gamst,” she said. “After all, I too have a soul.”

“That’s a strange womanfolk,” Martin Thomsen said. “I mean, a fella isn’t any expert on that kind. But she truly spent a lot of money. If she hadn’t come, there wouldn’t have been a large surplus.” The minister was happy when the last bazaar visitor was out the door.

Søren had brought his books home and he’d set up for himself a whole study in the room he shared with Niels and Anton. Anton was a big, rough, strapping fellow and the girls liked him. And now he wanted to find out about what experience Søren had had with womenfolk in the big city. But it wasn’t much. On the other hand, Niels was able to tell about back when he was a soldier in Viborg. “How are the girls in Copenhagen?” Anton asked. “I suppose their complexion is kind of somewhat more delicate, isn’t it?” But Søren turned sulky—that’s not the kind of thing he’d studied with the minister’s and schoolmaster’s money. “If only it were me,” Anton said. “I’d definitely make sure to have three or four sweethearts. Here a fella can’t even have two without them being on the verge of tearing his eyes out.”

No, Søren was a solemn person; he had something other than flirting in his head. While Karl and Anton gallivanted off in the bright summer evening to trysts with the girls, Søren sat at home and studied his books. “I can’t understand how you can keep it in your head,” Marinus said. “And even so people aren’t nearly so well read as they were in the old days.” And when Søren claimed that human knowledge surely had progressed, Marinus told a story his grandfather had witnessed in his youth. Mari-
nus’s grandfather served at a minister’s on the other side of the fjord, and one time one of the farmhands got mad at the minister. One evening, when the minister had been out administering the sacraments to a sick person and came home on foot, the farmhand met him outside the cemetery. He’d put a sheet over his head and pretended he was a ghost. But he came to a bad end: the minister began to exorcise and as the farmhand had sunk up to his waist, he shouted in his distress who he was. But the minister said: “Now it’s no use, Ajs, you have to go down there!” And the farmhand was conjured into the black earth, and a spot can still be seen by the cemetery levee where grass can’t grow. That’s the daring farmhand’s grave, that’s where he was conjured into the soil.

“That’s just superstition,” Soren said, but Marinus shook his head: much old wisdom had been forgotten in the modern age.

Olga had listened to the story and she laughed. “It’s strange you’d trot out that kind of nonsense, father,” she said. “That’s the kind of thing nobody believes in our day.” But Marinus got really angry with his clever children: “Neither you nor I know what in it is true or false,” he said. “But I really believe that after death we’re allowed to atone for every offense we commit, and you’re not going to talk me out of that.” Olga was silent, she breathed deeply, like a sigh, and her gaze was preoccupied; she was suddenly far away. “We have to atone before we gain peace,” Marinus said. “If people remembered that, perhaps they’d live differently. But I’m not complaining that the black magic’s been forgotten because it wasn’t good for anybody. My mother’s uncle could knock a person’s eye out, and he screamed in the most terrible torment on his deathbed. There he repented all the damage he’d caused.”

The lamp was shining in the living room, and if you went outdoors, you could see the gleam from the factory and hear the heavy boom of the machines. But Marinus had forgotten that he was a worker at a factory. He was telling stories from the old times, about killers who didn’t find peace in their graves, about unbaptized children who cried in the cemeteries in the dark nights. Pale, Olga got up to go. “I’m not frightening you, am I,
Olga?” asked Marinus, who’d become aware of her paleness. “It’s so ghastly,” Olga said. “Never you mind,” Marinus said. “Because we know that if we just stick to our baptismal covenant, evil will not gain the upper hand.” Olga didn’t answer; she went up to her room.

And now Marinus felt like talking to his enlightened son from the heart. “It seems to me something is wrong with Olga,” he said. “I don’t know if it might help if you had a word with her. She’s been odd since she came home from Funen. Sometimes she’s a complete fool and flirts with menfolk, both the married and the unmarried ones. And sometimes she falls into melancholy and is so totally depressed. I don’t know—are you a good judge of womenfolk, little Søren?”

But in this respect Søren couldn’t advise his father. “It’s not easy for me to say anything,” he said. “After all, I haven’t seen much of Olga for many years. But presumably she’s in love.” “Surely no other explanation is possible,” Marinus admitted. “It’s really not easy to have children, little Søren. The girls have their love affairs, which they won’t tell about, and the lads either want to drink or fight. But you’ll really never hear me complaining—my children have never caused me grief.”

Then the day came when Søren had to leave to visit the district magistrate’s son in Vendsyssel, and from there he was going to travel to Copenhagen to go on at the university. Just as they were parting, Marinus slipped Søren a ten-crown bill. “Don’t mention it,” he said. “Because we don’t have a lot of money here after the strike. But you can’t be without money when you’re going out among the bigwigs. I don’t want you to be put to shame when you’re out staying with people.”
One evening Tora went into Olga’s room. Her daughter was lying across the bed with her head in the pillows and crying. “But child, are you sick?” Tora asked, but it was nothing, Olga whispered, just as long as she was allowed to be left in peace. Tora sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked her gingerly across her shoulders. Olga’s crying became deeper; it was as if she couldn’t get the tears out. “You better talk about it,” Tora said. “It’s always a relief to talk to another person who wishes you well.” Olga’s shoulders trembled, as if she were having a convulsion. “You shouldn’t grieve even if somebody’s been unfaithful to you,” Tora said. “There are plenty of menfolk in the world. But the ones who leave us for the grave, they don’t return. The grief love causes passes when the next one comes, but there’s no cure for death. You should think about that, little Olga.”

Olga got up in the bed and stared with bewildered eyes at her mother. “It was surely something I dreamt,” she said. “I often have such unpleasant dreams at night.” “But I mean, you haven’t sleep at all, you haven’t been out of your clothes, child,” Tora said. “And you’ve been so strange ever since you came home in the spring. I don’t recognize you. At first I was afraid you were going to have a child, but now I definitely understand, it must’ve been a man who was unfaithful to you.” “Oh, if only it weren’t something else,” Olga whispered, and now Tora took fright.

“Olga, Olga, what have you done,” she said and shook her daughter. “Whatever it is, you have to say it, otherwise you’ll never be at peace.” Olga’s body became rigid, and she sank back into the bed with a scream. Niels and Marinus came stomping up the stairs and tore open the door. “What’s going on, has there been an accident?” Marinus shouted. “It’s Olga, she’s sick, but I’ll definitely call if it’s necessary,” Tora said. “Is she going to have a child,” Marinus asked, horrified. “Won’t you both please
go,” Tora said. “If she were giving birth, she certainly wouldn’t be needing two menfolk standing by her bed.”

The men left and Tora lifted her daughter up and held her in her arms. “What’s tormenting you—are you with child after all?” she asked. “Whatever we have to go through, we have to go through, and we can just as well use our common sense.” “No, I’m not pregnant,” Olga said. “But you mustn’t ask me any more, mother. I also want to get away from here. I don’t care to work at the factory—I want to go out and get a position as a servant.” Nervously, Olga began talking about her wanting perhaps to go to Copenhagen as a maid, so she could also be with Søren once in a while and look after his clothes. Tora listened to her for a while and then went down to the kitchen. “I’ll sleep with Olga tonight,” she said. “She’s so agitated.” “It would really be best if I took my bike and fetched the doctor,” Niels said, but Tora ignored the suggestion. “You people just go to bed now; I’ll stay with Olga till she calms down.”

Olga lay and wept quietly, and Tora got her clothes off. Then she got undressed in the dark and lay down in the bed next to her daughter. “Back when I was young, I also had grief,” she said. “I was fond of somebody, but he was above my station, and he took another even though it was me he cared for. I never thought I’d get over it, but now I know it wasn’t worth caring about. I married Marinus and learned not to take life for more than it is. Your father has always been soft-hearted and easily frightened, and if I hadn’t put up a fight, we’d have been completely wretched. But I certainly know how it can singe a person’s heart; I haven’t forgotten my youth.”

“Oh, what do I care if a man wants me or not,” Olga whispered. “I wish I were dead. I’ve often made up my mind to jump in the fjord. But what if it’s true that you’d be eternally damned.” Tora took her hand and lay with it in hers. “I don’t believe in any damnation,” she said. “But I know that we have to fight the good fight no matter how hard it is.” “I had a child on Funen,” Olga said, and Tora noticed how she was shaking over her whole body. “It was with the husband on the farm where I last served.”

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Tora lay silent, but she held her daughter’s hand firmly, and she sensed how Olga was squeezing her hand as if it were the only thing in the world she had to hold on to. “He must be a bad person,” she said. “That he could bring himself to seduce a poor girl who was serving on his farm. But there are many girls who’ve gotten into trouble before you. I wish you’d been spared, little Olga, but you’ve got to straighten your back and take what comes. If you’ve had a child, you’ll also have to care for it. You have to go over there where you put it out to nurse and bring it home.”

“The child died,” Olga said.

Tora sensed that her whole body turned cold; she could barely get the words out.

“Did you kill child?” she whispered.

“Nobody discovered I was with child,” Olga said. “I laced myself up tight . . . but it wasn’t my intention . . . I was just so ashamed to go home.”

“And so you gave birth in secret?” Tora asked.

“It came suddenly one night,” Olga said and recounted how she’d given birth to the child without daring to scream so no one would hear her. And when she regained consciousness after the pain and exhaustion, the child was lying in her bed.

“Was it stillborn, or . . .” Tora asked.

“It wasn’t stillborn,” Olga said. “It made a sound, and I was afraid it would scream. So I put my hand on its mouth. I wasn’t in my right mind, I was sick and desperate . . . oh, I was totally beside myself.”

Tora lay totally quiet and listened to her daughter’s confession. She’d given life to many children and every new life had been a new joy in the world for her even though she’d been worried about how to support them all. Tora started crying. It wasn’t out of compassion with Olga; she wasn’t thinking about her at all now. She saw before her the infant child, the blue-red face with big, open eyes, the little pliant body. And Olga had put her hand on its mouth and killed it. That was the welcome the new creature had received in the world. Suddenly she asked. “Was it a boy.” “No, it was probably a girl,” Olga wept. “I
don’t know it totally for certain. I didn’t dare look at it . . . afterward.”

Tora didn’t ask anything else, but now Olga had to speak. She recounted how she’d wiped out the traces of the birth. Perhaps the mistress of the house had probably had a suspicion, but she acted as if she believed Olga’s explanation—that she’d had profuse menstrual bleeding at night. The woman had mentioned that it was surely best to send for the doctor, but Olga claimed that that’s the way things were with her once in a while, and that it didn’t mean anything. “I’m sure she knew all about it,” Olga said. “She didn’t at all dare look at me; it was as if she were afraid, but presumably she didn’t want her husband to get mixed up in anything. I laid in bed for about a week, then I requested permission to leave, and that went easily enough. She never said a word against it. But I’ll never find peace; every hour of the day I dread that it’ll be discovered.”

Tora got out of bed; she couldn’t bear lying there any more. She sat down next to the half-open window. It was a cool summer night and there was a sweet scent of lilacs from the garden. There was a faint rustling out there, as if the world couldn’t sleep and were just waiting for it to become day. In the east there was already a fine, golden dawn, although it was many hours before the sun would rise. Tora’s thoughts were with Little-Vera’s grave in Alslev cemetery. Vera had been called away in her innocent childhood; she’d been spared all the world’s strife, and now she lay in her grave, which was decorated with boxwood and pansies, and on a marble stone it read: “Sleep sweetly, little Vera, till we meet again.” Little Vera was the one child of hers who’d never again cause her grief.

And suddenly it dawned on her: “Where did you dispose of the child?” she asked. Olga hesitated a little, as if she had to collect her strength to answer. “I hid it in a box under the bed, and several nights later I buried it . . . . There was a pitchfork in the dunghill . . . and I buried it. And now I’m afraid they’ll find it when they spread dung in the fall.”

Olga had turned around onto her back, and the down quilt had slid off her. Tora saw her plump arms, her ample bosom.
That’s where the child she’d killed ought to have been lying. Tora felt like getting up, going over to the bed, and beating her daughter. Because she certainly understood that it wasn’t grief about the evil deed that gnawed at Olga, but the fear of its coming to light.

“What am I going to do, mother?” Olga whimpered. “I’ve been thinking that if I went to America, then, you know, I’d be gone if it was discovered. Every day I’m in such torment. When I hear somebody knock on the door, I immediately think: Now they found it and now the police are coming for you.”

“You’ll never find peace till you manage to atone for your sin,” Tora said. “But I don’t want to go to jail,” Olga wept. “I wasn’t in my right mind, I was sick, I didn’t know what I was doing.” Tora sat down next to the bed and stroked Olga’s hair. But she felt no compassion for her daughter, only a hard, dull anger, which she didn’t dare voice. So what if Olga had brought a child home with her, even though she’d begotten it by fornication with a married man. Tora had broad shoulders and she could’ve endured it. But she’d never forgive Olga for the way she’d dealt with her child, who was now lying in a dunghill on Funen.

Finally Olga fell into a deep sleep, and Tora stole into the bedroom and went to bed. Next to her she heard Marinus’s steady breathing. Things would have to go badly for Marinus not to get his night’s sleep. She’d lain awake many, many nights in the old days and shuddered at how they’d all get food. But she’d never felt such anxiety as now.
The next day Olga lay there apathetically. Tora gave her food and talked to her as if nothing had happened. Before he went to work, Marinus asked how things were, and Tora explained that they weren’t good, but that it was probably not necessary to fetch the doctor. It was probably not a physical illness Olga was suffering from. Marinus saw from Tora’s expressions that it was serious. And it didn’t surprise him. For many years now Marinus had been living in favorable circumstances. He’d often thought that troubles would of course have to come. It wasn’t likely that fate would permit him to be without adversity for the rest of his days.

In the afternoon, after school, Tora put on her best dress; it was her intention to seek advice from Ulriksen. If anyone could help, he’d be the one. Ulriksen was walking bare-headed in his garden working. “I’d like to ask you for advice, Ulriksen, if you have a moment,” Tora said. “You’re looking so fine as if you were going to communion, Tora,” Ulriksen joked. “Now I’ll tell the housekeeper to make coffee.” “Thanks, I won’t be having any coffee,” Tora said. “If I could be permitted to speak to you in private.” Astonished, Ulriksen stole a glance at Tora. Tora was not in the habit of being so mild-mannered. She must be having trouble.

He invited her in and got her seated. “So what’s the matter, Tora?” he went straight to the point. “Olga got in trouble on Funen after she slipped out of your sister’s care,” Tora said and recounted Olga’s sinful love and how she’d killed her child. Ulriksen’s ruddy face suddenly turned old with worry. He sat and shook his head sadly. “I’d rather she were dead,” Tora said. “You dread the shame that will befall her?” Ulriksen said. “No, I’m thinking about the fact that she suffocated the child she herself gave birth to.” Ulriksen sat and stared ahead, and then he went over to the bookshelf and took out a hymnbook. “If we’re happy, we sing, and if grief strikes, we should also seek comfort.
in song,” he said. “Now let the two of us sing together, Tora.” And in his deep, worn-out voice he struck up a hymn by Grundtvig. Tora accompanied him in a trembling voice.

God’s purpose is in every storm, however wild it is; each flood and every raging fire a servant is of His.

And when the world is casting lots for honour, goods, and life, God in His hand the outcome holds with loving-kindness rife.

If you believe that God does love what He from dust has made, then in His Spirit rest and work and never be afraid.

“Now the storm is over you, Tora,” he said and put the hymnbook back on its shelf. “God’s purpose is in every storm, however wild it is, each flood and every raging fire a servant is of His. You have riches in your children, and your grief will also become your wealth. I’m a lonely old man, who has neither sorrows nor joys. That makes the heart cold and barren. If God had loved me, he would have sent me a great sorrow.” “It’s Olga I’m thinking of,” Tora said. “How’s she going to keep living with that offense on her conscience.” “Humans can live with much on their conscience,” Ulriksen said. “It’s best if I go talk to the girl. But you go ahead, there’s plenty of time to ask what happened.”

Ulriksen came right after Tora had come home. Together they went up to Olga, who, frightened, turned her face, which was red-eyed from weeping, toward the wall. “Your mother has told me everything,” Ulriksen said. “That was a frightful deed, Olga, and we know you well enough to know that you wouldn’t have done it if you’d been in your right mind. I didn’t come to preach about what can’t be changed, but so we can decide what
we’re going to do.” “Can’t I go to America?” Olga asked. “No matter where you are in the world, you’ll discover you can’t live with the deed on your conscience,” Ulriksen said. “No, Olga, you have to go to the authorities and confess, and today rather than tomorrow.”

“Oh no, oh no, I’d rather die,” Olga sobbed. “Death doesn’t bring any solace, if what we learned as children otherwise has any validity,” Ulriksen said. “But if you take your punishment with a repentant heart, then peace will come to you.”

Olga threw herself about in the bed and wailed like a sick animal. Tora took her hard by the arm and shook her. “Now you’re going to pull yourself together,” she said. “You made your bed, now sleep in it. If you’d brought the child, I’d never have said a harsh word to you. We know that it’s not always the worst girls who get in trouble. But if you killed your child, like a sow devours its piglets, you’ll also have to take your punishment. Those are hard words, little Olga, but I want it that way so I can respect my own daughter.” Olga remained mute. “It has to happen, poor child,” Ulriksen said mournfully. “And let’s do it today before the men come from work. It’s best to get it over with quickly.” “If I don’t turn myself in, will you?” Olga asked. “No, I can’t be expected to report my own daughter,” Tora said. “But I’ll never forgive you for your deed. I’ll regret the day I gave birth to you.”

It was a difficult time when Tora helped Olga into her clothes and combed her hair. It felt like back when she washed little Vera for the last time and dressed her for her final repose. They didn’t talk to each other, but Tora touched her daughter so gently every contact was a mournful caress. Down in the living room she heard Ulriksen’s heavy, tired steps. Then they were ready for the rough trip, and it was about the time the fjord steamer would be leaving for Færgeby. “We have to go,” Tora said. “We have to leave, little Olga.” She took Olga by the hand and led her through the house. Olga looked around as if she were leaving forever. “You’ll come back, Olga, I know, you’ll come back.” “Maybe I’ll be sentenced to death because I killed my child,” Olga said. “No, you’ll return, Olga,” Tora said, and
cried.

It was a calm, mild afternoon. The steamer hurried off into the winding navigation channel, now near land, now out into the small broads. It went close to the heathery knolls and marshy meadows where the cows were grazing. The shore birds ran chirping along the shore, a fishing boat with red sails rocked in the steamer’s wake. Olga sat slumped between Ulriksen and Tora on a bench on deck. It looked as though she were sleeping. Tora held her hand firmly in hers. It was as if Olga had once again become a little girl who’d had an affliction and, exhausted, had fallen asleep. “Little Olga,” Tora whispered ponderously to herself. That things should end this way with pretty, spirited Olga. But it was fortunate that Ulriksen was now standing at Tora’s side. “Did I raise her badly,” Tora thought. “Didn’t I take her strictly enough in hand? Oh, anything but that—if she just hadn’t killed her child.”

The steamer docked at Færgeby harbor and they took Olga by the arm and led her ashore. It was as if she were no longer conscious. She just let it happen, she followed, with feet which just moved mechanically, and eyes which were open, but didn’t see. “Don’t be afraid, little Olga,” Tora whispered. “It’s best for it to happen this way. And you’ll come back and find peace. I know you’ll come back.” A clerk received them at the judicial district office. The district magistrate wasn’t available—the office hours were over.

“Please tell him that we have to speak to him,” Ulriksen said. “It’s a matter of life and death.” The clerk hesitated. “I’m not much inclined to disturb the district magistrate,” he said. “He’s in the habit of resting at this time. But I can fetch the head clerk. He’s in the habit of drinking his afternoon tea over at the hotel.” “We have to talk to the district magistrate himself,” Ulriksen said. “If he has a post, he also has to attend to it. Would you get him up out of his sleep this instant. This is serious.”

The clerk thought it over for a bit—he wasn’t pleased about the situation. “Can’t you say what this is about?” he asked. Ulriksen tapped his fingers on the counter and didn’t answer. The clerk left and a few minutes later the district magistrate came.
He was heavy and squat with a short neck and small, fierce, red-rimmed eyes. He approached the counter, slowly and menacingly, like a bull with its horns lowered.

"Who are you?" he asked brusquely. "Schoolteacher Ulriksen from Alslev," Ulriksen replied in the same brusque tone. "We came to . . . ." "You must have come in an extremely urgent matter," the district magistrate interrupted. "It's not altogether customary to literally order me down here. What's on your mind, my good man, teacher Ulriksen?" "You'll find out how urgent our business is, my good man, district magistrate Arelius," Ulriksen said in a rage. "I've come with this young girl and her mother to report that she bore a child clandestinely and killed her child in delirium." "When?" the district magistrate asked. "In March, over on Funen," Ulriksen said. "It would have been more proper for you to approach the local parish sheriff and let him undertake what's necessary. I find it quite improper for you to demand that I be personally sent for when it's not a matter of a crime with fresh tracks."

The veins swelled on Ulriksen's forehead, and he thumped his clenched fist against the counter. "This won't do, damn it, district magistrate," he said. "You're the authorities, and it's your damn duty to hear what we want to say." "Are you banging the table right in my face," the district magistrate said, overwhelmed. "This is coming very close to insulting a public official while on duty, and that could become an expensive business for you." "Is it also a crime to try to get a public official to begin his duties," Ulriksen said. "But I'm going to go home right now and write a complaint about you to the government ministry. Surely there must be someone over the district magistrate in Færgeby." "I'll be damned if that isn't impudence that I'm supposed to let myself be taken to task by a deacon," the district magistrate shouted. "The only thing I'm demanding is to get you to be on duty," Ulriksen shouted. "I'll be damned if I'm going to put up with this any more," the district magistrate thundered. "If you don't hold your tongue this minute, I'll have you arrested."

Tora had pulled Olga over to a bench standing next to the
door. She sat quietly and patted Olga’s hand, while the men quarreled. The clerk had stolen out the door and run across the market square into the hotel. The head clerk was sitting there with company and playing dice for his afternoon toddy. “You have to hurry over, Harhoff, the old man is about to arrest a school teacher,” the clerk whispered. “Who the hell woke him?” the head clerk asked, but he got up and went along. He didn’t bat an eyelash when he saw the two men standing face to face each on his side of the counter, both hotheads flushed. “What’s going on here, district magistrate, sir?” he asked. “You might well ask about that,” the district magistrate said. “The deacon from Alslev comes here and is rude to me in my own office. But now that we’ve had a deacon as prime minister, these guys think that they can push royal officials around as they wish. But damn it, I demand that my office be respected. This is a law office and not a small huckster’s shop.” “Now I’ll deal with this matter, district magistrate, sir,” head clerk Harhoff said and looked stiffly at his superior. The district magistrate, with his eyes menacingly pointed at Ulriksen, withdrew out the door. They heard his heavy steps up the stairs.

“Hello, Mr. Ulriksen,” the head clerk said and shook hands. “Well, you know the old man and I needn’t say any more. A good-hearted person at bottom.” “In fact, if I had my druthers, I’d spank his bottom,” Ulriksen said, seething with anger. “Indeed,” the head clerk laughed. “But to whomever God gives a government post he also gives a head clerk. You should’ve sent for me right away.”

And with a smile and little witticisms the head clerk calmed Ulriksen down. A policeman was sent for and took down a report. The head clerk dictated the counts of the case to him. Concealment of birth and infanticide in March on Funen. It came in small, short, hard juridical sentences. The case shall be instituted in the competent jurisdiction. Jespersen, run over to the keeper of the local jail and tell him to prepare a cell for the prisoner. The constitutionally guaranteed arraignment before a magistrate will be held tomorrow. The head clerk cast a glance at the child murderess on the bench. Incidentally she looked
damned good. Yeah, these damned girls.

"How much do you think . . . how many years . . ." Ulriksen said, and his lips quivered. "The fact that the party charged with the crime turned herself in will be of significance," the head clerk said. "But we’re not the ones who’ll pass sentence. The case will be instituted on Funen. We hope for the best, Mr. Ulriksen, after all she was hardly entirely herself." The policeman slowly approached the bench where Tora and Olga were sitting. "Goodbye Olga," Tora said, and now you could see that she was practically an old woman. "Goodbye Olga, my little girl. . . ."

Tora and Ulriksen silently walked down the street, but suddenly Ulriksen stopped and banged his stick hard on the bumpy cobblestone. "What do the big shots care about the misfortune of us common people," he said. "We have to make inquiries concerning our troubles during office hours. A report is written and then the authorities go back to their afternoon nap or their tea and rum." "Do you think I’ll be allowed to visit her?" Tora asked. "I understood that she’d be sent to Funen," Ulriksen said. "It’s going to be rough on Marinus," Tora said. "Marinus always wants to yield to fate," Ulriksen said. "There’s no rebellion in Marinus, the meek man. It was us two who should’ve danced together, Tora. It wouldn’t have been easy for others to take liberties with us."

In the midst of her deep grief Tora felt a warmth in her heart. "We’d probably have been too uncompromising, the two of us," she said. "We would’ve been the beams that could support a house," Ulriksen said. "We would’ve been able to take the hard times that pass slowly." And Ulriksen hummed: "As the days grow longer, the winter grows stronger, the winter grows stronger and that’s dire! Hard times pass slowly, pass slowly, that’s their way." He took Tora very tenderly by the hand and said: "Tora, it’s a shame we have to die soon."

Ulriksen was right—Marinus did bow to the will of fate. "May the Lord preserve the poor child," he said, and his face was so wretched that it singed Tora’s heart. "But I suppose it had to be. We’ve given our children a good upbringing, I reckon, and I’d never have expected that Olga would disgrace us.
It’ll be bad if Søren finds out about it. It’s not possible, is it, that the district magistrate would throw him out of his house?” Tora didn’t think so, and besides, after all, they didn’t have to write Søren about Olga’s misfortune till he was back at his studies in Copenhagen.

Many times that summer Tora went to the cemetery and sat down beside little Vera’s grave. She thought about the child who’d had such a brief life on Funen. Now it, too, would surely be laid to rest in a Christian manner, but no one would plant flowers on its grave.
It was in the middle of the harvest, and it was a good crop. The clattering of the reaper could be heard from the fields, swinging cartloads of grain were driven into the barn, but the workers hardly saw it. The factory was in full swing. The workers went to and from the factory, day shift and night shift, people who for generations had had their home here, and others who’d moved here. Every man had his place in the line, his work day after day. Conveyor belts glided along with burned clinker, with sacks, with coal. The factory hummed as if with a tremendous latent energy. Seamen went ashore from the cement barges and steamers and danced in the bright summer evenings with the town’s girls at the inn. It happened that things ended up in a brawl, the foreign sailors were too wild with the girls, and the young workers gave them a thrashing. At night you could hear the tramping of heavy boots and curses and dull blows.

Tremendous thunderstorms moved along the fjord. The lightning crackled around the tall factory smokestacks, downpours knocked down large pieces of the face of the cliff. From the hills you could see fires like a small, steady flame far inland. But the thunderstorm brought coolness, and it was easier to work than in the broiling heat. The rain kept down the cement dust, which was a curse for people.

People talked about Olga’s misfortune—it couldn’t be hidden of course. The men didn’t say much—mostly they listened. But the women had sympathy for Olga. Of course, it must’ve been a shameless person who’d seduced her despite being a married man who was settled down. It would serve him right to be sitting behind bars together with Olga. But that’s the way it’s always been. The man had the pleasure and the weak woman had to bear the risk. Now there was Magda. She melted into tears when she heard about Olga’s fate. She was visiting Tora, but there wasn’t much talk about Olga; it was as if Magda’s words got stuck in her throat when she was about to mention
Olga’s name. Instead she talked about Iver, who surely wasn’t the best company, either for Ida or her innocent daughter. Magda didn’t feel that Kresten Bossen could defend taking such a lecher into his house when he had womenfolk to watch over.

“I surely know that I offended with him; I mean, I confided in you, Tora,” Magda said. “But he really does have a strange power over womenfolk. He also certainly managed to seduce Frederikke. Still, she had Cilius, and what do I have? I mean, Andres can’t even hold his water.” And in the midst of her grief Tora couldn’t help smiling, because there was of course no denying that Magda had a hard life.

But when Magda got together with the other women, she spoke her mind about Olga point blank. “If you want to know what I think, she should be sentenced to sit in the penitentiary for life,” Magda said. “It would’ve been better if Tora had listened to good advice in time. I warned her, back when Olga was having an affair with the engineer. I said to Tora: watch out for your daughter because she’s too loose, but Tora never wanted to listen. And when she came from Funen, I sure had a feeling something had gone wrong with her.” “Would you please stop your blathering,” Line Seldomglad said. “First put your own house in order.” “You can say what you will,” Magda said. “Olga was, you know, the loose kind, and the pitcher goes to the well till it comes home broken. If you want to know my opinion of Olga, I call her a whore.”

A letter came from Søren, who’d received the bad tidings in Copenhagen. He was very angry about what Olga had done. Fortunately, the matter, of course, hadn’t even gotten into the capital’s newspapers, Søren wrote, otherwise it could certainly do him harm. He’d just applied for a scholarship and gotten it, and he was determined to take a new name. “Søren Jensen is of course too common,” his letter said. “I’ve decided to call myself Søren Alslev. The petition doesn’t cost much—it can be had for four crowns.”

“Now he doesn’t want to have his name in common with us any more,” Tora said, but Marinus was immediately ready with a defense of his learned son. “Alslev of course is the name of his
native town,” he said. “And if he’s going to be a scholar, a fella certainly understands that he has to have a name that’s not like others.” “He can call himself whatever he wants, I won’t respect him until he’s shown what he’s good for,” Tora said. “It’s easy enough to learn Latin with other people’s money, but his brothers and sisters have earned a living almost from when they could walk.”

Marinus was an old hand and he knew that he shouldn’t be contradicting Tora at this time. One evening he’d seen Tora standing with little Vera’s rag doll in her hand, and right then he knew how closely Olga’s fate had touched her, although she never talked about it. Marinus was definitely a cautious man in this world, but he also had eyes in his head.

But now they were going to get serious about the co-operative society, and it was decided that Cilius and Børgezen should go to Færgeby to investigate whether they could get a loan at the savings bank to build a building and begin doing business. They took off from work and bicycled in the morning to Færgeby, and Cilius felt they should probably talk to attorney Schjott. The attorney wasn’t in the office when Cilius and Børgezen came, and they had to wait a while. A piercing woman’s voice and heavy thuds on the floor could be heard from the apartment above, as if somebody were speaking her mind by furiously stamping. The clerk became agitated. “I better fetch the attorney,” he said. “Surely you better not,” Cilius said with a grin. “He’s probably doing his gymnastics, as they call it.” But the clerk ran upstairs, and a moment later Schjott came walking like a crab with his crooked gait. His hair was in disorder and there were a couple of red streaks across one cheek, as if from a woman’s sharp nails. “Good morning, gentlemen,” he said out of breath. “Please, come into my private dwelling—what brings you here?”

Cilius was about to explain that they came as representatives and were seeking a loan, when the door to the private office was torn open and Mrs. Marja stood at the threshold. “You slimy grass snake,” she shouted. “May I ask you to go upstairs, Mrs. Marja,” Schjott said in dignified manner. “I’m occupied with
business, as you see.” "Yeah, I’ll go," Mrs. Schjøtt shouted, and her bosom heaved with agitation. "I’d rather go my way than live one more day with you. But pay attention to what I’m saying: I’m going and I’m taking the revolver with me.” "Marja, now be calm,” the attorney shouted and, losing his temper, stamped on the floor. "I’ll come up right away. Can’t you take a pill and go to bed?"

Mrs. Marja didn’t look as though she needed medicine or bed rest; she resembled an actress who was playing the big scene in the last act. She snatched a revolver from her dress pocket and waved it dramatically. A bang and a bullet whistled past Cilius’s head. "No, I’ll be damned if I’m going to be shot in this war here,” Cilius roared and rushed at the woman. He got hold of her legs and lifted her in the air. The revolver fell onto the floor and Børgesen picked it up.

"This way,” Schjøtt said and walked ahead like a crab up the stairs. "Carry her carefully, she has to be put in bed. Jensen, call the doctor, say he has to come right away—there’s a disaster again.” Cilius carried the lawyer’s wife up into bed in his arms. Mrs. Marja wriggled as if she were being raped, and her screams shrilled through the house. "God damn her,” the lawyer cursed. "What’s keeping the doctor?"

The doctor came, broad-shouldered and calm, with a little leather bag in his hand. He ordered the men out of the bedroom. Schjøtt remained standing right outside with his ear against the door. “Just as long as she doesn’t get convulsions,” he said. “The damn witch.” “Be quiet, Mrs. Schjøtt,” the doctor said and took out a syringe. “He’s tormenting me, doctor, he’s killing the human being in me,” she wailed and held out her hand. “Then get divorced,” the doctor said. “Next time it’ll be the mental hospital. I’m not going to give you any more morphine.”

Mrs. Marja got her injection and fell asleep whimpering. The doctor came out. “What am I going to do, doctor?” the lawyer asked and took him by the arm. “There are only two things that can tame women,” the doctor said. “Give her children or work.” “If that ain’t the truth,” Cilius said. “Womenfolk are like horses—they have to be exercised, otherwise they get stable
staggers.” “Good lord,” the lawyer sighed. “Damn it, it’s also true of menfolk,” Cilius said. “Truth to tell.”

Suddenly attorney Schjøtt was once again a lawyer and businessman. “We were interrupted in our business by my wife’s nervous breakdown. Goodbye and thanks, doctor, you’ll look in later in the day? And gentlemen, this way.” The lawyer led the way into the office, opened a cabinet and took out a bottle of port and glasses. “May I offer you a refreshment after the fright,” he said. “The bullet whistled by my head,” Cilius said. “I could surely use a sweet drink.”

The sweat formed beads on the lawyer’s forehead, and his hand was shaking when he lifted the glass. “I regret the incident.” “What’s that?” Cilius asked. “I mean my wife’s behavior,” the lawyer explained. “Forget about it,” Cilius said. “I mean, the rest of us have an old hag at home too; it’s not worth bothering about what they can think up. Well, I’ll give you this piece of advice if you ask me: get the womanfolk pregnant, that’s their delight, and it’ll give the rest of us peace.”

Cilius reached for the bottle of port and poured his glass. Then he put the bottle suitably close to himself. “Now in a way they’re really alike, that’s been my experience, but you have to keep a tight rein on them,” he said. “And I’ll tell you one thing, counsel, hold the rein tight, but don’t ever use the whip. I know womenfolk, if anybody does.” Cilius emptied his glass and poured again. “Thanks a lot for your aid and valuable advice,” the lawyer said tartly. “I’m usually an adherent of the principle of keeping business and private life separate. Nobody called up there, right?” The men listened, but it was quiet upstairs. “Excuse me, but I’m not quite myself,” attorney Schjøtt said and dried his forehead. “But let’s get down to business, gentlemen, to business.” “If this bullet had come two inches closer, dammit, I’d have been a dead man,” Cilius said. “I’m still shaking. Couldn’t you send your office boy over for a couple of bottles of lager—I’m getting nauseous with this sweet crap.” “Jensen,” Schjøtt shouted. “Would you run over to the grocer for six bottles of lager. And so gentlemen, what brings you here?”

Cilius and Børgesen explained their plans for the consumer
co-operative, and now of course they certainly needed to get a loan. Did Schjøtt think they could get five thousand at the savings bank if fifty good, solid men stood surety for a hundred crowns each? The attorney felt that could probably be done. It would be best if they went to the savings bank right away and talked things over. While Cilius and Børgeesen drank the last lager, Schjøtt went up to listen at the bedroom door. His wife was sleeping soundly. Schjøtt poured one more glass of port and took his hat.

At the savings bank the three men had to wait a bit before being granted an audience with the president, the former grocer Andersen, who resembled a fierce dog with whiskers. He listened to Schjøtt’s explanation while he stole angry glances at Cilius and Børgeesen over his glasses.

“What do you people need with a consumer co-operative?” he said when Schjøtt had finished. “There are enough grocers and half of them have trouble staying alive.”

“We’ve agreed that we want the benefit of a consumer co-operative,” Børgeesen said. “But Færgeby Savings Bank isn’t going to risk its money on this sort of tomfoolery,” Andersen said. “If you’re not satisfied with one grocer, you can go to the next one. I mean, there’s practically no way to please people.”

“Excuse me, if I might mention . . .” the attorney said, but Schjøtt wasn’t permitted to mention anything. “There’s nothing more to talk about,” Andersen said. “You’re wasting your time, counsel.”

The attorney was silent; he often had use for the savings bank and didn’t care to get into a quarrel with the president. “There are people from Alslev who put their money in the savings bank here, aren’t there?” Cilius said. “In any event I don’t recall having seen you as a depositor,” Andersen said and shot Cilius a dirty look over his glasses. “And you never will either, damn it” Cilius said. “I’ve never hoarded money. But then it’s better if we go to Havnsø and chat with them about putting a branch of their savings bank in Alslev.” “Why are you making such a fuss?” Andersen asked. “Can you people procure solid guarantors? We’re not going to run any risk because you’ve
come up with the idea of opening a consumer co-operative in Alslev.” “To a man we’ll all stand surety,” Cilius said, and now the conversation was on the right track.

“I drove him into a corner,” Cilius said, when they got outside on the street. “I took him by the nose ring like a bull. He didn’t care for us going to Havnsø. That’ll teach you, Børgeisen, always answer the big shots back. They can’t stand it. They’re not used to it.” Cilius and Børgeisen brought home the news that the money could certainly be procured and a site was bought for the consumer co-operative and plans worked out. Skifter understood it was serious. People talked about the consumer co-operative in his shop.

“There you really see what people are like,” he said. “I gave them credit and extensions for a great many years and am running a great risk because I also have my own obligations to meet. And when a fella is forced to say stop, they get sore and want to open a consumer co-operative. But it won’t work, boys, because a fella also has to be knowledgeable about business to make it work.” But on this point the farmers standing in the shop didn’t agree with Skifter. They weren’t so sure that a co-op probably wouldn’t work, and it surely didn’t do any harm for competition to come. That was a sound principle.

And it was a hard day for Skifter when his own son-in-law Konrad told him he could easily imagine becoming manager of the consumer co-operative. “So I’ll have to live to see it,” Skifter said. “Yeah, yeah, as long as you don’t come to regret it, little Konrad. Things have ended badly for awfully many co-op managers.” “Things have also ended badly for many grocers,” Konrad said. “But do you think they’ll hire you?” Skifter asked cautiously. Yes, he had an excellent chance. Konrad had talked to Cilius, who felt it was good for them to get a man who knew people and knew how much each one would be good for.

“Okay, I wish you all the luck, Konrad,” Skifter said, but you could see he wasn’t happy. In the last few years it was only rarely that Skifter had gone to meetings of the Pious, but now he got it in his head once again to hear a word for the soul. There was a meeting in Martin Thomsen’s parlor, and Skifter sat down
on the back bench. It was an old missionary who was speaking. He told about the difficult tribulations the Lord’s friends had to endure, and how they were mocked and disparaged by worldly children. He spoke meekly and well about the compensation in the next world that awaited those who led the good life to the end. Afterwards Martin Thomsen said a few words about the Mission house. Things were so far along that the foundation could be dug if only a very small sum could be raised.

After the meeting Martin Thomsen went over to Skifter and took him heartily by the hand. “I was so delighted to see you here once again among God’s children,” he said. “I’ve thought so much about you, Skifter, because it’s as though you had wandered away from the path.” “I’d like to give you a sum for the Mission house,” Skifter said. “You can come one of the next few days and get the money. I’ll just have to get it withdrawn from the savings bank.”

Skifter gave a donation of a thousand crowns and Martin Thomsen was full of thanks and praise. “I knew it, Skifter, I knew exactly that you’d find the way back to grace,” he said. “Praised be the Lord on high because he wants to have you back.” “I’ve always followed the Lord,” Skifter said. “Even if in the last few years I haven’t run around to meetings so much.” “Let’s pray and praise the Lord together,” Martin Thomsen said. “For what were we sinners without him . . . .”

Yes, yes, Skifter nodded and pursed his lips. He who put his trust in God didn’t go wrong. He had the power, and the glory was his. And if they were now creating a consumer cooperative, and his own son-in-law was going to become manager, Skifter had brought his offering to the Lord. Whatever was given to God, was repaid double.
Ulriksen had written to his sister to find out how Olga’s case on Funen was going. And one day a letter came saying that Olga had now received her sentence. She had to go to the house of correction for eighteen months, and the punishment had turned out to be so lenient only because the experts felt that she’d scarcely been completely responsible for her actions, and she was presumably given credit for having confessed her offense. While the men were at work, Ulriksen came to tell Tora what the letter had said. But there was another thing Tora wanted to know: had the child been found and laid in Christian ground?

Yes, Ulriksen said, to be sure there was nothing about it in the letter, but he ventured to vouch for its having happened. Tora sat silently. It would be a meager resting place. In a few years it would be a hillock overgrown with grass. Olga’s deed would surely not be forgotten so easily. Tora lay awake for hours at night and thought about how Olga was doing now. She’d forgotten her bitterness toward her daughter—oh, if she could only visit her in prison and sit a little with her holding hands. That would’ve been solace for her beleaguered heart.

“You’re taking it hard, Tora, and it mustn’t be taken lightly either,” Ulriksen said. “But grief cleanses the heart of pettiness and rancor. What Olga is going through now will make it easier for her to bear her fate. She voluntarily took the burden upon herself, and that’s why she’ll find help in carrying it.” “I hardly know, Ulriksen,” Tora said. “You’re smart, but you don’t know how things are for womenfolk. Surely some day other people will be able to forget what Olga did, but she herself will never get over the fact that she killed her child.”

The minister came to visit and talked to Tora, but he felt himself that he had a hard time finding the right words. Tora sat calmly before him and listened to him. “I was sorry to hear about it,” Pastor Gamst said. “I mean, your daughter was such a lively young girl.” “Whatever will be will be,” Tora said
guardedly. “And if we have to bear something, presumably we also get the back to bear it on.” “Maybe,” the minister said. “But can you find comfort in the old fatalism? Don’t you need to come into a more personal relationship with God, Tora?” Tora shook her head. “God didn’t consult me,” she said. “I bear responsibility for what I do, he has to bear responsibility for what he does.” “One day you, too, will certainly find the mystery of grace,” Pastor Gamst said. “No,” Tora said. “Never in all my born days will I join the Inner Mission.”

The men didn’t talk about Olga. A girl had been seduced and had killed her child. The same thing could happen with your own daughter. But when the women met, Olga was talked about. Magda was filled with dark horror. “Now she’s sitting behind bars and may God have mercy on her,” she said. “But I’d always feared it, with the life she led.” “How many have you slept with yourself?” Line Seldomglad said. “I’m like a hen you all peck at,” Magda wailed. “But you can say what you will, but I’ve never let anybody make me pregnant.” “That’s surely none of your doing,” Line Seldomglad smiled. “If anybody, surely it’s the men who deserve the credit.” “No, that’s where you go wrong,” Magda said all excited. “If you sleep with them in a seemly way, you won’t get pregnant. It’s only if you get wild and abandon yourself. And I’ve always been chaste—the Almighty can testify to that in his heaven that I’ve trusted people too well. That’s my mistake and I’ve paid for it plenty severely.”

It was well into the harvest and the grain was in the barn. Out in the heath the heather was in bloom. The first August darkness was about to fall and the sky stretched like a huge velvet-black dome over the heathery knolls when Boel-Erik left his property in the heath. As soon as he came from work at the factory and had eaten, he bicycled out there, and it got late before he came back. Boel-Erik had resigned from the union’s executive committee—his moorland plot had to be looked after. He’d begun to dig up potatoes—now they were getting a good price. And new heath had to be broken up. Now Boel-Erik was working out there alone; the others had enough work as it was at the
factory. “Why do you want to be a farmer instead of a worker?” Børgesen asked, when Erik left the union executive committee. Boel-Erik mumbled something about his also certainly being a worker. Boel-Erik couldn’t explain his dream of becoming his own man on his own land to other people.

But Inger no longer complained about its taking a long time before Erik got home. She put the children to bed early in order to have them out of the way before Niels came. Long ago people had begun to talk about their being up to something with each other, and one day Marinus heard about it. He spoke to Niels about it one evening as they were walking home together from work. It came about with a lot of cautious beating around the bush because Marinus wasn’t the man to go right to the point if a careful detour could be found. But what Marinus had to say to his son did come to light.

“I don’t care what people jabber on about,” Niels said sul­lenly. “Inger and I are grown-up enough to take care of our­selves.” “I really don’t want you to get Inger into trouble,” Ma­rinus said. “There are also definitely plenty of girls—you don’t have to go to a married woman. We have to be honest, little Niels, honest in all our dealings.” But Niels couldn’t be talked to. He obstinately kept silent. “We mustn’t do to others what we don’t want others to do to us,” Marinus said. “And if you were married, you wouldn’t like others going to your wife. Find your­self a sweetheart among the girls—you’re the right age for it. But we have to be honest, Niels.” Niels didn’t answer, and Ma­rinus probably sensed that his admonition didn’t bear fruit.

Then came clear cool September days. The men bicycled to work in the wet mornings when the dew sparkled in cobwebs in the grass. The factory attracted them—it was the focal point of the area’s life. The rotary kilns turned round. Chalk and clay were dug out and washed and burned to cement. Barges and steamers were docked at the wharf and loaded the cement in bar­rels and sacks. Day and night the rotary kilns turned round, con­veyor belts glided along. The machines thumped in the factory. People and machines worked in the same tenacious, steady rhythm. Men went to work and men came home from work.
Two buildings were built in the town of Alslev, the consumer co-operative and the Mission house. Cilius and Børgesen had found a site diagonally across from Skifter’s grocery store, and from his shop Skifter could follow how the walls were rising. It was going to be big, and how did they think they could get a return on such a building? No, Skifter knew what he was talking about: you couldn’t base a business on credit and debt regardless of whether it was called a general store or a consumer co-operative. After Konrad had learned his lesson and ended up in misery as co-op manager, he could return to Skifter. But for the future, Skifter himself would be at the helm because Konrad certainly didn’t have the ability for it.

The Mission house was the first to get a roof. It was a humble little building of ugly machine-made stone with a slate roof. A marble slab was placed on the gable end with gilt letters: “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!” Martin Thomsen had paid for the marble tablet out of his own purse, and it was meant as an admonishing word to the workers who bicycled past here every day. Maybe this word in gold and on genuine marble could get one or two to seek the path to mercy and remember that there are greater things in the world than daily bread and the labor union.

The Mission house was consecrated one Sunday in October. Martin Thomsen had written to Pastor Faaborg, who’d come to preach. It was a cold, windy fall day and the moisture streamed down the Mission house’s whitewashed walls. There was a stuffy smell of wet outer garments, whitewash, and smoke from the peat in the tiled stove which wouldn’t burn. Pastor Faaborg was a pale, pudgy man who talked for a long time about Peter’s haul and about the souls who were to be caught here. Pastor Gamst sat together with Martin Thomsen and several others of the leading members in the congregation right by the podium and looked down over the gathering. All of God’s children were there and some of the farmers had also come. But of the workers there were none other than Kresten Bossen and Andres together with their wives, Ida and Magda. On the rear bench he saw a city-clad woman—it was attorney Schjøtt’s wife.
After the sermon there were light refreshments and hymn singing; the friends felt at home in their new house. Martin Thomsen didn’t leave Pastor Faaborg’s side. “I want to thank you for the beautiful talk, Faaborg,” he said. “It was nourishment for the soul.” “And now we’re going to have coffee and food on top of that,” Pastor Gamst thought. “Oh, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!” “I’m not among the great preachers,” Pastor Faaborg said. “But fervor and good will must take the place of our abilities. It’s the will to God that counts, dear Thomsen, the will to God.”

There wasn’t much talking between the hymns, because even though you were having coffee, you were of course so to speak still under a sacred roof. But Pastor Faaborg was fervent and jovial. A man of the Lord and of the people. He had friendly words right and left; a smile had grown firmly around his mouth. He gesticulated a lot with his small, thick hands, and Magda really didn’t like him. He looked as though he was a womanizer, she confided to Ida.

“Not all clergymen are the way they’re supposed to be,” she whispered. “You better believe that I know it, Ida. And even though they have a frock and collar, they’re surely created like other men. There was a curate where I was born, and I can’t bring myself to tell you what he was up to with the girls who were going to confirmation. No, they’re wolves in sheep’s clothing a body can’t easily be on guard against. Now look there!”

Mrs. Marja had come over to greet Pastor Gamst and was introduced to the unfamiliar minister. “See how he’s looking at her,” Magda whispered. “He’s eating her up with his eyes. If anything, it’s certainly scandalous for a minister to look that way at a womanfolk in a Mission house. And she should be ashamed to deck herself out in a fur coat and a hat with feathers. She certainly wants to show that she’s finer than the rest of us.” “I mean, she is married to an attorney,” Ida said. “After all, there have to be differences between people.” “I really don’t like it,” Magda said. “And I’ll tell you what I heard about the attorney’s wife: they say she’s man-crazy.”

“What an experience to be together with all these wonderful
people,” Mrs. Marja said. “Of course it’s something totally new for me.” “I’m glad, madam,” pastor Faaborg said. “After all, we’re just simple people gathered to serve our lord and master.” “It must be beautiful to serve,” Mrs. Marja said and looked at him with soulful enthusiasm. “To abandon oneself in a great, passionate faith. But it’s surely not easy for a poor, fragile person.” “It’s much easier than many people think,” pastor Faaborg said. “It’s the easiest thing of all to confess one’s sins to the savior and place one’s burdens on him.” “I wish I could,” Mrs. Marja sighed. “Pastor Gamst, may I come really soon and have a conversation with you?”

Mrs Marja said goodbye; she had to get to Færgeby before evening, and Martin Thomsen accompanied her to the door. “You ought to look after her, Gamst, Pastor Faaborg said confidentially. “It’s always useful to have people from the better classes in the circle of friends. It gives the faint-hearted self-confidence.” “She’s a high-strung person,” Pastor Gamst said. “Nervous people also have souls, which we really have to look after,” Pastor Faaborg said.

Pastor Gamst had invited those who’d been especially active on behalf of the erection of the Mission house for dinner at the parsonage. They ate and sang hymns and spoke kind words. And Pastor Faaborg was just as jovial and smiling and unctuous when he ate chicken broth as when he gave advice for the salvation of the soul. Pastor Gamst had a headache and wished only that the evening were soon over. He stole away from the company out into the garden where the moon was shining down coldly through the bare branches and formed a delicate shadow pattern in the garden path.

“Is God alive?” he thought in torment. “Have humans found him. Or is he only the shadow of their own thoughts and desire?”

Now in the dark evenings the light shone from the Mission house. But the workers didn’t come. They didn’t hear the summoning words from its gable. Ministers and missionaries spoke, and meetings were announced by posters on the singing telephone poles. But it was the same small circle that sat with dark
faces and bowed heads below the podium and heard about hell's torments and heaven's salvation.

— Konrad had had a busy time: all manner of goods had to be stocked for the consumer co-operative. But one afternoon Konrad unlocked the door—now everything was ready to receive the customers. And they flocked in front of the counter. “See, this is a shop, folks,” Cilius said. “It’s good and surely twice as big as Skifter’s. The thing doesn’t exist we can’t get, and we don’t have to stand hat in hand because we own the whole thing ourselves. Damn it, next time we strike there won’t be anybody who’ll deny credit to a solid man.”

Cilius had been in the office with the executive committee and drunk a glass because the co-op was now opening up. He stood broad-legged and flushed in front of the counter and showed off for everyone who came. “Damn it, this is finer than what they have in many places in the cities,” Cilius said. “And we carry everything right from feedstuffs to wooden shoes. Just say the word, folks, you can have whatever you want.”

Cilius was becoming drunk, and in his pocket he had along a bottle of schnapps to take home and invited Børgesen and Lars Seldomglad for a bite. “It’s cheaper than going to the inn,” Cilius said. “And I have things I’d like to talk to you about. Damn it, this consumer co-operative isn’t going to be the last thing.”

Frederikke put the food on the table and asked them to make do—it was just plain fare. “We’re also just plain people,” Cilius said. “Sit down at the table, folks, please Børgesen, please Lars Seldomglad. Preserves and potatoes aren’t poor fare if a fella softens it with a drink.”

They ate and afterward they had coffee laced with schnapps, and what kinds of plans Cilius had been hatching out became apparent. Back when they bought land for the consumer co-operative, they’d bought amply. Cilius had had his plans for it. “Damn it, we’re going to have a meeting house,” Cilius said. “They have one in cities smaller than ours.”

“But where’s the money going to come from?” Lars Seldomglad said, but Cilius had also thought this over. If such a
meeting house were sensibly managed, it could easily be profitable. There’d be a restaurant, where people could get non-alcoholic beverages and coffee. “Now I’ve heard everything,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Are you going to build a temperance hotel next? I never thought I’d hear this from you.” “I’ve drunk my share,” Cilius said. “But it’s not certain that other people can tolerate what I’ve been able to tolerate. And if we do a temperance café, then we’ll get support from the temperance people. We have to take that into account.”

“You know a trick or two, Cilius,” Børgeesen said. “That’s what people have always said about me,” Cilius said. “But pour yourselves another little cup of black coffee with spirits, folks. Now we’ll appoint ourselves as a committee, as they call it, and afterward we’ll talk to the others about it.” “I don’t know how things are going to turn out with you, Cilius,” Lars Seldomglad said. “Now you’re the chairman of a union and a co-op, and now you’re about to build a temperance hotel. I wonder whether you’re going to end up as a member of parliament.” “They could damn sure get somebody worse,” Cilius said. “But I’m well satisfied with what I’ve got to handle here.”

Konrad was the right man as manager: he knew how to talk to people, and there was a thriving business in his co-op. When he looked out the door, he could nod to Skifter in his shop. There was no hostility between them, but Skifter had become a steady participant in the meetings at the Mission house. Of course, he was also an elderly man who had to think about his soul.

The workers shopped at the co-op, but the old customers among the farmers stayed with Skifter. And when Skifter was in a bad mood, he complained to Martin Thomsen or Mads Lund. “It’s rough: you have to put up with them taking the bread right out of your mouth,” he said. “Surely there’s still a little crumb for you,” Mads Lund felt. “But you haven’t suffered want yet.” “But I’m afraid the last days are fast approaching,” Skifter said. “I think it’s as if everything old has to be toppled over. It’s so to speak a sign in the sun and moon.” “As long as we just have our conscience in order,” Martin Thomsen said with a look at Mads
Lund. “When the time comes, we won’t have any benefit from the earthly mammon.” “Then it’s odd that you watch over yours so well,” Mads Lund said. “I’ve never heard it said about you that you gave a penny away without getting back two.” “I’ve never been a prosperous man,” Martin Thomsen said. “Although the Lord has granted me a living with moderation.”

After knocking off for work, Cilius enrolled co-operative owners of his meeting house. The money had to be raised now in the winter so it could be built in the spring. Every time he ran into a man, he took his list out of his pocket and put his glasses on his nose. “I don’t recall if I have you on the list,” he said. “You can surely manage a share for five crowns. You can pay a penny a week if that suits you best. Then I’ll write you down.”

Olga had now begun to pay her penalty, and she wrote a letter home from prison. Tora read it aloud to Marinus and showed it to Ulriksen. Other people didn’t get to see it. It was a sad letter: Olga repented of her misdeed and felt she’d never get peace of mind. The prison minister visited her often and talked to her, but it would be better if she were permitted to talk to somebody she knew once in a while.

“Yeah, now it aches,” Ulriksen said. “And that’s a good sign. The illness that doesn’t hurt is often the worst.” “Could I get permission to visit her?” Tora said. “But where would we get the money for the expensive trip? After all, the time’s coming when work will be scarce.” “And maybe you wouldn’t get permission at all to go into the prison, Tora,” Ulriksen said. “Don’t be afraid for her. I’m old and I know that life is merciful.”
It was a wet, sleety Christmas. Heavy clouds drifted off over the hills and the rain lashed down in torrential showers. The roads were slush. But the fact that it wasn’t so cold saved on fuel, and they had to save at that time of year when many people didn’t have work. In the winter months there was no work in the chalk pit. So much chalk had been hacked that the operation could be maintained even if there was snow and all the world was covered with drifts.

Marinus was unemployed and every day around the time the mail came he became restless. Mightn’t there be a letter from Søren? Søren still hadn’t written whether he intended to visit the parental home at Christmas. Finally a letter came. Søren sent many regards, but he wasn’t coming home. The trip was expensive and he had to attend to his studies. Besides, he’d been invited to spend Christmas at the house of a company president whose son he was going to university with. There were two pretty daughters, so Søren was looking forward to it.

“He isn’t going to go and be sweethearts with the daughter of a company president, is he?” Marinus laughed. “He surely will,” Tora said. “He’ll never marry one of his own.” But Marinus felt that since Søren had become a man with a university education, it was in fact the daughters of company presidents who were his own. How should a girl of the common people be able to stand at his side if he got a government appointment and post? No, you have to stick to your own class. “And he doesn’t ask about Olga at all,” Tora said. “He doesn’t think about anybody but himself.”

Marinus didn’t reply, but he knew that Tora was doing Søren an injustice. He hadn’t forgotten his home; he was certainly also good about writing. But it was a great disappointment that he wasn’t coming home at Christmas. Marinus had had that great hope.

It was probably the raw, damp weather that caused Matilde
to begin coughing and spitting blood again. The doctor’s opinion was that there was no alternative but to send Matilde to the sanatorium. “Can’t we keep her here at home over Christmas?” Thomas Trilling asked, but Matilde preferred going off right away. The grocer’s daughter she exchanged letters with had also had a relapse, and now they could see each other at the sanatorium. You could see that this seemed very fortunate to Matilde.

“It’s rough for you to have gotten a sickly wife,” Black Anders said. He felt as if he were responsible for his daughter. “She is indeed a poor creature,” Thomas Trilling said. “If only some day she could get completely well.” But Matilde hummed and sang and let her thin, white fingers dance on the keys of the piano. Now she’d play once again for the others at the sanatorium and be honored for her skill.

There were often visitors at Matilde’s: the other women helped her in the house, and of course everyone understood that a wife with tuberculosis couldn’t manage the work alone. She had to lie in bed for a long time in the morning and take walks and rest many times during the day. When Thomas Trilling and Black Anders came from work, Matilde hadn’t made dinner, and often the house hadn’t been cleaned, but who could reproach a sick wife for anything? While Thomas and Anders mixed up food in the kitchen, Matilde sat at the piano with paraffin candles and practiced.

It was especially Frederikke who came. There was friendship between her and Matilde. “You play so beautifully,” Frederikke said. “But I wonder if I shouldn’t put a little more on the tiled stove—it’s much too cold here.” “The cold doesn’t bother me a bit,” Matilde said. “I’m used to that from the sanatorium. Using your fingers on the keys also makes you warm. Now it’s only three days till I’ll be leaving. Yesterday a letter came saying they could definitely admit me.” “I’m going to miss you,” Frederikke said. “There’s nobody else here I can really talk to.” “You’re always pale, Frederikke,” Matilde said. “Are you sure you don’t have tuberculosis too? If you were sick, we could get together at the sanatorium.” “But I mean I have Little-Jep?” Frederikke said, and Matilde admitted that she couldn’t take him
along.

Thomas Trilling went to the assistance fund and they didn’t refuse to outfit Matilde. She got a coat and a warm woollen dress. Of course she’d best be dressed nicely when she went out among strangers. Mads Lund’s women came to visit. “And you’re going . . . you’re going out to travel again,” they said in chorus. “Yes, thank God for that,” Matilde said, and her white face was radiant, as if she were going to the land of paradise. “If you had a child, the illness would probably vanish,” the farmer’s women said. “We had a niece, she got well when she became pregnant.” But the doctor had said to Matilde that a pregnancy would be too much for her. And Matilde didn’t care about carnal love—she disliked that kind of thing. No, the farmer’s women nodded and looked with modesty at the floor. Men were indeed often so brutal—a body surely knew that.

One windy winter day right before Christmas Thomas Trilling accompanied his wife to Færgeby on the steamer and from there she was to go on by train. Matilde had a cloth tied up around the lower part of her face; once in a while she had to push it to the side to cough. They sat in the chilly waiting room till it was time for the train to go. “I hope you’ll soon be able to come home healthy,” Thomas said. “I’ll probably stay there until about summer,” Matilde said. “But it would be nice if you could come and visit me. Then you’d see with your own eyes how good it is to be there.” And Matilde spoke again about the doctors and nurses and nurses’ orderlies—they were the loveliest people in existence.

“Now come back healthy, Matilde,” Thomas Trilling said when Matilde was standing in the train. But his wife scarcely heard it. “Goodbye, Thomas,” she said. “I’ll definitely write about how I am. I’ll write as soon as I arrive down there. Now I’d just like to know whether Miss Johnsen has come already or whether she’s staying home over Christmas.”

Thomas Trilling stood and watched the train as it left. He didn’t move a muscle in his heavy, bony face. He’d come to the area back when the factory was being built and had met Matilde, who was like no other girl he’d ever known. But it was surely a
mistake that he'd gotten her to marry him because he didn't do her any good. Matilde had found happiness at the sanatorium.

Cilius didn't have any work and he used the time to get his papers in order, both the union's and the co-op's. The meeting house wasn't forgotten either. Cilius went to the president and got admitted to his office. "What did you come to make a nuisance of yourself over now, Cilius Andersen," Høpner said. "I don't want anything to do with your union." "That's not what this is about," Cilius said. "It has to do with a contribution for our new meeting house." "You're not going to get a penny," Høpner said. "I suppose it's going to be a house where you can stand at the podium and blather on each time there's a strike." "We can easily organize a strike without a meeting house," Cilius said. "We'll certainly manage that if we have to. But this building here, if anything, is going to be for popular education." "Well I'll be damned, Cilius," Høpner said. "And I thought that since you made a contribution to the Mission house, you'd also give to us. I mean, you're not a socialist, but you're not in the Inner Mission either, so far as I can gather from your way of life."

That was the tone you had to talk to Høpner in—Cilius had experience with that. He gave as good as he got—that's surely the way they learned it in America. Cilius got a hundred crowns on his list, as a kind of Christmas present amidst strong oaths and curses. "Did the minister like that hymn singing back when you made a contribution to the Mission house?" Cilius said. "Would you please go," Høpner said. "Make it snappy."

Now during the quiet Christmas days there was news from Cilius's house. Frederikke was with child again. She confided to Tora that she was already several months pregnant. "Have you told Cilius?" Tora asked, but Frederikke hadn't. She turned her head away. "I mean, he has to be told," Tora said. "And this time you surely have no need to be afraid." "No," Frederikke said and didn't meet Tora's glance. "So what's the matter?" Tora asked. Well, the thing was, Frederikke mumbled, that Iver had once again come to Alslev. He hadn't been near her, but what would Cilius think? "You have to tell him," Tora said. "If
you’re silent, it’ll look odd. You know, we don’t have to let ourselves be cowed either. Tell him right in his red kisser. Surely he’s the one who’s responsible for your condition.”

Frederikke plucked up her courage and one evening when they were sitting in the living room she said that she’d better look for baby clothes because unless she was mistaken, she was probably with child. “You didn’t see where I put my glasses, did you,” Cilius said and began hunting. “Damn it, I can’t figure out where I put them. By the way, what were you saying?” “I’m afraid I’m going to have a child,” Frederikke said. “So, we’ve gotten to that point again, huh,” Cilius said. “I’m probably going to have to go talk a bit with Børgeisen about these papers here from the union.”

Cilius took his jacket and hat and went out into the calm, rain-soaked evening. It was odd Christmas weather. The inn was closed, but he went into the co-op the back way. “I’ve got to have a pint of schnapps, little Konrad,” he said. “I’ve caught a bit of a cold in all this dampness here. It’s a mixture that helps if somebody has taken cold.” Cilius got the schnapps and walked down toward the factory. He went by the Mission house. There was light from the windows and hymn singing could be heard out in the darkness. But that’s not where he was going. He went down to a workmen’s shed by the cliff and kicked the door open. There was a box standing there in a corner among the tools. He sat down there and took a slurp from the bottle and looked through the open door at the illuminated factory.

Iver was working there in the slurry station. Now if tomorrow somebody walked in there and bashed his head in and threw him down into the gray paste of clay and chalk? Then there’d be one less scoundrel in the world and somebody would go to the penitentiary for his deed.

Cilius sat there for a long time and didn’t notice that time was passing. He heard the machines working in the factory while he slowly emptied the bottle. Somebody could take an ax and use it on Iver. But maybe it was best to bash his head in with a clenched fist so that he fell backward into the slurry basin. “I beat a man till he was a cripple,” Cilius mumbled. “And back
then I was drunk if anything. I can certainly do it again with my bare fists when I’m sober.” There was a dull roar of anger in him. “The little red fox,” he thought. “But I can’t take this sitting down. I want my rights, I want to see blood flow.”

Cilius of course could also do something else. He could cut that goat Iver with his pocket knife so he’d never again go near other people’s wives. Cilius Andersen was man enough for that, and it was certainly best that it happen right away. The bottle was empty and Cilius hurled it out the door. Now the terrible thing was going to happen. He heard something rustling outside. Maybe it was lovers who wanted to get into the shed.

He went outside and ran into someone. He realized right away it was Frederikke. “What are you doing here?” Cilius asked. “I was looking for you,” Frederikke said. “I thought maybe you’d gone down here onto the cliff—I got so afraid when you didn’t come.” “Oh, it’s probably other people you’re waiting for,” Cilius said. “I mean, you’re like a bitch, always picking up the scent wherever male dogs are.” Frederikke didn’t answer. But they walked up along the road toward Alslev. After they’d walked a bit, Frederikke said: “Of course, you know it’s always hard for me to say anything. It’s as if it doesn’t want to come out. But can you remember, back then when we first got to know each other. I opened my bedroom door for you.” “You don’t think a fella would ever forget that, do you?” Cilius mumbled. “I’d do it all over again if it happened today,” Frederikke whispered. “I’d let you in and nobody but you. And I haven’t known anybody but you either . . . it’s been many years now.”

They walked on a little in silence, then Cilius said: “Børgesen wasn’t there and I felt like a drink. It’s all that salted pork a fella eats at Christmas. I went in the back way at Konrad’s and walked together with one of the stokers down here to the factory. Then I sat down in the shed.” “I got worried about what had become of you,” Frederikke said in such a calm tone, as if every second evening she were in the habit of fetching Cilius home in the darkness of night. “I thought I better go out and look for you.” Cilius breathed easy, freed from his hard hatred. Because this he knew—that Frederikke might keep silent, but a lie
couldn’t cross her lips.

They went into the living room and the lamp was burning. In her fright Frederikke had forgotten to put it out. They avoided looking at each other. Then Cilius went over to Frederikke and stroked her lightly across her cheek with his index finger. She started to cry. “Stop it, Frederikke,” Cilius said harshly. “A fella sure knows the way you people are in that condition. I thought you were sterile, but things just go a little slow with you. Don’t cry because I’ve had a child with you. Damn it, you can have a whole dozen as far as I’m concerned. I still remember when I jumped into bed with you many years ago, I thought you were sterile.”

Now Cilius announced the news far and wide; he said to Marinus, Børgesen, and Lars Seldomglad: “I sure managed to get the wife pregnant again. Damn, I mean a fella had to kill time with something during this strike here.” Cilius’s red puss sparkled with pleasure, while he set forth that actually of course the employers should pay child maintenance. Because it was after all in a way their fault that a new life had come into the world. “I’ll mention that next time we hold a congress: damn it, they should have to pay.”

Magda came to visit at Frederikke’s and sat there in a sorry state. “You say you’re expecting,” she said. “I’m not so far along yet,” Frederikke said. “You know, it may soon be far enough along,” Magda said and sighed. “I don’t understand what you mean,” Frederikke said. “Since we’re alone, I can surely say it,” Magda said. “The two of us have been treated disgracefully and now you’re the one who has to bear the burden.”

But now Frederikke got angry: “I certainly know you were involved with Iver, but that’s no reason for me to get any burden to bear. I didn’t get pregnant because he went to bed with you.” “No, no, that’s not the way I meant it either,” Magda said, confused. “I thought you were still fond of him. I imagined that maybe he too . . . . No, no, don’t get all riled up, I only think well of you, but he’s not a guy a body can rely on. I found that out.” “I don’t know why you come running over with your stupid nonsense about Iver,” Frederikke said. “I don’t know
anything much about that guy and never did." "Frederikke, Frederikke, I mean well by you from my heart," Magda cried. "But I’m an unhappy person, I’ve been betrayed and deceived almost from the time I was a child."

And Magda told about her hard life, how the fellows had been after her from the time she was very young. At the places she’d been a servant, the men had tried to seduce her the moment she’d walked in the door. And Magda had had only that one flaw: she believed all people too much. She had that soft heart, that naive mind.

"But even if they seduced you, you didn’t get pregnant, did you?" Frederikke said, and Magda lifted her tear-stained face. No, that was indeed the misfortune—that she’d never become pregnant. Because if things had ended badly, somebody would surely have been obliged to marry her, and she wouldn’t have been forced to take Andres, who was an older man and cared only about hoarding money. "That’s plenty rough on you," Frederikke said. "But everybody has their own cross to bear." And Magda went home in a gentle, almost religious mood. She’d managed to get things off her chest—she’d been consoled.

There was a telephone call to the parsonage right after Christmas: it was attorney Schjøtt. The minister had to come right away: Mrs. Marja was sick and wished to speak with him. The lawyer’s voice shrilled nervously on the telephone. Might he send over a car? No, it wasn’t exactly dangerous, but a serious nervous crisis. "Can’t you send for a doctor?" the minister asked. But the doctor had been there, and now Mrs. Marja needed the consolation of religion.

A taxi came and the minister rode to Færgeby. The little lawyer greeted him and led him into his office. "I beg the pastor’s pardon, but a sick person, right? My wife has recently had some inclination toward religion, and if that could just help." "What does the doctor say?" the minister asked. "He’s taking it damn calmly, wants her in a sanatorium, but what’s the point if she won’t go?" Schjøtt said. "There are terrible scenes with the most vicious accusations. I can run the risk that while I’m sitting with clients here in my office . . . the damned female. Excuse
me, pastor, it slipped out of my mouth. One ought of course constantly to keep in mind—a poor, sick person.”

Mrs. Marja was lying in bed, with her hair beautifully done up, and winsomely powdered. She extended a feeble hand toward the minister. “Thanks for coming, dear Pastor Gamst,” she said. “You’re free to go down to your work, my friend, while I talk to my spiritual advisor. Sit down here, Pastor Gamst.”

The minister sat down next to the bed; he felt a little awkward and didn’t know what to say. “Naturally you believe just like the doctor that I’m just a pampered female who should just be made to scrub my own floors?” Mrs. Marja said. “That’s the terrible thing about these doctors, that they take everything so materialistically. They view the human being as a mechanism and nothing else. But it’s so terribly difficult to be a human being. Don’t you think?” “At times it is,” Pastor Gamst said. “And it becomes more difficult the more we’re occupied with our own little personality and our own little cares.” “How right you are.” Mrs. Marja said. “And you’ll take my hand, as if I were a little girl, and tell me about Our Lord and Jesus, and afterward I’ll ring the maid for tea.” “No, I won’t tell you anything, but I’ll read to you,” the minister said, and took out a pocket bible. He read a part of the sermon on the mount.

“How beautiful and grand it is,” Mrs. Marja whispered. “Is that the way it is when you administer the sacrament to a dying person? Don’t you also sing a hymn? Won’t you sing together with me. These lovely verses:

Now found is the fairest of roses,
‘Mongst briars it sweetly reposes,
My Jesus so precious and holy,
Abode among sinners so lowly.

The world may of all things bereave me,
Its thorns may annoy and aggrieve me,
The foe may afflictions engender,
My rose I will never surrender!”
Mrs. Marja had a beautiful voice and she abandoned herself ecstatically to the song. Afterward she lay quietly with the minister’s hand in hers. “I so need to have a good talk with a human being,” she said. “My husband, no, he’s not a human being. Do you know what he calls himself when he’s angry? The bread-winning beast. And actually it fits: he’s a drudge, who’s occupied only with material things. But of course there’s also something else.” “We have to believe there is,” the minister said.

“Things have always been terribly difficult for me,” Mrs. Marja said. “My home was poor, my father a drunkard. I became an actress, but my talent wasn’t great enough. I couldn’t express the deep things I felt. I was a violin without sound. Then I met engineer Hopner and later my husband. That was at a time when I felt lonely and unhappy. But I’m going to seed in this microcosm where people are interested only in food and drink. It’s as if I can’t breathe here.” “Wherever we are on earth, heaven of course arches over us,” the minister said. “That’s beautifully said,” Mrs. Marja said dreamily. “Heaven arches its infinitude over us. And everywhere the lonely are equally lonely. Listen, now let’s have ourselves a cup of tea, Pastor Gamst.” And Mrs. Marja rang for the maid and gave instructions.

“There’s so much within myself that I don’t understand,” Mrs. Marja said. “Perhaps I should have been a hetaera. I married Schjøtt because I felt sorry for him. He resembled a little ugly duckling, but no woman can make a swan out of him. But you understand me. I feel, as it were, a hollowness in my soul, a yearning for what is great. The great sin or the great humility. I would so much like to be filled by a great, pure feeling.”

As the minister was saying goodbye and was on the way downstairs, the attorney opened his door half-way. “Come right in for a moment, pastor,” he said. “Won’t you have a glass of port? You won’t, but you’ll permit me to take one. My nerves won’t stand it in the long run. So what’s your impression of my wife? I mean, her religiosity, huh?” “Your wife is very overwrought,” Pastor Gamst said. “Exactly,” the attorney said. “Sanatorium, says the doctor and I say sanatorium. That god-
damn—excuse me—female is of course in fact insane. I can’t be having this constant circus. It’s my business that winds up suffering.” “Mightn’t a somewhat greater indulgence and understanding on your part have a beneficial influence on your wife’s nervous system,” the minister said. “Indulgence, hah,” the attorney said and gulped down a glass of port. “Of course, damn it all—excuse me, pastor—I’m obliged to be indulgent. What the dickens are you supposed to do when a woman gets fits of rage and hysterical crying and wants to shoot somebody or commit suicide. What a soulful life, ugh.”

Agitated, the little lawyer walked crab-like around the office. “But if you can help her with religion, then by all means as far as I’m concerned,” he said. “In fact, she’s calmer after she’s been in the Mission house or to something of that kind. I mean, womenfolk need spirituality.” “Now listen, attorney Schjøtt,” the minister said angrily. “Excuse me, excuse me, my own nerves are on edge,” the attorney said. “I’ve always had respect for religion, please don’t misunderstand me. But you have to promise to come back—my wife considers you her spiritual adviser. Won’t you stay here and eat dinner—maybe you’ll play ombre?”

Pastor Gamst didn’t stay till evening at the attorney’s; he rode home right away. The car bumped along the muddy road, and all the way from Færgeby you could see the glare from the factory. “Spiritual adviser,” he jeered at himself. For sick and exhausted souls who desperately sought a cure in faith. The healthy didn’t have a need for a cure. Down there by the fjord the light from the factory’s large, dust-filled space was shining. Machines rumbled, wheels turned round, and dirty and grimy men were busily at work. The work went on day and night; men brought home the bacon. Pastor Gamst thought broodingly that he was outside of this wholesome world. A spiritual adviser on the way home to his parsonage.
Early in the spring the good times began again—everybody was at work. Now some money had to be earned to pay off the debt that had been incurred for groceries in the winter when work had been scarce for many. Cilius was a whiz when it came to getting a good piece rate. He negotiated with Høpner over the price for removal of earth from the cliff, for hacking chalk or unloading or loading the ships that moored at the wharf. Every penny he got the piece rate raised was earned money, and Cilius surely did things in a big way, but he knew what small change was worth. The workers didn’t get the big money—it was the pennies they had to live on.

Spring came early after the mild winter and the farmers got cracking on the spring plowing. When Marinus was removing the earth on the cliff, he often stopped work and looked across the land where a team of horses was pulling the plow through the soil, which steamed in the sun. If he were young, he’d probably do as Boel-Erik was doing—buy a bit of heath and bring it into cultivation. Because really the best thing of all was to be your own man.

Boel-Erik had gotten his potatoes sold at a good price and he could show black on white that he’d gotten something out of his land. Now in the spring he was going to break up the heath for real—the rest of the land would be put under the plow. If there was a strike again, Erik wouldn’t be upset: he had plenty to use his idle time on. But there was no strike; the factory was operating at full capacity—there was great demand for cement. Boel-Erik rented a plow and horses and plowed in the evening and on Sunday. He was practically so used to it that he could keep the furrow straight in the black of night.

There was an election for the parish council, and the workers elected one more man, but they didn’t get the majority as they’d expected. It was still the large farmers who had the power, and they’d really have hated to part with it. Now there was the meet-
ing house. Cilius was at Anders Toft's, who'd been elected chairman of the new parish council, and wanted a subsidy. "I mean, it's for popular enlightenment," Cilius said. "Of course they have this kind of meeting house everywhere else." "Of course you can say it," Anders Toft said. "But the matter can be viewed from several sides. Now how is such a meeting house going to be run? Of course it's certainly unacceptable for it to be used for political agitation." "That isn't the purpose," Cilius said. "But you can distinguish between political enlightenment and political agitation, can't you?"

Of course, Anders Toft could, but Cilius surely had to understand that a parish council chairman had his heavy responsibilities. It was the taxpayers' money he administered and it mustn't be used to no purpose. "We don't have money to give away, Cilius Andersen," Anders Toft said. "We're a poor little township and if there's unemployment, we'll have heavy outlays for the assistance fund and poor-law system. You better believe there are many considerations. But if I might give you some advice, don't build a meeting house now. We can surely manage with the banquet hall at the inn as we did before. No, let's not have more expenses here in the township—we have enough as it is."

"Yeah, yeah," Cilius said. "If you won't, then you won't. But when we get our chance, damn it, we'll certainly raise you farmers' taxes. You're sitting on your big farms and paying less than a poor day laborer."

Cilius had his list; he'd collected money all winter and put the money in the bank. He got a loan to build with, and as soon as the weather was tolerable, the building began. Skifter stood in the doorway to his shop and saw how the walls were rising. Not so many people came into his shop any more. Even the farmers had begun to shop at the co-op. You could, of course, notice the discounts. Little amounts added up, and every sensible man was duty bound to look after his own interests.

Boel-Erik was out in the heath every evening and Niels was at Inger's every evening. Tora decided to talk to him and explain to him that Inger was a married woman. "Surely there are enough pretty girls," she said. "I certainly think you could leave
Erik’s wife alone.” Niels didn’t answer; he sat and stared ahead. “I don’t know what kind of people my children are,” Tora said angrily. “You practically never take into account what I say. But if you can’t stay away from Inger, then you better leave the area and get work some other place.” “That may well be the smartest thing,” Niels said, and Tora understood that it was more serious between him and Inger than she’d hoped. “She’s also not the kind of woman it’s worth fighting over,” Tora said. “She’s never been a good wife to Erik.” “I’d ask you not to say anything about Inger,” Niels said. “After all, we are what we were born to be.”

Now Tora knew that her oldest son had fallen into a woman’s power, and Inger didn’t have gentle hands. Several times she said to Niels that he’d better leave soon. It was easier to find work now in the spring than at any other time of year. And finally Niels left. He was going to try to get work in a city. Tora accompanied him to the steamboat. Niels didn’t say much, and Tora had a feeling that she was chasing him away from his home. But she’d rather that he leave than that he should break up a marriage.

“Now write often, Niels,” Tora said, and Niels nodded: he certainly would write. He stood next to the gangway with his suitcase in hand, a tall workingman with large rough hands and already somewhat worn features. “You have to let us know about everything,” Tora said and made her voice firm. This was the third child she was sending out into the world and it was just as hard each time. “I will,” Niels said, but his eyes looked past his mother, as if he were waiting to see someone. Did he think that Inger would come to say goodbye?

Inger didn’t come, but at the last moment Bregentved came running, and Niels had company for the trip to Færgeby. Bregentved inquired as to where Niels was going, and nodded approvingly when he heard that Niels was going to Copenhagen to try his luck there. “If I were young, I’d go to America,” Bregentved said. “Over there’s where the big prospects are. Here in this country it’s not going to amount to much.” But now Bregentved was out to make his big plan reality. He was going to
try to obtain capital for his concrete block plant. It didn’t pay enough to drive around dealing in fish. “And if you can’t find anything, you can come back home and get work with me,” he said. “I’ll have a need for people who can put in a day’s work, and of course I know you.” But Niels shook his head: he was leaving not to return.

Bregentved treated him to coffee at the hotel and offered him cognac too. After all, it wasn’t every day they were in town. He accompanied Niels to the railway station and got him off well, and then he walked slowly up along the street to attorney Schjøtt’s office. Of course, a fella had to think over what he was going to say. Now the whole enterprise didn’t appear so easy to Bregentved. The attorney was busy and Bregentved had to wait a bit before he got in. “I read a poem in the People’s Gazette, and surely it was written by you,” he said chattily to the clerk. “I remember two lines: By the city there are two beautiful parks, by the road stands a lone goat kicking up sparks.” The clerk nodded modestly: indeed he was the poet. “It’s funny that you can compose it,” Bregentved said. “Of course, I also know there’s both the pleasure park and the temperance grove, and I also noticed that a goat frequently stands there tethered by the road from Alslev. But, really, I’d just never be able to get it to rhyme. But you must get a lot of money for a poem like this, don’t you?” But clerk Jensen really didn’t—he did it for honor’s sake and it came easily to him. He explained to Bregentved that he composed on wrapping paper because ordinary paper wasn’t big enough. It flowed so easily from him, if anything like shit from a new-born calf, if such a metaphor might be used. “It’s a great talent,” Bregentved said. “I don’t understand why I don’t have it. My father was good at writing poetry, but it was mostly funeral poems. Of course, he was deacon, as you perhaps have heard. But I can’t compose two lines.” “Mr. Bregentved, please come in,” the attorney’s voice could be heard.

Bregentved went in to the attorney’s office and explained his plans. He had his eye on a sand pit, cement was easy to get, and labor was right at hand. And it was good times for the building industry in Alslev and environs—it was a town that was develop-
ing. Big money could be earned at a concrete block plant. "That sounds excellent," the lawyer said. "And how much money do you have to put into it?" Yeah, that of course was the difficulty—that Bregentved lacked the capital, and he'd come to attorney Schjett to get his help procuring a loan. "Uh huh," the attorney said. "You saw that a sand hill is situated in Alslev, and you noticed that there's also a cement factory. But to start a concrete block plant, one must have capital. It can't be done with other people's gravel pit and cement." "I thought that's what we had lawyers and savings banks for," Bregentved felt.

The attorney politely accompanied him to the door, but he didn't want anything to do with the concrete block plant. "Try it yourself at the savings bank or at the bank," he said, but Bregentved had lost his courage. Surely there was no point. After all, he was only an insignificant man and had no advocates. Next day Bregentved was once again sitting in his fish wagon driving inland with fish.

About a month had passed after Niels's trip, when one evening there was a knock on Marinus and Tora's bedroom window. "What can that be?" Marinus said and got out of bed. "There's got to be a fire." He went out and opened the door. It was Boel-Erik. "Is there something wrong, Erik?" Marinus asked, and Boel-Erik related that Inger hadn't been at home when he came from his property on the heath. There was a letter lying there from her saying she'd left. "And the children?" asked Tora, who'd joined them. The children were safe and sound. Inger had sent them over to Line Seldomglad. Boel-Erik wanted to know where Niels was.

"Did she write that she was going to him?" Tora asked. "No," Erik said. "But I certainly noticed that they've been together a lot. I also spoke to Inger about it, but she just nagged about me begrudging her company when I myself was out on my land. But who else would she've gone to?" No, where else would Inger go?

"It's been a long time since we got a letter from Niels," Tora said, "and you're welcome to see what he wrote. But come in, there are still embers on the stove, I think. You need something
to warm you up. Because Inger hadn’t put out food for you for when you came home, did she?” Boel-Erik went into the living room and sat down at the table. His huge workman’s hands clutched his cap in an oddly helpless way. They were black from the soil and crusted with toil and hadn’t been able to hold on to a woman.

“Now you better go to bed, Marinus, you have to get up for work in the morning,” Tora said. “And you’ll come out into the kitchen with me, Erik, while I butter some sandwiches for you and make coffee.” Marinus went back to bed, because what good would it do for him to lose a night’s sleep. “I must say that’s awful for you to be rooting around on your land till late at night, Erik,” Tora said, while she blew on the embers and put peat in the stove. “Everything has to be in moderation, even work. We’re made for work, but also for rest and amusement, but you feel best when you can slave from morning till late at night.” “I mean it’s this land here . . .” Boel-Erik said. “Of course, but I mean there’s also Inger,” Tora said. “Surely she also had a right to see you once in a while. But eat now, Erik, you’re hungry, and have a drink too. There’s a little in the bottle.”

Boel-Erik ate a plate of open-faced sandwiches—he had a long day’s toil behind him. Tora poured him a few big drinks and poured the rest of the schnapps into his coffee cup. “And so are you going to write to her?” she asked. “I’m going to go fetch her; I’m going to bicycle to Færgeby now, then I can catch the first train.” “I don’t want to say anything bad about Inger,” Tora said. “But she’s never been a good wife to you, and if she’s now gone to Niels, it’ll be the worse for him. Why do you want to fetch her home if she doesn’t want to be with you?” “The husband has a right to his wife, doesn’t he?” Boel-Erik said. “Surely she can be expected to stay with him, can’t she? Otherwise I don’t know why a fella would get married. I’m not demanding anything in the world but my rights.” “But what if she doesn’t want to go back with you?” Tora asked. Boel-Erik remained sitting with the coffee cup in his hand and stared at Tora. That thought certainly hadn’t occurred to him.
"That can't be legal, can it, for a wife to run away from her husband and children?" he said finally, but Tora was of the opinion that he surely wouldn't get the authorities to bring Inger home. "I mean, it's not a heifer that ran away," Tora said. "You can't keep her if she doesn't have a mind to be with you. It's good she didn't take the children along. After all, you'd never have gotten her out there on your heath farm anyway, when you got finished building out there." "Oh, probably she'd have given in," Erik said. "And I certainly know it's the law that a husband decides where we'll live." "Inger has an obstinate nature," Tora said. "I think you'll be better off for her having left you."

Tora sat down across from Boel-Erik with her coffee cup and began to calm him down. Good lord, what was he losing in Inger? Now she'd gone, and after all there were plenty of women-folk on this earth. He could get a housekeeper who could be of greater use to him. Inger couldn't even milk a cow, could she? "You're speaking on behalf of your son, aren't you?" Boel-Erik said. "If I could talk him away from Inger, I'd have done it," Tora said. "Because I consider her an awfully bad woman. She never cared about anybody but herself. First myself and then myself and then once again myself—that's her catechism."

It was late at night, but Tora wasn't in a hurry to get Boel-Erik sent home to his empty house. She began talking about the heathland, yes, oh yes, Marinus had said that it could turn into a good farm when he got the buildings erected. Was he inclined to move out there soon? "You'll probably end up as a farmer before we know anything about it," Tora said. "But Inger really wasn't suited to be a farmer's wife, no, just you let the children stay at Line Seldomglad's for the time being and get your meals here. You'll see, Erik, there's a meaning to what happened."

"But I care for her," Boel-Erik said. "I can't do without her, even if she has her flaws." "Yes you can," Tora said. "There's only thing on earth you can't do without, and that's work. You have to slave away, then you'll get over it. You and Inger were too different in temperament."

Boel-Erik sat and nodded over the coffee cup; he'd become drowsy from the schnapps and Tora's gentle words. The trip
could surely be put off, and, after all, he didn’t know for certain
either where Inger had gone. Maybe she’d come to long for the
children and come back voluntarily. In any case, Boel-Erik
would now wait till she wrote again.

“How did it go—did he leave for Copenhagen?” Marinus
asked when Tora came into the bedroom. The day was already
dawning. “No, he’s not going,” Tora said. “I was afraid he’d go
wild if he found Inger with Niels, and she’s not worth it. But
once Erik begins to think, it takes a while. He’ll surely let Inger
go and that’s good for him.” Tora went to bed, but she couldn’t
sleep again. Outside the birds began to sing; the daylight filtered
in through the curtains. It would be hard for Niels now that he
was getting a burden to bear. Because a good woman Inger
wasn’t.
Cilius had gotten his meeting house built. An old shoemaker and his wife were managers; the wife could certainly make coffee, Cilius felt, and the husband keep an eye out so everything would proceed properly. And the meeting house got a piano.

Later in the spring a letter came from the sanatorium saying that Matilde had gotten worse and that Thomas Trilling had better come if he wanted to say the last farewell to his wife. Thomas and Black Anders set out. Matilde was very sick. She lay there still and barely recognized them, but when the nurse came in, Matilde smiled weakly. Here at the sanatorium she'd found her home and here she said farewell to the world. Matilde was buried in an unfamiliar cemetery—it was too expensive to get her home.

"Well, she was the way she was," Black Anders said. "It was the same thing with the wife while she was alive: they couldn't put up with the inferior conditions." "I'll only have good memories of Matilde," Thomas Trilling said. "The same with me and the wife," Black Anders said. "They were of a superior kind to the rest of us. I mean, she couldn't play the piano, but she read the serialized novels in the newspaper. And of course the likes of me couldn't keep up, but it was about love and such and what the fashionable folks otherwise do. But that kind of womenfolk never live to be old: they can't live in the world the way it is." Black Anders shook his head sadly.

They sat in the train on the way home from Matilde's funeral, and they looked as if they were father and son. A small, fat man in a worn, blue suit sat right across from them listening to their conversation. "Excuse me," he said all of a sudden. "Might I give you this little book. I hear you're coming from a funeral, and it's about the fact that millions now living will never die." "That sounds strange," Black Anders said. "It's nevertheless a fact, sir," the man said. "You'll see that this pamphlet is based on irrefutable proofs from the Gospel." "Is this perhaps
the Mormons?” Black Anders asked. “No, we don’t have anything to do with the Mormons,” the man said. “This polygamy of theirs is an abomination all right,” Black Anders said. “And how is the poor man supposed to support all those womenfolk? No, we’ll stick to what we learned at our mothers’ knees.”

And while the stranger set forth with sound reasons from the holy scripture that millions of people now living would never die, Black Anders looked out the window at the landscape rushing by. These were rich districts, here in the south, and it promised to be a good harvest. Black Anders happened to think about how it was to hunt in the forest north of the fjord in the fall and winter, sneak from tree to tree, on the trail of a goat, or hide behind the fence and lie in wait for a fox. He’d given Matilde a fox fur collar last winter and she certainly didn’t know where the fox had been shot. No, Matilde had been of the superior kind. If she’d known where the fox fur had been obtained, she’d never have put it on her neck. But now Matilde lay in the ground. Black Anders turned to the preaching man and said: “Would you shut up with your nonsense. It’s best for us to die when we’re called.” Dumbfounded, the man stopped talking.

It was empty at home, even though Matilde hadn’t been there for almost half a year. The piano stood dusty and closed. “Surely nobody will play it now,” Black Anders said. “It was really beautiful to hear and it was Matilde’s delight.” “We could give it to the meeting house,” Thomas said. “Because we’re definitely not going to sell it.” After all, it would have been like selling a little of Matilde. And the piano was presented to the new meeting house and put in the assembly hall. It could be used whenever there was a meeting or dance. But when the piano was carried out of the house, it was as if Thomas Trilling for the first time said goodbye to Matilde for real.

It was a beautiful summer; all the men were at work. It was as if all the world needed cement. Steamers and small barges moored at the pier, and cranes and tackle clattered all day long. Steamers came and went with cement. In the warm summer evenings there was a dance at the inn, the music shrilled, and the girls squealed when the fellows swung them to the ceiling. The
young workers had money in their pockets, they were earning a good weekly wage, and money exists to be spent. Now there was Kresten Bossen’s Andrea. She’d taken a position with a farmer inland, but every time there was a dance at the inn, she was there. Andrea had a lot to make up for; she wanted to have fun while she was young. But all that dancing wasn’t good. By Martin Thomsen’s farm there was a hedge of elder and wild roses. The young people hid there in the hedge, and in the morning Martin Thomsen saw the snug gaps between the bushes where the youth had hidden at night. That gave Martin Thomsen material for a talk at the Mission house on the text: If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. Martin Thomsen cut down the hedge while the wild roses were in bloom.

A letter came from Niels: he’d become a dockworker in Copenhagen. Inger was living with him and they were fine. Niels asked his mother to speak to Boel-Erik about whether Inger couldn’t get a divorce. Because he’d like to make her his wife: she was very dear to him. Tora read the letter aloud to Erik. “I’m not hiding anything from you, Erik,” she said. “Though I’d prefer that it not be Niels and Inger. Now you have to think about what you want.” “Does she want to have the children over there?” Erik asked. “Oh, God help us,” Tora said. “Do you think Inger cares about her children any more than a sow does about its piglets.” But she got heart palpitations—because how had her own daughter dealt with her child? “All right,” Boel-Erik nodded. “If she wants to leave me, I won’t hold her. But I won’t take her back either.”

Søren wrote letters home and told about the elegant houses he’d gone to. Now he’d been at a professor’s for evening coffee. And Olga was sitting in women’s prison paying the penalty for her offense. Now Niels had become a dock worker and lived together with another man’s wife. What did Tora know about her children now that they’d flown from the nest? “I’m like a hen who hatches out ducklings,” Tora said and couldn’t help laughing. Marinus looked at her sadly. It took a toll on her that her oldest son was living in adultery. All his days Marinus had been a clean-living man. But of course there was Karl and Anton and
the three little ones and Vera, who lay in the bowels of the grave and nevertheless lived in Tora's heart. Fate had still not touched five children. "We surely have both good and bad left," Tora said. "We have to take it as fate wills it."

Søren came home for summer vacation; he'd taken an examination, which was called a philosophicum, and he'd also passed it with distinction. "Damn it, he's quite a guy," Cilius said and decided that Søren should give a lecture at the meeting house and explain to the common man about all that learning he'd absorbed. "But we have to have a dance afterwards, because otherwise we won't get them to come." Søren gave his lecture before a small gathering; the young people surely didn't care to hear about epistemology. They didn't come until afterward. Marinus sat in the first row: it was a great moment when he saw his son at the lectern. And a fella could surely understand that Søren had mastered the material and had penetrated far into the science. It was about people named Spinoza and Kant, but Marinus really didn't understand much of it. It went over his head.

After Søren's lecture Søren and his parents went home, while Karl and Anton stayed to dance. Søren didn't care about that kind of thing. "That was a lovely talk," Marinus said. "I wish you could get it into your head to become a clergyman. I think you'd be a great preacher. Did you see both Ulriksen and the minister were there? It was a great honor that they came to hear you. Don't you think so, Tora." Yes, Tora had to admit it. For once she was impressed by her son the university student. "But now don't you forget all the same what you learned as a child, little Søren," Marinus admonished him. "Science is fine, but if we lose our faith, that's not good."

Søren told about Niels and Inger: he'd visited them and things weren't good. As far as Søren could get a sense, Niels longed to come back, and Inger... Søren spoke hesitatingly—he was a cautious young fellow. But of course Inger was all for amusements, and when she went to a dance, it wasn't always Niels who accompanied her. "I'm not sorry to hear that," Tora said. "The quicker it's over with, the better for Niels." But Ma-
rinus didn’t like that talk. If the two had gotten together, they also ought to stay together. Søren’s vacation wasn’t long—he had to get back to his studies over in Copenhagen.

This was during the hottest summer, a warm summer such as there hadn’t been in years. It was like a baking oven in the factory’s dusty rooms, and the sweat poured in streams from the men who worked with pickaxes on the cliff. Things were best for those out in the fjord who took clay from the bottom. But the glaring sunlight in the water wasn’t good for the eyes. Boel-Erik and Jens Horse, who worked out there, had red, inflamed eyes when they came ashore in the evening. The warm haze shimmered over the hills—it was so warm that the heather died. It stood there black and withered, and it looked as if it had been ravaged by fire.

During these hot days people read in the newspapers about how war was approaching. Now the Germans probably couldn’t control themselves any more: they wanted to fight—after all, that’s what those people were like. In the canteen there was talk every day about the danger of war, but the ones with brains really didn’t feel things were so bad. “They won’t be allowed to do it,” Børgesen said. “In Germany the workers are strong, they have their organizations. And if the workers don’t want it, there won’t be any war.” Børgesen was a well-read man; he knew what was what. Resolutions against the war had been adopted at socialist congresses, and if all the world’s workers stood together, nobody would be allowed to fight. Børgesen was at the center of a knot of listeners; he talked about the International, which was the workers’ great association, which was supposed to lead the fight against war. All across the world workers stood shoulder to shoulder.

The sun was baking hot, the rye ripened too early this year, and the grain was extraordinarily short in the blade. One day the rumor ran around the factory—that in spite of everything, war was now certainly imminent; now there’d be mobilization in all the big countries. The work stopped, on the cliff, in the factory buildings. The work crews were standing in clusters and chatting in hushed tones. The heat was almost unbearable; it was
like before a storm, and now a storm really did come over the
world.

"Well, this can't possibly be a long war," Cilius said. "The
German is strong, the rest of them can't hold their own against
him." But others felt that the Englishman had his fleet and was
lord of the seas; it wasn't good to get at cross purposes with
England. But how would things be in this country—would we
also join in?

They'd read in the newspapers about everything that had
happened, about the murder of the archduke in Sarajevo, about
the ultimatum and declarations of war, but it was almost un-
real—it was happening so far, far away. After all, it wasn't so
many years ago either that there'd been war between the Russian
and the Japanese, and that certainly hadn't affected Denmark.
But if the Germans went into Belgium, which was a peaceful
country, then couldn't they also get it into their heads to take
Denmark? After all, they'd taken South Jutland in 1864 and
didn't wish us well.

Hopner went around somber-faced; he saw the workers
standing in groups talking, but he didn't interfere. He was hav-
ing telephone conversations all the time. Laurids from America
had learned from his conversations that a landing of the English
in Esbjerg was probably expected. It was said that the English
fleet was already on the way. And it was probably the plan that
from there the English would march south against the Germans.

Now the danger had drawn near; now war was standing out-
side the door. Tomorrow maybe Denmark would join in. And
how many would have to go to war—maybe mobilization would
already take place tonight? On which side would they probably
come to fight?

The day was long—it was as if it would never end. Laurids
went by a knot of workers. He found a pretext for going to the
office. "He's buying coal now," he said. "He called up the cit-
ties, he's buying what he can get hold of." The workers stood si-
lently. So, Hopner was buying coal! That meant that with cer-
tainty he was counting on war. He wanted to keep the factory
going.
Yes, the factory, what would happen with it if war broke out for real? How would ordinary people find work and food? Somebody said: “I doubt that they’ll have much use for cement.” But another person explained that it was precisely now there’d be use for cement when of course forts had to be built and overhauled. There’d be more use for cement than there’d ever been before. Yes, yes, then they’d surely have food. But a great misfortune had come over the world.

The wild rumors flew from house to house, from farm to farm. Fellows were called up for guard duty, but there was no fun and games as when the fellows otherwise had to wear the king’s uniform. Who knew whether you’d ever again get to see your home again? From Alslev a whole troop of young workers left, among them Karl, Marinus and Tora’s next-oldest son. Many people were down at the pier when the steamboat sailed off with them in the early morning. The young fellows stood on deck with their suitcases and parcels, and not many words were spoken. Then teacher Ulriksen’s voice resounded: “Now sing, people, join in!” And he led the singing as if it were in his own school room: “A mighty fortress is our God . . . .”

After the song the landing hawser was detached and the little steamboat put out from the pier. Ulriksen waved his hat and shouted: “Behave yourselves, fellows, and come home safe and sound.” The fellows waved their caps. And the steamer glided out into the fjord’s broad waters, while the people remained standing and stared after it until it disappeared behind the nearest promontory.

“Yes, people, we have to take the bad times with the good,” Ulriksen said. “Let’s hope our youth may be spared, and that we’ll succeed in shooving away evil. Of course, we have nothing else to do but wait and pray that all may end well.” There was a hush while teacher Ulriksen bowed his head and in his deep voice began to say the Lord’s Prayer.

Tora walked up to town with Ulriksen. “How long do you think the war will last?” Tora asked. “How should a sorry village deacon be able to prophesy about that?” Ulriksen said. “The world has gotten harsh masters.” “Now I’ve sent Karl off,
and Niels has presumably also been called up,” Tora said. “And
by next spring Anton is also supposed to wear the king’s uni-
form. If it were just over with by then.” “We have to keep up
our hopes,” Ulriksen said.

Ulriksen had business at the parsonage; Pastor Gamst was
also having a hard time staying hopeful. The minister was sitting
in his study reading. “Is there news, Ulriksen?” he asked.
“Nothing except that we’ve now sent off our youth,” the teacher
said. “How will it end?” the teacher said. “It’s the flood, the
great Armageddon. And it’s almost two thousand years since
God sent us his son for the salvation of the world.”

“You don’t have a cigar, do you,” Ulriksen said. “I forgot to
put my pipe in my pocket.” The minister offered him one from
a cigar box and lit it for him. “You should smoke tobacco,” Ul-
riksen said. “Instead of always nervously stampeding up and
down the floor like a colt pulling at its tether. Tobacco is a great
gift from God. And so what thoughts have you had about the
war, Pastor Gamst?”

The minister sat down, but he was restless; he got up again
and began to pace the floor while he talked intermittently and
nervously. “The terrible thing is that it smashes to pieces our
whole outlook on life, our trust in providence,” he said. “I stand
here every Sunday in church and preach about God’s infinite
mercy and love for his children. And at the same time God lets
thousands upon thousands of innocent young men kill and muti-
late. Oh, it’s hopeless, hopeless, all of it.” “Now remember one
thing, Pastor Gamst,” the teacher said. “The earth is old. It’s not
the first time it’s drunk blood. Surely you know the lines:

Earth in whose bosom there is hatred and murder,
Generation after generation,
Bloody earth with all your sin-burden’s growing weight!
Where can you so easily follow your celestial way
round about that sun, that beholds your wounds,
and so light-green a wave,
Spring after Spring?”
We have to walk on earth, even if it burns, and the path of progress is a difficult journey. Human nature has much to struggle against.”

“But God’s goodness?” the minister said and stopped in front of him. “How can the almighty, all-merciful God let this happen? I tell my congregation that the Lord is our father, heaven the great, good ancestral home. I preach that we can safely place our fate in his hand, as a small child puts his hand in his father’s. But if we are God’s children, why does God torment us then as if he were a sex murderer?” “Pastor Gamst, now be careful what you say,” the teacher said. “What’s important here is not to be careful,” the minister said. “The important thing here is to get clear about the truth. I’ve lain awake and tormented every night since this insanity began, and I can no longer believe in God. Whether he exists, I don’t know, but I’m withdrawing my allegiance from him. He’s no God of light, but the Old Testament’s bloodthirsty Jehovah.”

“Lord God, Pastor Gamst, aren’t you ever going to find peace of mind,” the teacher said gently. “Why is it so difficult for a person to admit that there’s something that exceeds his understanding? Our Lord didn’t consult either you or me about governing the world. He merely requested in all modesty that we live sensibly and decently according to his words here in Alslev parish. Nothing else is expected of us. We must be faithful in small things.” “But if life itself and faith lose their meaning?” the minister said. He couldn’t keep his hands calm—they clenched and opened as if in a spasm.

“Mankind has a long way to journey, and there are perhaps many, many miles yet before we reach God’s goal,” the teacher said. “And now I’m going to say something heretical: I’m not certain that Our Lord cares that much about all that faith. Don’t you think that he’d rather that we do our best to carry out his good work? That’s what you should preach from your pulpit and in your Mission house, Pastor Gamst. . . .”

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Late in the fall Olga came home. Her sentence had been reduced for good behavior in prison. Olga had become gaunt, and her face was white and closed, her eyes avoided meeting people’s looks. Søren had fetched her at the prison gate and had talked with her for a long time before he got her to go home to Alslev. She’d have preferred to be at a place where no one was familiar with her disgrace. But Søren felt she ought to go home for the time being, then later she could always look for a position as a servant. That’s what Søren wrote to his parents, but Tora agreed with Olga. It would probably have been better if she’d stayed for a time among strangers.

Tora welcomed her daughter while the men were at work. “Hello, mother,” Olga said, and her voice was so pitiful that Tora began crying. “Lord God, child, how emaciated you’ve become,” she said. “They weren’t mean to me,” Olga said. “But can we go round the back of town—I’d hate to meet anybody.” “Olga, I mean, you’ve taken your punishment,” Tora said. “Surely the worst is yet to come,” Olga said. “I’ll certainly endure that too, but I’d like to have a little time.”

So Olga had come home, at a rough time, when no one knew when the factory might stop. It was the continual difficulty: Coal! Høpner experimented with setting up new furnace mechanisms that could burn peat litter and spruce, and Laurids from America was his right hand. But no matter how much Høpner swore and cursed the whole world, they couldn’t get the temperature high enough. You had to have coal if you were going to burn cement.

Høpner had made purchases, but much of what he’d bought had been taken back from him. Høpner was traveling and bawling people out in offices and government ministries: he thumped his fist on the table and explained that many people’s welfare depended on him. But the bigwigs shrugged their shoulders. Everyone’s welfare depended on fuel, and of course there was also
other industry in the country besides a small cement factory by a Jutland fjord. Høpner came home and cursed and swore about the damned bureaucrats. No, it was different in America—there were tough, plucky people there.

Olga spent her time at home and helped her mother and didn’t say much about how things had been in prison. When Marinus spoke to her, his voice was cautious, as if he were afraid of wounding her. “Little Olga,” he said every other word. “Shouldn’t you show your face a little among people?” Tora said, but Olga didn’t want to. Mostly she sat in her room in the evening, and she was at the Mission house a few times. Tora didn’t say anything about it, though she couldn’t stand the thought that Olga might become an Inner Mission member.

But one person Olga couldn’t avoid and that was Magda. Magda roped her in one evening after both had been at the Mission house, and she didn’t let her go. “I thought about you so much all this time,” she said. “Often I laid and cried in my bed at night over how in the world you were doing.” And now Magda wanted to know how a woman was treated in prison. Wasn’t it awful with all those prison guards who looked after you. “They were women,” Olga said. “Oh, they were womenfolk,” Magda said, a bit disappointed. “You know, I once read a story about a girl who was manhandled in prison—they just plain raped her.”

Olga hadn’t been raped; nobody had hurt her. “But you’ve really been changed,” Magda said. “But I certainly know how it is when somebody has been treated badly. I haven’t had it too easy in my life either, and I can surely say it to you: now Andres can’t sleep at night without wetting his bed. He’s like an infant, and I’m still a woman in my best years.” “That’s rough for you,” Olga said and couldn’t help smiling. “Yeah, you laugh,” Magda said. “But what’s a smile for one person is tears for somebody else, and maybe you’ll have your own lesson to learn, even though now you may think you’ve gone through a lot. I’ll tell you what I think: some are born lucky, and they get everything they want. And others are born unlucky, and everything turns bad for them. And the two of us aren’t destined to have it
good—now that’s what I believe, Olga.”

Magda went home with Olga and Tora was obliged to offer her coffee. They were sitting and drinking when Laurids-American came into the living room. “Hmm, are you here?” he said. “Yes, I’m here,” Magda said and looked humbly at the floor. “But if somebody’s opposed, I can gladly leave.” “Nonsense,” Tora said quickly. “I know full well that Laurids can’t stand seeing me,” Magda said, her cheek wet with bitter tears. “I don’t know as I’ve ever hurt you, Laurids. And if I did, I’d beg your forgiveness, as God’s word demands of us.” Laurids from America didn’t answer, but rushed out and slammed the door after him with a bang. Magda had been at the Mission house and heard a lovely talk about the Christian heart, and she sat there literally in need of somebody who’d strike her on the right cheek so she could turn the left one.

With every passing day it became harder to live. All the world’s goods rose in price, or they weren’t to be had at all. The only thing that didn’t rise was wages. Cilius sat at home in the evenings and studied union wage scales with Børgesen, but it wasn’t easy to turn up the rates. “This is absurd,” Cilius said, “you can hardly buy cement for money, but we’re living worse and worse.” And it wasn’t only Cilius who felt that way. There’d been good years, now came the hard ones. Everything rose and rose and rose. Now came ration cards and maximum prices and shortages of goods, but the simple unskilled laborer didn’t get any more in wages than before. “We have to pull through,” Børgesen said. “I mean this stuff here can end in only one way: The working class is going to take power. After the rest of them have gone bust, we’ll take charge. We’re headed toward great times when some day the proletarian will turn the weapons in the right direction.” “But it’s damn tough waiting for it,” Cilius said. “But nobody said it’d be easy, Cilius,” Børgesen said. “We’re not going to get the power and the kingdom for nothing.” “But everything is going up and up,” Cilius said. “Now they’re saying that the schnapps is going to be raised twenty cents a quart.”

Boel-Erik had managed to put up a house out on his moor-
land. It was only a humble dwelling, but it was easier for Erik to live out there. Agricultural commodities were now fetching a good price, and if the factory were obliged to stop, Erik could live on his land. He moved out there, but he didn’t take his children along; they stayed with Line Seldomglad. They had to go to their school, and Boel-Erik didn’t want a housekeeper. He’d had enough to do with women in his days, he said.

They’d heard news about Inger and it wasn’t good. Niels had been called up for guard duty and Inger had become a waitress in a restaurant. But it was probably a nasty place, Niels wrote home, and he regretted what he’d gotten her into. After all, Inger liked dancing and fun and was easy to tempt. Niels saw her once in a while, and he’d asked her to go home. But Inger didn’t want to go to Alslev.

Pastor Gamst had become oddly taciturn; he preached every Sunday in church, as was his duty, but at the Mission house he didn’t say much. He sat still with his head bowed and listened to traveling missionaries who told about blood punishment and trials, which were on us for our burden of sins. He went for long walks, and once in a while he visited the little people who belonged to the congregation. He almost never set foot in the houses of the pious farmers. Pastor Gamst once again sought the places most lowly.

Now there was Kresten Bossen who’d tempted God and gotten his punishment. He’d drunk cognac, according to the minister’s advice, and drinking agreed with him. Now Kresten Bossen had discovered that schnapps too warmed the soul and made him light and free. Kresten Bossen wasn’t a drunkard, but he took a drink like other Christian folk. But now there was once again trouble in his house. His daughter Andrea was going to have a child and it was Iver who’d seduced her.

Ida discovered how things stood with her daughter and gave her a grilling, and Andrea confessed, weeping, that she and Iver had been lovers for a long time. “Now we’re really wretched,” Ida wailed. “Now we’re going to become the laughing stock of the whole parish. And how could you have anything to do with that middle-aged guy?” “Well, I mean, I was never allowed to
be together with the young ones," Andrea wept. "So do you care about him?" Ida asked. Yes, Andrea supposed she did.

It was a hard blow for Kresten Bossen. Fornication and sin had invaded his house. "It seems to me we’ve given our children a Christian upbringing," he said. "The more pious we become, the worse off we get," Ida said. "And if you can drink in the name of Our Lord, then of course your daughter can engage in fornication in the name of Our Lord." "Ida, Ida," Kresten Bossen said. "I’ve really only drunk a single little coffee with schnapps every once in a while." "Presumably she also pursued her lust only once in a while," Ida said saucily.

Ida had become such a bitter plum with the years; she had much to struggle with. Things once looked promising for them, but it was as if Kresten’s devoutness had destroyed everything. While he studied the scriptures, everything around them fell into disrepair. And were they respected among other workers? No, Ida certainly knew that the others regarded Kresten as a sourpuss, who was best at rattling off scriptural passages. Kresten Bossen stood there a bit and pondered, as if he hadn’t quite understood how badly things had gotten for Andrea. Then he said: "Hand me the book, little Ida." And Ida hurled the worn-out bible with a smack on the table in front of him.

Kresten Bossen sat down to read about the offense of adultery and the punishment of fornication, and in the meantime Ida went to the minister and poured out her troubles. "Good God, the young girl," Pastor Gamst said. "Is the fellow going to marry her?" Ida didn’t know, but she’d come to ask the minister to have a word with him. Because in Ida’s opinion he was duty bound to make up for his offense. But he was a rotten guy, Ida explained. He had a bad reputation and it was over her dead body that he had come into their house.

The minister sent a letter to Iver and asked him to come talk and Iver came, though he first cursed that he didn’t have anything to do with the minister. "Wasn’t it you who lived with Andres Johansen and Magda?" the minister asked. Of course, Iver couldn’t deny that. "Back then you had an affair with Magda, and now you’ve made Kresten Bossen’s young daughter
pregnant. I’m not at all going to talk to you about the religious aspect, but do you think it’s proper to harm women this way?” Iver glowered at the minister. This stuff was a damn pain. Now he either had to marry the girl or make compulsory child support contributions for many, many years. “I mean, the womenfolk themselves go along with it,” Iver said. “It surely takes two to do this, I know.” “So what have you thought about doing?” the minister asked. “I don’t know yet,” Iver said. “It surely isn’t certain either that I’m the only one doing this. I mean where there’s been one, others could also have had their turn.”

Flabbergasted, the minister looked at him, and Iver looked down. He knew both that he was lying and that Andrea had never had anything to do with other men. But his life had been hard; from childhood he’d been used to ducking to avoid the blows that threatened him. And he didn’t know whether he wanted to get married. “Do you mean to say that the young girl had several lovers?” the minister asked. “You better ask her about that,” Iver said. “I only have to be accountable for what I myself did. And I’ll certainly pay whatever the law orders.”

“Thanks, that’s all,” the minister said and opened the door. Iver left, but remained standing for a moment out on the road, defiant, but at the same time embarrassed. Should he go back? But the lunch break was about to be over, and if he went back to the minister, he risked coming to work too late. What damn business was it really of the minister’s that he’d made Andrea pregnant?

At dusk Ida came sneaking to the parsonage to find out what Iver had said. “I spoke to him, Ida Bossen,” the minister said. “He’s a rotten rascal, you’re right about that. He hinted that he wasn’t the only one . . .” “Jesus have mercy on us,” Ida wailed. “Just looking at him you could see he was lying,” the minister said. “But if it were my daughter, I’d do anything to prevent her from marrying him. That marriage would never be happy.” “Does the minister mean that?” Ida asked and stared at Pastor Gamst round-eyed. Was this a minister advising against marriage when a girl had been seduced?

“Andrea’s young, she’ll surely find another one,” the minis-
ter said. "But the child?" Ida said. "Who'd want her with that encumbrance?" "Oh, if love is really there, they'll talk it over and reach an understanding about the child," the minister said. "It's wrong to enter into a marriage that will only be the caricature of a true marriage. Andrea went astray, but I know her so well that I know she'll surely find the right way again. If she marries that bandit, she'll become an unhappy person." "But can that be right," Ida said. "After they've sinned with each other?" She was frightened by her own words. Because of course what a minister said had to be right. He knew what was required.

Ida came home in a hot-tempered mood: now she intended to put her house in order. Kresten Bossen and Iver returned home from work; it was meal time, but no plate had been set for Iver. "I wonder where my place is," he asked. "You're not going to be in this house any more," Ida said, and her eyes flashed with anger. "Ida, Ida," Kresten Bossen said. But now Ida couldn't be stopped.

"You came here to the parish as a tramp and you've done nothing but harm," she said. "I won't have you another hour in my house. You spoke ill of Andrea to the minister, but even if she had ten children, she'll never be allowed to marry you. She couldn't possibly get a worse husband. Pack your things and get out. I'll be glad to see the last of you." Iver flushed with anger; it looked as though he'd slug her. "Yeah, you can certainly manage to lay a hand on a woman, you worm," Ida shrilled. "You carefully avoid the guys. How was that at the inn when you got a beating from Cilius? Yeah, we certainly heard about that. Even that old sucker Andres, he'd nearly scared the living daylights out of you. I know what I'm talking about—I know you real good."

"You hear how your wife's talking to me?" Iver asked, and Kresten Bossen could of course hardly avoid hearing it. But he stood there submissive and let the storm rage. When Ida was in that mood, it was best to keep your mouth shut. "Yeah, have it your way, you crazy hag," Iver said, suddenly desperate. "But you'll pay for it dearly. If I'm going to be pushed out the door, I can swear my way out of it." "Yeah, go ahead and swear your-
self down into hell, where you're going anyway,” Ida shouted. “I'd rather die than see our daughter married to you.”

Iver stood outdoors with a bundle of clothes in his hand on this cold winter day; now once again he was a homeless man. He was black with anger, and at the same time he was on the verge of crying: no one on this earth cared about what became of him. He'd never possessed a more beautiful girl than Andrea, who was so young, gentle, and warm. And the world had separated him from her—that's the way Iver felt now. But if he was being chased out, then the girl could stay there and be disgraced.

He remained standing for a long time in the biting evening cold and didn't know what to do. What if he went in and asked for forgiveness and calmed down the angry Ida with talk? He already had his hand on the door latch, but let it go again. He'd been humiliated so much in this world that he couldn't humiliate himself. He strolled through town. The lights from the factory could be seen dimly, but Iver didn't give a damn about the factory. There were other places in the country where he could get work, he only had himself to take care of, and could get cracking on whatever life offered. Now Iver longed for life on the road; fate had begrudged him the chance to put down roots. By the next morning the Zealander had wandered southward.
It was a hard winter with much unemployment. Marinus began to talk about the possibility that in the spring he might get a job as herdsman or permanent day laborer on a farm. Because, after all, it looked as though there’d be great times for agriculture. Horses and cattle brought tremendous prices. But Tora said no—never in her life would she work as a servant for the farmers; in that case, they’d better move to a city.

Olga was still home; she’d again taken work at the factory—they were in much need of female labor. The old sacks had to be mended and cleaned and used again till they fell apart. There was no heat in the room where the women worked and they had to wrap themselves up well to keep warm. When they went to the factory in the morning, they resembled walking bundles of clothes in the greyish dawn. With their fingers blue from the cold, they used needle and thread. It was piece work: so and so many sacks mended per day, and it had to be done fast.

But conversation continued during work, and little by little it was as if the room thawed out, and it became quite cozy. Olga sat and listened; she replied only when someone addressed her. Of course, they all knew about Olga—that she’d killed her child and been in the penitentiary. If she hadn’t herself been sitting in the sack workshop, they’d surely have been talking about her—that she knew well.

It was Magda who led the way in gossiping, and she didn’t spare her own affairs. The other women got to hear how things were going with Andres’ infirmity. The old bugger had been so unlucky as to smash to pieces the vase he used as a receptacle, and he’d had a lot of trouble finding a new one that fit. They told many crude jokes, and Magda laughed in a shrill voice. Then she lowered her voice and began talking about Kresten Bossen’s girl. Now it was probably about the time she was expecting and the child’s alleged father had streaked off.

Line Seldomglad and Dagmar Horse were sitting here among
the other women. When the men were unemployed, the wives had to provide the support. "By the way, you knew Iver rather well," Line Seldomglad said unobtrusively. "Yeah, now I can say it like it is," Magda gushed. "He was close to raping me back then when he lived with us. But I scratched him so hard he still has scars on both cheeks. No, you can believe of me whatever you want, but they’ve really never had an easy time getting too close to me. And if Andrea had just guarded her virginity the way I guarded mine when I was her age, she’d be better off now. But what are the girls like nowadays?"

And for once the women couldn’t contradict Magda, because the girls were in a bad way. Even though it was in the midst of wartime, and nobody knew whether they’d be alive and eating tomorrow, the young people went dancing until far into the night. There wasn’t a week when there wasn’t a din from the inn, and in Cilius’s meeting house they danced merrily till daylight.

There was a snowstorm, which snowed the town in with drifts, and the frost was biting. Høpner made sure that a tile stove was set up in the sack workshop, and the women sat there bleary-eyed in the acrid peat smoke. But it was worse for the men, who sat at home and had no work. It was no weather to go out in, and it was chilly in the living room. They had to save on fuel to make it last.

Andrea Bossen gave birth to a son one winter night amid drifting snow, and the midwife could barely get through the snow showers. Andrea had moved into the bedroom and Kresten Bossen slept on the bench in the living room. Of late he’d become even more brooding: it was the world’s fate he was brooding over. It was so strange how John’s revelation fit the times as they were now. It spoke of the four angels who’d been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year and were released to kill a third of mankind. Kresten Bossen read about the heads of the horses that resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. Surely that could only be the cannons that Saint John was prophesying about.

Kresten Bossen sat with his fingers in his ears reading, while
his daughter delivered. It went easily, and when it was over with, Ida came in and took him by his shoulder to attract his attention. She said: “It’s a boy. He weighs eight pounds.” Kresten Bossen awoke as it were from a trance. “So, it’s a boy,” he said. “I think you should go in and look at him, Kresten,” Ida said. “It’ll do Andrea good.” Kresten Bossen got up meekly and went in to see his grandchild. Andrea was lying there pale in bed with the little one at her breast. She smiled anxiously at her father and Kresten Bossen stroked her hair. His thoughts were with the book in there. What could be meant by that big beast in Revelation? Was it the German or was it something that was going to come?

Word got round to the houses that Andrea had pulled through the delivery and women paid a visit after the birth. They were full of gentle forgiveness. After all, Andrea was half a child, and if she’d sinned, that was her problem. But in the Mission house the missionary from Færgeby gave a talk, and it was good that Andrea didn’t hear it. It was about sin and fornication, which had penetrated even where Jesus dwelled, about the archfiend, who was always lying in wait. There was nobody who doubted that he meant Kresten Bossen’s Andrea. But it was right that the truth was told. Because it had, of course, run all around the parish that it was the minister’s fault that Andrea didn’t marry her fornicator, and many were outraged for that reason.

Martin Thomsen had a conversation with the missionary and the next afternoon he turned up at the parsonage. The minister received him coolly, but Martin Thomsen was nothing but humble affability. “It’s almost been ages since a fella has had a chance to talk to the minister,” he said. “I know the friends long to hear you say a word or two at the Mission house.” “Of course,” the minister said. “But it’s hard to say words that comfort in these times.” “Perhaps words of judgment should also be spoken,” the farmer said. “A judgment has come over humanity.” Exhausted, Pastor Gamst sighed and didn’t respond.

But it was something else that Martin Thomsen had on his mind and he played it by ear. Now of course Kresten and Ida
Bossen’s girl had had a child in sin and dishonor—by the way had the minister heard about it? Of course, Pastor Gamst was familiar with the news; after all, it had been reported to the parish register. “Of course, it would have been nice if the poor little creature had had a father,” Martin Thomsen said. “There’s hardly anyone who’d disagree with you about that,” the minister admitted. “I’m obliged to confide to the minister that out there in the parish people say that you advised the girl against marrying the fellow who’d made her pregnant. Well, I really never believed it; I mean, I know the minister’s opinion about this kind of thing—but I think I have to say it.” The minister smiled and said that what people were saying wasn’t that wrong. It would’ve been a calamity if the two had gotten married.

Martin Thomsen looked at the minister as if he didn’t believe what he’d heard. “But isn’t the minister thinking about the offense it would give, and it’s written in the scripture . . .” he said, but the minister interrupted him. “Won’t you please spare me having to hear what’s written in the scripture, Martin Thomsen?” he said. “For one thing, there’s so much written in the scriptures, and for another, I know it better than you do. And there’s more offense from a bad marriage than from an illegitimate child.” Now a strange change came over the farmer. It was as if his round-shouldered figure grew, his face became hard and authoritative. Now Martin Thomsen was a warrior in the Lord’s struggle.

"Those are words I’d never, no never ever expected to hear from your mouth, Pastor Gamst,” he said. “I’ve respected you and considered you one of God’s children, and I didn’t think you’d protect fornication and a scandalous way of life.” “You’re so well-versed in the scriptures that of course you surely remember the Savior’s words: he that is pure let him first cast a stone,” the minister interposed. “But in that respect I am pure—of that you can be assured,” the farmer said. “I’ve always been on guard against fornication, indeed, like the apostle Paul I’ve killed the carnal urges in myself. For many years I’ve not cohabited with my wife, even though it’s permitted in modesty and marriage. But we agreed to be pure in flesh as well as in spirit. I’ve
overcome the thorn in the flesh in me, and I have a right to castigate fornication in others.” “In other words, you yourself have lived in an unhappy marriage and now you think others must be punished with the same rod,” the minister said.

A spiteful gleam blazed in Martin Thomsen’s eyes. “I’m going to tell you something, Pastor Gamst, I believe in my Lord and my Savior,” he said. “That must be a great joy,” the minister said. “But it doesn’t seem to have softened your heart. You swing the gospel like a scourge.” “I do, I readily admit it,” the farmer said. “I’m going to punish sin and aberration wherever I meet it. I’m going to castigate the ungodly as well as I have the ability to do it. And I’ll say it to you straight out, Pastor Gamst, there’s been dissatisfaction with your preaching for a long time. It’s not the Lord’s holy word that’s being preached in Alslev church. I’m going to bring up your attitude in the matter of Andrea Bossen’s illegitimate child in the parish church council, and I’m going to insist uncompromisingly that your view is not worthy of a minister, I’m going to . . . .”

“My God, Martin Thomsen, you’re a worn-out little human being,” the minister said. “You’re crushed and destroyed by existence like a tormented cat one’s tried to tear the life out of. Now you’re scratching with your claws as well as you know how. But in these hard times it remains to be seen whether our faith can hold up. Maybe it can and maybe not. But we have to turn to the sources of faith, to the words that Christ, as it were, whispers to us: forgive thy brother, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “And the burden of sins and atonement and mercy?” Martin Thomsen asked. “And sacraments and dogmas and everything else,” the minister said. “Those are words and words and words.” “What you’re saying now isn’t Christianity,” the farmer said. “But you’ll have to bear the responsibility for it in the parish church council. You can say what you will about me, but you won’t be permitted to touch my Christ.”

The little farmer stood with angry eyes and pursed lips. There was something positively moving about him, and Pastor Gamst went over to him and put his hand on his shoulder. “You’re an unhappy man,” he said. “But before we can find
mercy, we must learn to be merciful. That’s the difficult commandment.”

Martin Thomsen left the parsonage in anger: a man had abandoned the straight and narrow path, and that man was a minister. But he swore to himself that in the struggle that was now drawing nigh, he’d certainly get the upper hand. Martin Thomsen knew his own weakness: he was inclined to look after his own interests in a business deal, and he was wont to present himself as a man without means, although he was tolerably well off. But he’d laid his weakness at the Lord’s feet; he’d taken the Savior to his heart.

There was a lot of business in real estate now in the spring, and there was talk of the high prices people were getting for their land. Even Boel-Erik had had offers for his wretched property, but Erik wouldn’t sell. He didn’t have anything to spend money on since Inger had left him, but he needed the land. Boel-Erik had bought a cow at an outrageous price, and it was going to calve soon. He’d also bought piglets at the time when they could be had for nothing. It was almost a whole herd.

Work at the factory had started up again: Høpner had succeeded in procuring coal. Steamers were docked at the wharf with the Danish flag painted on their sides. Seamen went ashore and drank at the inn, and speakers came to the meeting house and told about events out in the world. The war was an Armageddon, but when it was over, everything would be good. But they couldn’t say when it would be over, and life became harder month by month. Now coffee also ran out. The workers had a malt brew in their flasks when they rode to work, and coffee wasn’t served any more after the meetings at the Mission house.

The farmers gathered every morning in Skifter’s shop and talked about prices for grain and animals. In these times it was important to know about what things cost: after all, nothing was firm. Skifter put in his two cents: he was becoming more and more certain that the last days were near. The farmers admitted that it didn’t look good, but incidentally agricultural products were of course fetching good prices. There wasn’t an old nag that couldn’t be sold.
These were good times, many people felt, but also strange times. Now there was a man like Bregentved—who’d have considered him before? He’d worked as a day laborer, had sold lots, and dealt in fish. But now Bregentved had become a real businessman, and if he kept it up, the way he’d begun, he’d probably wind up a millionaire.

Bregentved had begun buying up fish from the fjord fishermen and had resold them in town at a big profit. That had produced cash, and he bought a small property from a smallholder who hadn’t discovered that the prices for farmland had risen. That produced even better profits when Bregentved resold it, and he rented a room on the road through Alslev and put a cardboard sign in the window saying: M. Bregentved, real estate agent.

Bregentved had big plans, but capital was tight. If you wanted to deal in real estate, you had to have money both for a down payment and for sealing the bargain with a drink, but it was money that was repaid with interest. Bregentved chatted with a few people, but no one was willing to enter into partnership with him. Real estate deals could produce big profits, but also big losses. People had heard plenty about that.

One evening Bregentved came to visit Andres. He sat there respectably and drank ersatz coffee and chatted about the times as they were. Andres took the view that the times accustomed the people to contentment, and it was for their genuine best. Because what hadn’t been rife with lavishness and extravagance? No, now people were learning to save. “You’re not kidding,” Bregentved replied readily. “But I mean we shouldn’t bury our talent in the earth either. Then it easily happens that it gets rusty. But presumably you don’t do that anyway, Andres—you’ve got your money well invested, don’t you?”

Andres looked at him mistrustfully out of the corner of his eye. “What I have is so little,” he said. “Well, good heavens, that’s strange,” Bregentved said. “Because all your days you’ve been both a capable and thrifty man.” “Andres was glad to hear that. Otherwise people were wont to mock him for his stinginess. But there you have it. Bregentved was certainly not without talent.
“In times like these capital has to be invested, otherwise it’ll crumble away,” Bregentved said didactically. “If previously you owned a thousand crowns, they were worth so and so many barrels of barley. But now they’ve turned into fewer barrels of barley because the barley has risen and the money has become worth less. That’s easy to understand, isn’t it?”

Andres nodded. He realized that these matters were right up Bregentved’s alley. They had of course heard that he’d earned money in a deal for a smallholder’s farm. People weren’t always as dumb as they looked—Andres knew that from experience. “Don’t you think a fella could let his little nest egg stay in the savings bank, Bregentved?” he asked. “Sure, you can certainly do that,” Bregentved said. “After all, that’s where we businesspeople borrow our money from. We take the profits, and if there’s a loss, ultimately you take it. Yeah, by all means let your money stay in the savings bank at three-four percent. The rest of us are getting fifty percent on it the way the times are. But don’t ever let me entice you out on to the thin ice,” Bregentved said.

Andres sat there, an old man who, his whole life through, had known how to hold on to his money, but who now couldn’t even hold his water. He stole a few pieces of coal from the factory and a couple of handfuls of oats in the stable for his chickens. But what of it? He’d never had a head for big deals, but Bregentved certainly did.

“Now if I went into partnership with you in a business, could you give me a guarantee?” he asked. “I could,” Bregentved said. “I can give the best guarantee and that’s my honest face.” Andres looked as though he’d imagined a better security, but Bregentved began recounting huge deals, inconceivable sums that had been earned on real estate. But of course they’d barely come here to the area yet. “Yeah, you’re the son of a deacon and presumably something there rubs off,” Andres said. At one and the same time he was elated and testy. It was as if Bregentved were making demands of him and he didn’t like that. But there was great wealth to be gained and that was pleasant for Andres.

“I’d like to treat you to a coffee with schnapps,” he said. “But the coffee has gotten so bad that it’s a shame to mix
schnapps with it.” “I mean it always softens the taste a bit,” Bregentved said, but Andres didn’t respond. He was absorbed in speculating about how his money could multiply if he took up the deal. “Now what if I went into partnership with you for three thousand crowns?” he said. “Then you’ll be the richest man in the parish before a year’s out,” Bregentved replied. “I don’t have it myself, but maybe I can get it,” Andres added quickly. “Then you’ll get it by tomorrow without fail,” Bregentved said in good spirits. “The two of us, Andres, we’re a good match. You’re an awfully careful man, that has to be said to your credit, and I also think twice before I act. They were going to make me president of a concrete block plant some time ago, it was a consortium, they call it, but I said to them: Money on the table first, folks, we have to have money to get the production going. Without money you people can’t get hold of Bregentved.”

Andres overcame his misgivings and Bregentved got his money to do business with. They bought a farm near Færgeby and it turned into a good deal. Bregentved sold off some of the land and culled out a portion of the cattle from the herd. It was attorney Schjøtt who took care of the papers, and he jovially tapped Bregentved on the shoulder. Now Bregentved was the solid man.

The time had come for Anton, Tora’s favorite, to be drafted as a soldier. There was one less person to support the family. But you had to know how to endure it. Just as long as we didn’t get into the war. Tora prayed for it every evening before she went to sleep. She now had three sons in the army, and if things got serious, Sören would probably also be included. It was as if life had become nothing but grief and worry.

There was a sharp discussion in the church council. Had the minister acted correctly in advising Andrea Bossen not to get married? Martin Thomsen stood up, a little crooked-shouldered, with penetrating, hard eyes, and accused his minister. Pastor Gamst sat calmly and listened to him and mentioned nothing further in his defense. But after the meeting he said to the farmer: “I like you better now, Martin Thomsen. Before it was as if you were dipped in a bucket of honey, and it didn’t become you
to be sweet. Now you’re honest in venom and gall. But remember the slab on the Mission house: O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!”
Now Bregentved built his own house on the main street: its grandeur was without match. The time was past when Bregentved could be content with a rented room and a cardboard sign in the window. He had to have an office and telephone and a woman to look after it. He was well versed in big undertakings.

Bregentved had put on weight, had gotten a little belly, and was becomingly blotchy, and that wasn’t just from wind and weather. When he was out with other farmland dealers, they ate well and drank strong spirits, and Bregentved had a lot on the credit side of life’s pleasures. He’d had many lean years; now came the fat years.

Bregentved’s property was spacious: there was a shop for a new dry-goods dealer and a large office and an apartment for real estate agent Bregentved. There was nothing stopping him from being able to get money now. Bregentved was received politely at the bank in Færgeby and at the savings bank, and he was an esteemed client in attorney Schjøtt’s office. He’d already subdivided many of the area’s farms, and now he’d also begun to deal in peat. He bought peat bricks by the hundreds of thousands from the small peat farmers inland and resold them to the towns. That produced good profits. Bregentved had discovered before the bog owners what peat was now worth.

Bregentved had to have an assistant, and one evening he called on Marinus. Marinus greeted him a bit self-consciously: after all, they’d once worked together, but now Bregentved was the big businessman. Bregentved greeted Marinus and Laurids from America without haughtiness and asked how things were going. Did they have work—were they earning a decent day-wage?

Yeah, there was plenty of work, as long as coal could be gotten, Marinus explained, and even if the factory was forced to stop, there’d surely be work for everybody. They were felling timber and digging peat like never before. “In spite of every-
thing, you should have stuck to farming, Marinus," Bregentved said. "Because now there’s money in it. I can sell you a good little farm I have an option on."

Marinus shook his head: his heart had been set on farming for many years, but it was inconceivable to buy at these real estate prices. Because there would surely come times when it would be harder to pay the interest on it. "It certainly won’t happen in your lifetime," Bregentved said. "When they’re shooting the whole world to pieces, it’ll take many, many years before they get it built up again. No, the prices will hold—you can be certain of that." And Bregentved continued on about the good little farm he had an option on. It was just right for Marinus.

"But the house here, it isn’t the kind that can be easily sold at a good price, is it?" Marinus objected. "That can be easily taken care of," Bregentved said. We can take it in exchange instead of a down payment. I’ll definitely find somebody who wants it. Come along tomorrow and look at the property, then we’ll make a quick deal." It was a tremendous temptation for Marinus, who most of all in this world wanted to be a farmer again. He looked over at Laurids, but Laurids was sitting with an inscrutable face smoking his short pipe. He didn’t meddle in other people’s business; he didn’t give advice to adults. But then Tora came in and heard what they’d been talking about and she became angry.

"You’ll never learn, Marinus," she said. "Have you totally forgotten how we slaved and drudged and didn’t get anywhere? And now you want to start all over again at your age—you’re not in your right mind. But I don’t have any respect for you Bregentved: you earn your money by enticing people to buy at too high a price." "I only mean Marinus well," Bregentved said, offended. "I’m not going to pay any mind to you, even if you’re sitting there with your wallet full of big bills," Tora said. "You were never worth anything at work, everybody knows that." Marinus tried to stop Tora, but she was furious for real. "You stampede around and break up farm after farm and sell to people at such prices they have to end up in debt and destitution; yeah, you certainly did turn into a businessman. But we’ve been paying
this house off on instalments for many years, and it’s surely humble, but it’s our own. I’m not going to sit on some property I’ll be chased from some day in disgrace. And I don’t care about your guarantee—I wouldn’t rely on your brains.”

Bregentved had been knocked out; he winked to Marinus and Laurids. That was supposed to be understood this way: that womenfolk, of course, had their moods; there was no point bickering with them. “Then we won’t talk about it any more,” Bregentved said and wasn’t in the least angry. And Bregentved revealed what he’d come for. He’d had two of their boys in his service while he was a fish dealer, and now that he was a real estate agent, he’d like to have Olga in his employ. “As a housekeeper?” Tora asked, but that wasn’t it. Bregentved was mostly out on business and when he was in Alslev, he took his meals at the inn—that suited him best. Olga would be in the office. “She certainly hasn’t had the training for that,” Marinus said, but Bregentved felt it was no big deal. As long as she could write letters for him and take messages on the telephone, that was all that was required. And she’d get a reasonable wage. That would suit her well because Olga wasn’t happy with her work at the factory. She was called down from her room, where she was sitting in solitude, and heard Bregentved’s proposal. Olga accepted—she became a clerk in Bregentved’s new office.

Time passed; people got accustomed to the fact that there was a war. It was as if it had lasted for years, and it would perhaps last many years more. The young fellows came home from the defense force, were permitted to be at home for a time, and were called up again. Niels was visiting, and Karl and Anton came home and had work at the factory. Niels didn’t talk much, and Tora had to interrogate him about Inger. It was a long time ago that he’d seen her, but she’d moved in with a seaman. “So are they going to get married?” Tora asked. “Because I mean Boel-Erik has divorced her now and has gotten sole rights to the children.” Niels didn’t think so. The man had probably been a seaman once, but he didn’t sail any more. He lived off women.

Tora started crying. Things had gone so badly for Inger. She’d had a hard heart and been a bad person. But she hadn’t
deserved such a harsh fate, and it was Tora’s son who was responsible for her misfortune. He’d led her astray. “Did you talk to her, Niels?” she asked. “Didn’t you try to get her to give up that way of life?” Yes, Niels had talked and talked to Inger earlier, because even while they’d been together, she was in a bad way. That’s why they’d broken up. “But you have to tell Boel-Erik,” Tora said. “It’s his right to hear how badly things stand. It was a hard blow to him when she left him.” Niels didn’t much feel like it, but Tora insisted that he couldn’t shirk that obligation, and one Sunday morning Niels went out to the heath to Boel-Erik.

It was a warm summer day, the larks were singing, and in Alslev the bells rang for morning services. There was a sweet and warm scent of hay and heather. Peat smoke rose from the small moorland farms, distant churches shone chalk-white in the sun. It was a poor and peaceful world, and Niels walked more slowly. He didn’t have good news to bring.

Boel-Erik was at work although it was a holiday. He was building a sheep house, while other people were taking a rest. He didn’t move a muscle in his sunburnt face when he caught sight of Niels. “So, you’ve come home,” he said and looked past him. “It’s just a visit,” Niels said. “And how’s Inger,” Boel-Erik asked. Beating around the bush wasn’t his style. Niels recounted what he knew, while Boel-Erik didn’t take his eyes off him. It was as if he wanted to fix every word in his memory. “It would’ve been better if you hadn’t lured her over there,” he finally said. “Her home was here, and if you’d only left us in peace, things probably wouldn’t have gone bad with Inger. Because I’m going to tell you what you don’t know: she fought hard against her own nature. I sensed it many a time even though she never talked about it.”

Boel-Erik stood there with a hammer in his hand, putting up a shed for his sheep. He was large-bodied, with broad, heavy shoulders that were accustomed to carrying big loads. And across from him stood Niels, slighter and lighter, and with that weighty responsibility on him. “I wasn’t responsible for her leaving here,” he said and added: “I never asked her to do it. I’d
have preferred if she’d stayed. I mean, she had the children.”

“Of course you drew her over there,” Boel-Erik said. “And cer­
tainly neither of you gave much thought to the children. Do you
suppose that she’s in the seaman’s power?” Niels didn’t know
anything about that—he didn’t know the man.

Boel-Erik thought it over for a while; he was considering
calmly and slowly—you could see in his face how his thoughts
were working. “So I suppose you know where she’s living?” he
asked, and Niels was able to shed light on that. Somebody had
told him and it had stuck in his memory. Boel-Erik repeated the
address a couple of times, then he got down to work again. The
sheep house was supposed to be finished. Weekdays he had
work in the factory, and the long Sunday had to be made use of.
It looked as though he’d totally forgotten Niels. Niels stood for
a little and looked at him, then he walked home to Alslev.

Several days later Boel-Erik took off from work and made
the long journey to Copenhagen. It was his intention to find
Inger and free her from the way of life she was now leading.
Boel-Erik had decided that he’d take her back as his wife. If
she’d move out to his place in the heath and share his toilsome
life, every sin would be forgotten. But he returned without In­
ger.

Søren was home during his vacation. He was on the verge
of losing his youthfulness. He’d gotten glasses and his hair had
thinned somewhat; it came from all that studying. The girls fol­
lowed him with their eyes—Marinus certainly noticed that. Be­
cause he was far from ugly, though he was, to be sure, sedate for
his age. Søren had a photograph of a young woman he’d gotten
to know in Copenhagen. She was almost all eyes, hair, and
white teeth, it seemed to Marinus, but he praised the girl’s ap­
pearance so as not to wound his son’s feelings. “I mean, she’s sort of the more delicate kind,” Marinus said. “A fella can really
see by looking at her that she has a good mind. Are you sweet­
hearts, if I might be permitted to ask.”

They weren’t exactly sweethearts, but they were friends,
Søren admitted. And maybe it would become more serious in
the future. Her name was Tove, her father was treasurer of a
bank. She herself was an artist and was learning to paint at a large school called the Art Academy. “You’re welcome to tell mother,” Søren said. “But don’t tell the rest of them. I mean, we’re not as such really engaged yet.” Marinus promised to be as silent as the grave. He was proud and touched by his son’s having shown confidence in him.

Søren was at teacher Ulriksen’s and gave an account of how his studies were progressing. Ulriksen listened to him absent-mindedly. “That’s good, learned Søren,” he said. “You’re absorbing learning and that’s good. We’ll certainly pay for you for the time being, but be industrious, because a fella doesn’t know how long it can keep on going in these times.” And Ulriksen said to Søren that he needn’t go to the minister. Pastor Gamst was very busy at this time and Ulriksen would definitely say hello.

Pastor Gamst was busy defending himself against people who previously had been his friends. The minister no longer went to the Mission house. The last time he was there, a wave of coldness came surging toward him. Pastor Gamst had shielded immorality: he’d advised a girl who’d been seduced not to get married, and the alleged father had skipped town. Now how many girls would Iver make unhappy before he was restrained?

The minister was severely censured in the parish church council, and in the parish council they weren’t gentle either. How were they going to collect the compulsory contribution for the maintenance of the illegitimate child? It was, so to speak, the minister’s fault if the township were forced to bear the loss. A part of the congregation led by Martin Thomsen had submitted a complaint to the rural dean and bishop. Because a minister had not acted in a seemly fashion.

Pastor Gamst no longer took long walks; he walked in his garden, on the overgrown walkways, where the air was cool, almost as if you were walking on the bottom of a green lake. But he still had friends. Mrs. Marja drove over to the parsonage and was full of comforting words. She’d heard the whole story from the missionary in Færgeby, but she’d also told the man her opin-
ion in plain words. What incredible narrow-mindedness! But it was worth remembering that he was strongest who stood alone.

But it wasn’t the dispute with Martin Thomsen and his people that was preoccupying Pastor Gamst. Good God, the whole world was at war, and of what importance was his little skirmish? But where was God? His heaven was darkened by war planes and his green earth was being poisoned by mustard gas. Where had the Almighty hidden from his children’s prayers?

Here the rich harvest was growing in the field, the grain was reaped and taken into the barn. The cattle stood in the grass in the fjord meadows and stuffed themselves fat for export. Business was transacted and money earned; yesterday’s poor were today’s rich. Farmers built new farmhouses, the large farmers got cars. There was wealth in the country, while the world’s youth went to their deaths, and children wasted away from want in their mother’s womb. Where was God?

Not many people came to church when Pastor Gamst preached. His sermons were hard to understand and there was no warmth in his words. He read the text for the day and spoke briefly. Now and then he stopped short and took a long time to find the thread. Teacher Ulriksen followed him anxiously with his eyes from the bench below the pulpit and sighed with relief when the minister said amen. “How long can he stand it,” Ulriksen thought. “He’s as tight as a kettle the steam can’t escape from.”

The harvest was over with. The farmers began to think a little about the fall plowing. The trees in the parsonage’s garden became darker in color and it was cool in the evenings. Pastor Gamst had had a thought that he was now considering. What if he now went to the bishop and talked about his scruples? Because there was no point talking to the dean unless it was about red wine vintages or Jersey cattle.

The minister went off and obtained an audience with the bishop. He was shown into a study with bookshelves from floor to ceiling. There was a soft carpet on the floor, but only a few spartan chairs and a desk. On the wall between the windows hung a large picture of the Lord’s Supper.
The bishop was a small, white-haired man with sharp features and intelligent, lively eyes. He asked Pastor Gamst to sit down so he had the light in his face. He himself stood with his back to the window. "Lawyer's trick," the minister thought.

"I'm glad to see you here with me," the bishop said. "For a long time I've wanted to have a conversation with you. Of course, we belong to different movements within the church, but . . . ." "I no longer belong to any movement," the minister said, and the bishop knitted his brow slightly. He wasn't accustomed to being interrupted. Pastor Gamst didn't pay any attention to it. He'd gotten up and trudged up and down the floor while speaking of his doubts. The bishop grudgingly watched his wild wandering, while he gently nodded once in a while: to be sure, to be sure.

"I don't understand what's happening in the world," the minister said. "I've begun to doubt God's supreme goodness. Or rather, I no longer believe in supreme goodness. If God is almighty, why is he letting it happen? Every day millions of burning prayers ascend to him from desperate, helpless human beings; he doesn't hear them, even though he himself instructed us in prayer. For more than a year now the mass murder has been continuing . . . . how are we, who believe we're God's servants, supposed to be able to speak to others about him? The God who we were taught was lenient toward his children, is now like an insane despot. If he exists, Bishop, if he exists?" The minister, now stammering chaotically, now violently and urgently, spoke a stream of accusatory words. The thoughts he'd thought over and over again now took form. The bishop's eyes were constantly directed at him; he looked a little tired. He reached out his hand and pushed a button. A maid came and the bishop asked for tea. "It's a little sophomoric," he said to himself.

"Now sit down, dear Pastor Gamst," he said. "Now let's drink a good cup of hot tea. I well understand your scruples; each of us has had times in his life when doubt marches into his soul. The Christian life is a constant struggle. Time and again we're confronted with the question: why should this or that happen. But I'll tell you one thing: because Our Lord has permitted
us to be his preachers, doesn’t mean he’s initiated us into his confidence. He doesn’t send a message to your parsonage or my bishop house about how he intends to manage the world’s governance.” The bishop smiled in a friendly way and poured the tea.

“There’s nothing for us to do but surrender to God’s will, to full and complete trust in him,” he continued. “Everything that comes from him serves us for the best. If he punishes us, perhaps we imperfect ones don’t understand why, but we certainly need the most severe punishment. And after all, what do the earthly sufferings mean as against eternity’s splendors.” While the bishop was speaking, Pastor Gamst took a look around the cozy, well-lined room. The screams from the suffering world didn’t penetrate in here. Here a friendly old man sat in undisturbed tranquility with his books and governed his diocese. “But your scruples are human,” the bishop said. “We must constantly wrestle as Jacob wrestled. We must win the faith again and again. I propose that you be relieved of your official duties for a time. I will recommend to the government ministry that you receive half a year’s leave, and that a curate be appointed for you. You’re in a spiritual crisis and must have peace. When that period has passed, we’ll talk about it some time. But I will pray for you that you may regain your trust in our Savior.”

When the minister was going to say goodbye, the bishop’s countenance changed: now he wasn’t the friendly old fellow, but the clerical official. “But just listen, Pastor Gamst.” he said. “You know a complaint or a kind of petition came where they complained about your having dissuaded a girl who was made pregnant outside of marriage from marrying the man who’d seduced her. What’s this all about?” The minister explained that in his opinion Iver was a bad person and that a marriage could never bring happiness to the two of them. “It’s possible that you’re completely correct in your judgment of the man,” the bishop said. “But nevertheless your action was wrong. Under no circumstances can we tolerate these extramarital sexual relations.” “I truly didn’t do that either,” the minister said and began to laugh.
“Well, now don’t laugh,” the bishop said. “Because the matter is plenty serious. If the Christian moral ideal is shattered, more than that will go to pieces. I certainly know that we can’t prevent young girls from having illegitimate children. But we must maintain that it is sinful and that the damage as far as possible must be repaired. If an unlawful sexual relationship has existed between unmarried people, and it’s had consequences, it’s our duty to demand that it be legitimated. Nothing is of greater significance than our maintaining the moral values. If we give free rein, we’ll end up in the ditch.”

The bishop fell silent for a bit and once again became the indulgent old man. He accompanied the minister to the door and patted him in a friendly way on the shoulder. “I’ll write a recommendation to the government ministry this very day,” he said. “And if there’s anything you want of me, just come. While we’re young, things roar and ferment in us. And it’s surely the fermentation that produces the delicious wine. You’re not the first young prelate who’s confided his scruples to me. Oh, there’ve been many through the years. But all of them have lost their fizz and are sitting as good ministers in their parishes.” The bishop fell silent and sighed. Then he continued while he opened the door out to the sunny market square: “But you can’t protect immorality. On that subject I’m very strict.”
Pastor Gamst got half a year’s leave, while a curate attended to his duties, and the bishop was right: his nerves calmed down. But he was no longer in the Inner Mission and Ulriksen wasn’t displeased with that. They were together almost every day while the minister was on leave from his post, and Ulriksen taught Pastor Gamst to smoke tobacco. But scarcely had he managed to learn it before there was no more tobacco to be had. It was a hard blow for Ulriksen. He tried dried cherry leaves and hops, but it tasted worse than nothing. That spring Ulriksen decided to become self-sufficient. He cleared out some flower beds in his garden and began cultivating tobacco. If they could do it on Funen, they could surely also do it in Alslev even if the climate was a tad windier.

There was irregular work at the factory: now it was in full swing, now it stopped completely. It was all about the coal, the coal, which was so hard to procure. It didn’t matter that there were rotary kilns and mills and a hundred fifty men who’d be dying for work if coal couldn’t be procured. Cilius had gotten work in the coal mill; he tended the pyrator and was as black as Satan when he came from work. But this way he knew exactly that there was now coal for so and so many days’ consumption. Many anxious eyes kept a watch out across the fjord when a coal steamer was expected. If it didn’t come, it meant fresh idleness. It was the hard life once again. Uncertain work and high prices, and a constant anxiety about their daily bread. But Cilius got the worst blow when the big tax on schnapps came. “I’ve lapped up schnapps almost from the time I can remember,” Cilius cursed. “There’ve been times when it meant more to me than house and home. I’ve drunk schnapps when I was cold and when I was warm, and when my bowels screamed in my body from hunger. I’ve drunk like a horse when my luck was against me, and now they’re taking the schnapps from us at a time when we may need a drink. It’s the poor man’s aquavit.”
Cilius held a dirge in the canteen when the new tax became known. He was black with coal dust, and his bloodshot eyes shone in his black face. Now Cilius was angry at his own people. Because the bigwigs had never dared put a tax on the poor man’s aquavit. It was a government of the people that did it and a socialist was sitting in this government. But maybe it was somebody the temperance men had wangled in. “If he’d lived our life, he wouldn’t have taken the schnapps from us,” Cilius said. “Then he’d have gone a different route.” And Cilius put forward his program for indirect taxation to his listeners in the canteen. The rich people would have to pay a premium for all commodities because they had more to pay on. Many agreed with him—it sounded sensible. Everything was expensive enough for the unskilled laborer—the point wasn’t to make anything more expensive.

Now it was around the time that the collective bargaining agreements had to be renewed, and Cilius declared that the big battle would surely be coming. For many years the workers had borne the burden; now they’d be put in the same position they’d been in before. “Are we going to have a strike?” people asked. “Damn right we’re going to have a strike, and we should’ve had it years ago,” Cilius said. “We have to think about our wives and children. I mean, all the bigwigs are earning money left and right—are we getting to see any of it? Have any of you found it in your pay envelope?” And everybody had to admit there wasn’t too much in their pay envelopes. It was touch and go making it last.

“Take it easy, Cilius,” Børge sen said one day as they were walking home from work. “Your problem is that you fly off the handle.” “Why don’t you shove the devil and his great-grandmother up yours,” Cilius said, losing his temper. “What do we have labor unions for? Did I become chairman because we have to achieve something or to sit at a desk and play clerk? No, damn it, if we’re going to get something, we have to take it ourselves. They’re not going to give it to us if they can help it. I was a navvy and thrashed a contractor till blood flowed. My whole life I’ve had to fight with somebody or other over making
a living. Sure, I became a smallholder because I got in Frederikke’s bed, but that was a slave’s life too. Toil and drudgery are what we have and a song and a dance are what we get. We have to learn to take for ourselves.”

There was rebelliousness in Cilius, but at home he was a man of peace. He had it good with Frederikke: in an unobtrusive way they’d finally worked things out. The little red fox had begun to go to school, and Ulriksen was all praise. “He’s behaving himself the way he’s supposed to?” Cilius asked, and Ulriksen explained that Little-Jep was gifted, but, of course, he was a tad wild. “It can’t do any harm for him to be all stirred up,” Cilius said. “But if it goes too far, give him a lively thrashing.” “I’ve never hit children,” Ulriksen said. “I can say the same,” Cilius said. “The thrashings I’ve given have always fallen on the right place. A fellow has to hit on the bigwigs and not on the little people.” Ulriksen laughed good-naturedly, but they agreed on that.

It turned out that Cilius had done an injustice to the bigwigs in the union: there was a wage increase, the wage scales were raised. “There, you see,” Børgesen said. “You’re too quick to judge.” “But it’s not much,” Cilius said. “We have less in wages now than we had when we began working at the factory. Why should we bear the burdens? Is it because we keep the whole thing going? We do the most important work and we’re given the least consideration.” “Now take it easy, Cilius, we’ll definitely accomplish it all,” Børgesen admonished him. He was a calm man and had great confidence in the strength of the working class. The important thing was not to get carried away, but to haul progress ashore with long steady pulls.

But was it easy to take it easy in times like these? The farmers were earning money left and right; the bank notes came flying at them without their having to make a move. And now take a look at Bregentved. He’d been an unskilled laborer, but he’d understood the art of climbing, and he himself felt it resulted from the fact that he secretly descended from a count and had a deformed hand as a sign of nobility. Bregentved had become a big man, he did business with farms in the whole district, he had
credit in banks and savings banks. He strode erect into attorney Schjøtt’s office, and now he was the one who slapped Schjøtt on the shoulder. And one day he had the honor of being introduced to Mrs. Marja.

“This is real estate agent Bregentved, in a way we could actually very well say large farmer Bregentved,” Schjøtt said, and Mrs. Marja smiled her sweet-tempered smile. “That’s strange I’ve never met you before, Mr. Bregentved,” she said. “Because really I’ve been here in the area now for so many years.” Mrs. Marja was no longer interested in the spiritual life: she’d had a disappointment with Pastor Gamst, who’d turned out to be so cold and indifferent. At the moment Mrs. Marja was more inclined to be partial to the great figures of the world of business. The vibrant life, the great decisions, on which many people’s fate depended. And Bregentved was interesting: he’d worked his way up from the lowest stratum of society, and it was so touchingly sweet that he still said “A” instead of “I.” Bregentved was invited to tea in the attorney’s private apartment. Mrs. Marja didn’t drink coffee like the common provincial hen. “And now tell me about your enterprise, Mr. Bregentved,” Mrs. Marja said, but Bregentved sat there mute. He could certainly use his powers of speech, but this attorney’s wife here wasn’t easy to figure out. Bregentved had never seen French drawing room comedies performed at a provincial theater.

Attorney Schjøtt was earning money—there were big real estate deals—and had a reputation for being capable. Mrs. Schjøtt was the most elegant lady in Færgeby; she had the honor of being invited to the count’s at Å Estate and was such a hit that the count suggested to her right off that she go to bed with him. Mrs. Marja turned pale and in bewilderment said: “But Count, really.” And the count said in his rustic, good-natured way: “It wasn’t my intention to be crude. I always speak bluntly and say what I mean. And stop calling me Count, because after all it’s nothing but a large farmer’s farm and I call myself simply von Haller.” Mrs. Schjøtt looked at him in astonishment: that’s not the way she’d imagined a count.

Bregentved still had Andres’ money to work with and that
was a great benefit for Andres. Once in a while Bregentved visited him and made a report, and as time went on those were large sums that Andres had earned in the partnership. Once in a while he was paid out a large banknote, but most of it remained invested in the big transactions. When Bregentved sold a farm, it was necessary that some of the profit remain invested as a mortgage. But Andres certainly understood that there was no risk involved in that because the land prices kept rising.

“Oh boy, oh boy,” Andres said. “All that money—I wouldn’t ever have thought it possible.” “Things are going forward nicely,” Bregentved said. “Now we’ve practically managed to lay down the keel under the old tub. If you feel like it, Andres, by all means you can order a receptacle made of gold instead of the porcelain vase you have in your pants.” But Andres resented that. No one was allowed to poke fun at his infirmity. And he said spitefully: “Then while I’m at it I can order a mitten for your crippled hand.”

Konrad had come home from guard duty; he’d served out his time and was free. He looked after his consumer cooperative, under Cilius’s strict supervision, and from his door Skifter could see how the customers came and went. Skifter had calmed down a bit: the world probably wouldn’t come to an end this time, even though the people were routing one another. He had a good old stock of goods, and he made a profit by raising the prices. But Skifter was an honest man: he faithfully paid ten percent of his profit to the Mission. That way Our Lord got his.

But something new had entered the farmers’ conversation at the counter in the grocer’s shop: they talked about stocks and shares and what could be earned on them. Anders Toft told of a farmer in Havnsø who was probably on the way to becoming a millionaire. It was shipping shares he’d bought and sold with a big profit. A hush came over the shop. “It’s probably not so easy,” Mads Lund felt. “You presumably need big money to buy.” But Anders Toft knew what he was talking about. A fella didn’t need all the money in the world: most of the purchase price was given on credit. And in the evening a party of farm owners got together secretly, and now Alslev was also repre-
sented on the stock exchange. No, that wasn’t the big money, but they certainly wanted to be in the game too.

But what were the rest of them compared to Bregentved? Andres was standing in the factory stable giving the horses a feed when Marinus came in and recounted that now Bregentved had bought Holle Estate. “He did what?” Andres said. “But he’s not all there, is he? That deal is a couple of sizes too big for him.” “You know, I barely understand it,” Marinus said. “But they say it’s true. He bought it including crops and livestock and took possession right away. Back when I applied for a position there as herdsman, I didn’t think Bregentved would ever become the owner.” The two aging men looked at each other. They’d lived long, they’d heard a lot about Holle Estate. Their fore­fathers had performed compulsory labor services there and ridden the wooden horse. They themselves or their peers had worked there in the field as day laborers. Holle Estate was enmeshed in the life of the district. Lords of the manor who haunted the place, oppressors of the peasantry, immured dam­sels. And now Bregentved had bought the old farm, day laborer and fishmonger Bregentved with the bad hand.

“It’ll never work,” Andres said. “That big farm is a couple of sizes too big for him.” But Marinus had great confidence in Bregentved’s abilities. “If he’s gotten this far, he can surely also go farther,” he said. “I know him well, I worked with him in the beets at Mads Lund’s. He was awfully nice, and he was smart too. He told about his inventions, and all that stuff certainly wasn’t nonsense. He’s shown it ever since.” “Yeah, yeah,” Andres said. “He’s talented, I’ve got to admit that. But can something like this work?”

Andres filled his pockets with oats and strolled home from his day’s work. Bregentved had come and was sitting in the kitchen talking to Magda. “But is it true what they say,” Andres asked. “Did you buy Holle Estate?” “I bought it yesterday evening,” Bregentved said. “I got it cheap. It’s the biggest one we’ve gotten hold of yet, Andres, because I hope you’re going to be in on it.” “My father was coachman on Holle Estate in his youth, and I recall we often got a visit from the old lady of the
house when I was a boy,” Andres said. “And while I was a sta-
bleman at Havnsø inn many, many years ago, one of the sons
from Holle Estate was there who fell in love with the innkeeper’s
daughter. Of course, they couldn’t have each other, but she had
a child by him, and that boy has a small farm over in Holsted
parish—I know him really well. But he doesn’t like people to
talk about who his father was. Yeah, it was always an awfully
big farm.”

Andres sat and rocked his head, while Magda put the food in
front of him. Magda’s voice was pleasant and she didn’t nag, as
she usually did, when Andres emptied his pocket of oats and put
the grain in a little pile in front of him. She was mighty im-
pressed by Bregentved and his big deals. “What did you pay for
Holle Estate?” Andres asked and held his breath. “Four hundred
thousand,” Bregentved said. “Oh boy, oh boy, it can’t possibly
be worth half that,” Andres wailed. “What kinds of times are
these and where are you going to get the money from?” But
Bregentved already had pencil and paper out and figured it out
for Andres. There were so and so many acres of good land and
land was at such and such price. Much of the land could be sold
off and there’d still be a nice large farm with good outbuildings
and a luxury residence. “I could resell today and collect five
thousand,” Bregentved said and made a movement with his bad
hand as if he were raking big money in. “But in a few months I
can get ten. And if we subdivide, then it’ll be big money. Think
what somebody can get for the livestock alone on that farm. You
have to keep in mind that there’s first-class livestock on that
farm. This isn’t the junk we otherwise deal in. I believe we can
make a hundred thousand on this deal here—you want a piece of
it?” Andres moaned, cold sweat stood on his forehead. So much
money, oh, so much money!

Bregentved had always had the gift of gab—it had benefited
him a lot in real estate deals. He explained and calculated, while
Andres sat there with the little pile of oats in front of him. It was
from the factory’s stable. But before Bregentved left, Andres
had secretly become co-owner of a manor. Now he himself had
a stable with horses and hundreds of barrels of oats in the loft.
With trembling hands Andres had signed a piece of paper. It was a surety for a line of credit at Færgeby Bank. Now they were going to risk everything; now Andres and Bregentved were on the way to the big money.

Word had gotten out about the big farm deal and Bregentved was the man of the day. He came into Skifter’s shop to buy cigars—provided there were any to be had. Mads Lund was standing at the counter. He said in a quite subdued voice: “That was really a big deal, Bregentved. Can it really work out?” Of course, of course, it can easily work out. Bregentved explained all his plans to Mads Lund. “And the money?” the farmer asked. “A fella can get money in Færgeby, and if they say no, they certainly have money elsewhere,” Bregentved said. “At the Havnsø Savings Bank last week they refused to accept a deposit of five thousand except at a reduced rate of interest. They don’t know what to do with all the money, and they’re happy to get it put into circulation.” “And what’s your opinion of the stock market?” Mads Lund asked his former day laborer. But Bregentved didn’t know anything about the stock market; the only thing he knew all about was real estate—that’s what he was a specialist in.

Alslev inn became lively because now Bregentved had become the big wheeler-dealer for real. The other businessmen drove over to talk to him, and when Bregentved fed them, no expense was spared. But they could also do with new customers at the inn because now it was rare for working people to go there. They just couldn’t afford to pay those prices for schnapps—no, that was just impossible. Cilius, Lars Seldomglad, and Børgesen were at the inn a single time in a whole month. It was an evening they’d held a meeting of the consumer co-operative’s executive committee. They were going to have coffee with schnapps, but now they didn’t order the bottle of schnapps, as they used to do in the old days when prosperous men went to the inn. They’d pour a glass that was teeny-tiny, almost like a thimble. “Oh, good god,” Cilius said. “Damn it, I never thought I’d live to see the day. Malt coffee and schnapps to fill a hollow tooth, and it costs just as much as a whole liter did in the old
days. Damn it, this’ll end up with us turning into temperance people from pure necessity and misery. It was good that Old-Jep went to his grave in time."

In the other room there was a din: Bregentved was having a party with two cattle dealers who’d been at Holle Estate to look at the livestock. A huge roar resounded from in there: they were really knocking back the drinks, Lars Seldomglad said, but, of course, they also had the money for it. But Cilius looked toward the door angrily and suddenly he opened it. “Could you tone down the fun, folks,” he said. “There are also other people in the world.” Bregentved turned his blotchy face toward him. “Come in the room, Cilius, and have a round,” he said. “You’re welcome to bring the people you’re sitting with.” But that’s not what Cilius had in mind. “Thanks, but I don’t drink on another man’s money,” he said. “But you people’ve got to be quiet—we can’t stand the noise.”

Cilius went back to the table and gulped down his coffee with schnapps. Then he took his cap. “Damn it, no,” he said. “I’d never have believed it. But if we’ve gotten through this much, we’ll surely get through this stuff here too.”

It turned fall and teacher Ulriksen took in his harvest. His tobacco plants had grown well, and he’d dried and treated the leaves according to all the rules of the art. But the real question was whether you could smoke the tobacco! Pastor Gamst was visiting as Ulriksen with delight was stuffing his long pipe to try out his own crop. “It’ll be good to taste that honest herb again,” Ulriksen said, full of hope, and lit up. He blew a few huge clouds of smoke and took the pipe out of his mouth. “One’s probably just gotten out of the habit,” he said and tried again. Then he put down the pipe; he was pale. “Really, that this should happen to me,” he said. “This tobacco is too damn strong.”

But teacher Ulriksen didn’t give up: if the tobacco was too strong, it could surely be made weaker. He hit upon boiling it and drying it, and now some of the nicotine had been boiled out. And now the herb was smokable: it positively reminded you of tobacco. People have to know how to help themselves.
Søren hadn’t been home to visit for a long time; he slaved away at his studies and it was expensive to travel. Now he’d become properly engaged to his girl. Printed cards had been sent to the people in Alslev whom Søren considered his friends. Søren Alslev, M.A. Candidate, and Tove Faber, it read, and it was printed on the finest paper. Ulriksen brought the card and his congratulations. “What kind of tomfoolery is this to send out something like this?” Tora said, but it was Ulriksen’s opinion that something like that was probably the custom and Søren couldn’t be reproached for it.

Søren came home with his fiancée, who wanted to get to know his parents and the area he was born in. But Søren had written ahead of time that it would be best if they didn’t mention anything to his fiancée about Olga’s misfortune. It was best for everybody concerned if it remained concealed for the time being that his sister had been in prison. Later Søren intended to tell Tove himself. But she’d have a hard time understanding something like that without more careful preparation—after all, she was from a well-to-do family. “Oh, I think the boy is totally crazy,” Tora said. “What difference would it make if she found out that his sister had had bad luck? There aren’t any nicer girls than Olga, are there?” But Marinus felt that Søren was right. It was better to wait until they knew each other better. He could always tell her about it.

They’d made big preparations: Olga had moved out of her room, where Søren’s fiancée was going to stay. Anton was at home and worked at the factory, and he felt that Søren had to have Laurids’s garret because an engaged couple surely had to be near each other at night. Marinus got angry about those words. “Somebody might easily think you wanted to say something about the girl,” he said. “But those kinds of people don’t have anything to do with each other before they get married. I won’t have loose talk in my house.”
The betrothed came by steamboat from Færgeby. They hadn’t written what day they were coming, and there was no one to greet them. On the way up to Marinus’s house they met Cilius, who’d been home for lunch. “Well if it isn’t Søren,” Cilius said. “Welcome to our town.” Søren introduced his fiancée to Cilius, who was black with coal dust. Cilius stared at her and burst out: “But is that there really a human being!” He thought better of it because he didn’t want to be rude to a girl who was a stranger. “Excuse me,” Cilius said. “Of course I know very well you’re a human being, but I’ve really never ever seen your match.”

It wasn’t just Cilius who was astonished by the sight of Søren’s fiancée—many others in the town of Alslev were. The girl was dressed according to the new fashion in short skirts, which showed her nice round legs. She wore makeup and was powdered and decked out like they’d never seen a womanfolk before. And right in the middle while people were talking to her, she’d take out a box with powder and chalk herself up. Her dresses were of a strange cut and in gay colors—that’s what was probably in vogue now among the fashionable people.

“I mean, I could instead ask whether that black man was a human being,” Tove laughed. “But they certainly are very primitive here in your part of the country. I feel as if I were on an expedition to the interior of Africa.” But when they came to Marinus’s house and Tora welcomed them, Tove was kind and friendly. “It’s so nice of you to allow me to come with Søren,” she said. “It’s not everybody who feels that engaged couples should be allowed to travel together.” “Well, we’re not in the Inner Mission,” Tora said with a veiled look at her prospective daughter-in-law. She really pretended to be a bit too virtuous and well-mannered.

But Marinus almost couldn’t take his eyes off her when he came home from work. Søren had gotten such a splendid and fashionable fiancée—she looked as though she were of the most fragile porcelain. The women stole over to see her, Dagmar Horse, Line Seldomglad, Meta, Magda, and others in a group. Tove sat in the middle of the circle and drank coffee and was
lively. They all had to admit that there was nothing haughty about her. And her father probably had an awful lot of money—Søren was making a good match. But that a girl would deck herself out like that—that was plenty hard to understand.

But Magda was terribly enthusiastic about Søren’s fiancée and took precise measurements of the cut in her dresses. “Is that the way the fashion is now?” Magda asked, and Tove willingly explained how women in the big cities now went dressed. This dress here had come from Paris despite the war. “I’ve been promised a silk dress,” Magda said. “But who can sew this fashionable dress here? I mean, they don’t have the right patterns—those crummy seamstresses we have here in the area.” And Tove promised that she’d send Magda patterns so she, too, could be fashionable. It would happen as soon as she got back to Copenhagen.

“You’ve gotten a daughter-in-law there, Tora,” Magda said, when she was alone with Tora. “But I always knew that something great would certainly become of Søren—he’s also really the best of your children.” “Stop that nonsense,” Tora said. “He’s not better than the others.” “If only I’d had children,” Magda said. “But it didn’t fall to my lot. Maybe they’d have been of the finer type too.”

Søren and his fiancée visited Ulriksen and were offered port. “You’ve gotten yourself a pretty girl, learned Søren,” Ulriksen said. “But she certainly fits in best in the city and no doubt so do you.” Søren recounted how his studies were progressing. He’d been diligent, and before many years had passed he’d be able to sit for his exam. “And then?” Ulriksen asked. “Then of course there’s the possibility of doing a doctoral dissertation,” Søren said. “I’ve already begun collecting material little by little.” “This is a viper I nourished in my bosom,” Ulriksen said good-naturedly. “I’d intended to make you into a man who could go out into the everyday life of the people and make use of your learning, and instead you’re becoming a withered academic. That’s not good for an old Grundtvigian to think about. But so much is happening in these times that I suppose I can’t complain. Good luck with it, Søren.” Ulriksen sucked on his pipe with its
pungent home-grown tobacco and recalled the time when Søren was a little, white-haired rascal. Tora’s bright son. But there wasn’t much of Tora’s nature in him.

“Such a queer old fogey,” Tove said, as they were leaving Ulriksen. “You have to promise me that you’ll never have a beard or smoke a long pipe. But otherwise he was sweet. I’ve always had an appreciation for eccentrics. But your sister is strange; it’s sort of like she can’t stand me. Is she always so quiet?” Yes, Søren informed her, she was not among the most talkative of people, and once years ago she’d had a sorrow, a love affair. “Otherwise I get along terrifically well with all of them,” Tove said. “Surely they like me and they’re sweet. But how primitive they are! And the heavy down quilts here in the middle of the summer. I’m sweating like a pig.”

Søren and his fiancée didn’t stay more than a week—they had to travel on to visit the girl’s uncle, who was president of an engineering works in a town to the south. He was definitely expecting them and it wouldn’t do to put off the trip. Tove hugged her mother-in-law good-bye and kissed Marinus’s bearded cheek.

“She was a pretty girl, so gentle and friendly,” Marinus said. “A baker’s children have white skin from all that white bread, you’ve heard people say, haven’t you,” Tora said, but Marinus didn’t understand her. “She was plain and straightforward,” he said. “She’s from a good family and could easily have looked down on us. But there was never anything of the sort.” “But you’ll get to see Søren even more seldom than you saw him before,” Tora said. “I don’t expect anything else,” Marinus said. “He has to tend to his learning; we’ll certainly hear news from him. He’s a great credit to us, Tora. People even turned around when I accompanied him down the street.”

Søren was a source of comfort to Marinus, Niels of worry to Tora. There was rarely a letter from him, and what he wrote was nothing good. He’d worked most of the time, but he had a hard time forgetting how Inger had been getting on. He’d met her on the street, and there was no doubt as to Inger’s occupation. He’d reasoned with her, but had gotten harsh replies in return. Inger
was satisfied with the way things were; she didn’t desire to get away from the life she was leading. “If he could just find another girl,” Tora thought, but there was nothing about other women in the letters from Niels.

Anton had served his time as a soldier and now he wouldn’t be called up for the time being if everything went well. Now in the summer Anton had become oddly restless, he was never home in the evening, and there were soon rumors about where he was a regular visitor. It was Magda who let the cat out of the bag to Tora. “You know I think you have the nicest children in the parish,” Magda said, and now Tora knew that something was wrong. “I envy you your children and I only wish things go well for them in every way, and I really don’t think Anton is ever going to fall into a bad woman’s clutches.” Tora hoped not either, and in a woebegone voice Magda said that there was surely something between Kresten Bossen’s Andrea and Anton. People were talking about it.

“I don’t blame her for having that child, because, after all, she was young,” Magda said. “And I knew Iver well enough—he was hard to be on your guard against. He got what he wanted. But I think a girl who’s gone astray, she has to be humble. And Andrea really isn’t.” “Oh, if she’s not allowed to do anything else,” Tora laughed. “Then the guy who played the game with her should surely also wear sack cloth and ashes.” “Yeah, I sure know how you look at it,” Magda said cuttingly. “But most people would probably side with me. The girls take all of life like a joke and flirtation. And it definitely isn’t proper for a girl with an illegitimate child to go dancing. We had more honor in us when I was young.”

The child Iver and Andrea had begotten was at Kresten Bossen’s, and Andrea had a position as a servant on a farm. She was still young, about twenty, and she didn’t grieve over Iver. There wasn’t a dance in the area Andrea didn’t go to. She shook a leg in the dance hall, but she didn’t go outside with the fellows—she’d learned to be on her guard. But now Anton had come her way. He was a proud, handsome fellow, and the girls were fond of him.
Tora kept an eye on Anton, and you could sense something was wrong with him. One evening they were alone in the kitchen and Tora turned to him. “I’m going to tell you one thing, Anton,” she said. “I’ll never forgive you if you seduce Andrea and leave her in the lurch.” “What are you talking about?” Anton said and looked sideways. “You know best, but remember what happened with Niels and Inger,” Tora said. “Are my children going to have a reputation for being loose and leading women into misfortune? And Andrea is a good girl if she just has somebody to turn to. She’s never had that.”

They didn’t talk about it any more, but the next Sunday Anton accompanied Andrea to her home. Ida received him well. Andrea was going to have a child, and Anton was the guilty party—he didn’t deny it. He’d marry Andrea and that could happen soon as far as he was concerned because he had work now. The same day Anton said to his mother: “So we’re going to get married as soon as possible.” And Tora calmly entered the conversation and talked about where they’d live and how they’d get furniture scraped together. Andrea had a little in her savings bank book and Anton had also put a bit aside.

Then Anton settled down in an apartment he rented in a house right outside town and went to work every morning at the factory. He got the responsibility for a wife and children early on, but he had the shoulders to bear it. That’s what Tora felt about him. She was delighted with Andrea—they soon became good friends. But at the same time something happened that Tora couldn’t straighten out: Laurids from America was alleged to be the father of an illegitimate child by a middle-aged widow.

It was the bird of ill omen, Magda, who once again brought the news, but it was soon out across the whole town. A few people tried to tease Laurids from America, but they didn’t do it more than that one time. Laurids didn’t go along with the joke: he cursed horribly and threatened to wring the neck of anyone who dared mention the widow’s name in his presence. Then Tora went into action because people had to know whether Laurids acknowledged the child.

To Tora Laurids was submissive, and he acknowledged that
yes, of course, he’d had intercourse with the widow Marie a few times. “You know how it is with me,” Laurids said. “I come when they call, I don’t have the ability to resist. But I really didn’t make her pregnant.” “How can you know that?” Tora asked. Well, there were dates that couldn’t be shaken. He’d asked around as to when Marie was expecting and he’d counted up the months. There had to be another man. It wasn’t Laurids. It was a very long time ago that he’d had to do with her. If he was the father of a child, it would’ve been born long ago.

“Are you going to keep sleeping with all the dirty sluts until one day you fall over?” Tora asked, and Laurids sadly shook his grey head. There was of course the hope that the strong urge would diminish with age, but as of yet there was certainly no prospect of it. That wasn’t very good. Tora made inquiries about Marie and her reputation wasn’t the best. She’d had many lovers, and it could perhaps be difficult for her to name who the alleged father was. “The idea that he wanted anything do with her,” Magda jabbered away. “He surely doesn’t have an ounce of shame in his body. I say that, Tora, even though he’s your own brother-in-law.”

Laurids from America went about looking gloomy and he gave his subordinates a hard time. He’d had much disappointment in love, but he’d never been named the alleged father of a child. When he was alone with Tora, he talked to her about it; with everyone else he was mute. “It’s shameful that I’ve been treated this way,” he said. “The disgusting witch. If I just hadn’t had anything to do with her.” “It’s a little late for you to be thinking of that,” Tora said. “But according to what I hear, she’s not so bad. She’s decent and hard-working; she just can’t say no. If she has flaws, so do you too, little Laurids.” “I don’t deny that, I have nasty flaws in that regard,” Laurids said. “And actually you should be proud that she’s choosing you as the alleged father if she’s got plenty to choose among,” Tora teased. “She respects you more than the others.”

That thought suddenly occurred to Laurids—he hadn’t seen it from that side. “That may well be,” he said. “It’s probably not so easy to provide such a poor kid with a decent father who can
“pay.” “No, and who later can sort of keep an eye on the child,” Tora said. “A body knows, after all, that those children are treated no better than dirt.” “That’s possible,” Laurids from America said. “Maybe she didn’t do it out of malice, but on account of distress and need. After all, a fella also has his own conscience.”

Laurids thought the matter through and decided to accept paternity, but he didn’t want to marry the woman. Laurids didn’t protest when he was summoned as the alleged father, but admitted that of course it could possibly be him. He didn’t mention either that it could also be others. It was, after all, lucky fate that Laurids hadn’t had a flock of children, numberless like the sands on the seashore, to pay compulsory maintenance contributions for. That’s why he paid for this child here as a kind of voluntary fine. Once in a while he paid a visit to the widow and inspected the child to make sure it was kept clean and got good food.

The war raged uninterrupted; in Alslev children were born and the dead carried to the grave. The work stopped and reappeared when coal arrived. They’d gotten used to the insecure existence, and it helped that assistance was given to those who remained without work. They didn’t have to go to the assistance fund for every penny. But the uncertain times wore on Høpner. You could see that he was no longer a young man. The sharp furrows around his mouth had become deeper and his eyes a little weary. He lived a lonely life in his large president’s residence and had only one love: the factory that he himself had erected.
Old Povl Bøgh lay sick and had been sick for a long time. It had come in the spring and he himself felt he was going to die. But death didn’t take him, he got out of bed once again, but in the fall it got worse again. Black Anders had to move in with him so someone could be with him at night. Povl Bøgh didn’t want unfamiliar womenfolk in his house. He couldn’t sleep and lay in the dark and chatted with Black Anders hour after hour, even though Anders had to get up the next morning and go to work. But you gladly sacrifice your night’s sleep for a dying man, and the time was surely not far off when Povl Bøgh would have said his last word.

Povl Bøgh wasn’t afraid of dying, no, he longed to get away. A fella had become old and wasn’t good for anything more. And those he’d loved had already been laid in the grave, both Louise and William lay in the cemetery and were waiting. And many more, relatives and friends from old days, lay there. When you became old, you became homeless in the world and longed for the grave as your home.

In the early mornings Povl Bøgh heard the workers going to the factory; at night from his bed he could see the glow from the lights down there, and often he thought he could hear the machines rumbling. The huge machines went round and round and crushed cement, and people came riding their bicycles from miles away and worked and returned home in the evening, gray with the dust. And out in the world they were probably using cement for trenches and fortifications—no good would come of that. Povl Bøgh lay and thought about how the world had changed from when he was in his youth and mature years. It caused no grief to leave the world as it was now.

“I gathered ears of corn on Holle Estate’s field back when I was a child,” he said out into the dark. “And if we kids lost a loaf of bread, we had to kiss it when we picked it up. We were awfully poor and bread was a gift of God. Later I had to slave
hard both for lords of the manor and for farmers, but I thought the work was always a blessing for me. That’s not the way it was for Louise, my dear departed wife; she could never be completely satisfied, but I was happy when I’d performed a good piece of work. My limbs are exhausted now, but that was a nice kind of exhaustion when a fella had swung his scythe for twelve hours in the harvest.” “Yeah, you people worked hard in those days,” Black Anders said from his bed.

“Once at nightfall on the way home I came with my mother here right outside of the town of Alslev,” Povl Bøgh said. “From the field you could hear a moaning, it was like a person in the most extreme distress. But my dear departed mother held my mouth so I wouldn’t say anything; she explained it was a boundary mover we’d heard. He’d moved the boundary with the neighbor’s field, and now he had to haunt that spot forever for his deed.” “Of course, it could also have been an animal,” Black Anders said. “When the fox barks, it can sound like a woman in labor.” “Maybe it was an animal, I don’t know,” Povl Bøgh said. “But now I hardly think there are any boundaries any more. They’re so busy getting them shifted. A fella can scarcely tell the difference between working people and big farmers, and now they’ve parcelled out Holle Estate. My mother’s father’s father sat on the wooden horse there as a young man. But they didn’t get the upper hand on him—he beat the estate bailiff to a pulp one dark night, according to what they tell. But now they’ve got the farm split up.” “As long as they don’t destroy the game for us in the manorial woods north of the fjord, I won’t protest,” Black Anders laughed sleepily and turned over in bed.

The nights were long for the old man, they wouldn’t come to an end, but the day went quickly. There were sounds outside: a fella could lie and listen to them and guess what they might mean. And people came for a visit and told what was new, which wasn’t good to hear, but which a fella of course should hear nevertheless. A couple of times a week the minister came and sat down by his bed. But he didn’t talk religion, and Povl Bøgh liked that because there wasn’t much to the modern faith. “When you deliver the funeral oration over me, just say that I
passed away at peace,” Povl Bøgh said. “I’ve lived a hard life, but I was satisfied with it and don’t blame anybody. Oh, all those hours of work I had, and they weren’t according to union contract, that’s what they call it.” Pastor Gamst sat by the bed and listened to Povl Bøgh without saying much. He thought to himself: “That’s the old era that’s dying. The old, patient era, that got most of the toil and poverty and could live on a stone, but that nevertheless had the intestinal fortitude to be happy. Pass away in peace.” When the minister told teacher Ulriksen about the visits at Povl Bøgh’s sickbed, the teacher said: “It’s precisely that humble contentment that’s the worst. I know Povl Bøgh really well: he was like a tree that stayed where it had been planted and took shape according to the stiff wind. But I think more of the ones who resist and would rather let the trunk crack. With working people like decent old Povl the world will never make headway, even though they are perhaps the reserves. But there we are again. You’re a city man, Pastor Gamst, and fall for the folk-romanticism. You’re always looking for places most lowly and Lord knows there are plenty of them. No, the wild Louise was dearer to me. She put up a fight, she wanted to relive her life.”

Povl Bøgh was lying dead in bed one evening when Black Anders came from work, and he’d escaped from living on in the time that wasn’t his. It was Black Anders who was in charge of the funeral and it was performed according to the old-fashioned ritual. Povl Bøgh would certainly not have liked to be buried without plenty of food and drink for the mourners, and Black Anders bought schnapps with what cash he found among the old man’s things. There were only distant relatives who’d inherit, and Povl Bøgh was going to have a respectable voyage from the place where he’d lived.

But outside the band of unskilled laborers probably no one paid attention to the death of an old day laborer. Povl Bøgh lay in the cemetery in peace next to his wife and his son and didn’t need to worry about the boundaries that were being moved. There were former town and rural people, but now farmers speculated on the stock exchange and knew precisely what Orient and
Burmeister & Wain were quoted at. Mads Lund’s consortium had expanded its business and they were about to become well-to-do people. They got a statement from stockbrokers, but it was too early to sell—everything would go up more; after all, now it looked as though peace was in the offing.

Yes, peace now came to the world, now the German was completely finished. But the big cities in France had to be rebuilt and once again there’d be use for cement. The hungry masses had to have bread and butter and pork—now farm product prices would rise for real. It was in the newspapers; it was the opinion of experts. And now wages had risen, now it was good to have work.

There was revolution in Russia, and the fighting over there was rough. “I believe in those people,” Cilius said, but Børgesen had his doubts. They went about things too violently; it was better to stick to peaceful development, but now Cilius, of course, had never done that. Revolution came in Germany and Børgesen was satisfied. It was the old tried and true socialists who moved to the forefront, the organized working class that took power. “I haven’t had time to read,” Cilius said. “I’m just an uneducated man. I suppose the smartest thing would be to root out all that rich rabble. They have to go by hook or by crook, otherwise we’ll never have peace.” But Børgesen soberly explained that you had to win by the power of the ballot. That was the path of hope and progress. And now the time would also come for the people here at home to take power in their own house. Now the working class would move to the forefront.

Old boundaries had fallen, but new boundaries had been put in place. The farmers studied stock prices and quotations, they had gotten new houses, new furniture, cars. The workers had gotten a wage agreement, which improved their wage, and they had gotten hope. In two large countries the people had taken power. These were great days, great times—you could also sense it in Alslev parish. The schnapps had become expensive, but Cilius liked revolutions more. Cilius put his arm around his son Little-Jep’s neck and said: “What days you’ll be living in, you little red fox!”
But the times were full of difficulties—attorney Schjøtt realized that. They’d done business with farms for large sums; now that wouldn’t work any more. The important thing was to be cautious and consolidate; you couldn’t put mortgages upon mortgages. He had his finger on the pulse of the times and smart people had to say stop. The lawyer had gotten a good name in Færgeby: he’d become a member of the bank’s board of directors. If he had to say so himself, he was surely the bank’s leading personality, because he knew the population a good deal better than the bank clerk who had the title of bank president. Nothing should be smashed to pieces, but no new risk.

The parcelling out of Holle Estate had gone well. Bregentved had sold his lots at high prices, and he could submit a balance sheet that was fine. He still had the principal lot; it was too early to sell, but the stables were empty—Bregentved was operating the farm without cattle. There were still a dozen cows and three teams of horses, but what had been sold he’d been paid well for.

Now Bregentved had gotten a car and learned how to drive, and things went fast. He was part of a consortium that was parcelling out a manor in Vendsyssel, and compared to that, Holle Estate was child’s play. Once in a while Bregentved came to Andres and gave an account of how things were going with Holle Estate, and if Magda wasn’t in the living room, he told about the merry life big businessmen lived. There were huge parties round about the towns where beautiful girls were along, and he’d been invited to farms where there was a girl for every man and she was plenty willing. “That’d be a life for you, Andres, and I could easily take you along,” Bregentved said. “But of course it’s unfortunate that you use a receptacle.” “And your withered hand,” Andres said caustically. “That doesn’t mean a thing in this case—it’s worse when you’re driving a car,” Bregentved said. “But I got my defect because I’m from an aristocratic family, you got yours because you’re a louse.”

Bregentved had gotten a nasty tongue, but, after all, he was a rich man. Andres was too, because on the accounts Bregentved presented to him, the balance due him was increasing more and
more. Andres had put everything he owned in the business and it had truly paid. It was nice to look at the big numbers because it didn’t occur to Andres to spend any of his money. He earned his satisfactory weekly wage as horse driver and stableman at the factory, and he stole a couple of handfuls of oats for his chickens to boot.

But Magda was scarcely as satisfied: she’d gotten ideas into her head and wanted dresses and all manner of finery. “Magda, remember that we have to be content,” Andres admonished her, but reason was wasted on Magda. “You can at least pay me what you still owe me from when I was your housekeeper,” Magda said. “I still have that pattern sitting here that Søren’s fiancée sent me, but did I ever get the silk dress? And I’d also like a new coffee service with the flowery pattern, but I never ever get anything.”

Andres sighed heavily: there were surely no limits to womenfolk’s demands. It was much easier to take care of horses. “Contentment is a gain,” he said. “And do we know what we’ll have tomorrow?” No, Magda didn’t know anything about that, but she also needed to wear her silk dress today. “Surely you must recall that you haven’t been faithful to me,” Andres said. “Surely it can’t be expected that I should pay for the silk dress on your lecherous body.” “You would’ve had to pay for my shroud and coffin if you’d succeeded in getting me into the well,” Magda said, and Andres didn’t care to hear that. He promised Magda she’d get silk fabric for a dress even though he couldn’t afford it.

Olga had sat in Bregentved’s office for many years and there wasn’t much work. Once in a while the telephone rang and someone asked for Bregentved, or Olga, with the neat handwriting she’d learned in school, had to write a letter to one of the real estate agent’s connections. Bregentved paid his office help well. Olga wasn’t dissatisfied being with him. For days at a time he wasn’t at home, but out on business in his new car. Bregentved was constantly expanding his district.

But Olga wasn’t happy, though the work was easy. When she went home in the evening, she mostly sat in her room.
read books, though Marinus didn’t like it because what would reading lead to? It was something else with Søren, who could become a minister or teacher or district magistrate, but for Olga it wasn’t good. It only made her more peculiar. Marinus was inclined to take a strict view of his daughter, who’d gone to work at an office. “I think you have to talk to Olga,” he said to Tora. “She reads and reads instead of making herself useful.” “Let Olga do as she wishes,” Tora said, and Marinus didn’t say anything more. But he thought that womenfolk should really stick to their own business.

Olga had had her sad fate on Funen; she wanted to know about the way the world was. Were the men like wild animals, was life evil? Olga got book after book from the book club in Færgeby. She’d turned pale from her sedentary life. When Tora looked at her, it gave her a pang in her heart. Olga wasn’t happy, but she was a good girl—otherwise she wouldn’t be able to grieve so deeply over her crime.

Bregentved had become a different man. He’d been out too much among the other real estate agents and had heard many stories about how they treated their office girls. Bregentved began eyeing his clerk with an unchaste look, and Olga surely noticed it. It also happened that he invited her out to come along on car trips, but Olga didn’t care to drive in a car. He’d gotten fat, his face flushed; now you could almost see by looking at him that he was secretly descended from a count. When he whizzed off in the car from hotel to hotel, things went fast. On the curves the car stood on two wheels; Bregentved was a man who lived life dangerously. At the next inn, a deal, a couple of dealers and tea with a shot of schnapps were waiting. Bregentved was in a hurry: he’d found out that the whole country was for sale.

Olga was sitting in the office toward evening when Bregentved came home. He asked whether anybody had called, and there was a pig dealer who’d asked about porkers from Holle Estate. Bregentved laughed because there was nothing more to sell on that farm, but if the man called another time, of course he did have other farms. He happened to look at Olga’s round bosom. Then he went closer to her. “You know, we’d make a nice
couple,” he said. Olga didn’t reply; she just sat there and looked out the window: she’d had enough of men and knew them. “By the way, Olga, if you’ll be my girl, I certainly have plenty of money,” Bregentved said, and he felt a profound delight saying it. He’d been a poor devil most of his life; now he had dealt in farms and gave orders to a beautiful girl. If a fellow could just feel her udder, as if she’d been a cow, Bregentved thought.

Olga didn’t say anything and Bregentved became angry. “I’m going to tell you something, Olga: we know very well you killed your child, but you’ll be forgiven for that,” he said. “I don’t have anything against marrying you if something happens. But don’t be so high and mighty, I’m telling you, I’ve had you here in my office long enough. The other businessmen are beginning to talk about us.” “How so?” Olga asked. “They think it’s peculiar that I haven’t had you,” Bregentved said. “I mean, the rest of them have both wives and girlfriends they sleep with. You know, that’s the way it works. I mean you no harm, Olga, you can have whatever you want.” “Nothing,” Olga said. “I just want to be left alone.” Bregentved came closer and wanted to paw her. He smelled of liquor and she shoved him away. But he became ruder—now it was for real. Short of breath, Olga had to defend herself against the violent man: she got the door open and got away from him.

Olga was in a hurry and didn’t watch where she was going. A bicycle without a light grazed her in the sleety dark and she fell. It was Boel-Erik who was coming from work on the way to his farm. He jumped off the bicycle and picked Olga up. “Are you hurt?” he asked. “No,” Olga said. “I’m all right.”

Boel-Erik stood with Olga in his arms; he could easily have let her go—after all, she hadn’t been hurt. Olga was breathing deeply and leaned against him. They remained standing very quiet, they didn’t know for how long. They’d lost their sense of time while they were holding each other in their arms on the dark road. Boel-Erik felt the warm, exotic scent of a woman, and he held on tight.

Someone came by. They let each other go, and Boel-Erik picked up the bicycle. They walked next to each other without
speaking until Olga all of a sudden laughed and said: “But I’m not going this way at all. I have to go home.” “Do you have to?” Boel-Erik asked and took her by the hand. They remained standing again for a bit, close together, and then Olga said quietly: “May I stay with you, Erik?” Boel-Erik couldn’t quite find words, but he hugged her.

Olga gave notice to Bregentved and moved out to Boel-Erik’s land. “I think you should get married first,” Marinus said, but Olga wouldn’t hear of it. “I can be housekeeper for the time being,” she said. “He can certainly use it.” And Marinus thought wistfully that his daughter was, after all, far from being a maiden with an unblemished reputation. Olga moved out to Erik and now he could bring the children home.

It was a little house that Boel-Erik had managed to build, two rooms and a kitchen, and it was probably years since he’d had time to clean. Olga scrubbed and scoured, but she sang at the top of her lungs. And when Erik came home from the factory, a change had occurred. He looked around and nodded, but otherwise he didn’t say anything. It was hard for him to express that he was pleased to have Olga in the house. Boel-Erik had lived alone for so long that he’d almost lost his faculty of speech.

Olga and Boel-Erik got married and that day Tora was content. Her son had seduced a wife away from Boel-Erik; now he’d gotten Olga in place of Inger. And it wasn’t a bad trade: Olga was a hardworking girl and she had nothing against living on the heath, away from other people.

Bregentved didn’t get a new clerk at his office. He moved to Færgeby: conditions in Alslev had become too cramped for him. People heard rumors about the big parties he held at the Færgeby hotel. Bregentved had begun associating with the prominent people; he’d had a dress suit sewn, which was the thing to do. He was no longer merely real estate agent, but squire Bregentved of Holle Manor.

Once in a while he came driving over in his car and visited Andres. Andres wasn’t pleased to have the car standing outside his house—people didn’t need to know that he was involved in Bregentved’s ventures. A fella could also get a nasty hike in
taxes, which were high enough as it was. If anybody asked, An­
dres said: “I really hardly know what he comes for. He has a cup of coffee and chats with Magda. I suppose it must be that it’s hard for him to kill time.”

When Bregentved was visiting, Andres rolled down the cur­
tains and locked the door. Then Bregentved took out a greasy notebook and began to give an account. “I received thirty thou­sand from you,” he said. “That’s so to speak the fixed capital. Then there’s your share in the profit, that comes to about another thirty thousand. That means that around sixty thousand is depos­ited in your account with me. That’s quite a sum.” “But what security is there?” Andres asked. “You can have as much security as you want,” Bregentved said. “You can have mort­gages for a hundred thousand crowns on the properties I’ve dealt in. And they’re just as good as credit association bonds on first mortgages. You can easily retire and live high on the hog as a rentier.”

Andres didn’t care about becoming a rentier, but he’d begun to sleep uneasily at night. Was there really security for all that money? Wouldn’t he be risking that some of it would be lost? It wasn’t easy to be part of such big and risky undertakings. “I’d like to have thirty thousand paid out at the next due date,” he said. “It won’t be so easy right now,” Bregentved said. “I’ll tell you, right now it’s hard to obtain money. And I’d really hate to sell out because the prices are going to rise even more. I’ll tell you straight out, Andres, you can easily take the risk of becoming a man worth a hundred thousand.” “But I’m also standing surety,” Andres said, but Bregentved took it lightly. If anything, that surety was a formality—after all, they wanted to have some­body sign. But Bregentved was otherwise deemed all right. “I dare say it,” Bregentved said. “I can get money wherever I want for my honest face. No, you’ll never need to fear that surety, Andres. I’ve never been in debt and I never will be either.”

Bregentved whizzed back to Færgeby, and Magda wanted to know what he’d said. “Oh, it was money matters,” Andres said. “It’s nothing womenfolk can understand.” “Did you people make a profit?” Magda asked. “It’ll probably be a couple of
thousand if all goes well,” Andres said, and Magda got excited. “Then you really also can afford to give me silk for that dress that you promised me a year back,” she said. “Here you are shoveling money in, but I hardly have the clothing to show myself in. I’m a laughing stock for everybody every time I’m in church or the Mission house.” “Don’t make such a fuss,” Andres whined. “You’ll get that silk dress, it won’t take long and then I’ll have collected the money for it. But money doesn’t grow on trees, little Magda, and I have to think twice before running us into unnecessary expenditures.” “Now I’ve had the pattern sitting here ever since Søren’s fiancée sent it to me,” Magda said. “And who knows, maybe by now that style has already gone out of fashion.”
It was the greatest good fortune that could befall Marinus when Søren took his degree summa cum laude and had his picture in the newspaper. Søren sent a clipping from a big newspaper in the capital and there you saw Søren’s features under the headline: M.A. in record time summa cum laude. Søren had finished the race, they’d helped him get on in the world, but he’d been a credit to his benefactors. “It’s a good likeness,” Marinus said when he showed off the picture. “They say it’s the best exam anybody’s taken in many years, but really it’s not me he’s got his talents from. I’ve never been talented.” Marinus painstakingly wrapped the newspaper clipping up in paper and put it away in the inside pocket of his Sunday best. But it would be taken out many, many times so people could see it.

Søren had finished his studies. But he hadn’t totally finished: he wanted to write a doctoral dissertation. He wrote about this to Ulriksen and the teacher read the letter to the parents. “He writes that he’s studying the ballads of the Virgin Mary,” Ulriksen said. “I’ll be damned if I know what sort of ballads they are.” “Can somebody really get a doctor’s degree in ballads?” Marinus said. “That sounds strange to the common man. But whatever Søren sets his mind on, he’ll certainly go through with, all right, you’ll see. Now I’d prefer if it was a real doctor’s degree he was taking, but after all a fella doesn’t know anything about it.” “He’s been diligent, you can’t take that from him,” Ulriksen said. “We’ve spent our money well.” Those were words that gladdened Marinus’s heart.

Søren finished his studies and was going to get married. An invitation came to Marinus and Tora to come over to the wedding. “I certainly wouldn’t mind doing that,” Marinus said. “But I mean, traveling is so awfully expensive.” “Oh, come on, we can certainly manage it,” Tora said. “I think you should go.” “But you have to come along too,” Marinus said. “It mentions both of us.” “I couldn’t very well be away from home,” Tora
said. "Olga’s expecting soon, and it’s surely not your intention for her to be alone during that time. But I think somebody from Søren’s family should be there so they can see that he comes from a decent family."

Marinus gave in: he wouldn’t let his son be without his kin on the great day of his life. But that long trip: would a fella be able to find his way? Marinus became all nervous at the thought of all those trains he’d have to take: if a fella got on the wrong one, where would he wind up? If Marinus had had the time for it, he’d really have preferred to walk on his two legs to Copenhagen.

Marinus departed for the wedding celebration and he came home safe and sound. He’d been treated well in all respects and had seen countless sights. He could tell about the big city with its huge houses, about theaters and parks and fine inns. He’d used the week he’d been over there well. But what did all those people live on, how did they make their living?

But Tora was really most interested in hearing about the wedding, and the odd thing was that it hadn’t taken place in church. Søren and his bride had been married at the city hall by a mayor; that was sort of more modern, in Marinus’s opinion, but it was really just as valid as a church wedding. Then there’d been a party at the bride’s home with lots of distinguished people. One of them had a cross in his buttonhole, and he’d been so very friendly to Marinus. But Marinus didn’t care for the food and wine they had. Those were things a fella had never seen the likes of on a table. “Let me just have my normal food,” Marinus said. “They’re welcome to keep their wine and stuff as far as I’m concerned.”

Three of Tora’s children were now married and settled, and Karl was surely on the same path. As far as Tora could sense, he was running after a girl down in the fishing hamlet. And the little ones were growing up and soon wouldn’t be small any more. Tinus was serving with a farmer, and it wouldn’t be long before he could start at the factory.

In the middle of the harvest Olga had her child. Tora was with her and it was a difficult birth. In the end they had to fetch
the doctor and he delivered the baby with forceps. Boel-Erik had come from work while Olga was in labor pains, and he hid from the frightful screams out in the stable. And in between the labor pains Olga said to her mother: “Maybe I’m not going to be allowed to have this child, that’s why I’m being tormented. The last time it went so easy. Maybe I’m not going to be allowed to be entrusted with a child.” “Are you in your right mind, Olga, or are you about to join the Inner Mission?” Tora said. “Won’t you please make sense now and then. I’ve been at many childbirths, I know as much about it as a midwife, there’s a living child in you and it’s going to come out. But we have to get through it.”

But was Tora herself really calm? When the little one came into the world, she ran into the stable where Boel-Erik was sitting on a box with his fingers in his ears. “It’s all over with now, Erik,” she said. “It’s a boy, and no wonder it was so difficult, because he surely weighs his ten pounds.” Boel-Erik gasped a little, as if he couldn’t find his voice, then he said: “I mean, I’m not that small either.” “No, but listen to how he’s screaming,” Tora said. “He’s better at using his voice than you are.” “Yeah, glory be to God,” Boel-Erik said, and Tora started to laugh, because Boel-Erik wasn’t usually pious.

Olga and Boel-Erik got along well together—they suited each other. Before they’d both been taciturn; each had his or her cross to bear. But together they got the power of speech. Boel-Erik wasn’t spoiled, and he was forever astonished by how capable Olga was. She could milk a cow and clip sheep, and she wasn’t afraid of giving him a hand with the hard field work. She kept the house spic and span. “I’d never thought it possible,” Boel-Erik said to Jens Horse. “And to boot she’s cleanly. She washes her legs. And the kids have never had it so good. I didn’t know womenfolk could be so easy to be with.” “You were unlucky the first time,” Jens Horse said, but he didn’t say any more about Inger because Boel-Erik didn’t like it when bad things were said about Inger. “And Olga can have children: it’s a big, beautiful boy,” Jens Horse added. His wife Dagmar was a capable wife in his house, but they hadn’t been blessed with children.
It was a small farm that Boel-Erik had, but he’d put a lot of work and all his earnings into it. And when the big, heavy man bicycled home in the evening from the factory, his heart was filled with calm delight. He was going home to a beautiful wife and to his own farm.

Niels, too, had been invited to Søren’s wedding because he lived in Copenhagen. But he wasn’t comfortable celebrating among the unfamiliar distinguished people and he begged off. Marinus had been with his son over there and on Tora’s behalf asked whether he wouldn’t come home. He was certainly needed at the factory. But Niels didn’t want to go home. And now a letter came from Niels saying that he’d taken Inger back. She’d been in the hospital with a nasty disease and had come out of there cured. But the seaman she lived together with had gotten himself a new one in her absence, and she was standing on the street without friends and without money. So she came to Niels.

“Oh, that shameless female,” Tora said. “But couldn’t she leave him in peace. Why didn’t she go to one of her whoremongers? What was he supposed to do with her with the kind of life she leads.” Marinus had read on in the letter while Tora was calling her names. “Wait a minute, Tora, there’s more here,” he said. “It looks like she’s getting the upper hand on him. This isn’t good.” Marinus read on. Niels was happy because she’d come to him and they talked things out. Inger herself could certainly understand that she was leading a bad life and would end up in misery. And they’d agreed to get married. “Oh, good God,” Tora said and got tears in her eyes. “That’s definitely the worst calamity for Niels. He’s my oldest boy. I’ll write to him and warn him . . . .

“It’s surely too late, little Tora,” Marinus said. Niels wrote that they’d gotten married. But he thought it would be hard for Inger to live a decent life when so many people were ready to tempt her. That’s why they were going to Canada where he hoped he could get a piece of land and become a farmer. He’d lived frugally these years he’d been in the city and saved up a little money.
"Scarcely has one affliction let go, before you get a new one," Tora said bitterly. "You know, he was the one who seduced her first, we have to remember that," Marinus said. "Oh, it's easy to seduce the one who'd like to jump," Tora said. "And now he thinks she's going to reform! But nobody gets better; we are the way we are. She's destroying Niels's life, she's chasing him out of the country. He was my oldest boy and now am I ever going to get to see him again?" It was an affliction for Tora, and it didn't get any better when the letter arrived saying that Niels and Inger were setting out on the long journey. "He'll surely come back home some day," Marinus consoled her, but Tora replied that if he'd placed himself in a bad woman's power, then how would he come home? As an unhappy person.

Tora went to the cemetery again and sat by little Vera's grave. Over the course of the years the gilt letters on Vera's tombstone had been washed white by rain and sleet, and you could hardly read what it said. Tora bought bronze gilding and regilded the letters. As long as she was alive, Vera wouldn't be forgotten.

The hard work on the cliff was getting too tough for Marinus: he was on his way to becoming an aging man. He had pains in his back when he came home in the evening, and Laurids from America got him lighter work. Marinus wound up in the warehouse where he was to pack cement from the silo. But it wasn't good to get cement dust down in your lungs. Marinus coughed when he came home, but he didn't take it seriously. "I'm too old to get tuberculosis," he said. "It cares only for young blood. I'm not running any risk."

Marinus got used to the dust—it didn't irritate him so much any more. But it was rough being inside the whole workday. From the cliff he'd had a view of the land, he'd been able to follow the farmer's work spring and autumn. He'd been able to see the fishermen on the fjord and the ships that sailed with coal and cement. But now Marinus had become a factory worker, he was locked inside and no longer had his work in the sun and wind and all manner of weather. It was a greater change than when he'd come from his land, and it wasn't for the better.
But you shouldn’t complain when you were making a good living. And Marinus thought he was a well-off man. He had house and home and could pay everybody his due. His children behaved themselves well and Olga’s fate had been turned for the best. Marinus could thank fate: it had treated him mercifully.

At the cement silo Marinus worked together with Kresten Bossen. They’d now become in-laws and had a grandchild in common. There was a time when Kresten Bossen had flourished a bit. It was back when he got a taste for hard liquor. But now it’d been years since he’d tasted cognac in his mouth—schnapps had become too expensive. It was only for the rich man. Kresten Bossen had become taciturn, he answered tersely if anybody spoke to him, but he was occupied with heavy thoughts. Now there was Judas who’d betrayed his lord and master. It was prophesied that he’d betray Jesus—he was chosen for evil. Then why was Judas damned and did he have to take his own life? After all, he was destined by God for the evil deed. While Kresten Bossen packed cement or drove sacks and barrels into the warehouse, he brooded over dark passages in the gospels or the prophets.

Once in a while Kresten Bossen came to Pastor Gamst and talked to him about his doubts. Because a minister and a university-educated man could surely clear up what was obscure. But the minister said: “Good God, Kresten, aren’t you ever going to get tired of reading and brooding? I mean, you’re a happy man, you have a good job, a good wife and nice children, why can’t you be happy with it?” “I am, I thank Jesus for his mercy,” Kresten said. “But I want to reach clarity.” “Yes, who doesn’t,” the minister said with a little sigh. “What’s it about this time?” And Pastor Gamst, to the best of his ability, instructed Kresten Bossen as to how the dark passages in Jeremias and Paul were to be interpreted.

But he himself felt it curious that Kresten Bossen’s visit made him nervous. “Am I just as ridiculous as Kresten the seeker?” he thought. “Is my world of problems just as antiquarian? Am I also a man who’s hiding from the living world?” And as a rule it ended up with the minister’s going to visit teacher Ul-
riksen. “It’s strange the way I vacillate,” he said. “There are various tendencies in me. Sometimes I feel like a religious visionary, sometimes like a royal Danish state clergyman.” “Fill your pipe,” the teacher said. “Once a missionary came to me and asked: How do you stand with Jesus. I said to him: really well, from my side there’s no problem, but I really don’t know whether he’ll accept me. But now tell me: how do you stand with women. The man cleared out without answering a word. Maybe it was indignation, but maybe it was also out of honesty. Probably people can live that healthy, vigorous life with many women, Pastor Gamst, but by God you have to have one. In that regard you live too solitary a life. One becomes egocentric in solitude. There are many people who think they’re seeking Christ, while they’re seeking themselves. To hell with ourselves, excuse me for cursing. It’s the abundant life that’s important, the life that ventures forth toward those great, wholesome goals.”

Now Pastor Gamst knew that the teacher couldn’t be stopped. Now the old Grundtvigian sang a song of praise about labor unions, which taught little people to stand up for their rights, about people’s parties, folk high schools, poachers, revolutionaries, everything that taught the common man to straighten his back. Teacher Ulriksen’s pipe went out and he said, a bit of out breath: “I’m getting old, Pastor Gamst, the whole thing will soon be riding on a merry-go-round as far as I’m concerned. But it doesn’t matter because the merry-go-round also has its fixed point everything else revolves around. And that’s the liberty of the people, the free-born, workingman’s right.”
It was rumored that Bregentved was having a hard time meeting his commitments. Andres heard it mentioned and it occurred to him that it had been a long time since the real estate agent had visited him. He was frightened: had something gone wrong?

Andres went to Færgeby and looked for Bregentved at his office. Bregentved wasn’t at home, a clerk said, and nobody knew when he’d be back. “Then I’ll wait,” Andres said. “I won’t be missing anything. I lost a day’s wages coming here anyway.” Andres sat down in the office and sat a bit doubled up leaning on his cane. There were several telephone calls and Andres wasn’t so stupid that he didn’t understand that it was people pressing for their money. So then it was true: Bregentved was in trouble.

Several hours went by, but finally Bregentved came and he wasn’t happy to see Andres sitting there. “This isn’t an opportune moment, Andres,” he said. “I have to go to a meeting with several gentlemen. I can’t talk to you today.” “Never you mind about that,” Andres said. “I don’t have any problem going along to the meeting. I’ve got plenty of time and maybe we can get a little time to talk in between.” “That’ll never do,” Bregentved said. “It’s with the attorney and the president of the bank—people who have no business there can’t butt in. It’s about important matters.” “I’m not butting in any more than I have a right to,” Andres said. “You have to remember that we’re partners.” Bregentved tried to explain that it wasn’t the custom to bring other people along to meetings, but Andres was obstinate. “I’m involved in your business dealings, and now I want to go along to your meeting, and wherever you’re going, I’m going too,” he said.

Shifty-eyed, Bregentved looked around the office, but he couldn’t expect any help from the clerk. He was tending to his scribbling and apparently didn’t hear what the two were talking
about. "I've got a right," Andres said. "I want to know all about it. And if you don't want me along at your meeting, Bregentved, then pay what you owe me." "Then I suppose you better come along," Bregentved said. "But don't get frightened. There are great possibilities. The great times have just now begun."

Andres walked with Bregentved over to the bank, that's where the meeting was to take place, and several bank board members, the president of the bank, and attorney Schjøtt were there. They looked a bit surprised at Andres, but Bregentved quickly explained that he was a man who had an interest in his business, and then the president of the bank got going. He looked at a document, and those were big numbers he mentioned. Andres got a chill because this much he understood: this meeting here was being held about Bregentved's debt and it was large. Andres hadn't thought there was that much money in all of Færgeby.

"Now I've mentioned your liabilities, Bregentved," the president of the bank said. "In part what you owe the bank, and in part what you've borrowed from other banks and savings banks according to your own information and the communications we've received. As far as the statement of your assets is concerned, I'd ask you to take the floor, attorney Schjøtt."

What Schjøtt said wasn't good either. Now to begin with, there was Holle Estate, which was mortgaged for as much as it was worth. Then there was Bregentved's share in the estate consortium in Vendsyssel. You'd be lucky if that item didn't involve a loss. And as far as the bonds were concerned, they were fourth and fifth mortgages and they weren't worth the paper they were written on. But now Bregentved got angry. "You know, it was surely expensive enough to get those papers prepared by your office, attorney Schjøtt," but Schjøtt paid no attention to the interruption. Then there was Bregentved's office equipment, a small account in Færgeby Savings Bank, and finally the car. That's what Bregentved could bring in. Bewildered, Andres got up. "I wonder if there's a place where somebody could get his receptacle emptied," he said. "He means urinate," Bregentved said, and the president of the bank in a rather friendly way
showed Andres into a room where he could attend to his business. And in here Andres had the peace and quiet to reflect a little. There was no doubt about it—Bregentved was a scoundrel and everything was lost.

“These real estate agents are of course completely insane,” the president said. “And by your transactions you’ve landed the bank in trouble. The board is in agreement that the whole thing has to be liquidated, we have to take over Holle Estate and your share in the estate in Vendsyssel and see what we can get out of it. The rest of your assets have to be included too.” Attorney Schjøtt added to appease him: “You know, Bregentved, that in the business world everything goes up and down. The bank is going to lose a lot of money on you. We have to liquidate now, but who’s to say that you won’t rise again? So we’re proposing to you that you voluntarily convey to the bank what you have. Then we’ll take care of things with the other financial institutions. Otherwise we’re going to have bankruptcy and forced sale, and that’ll be expensive.”

Schjøtt looked earnestly at Bregentved, as if he were giving him well-intentioned legal advice. “I won’t go along with that,” Bregentved said. “You people can declare me bankrupt, but you can’t force me. I’ll certainly make a living in the future.” “Easy does it, easy does it, Bregentved,” the lawyer admonished him. “You know, we’re sitting here in order to reach a reasonable arrangement. I mean, you yourself must realize that your business can’t be saved. But surely it must be a comfort for you to get out of this like a decent man. A voluntary liquidation will save money, and truly there’s nothing to spare.”

Bregentved sat there trapped. He’d dealt in farms and changed the area’s appearance, had cannibalized large farms, sold stables full of cattle, created new, small farms, and he’d lived the rich man’s life while it lasted. So now it was over with, as Bregentved had long expected. But he was a businessman; he couldn’t accept the deal as such without further ado. They had to haggle and higgle, and Bregentved happened to notice Andres.

“If I’m to go along with these terms, it’ll be only on one condition,” he said. “You people will have to pay this man here...
next to me five thousand crowns and release him from the surety he’s liable for.” The assembled gentlemen looked at Andres, who sat hunched up and hadn’t gotten over the fact that all his property was lost. “But why, Bregentved?” the lawyer asked. “He supported me and he shouldn’t lose everything because of me,” Bregentved said. “He’s also an elderly man and has an infirmity; he can’t endure losing all his money. That’s the condition I’m laying down.”

The president of the bank rummaged around in a portfolio and produced a surety bond. He cast a sidelong glance at Andres. After all, the man didn’t look to be any real kind of asset. “I suppose we can go along with releasing the surety under the present circumstances,” he said. “But we can hardly pay out money. What do you gentlemen feel?” The members of the bank board didn’t feel it was defensible either—then they’d sooner declare Bregentved bankrupt. “Now listen,” the attorney said. “We have to be able to reach a compromise. I mean, Bregentved isn’t an unreasonable man. If we’re going to agree on a quick resolution, let’s say a thousand crowns.” And addressing the bank board, the lawyer added: “A bankruptcy will be expensive. There are large assets to be sold. And one knows from experience that forced sales . . . .” “Four thousand,” Bregentved said. Now he felt on familiar ground: you could do business with your adversary. “Good, we’ll make a final offer,” the president of the bank said. You’ll convey to the bank your assets and we’ll pay your surety two thousand and deliver up the surety bond. That’s our final word.” “Then I’m compelled to accept it,” Bregentved said. “But I want you people here at the bank to know that you’ve smashed to pieces a lot of what I’ve done. I’ve always honestly and decently striven to get everybody his due, and if you had let me in peace, it would have worked too.”

So the matter was settled: documents were put out for Bregentved, which he signed, and Andres got his surety bond and a check for the money they’d agreed on. “Yeah, so that deal is done,” Bregentved said and looked around, but it didn’t look as though there’d be any drink to seal the deal.

“Let’s go, Andres,” Bregentved said, as they stood outside
the bank. "I don’t want to go back to my office; I have nothing more to do with it. But I’ll treat you to a bite to eat at the hotel: I pocketed a little bit of traveling money when I saw where things were headed. Now we’re going to have three sandwiches and a drink." Andres went along without a will of his own. His soul was paralyzed. He’d lost a fortune—he was a poor man.

"Now I’m going to tell you one thing, Andres," Bregentved said, after they’d drunk the first schnapps. "Your money is sitting in a secure place. The money you got today you should just regard as an instalment. Now I’m going to give you a note-of-hand for the rest of the sixty thousand crowns. That’s a lot of money, but I’ve got big things in sight. I’ve got loyal friends among the big businessmen, and my time will come again. I’m the one who bought Holle Estate, and I was a partner in a big estate in Vendsyssel. Don’t forget it."

Bregentved chatted away and drew up a document for Andres in which he acknowledged his large debt. His face was like a boiled lobster: you could definitely see that he’d been drinking a lot recently. But Andres remained strangely calm. After all, it was true that Bregentved had bought Holle Estate and parcelled it out. And he had been co-owner of an estate in Vendsyssel. He’d understood the art of doing business, and he’d surely get on his feet again.

"I’ll get interest, won’t I?" Andres asked. "You can be as certain of that as heavenly salvation," Bregentved said. "You’ll get paid everything down to the last penny, but of course I can hardly promise that it will take place completely regularly on the due date. But you heard yourself how I fought for you. You’re leaving from here with your surety bond and with money in your pocket. But what about me? I’ve taken care of other people so well there’s nothing left for myself."

Andres said goodbye to Bregentved, who wanted to go to another area and do business there. He didn’t say anything spiteful, and he didn’t discuss what he’d lost, because, after all, he had himself witnessed how Bregentved had fought for his cause. He wished Bregentved luck and that he’d be blessed, wherever he went. Then Andres walked on foot to Alslev be-
cause now it was important not to spend money to no purpose. A couple of times he had to stop and empty the receptacle. He’d had hard luck all the same.

“How did it go?” Magda asked him when he came home. “Did you get to talk to Bregentved?” Andres replied that he’d gotten to say what he wanted to, and that Bregentved was now bankrupt. “Good heavens,” Magda said and looked admiringly at Andres. “Did you bankrupt him? So are you going to be allowed to take over Holle Estate?” In a flash Magda saw herself as a large farmer’s wife, but then Andres said: “God have mercy on us, no, it was the bank that took everything he owned.” “And your money?” Magda shouted. “It’s lost,” Andres said. “Every honest penny is gone. We’ll have to go out with a cup and beg the day I get too old to work. And that surely won’t be long now.”

Andres looked old and poor and worn out, and you could certainly feel sorry for him. But Magda didn’t. “Didn’t I always say that there wasn’t a stupider ox on earth,” she screamed. “You’re no good for anything and I should never have taken you. Here you’ve lost all your money while I have to go without clothes on my back. My slip will soon be hanging in shreds and I’ll probably have to go to other men to get a new one.” “Magda, little Magda,” Andres said, pleading, but Magda couldn’t be stopped. “For years you’ve promised me a silk dress, and I didn’t get it—there was no money for it. I have to go dressed like a scarecrow. But you’ve thrown out thousands of crowns on Bregentved.”

“Oh, if it was only the money I’d lost,” Andres whined. “It’s worse with the money I owe—how am I ever going to manage to pay it?” “You also owe money?” Magda said, appalled. Andres reminded her that he had of course signed documents for Bregentved—he’d guaranteed for him and now the bank wanted two thousand crowns. And they had the house as security; so if the money wasn’t paid, they’d take it all.

Now Magda gave up; she sat down quietly to cry. “Yes, Lord have mercy on us,” Andres said. “Now a time of trials is impending, little Magda, and we have to search our hearts to find
who’s to blame. Maybe it wasn’t intended that you should be haughty and go in silk and finery.” “But I never got the silk dress,” Magda cried. “No, but the desire was there,” Andres said mercilessly. “And we know that the Lord searches our hearts and reins. There’s a meaning in what happened; not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the will of the Lord. But we must have the disposition to be able to say: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen.”

Andres stood there, pious and ruined, but quietly with a couple of thousand crowns, his surety bond, and his note-of-hand from Bregentved in his pocket. He’d lost large sums, sixty thousand shiny crowns, but he had confidence in Bregentved—he’d surely rise again. And much would’ve been achieved if he could now get Magda to appreciate that frugality was a delight for God and man. “Yes, little Magda, we’ve been hard hit, no matter whose fault it was,” he said. “But we’ll surely be allowed to keep the house and furniture. They weren’t unreasonable at the bank: they know I’m an honest man who isn’t going to squander anything. I can get permission to pay in instalments, and I’ll be let off paying interest, so if we can just scrimp and save, we’ll surely recover from our heavy debt.” Comforted a bit, Magda dried her eyes. “Oh, thank God, Andres,” she said. “I was afraid they’d sell the house and furniture.” “You don’t have to be worry about that,” Andres said. “But in the future you’ll have to count every penny before you spend it. And I don’t want to hear about silk dresses and unnecessary things, you have to understand that, little Magda.”

Andres went to work in the factory’s stable and wasn’t a defeated man. Now he was allowed to scrimp and save and no one could reproach him for being frugal. But Magda sought consolation with good friends. She cried her heart out to Tora. “I don’t know how much Andres lost, but Bregentved managed to lure every penny from him,” she said. “Many a time I said to Andres: watch out for Bregentved, he has evil eyes and he lives a nasty life. But Andres wouldn’t listen.” And Magda became absorbed in conjectures about what Bregentved might have squandered
Andres' money on. He'd probably kept lots of women, and that had cost money, Magda felt, because surely no one would voluntarily give herself to him with that ugly, crippled hand. It comforted Magda to talk a little about Bregnentved’s sinfulness, but when she talked about the silk dress, she started crying again. "I wished for that silk dress for many, many years," she said. "Now I'll never get it. I'll be lucky if I can keep the clothes on my back, that's how poor we've become now."

It wasn't only Bregnentved who went to the wall: many others had difficulties. You heard about big businessmen who were thrown out of their homes. All the money they'd earned was sitting in mortgages that were worthless. And people who'd bought farms at high prices couldn't keep their farms. It was said now about one and now about another that he had to give up his farm.

No, it wasn't easy to carry on farming—the farmers at the counter in Skifter's shop agreed on that. In bad times you couldn't pay interest on your debt, and in good times taxes and the number of employees increased, and those who were going to buy a farm would have to pay too insane a price. It was almost the same regardless of whether things went up or down: it was always the farmer who was supposed to carry the load. And his back was surely broad, but there was also a limit to what a broad back could support.

It wasn't easy to have a stock exchange consortium—Mads Lund and Anders Toft agreed about that. At first things went swimmingly, then the stock prices stagnated, and now they were going down. Of course, they were bound to rally because after the war there were now great possibilities. But the securities wouldn't go up in price; if you sold them, you took a loss, and if you held them, you ran a great risk. And you had to pay huge interest on loans for speculating at the Færneby Bank. That's the way banks were: they plucked a fellow down to his bare skin.

Mads Lund, Anders Toft, and a few of the other farmers were summoned to a meeting at attorney Schjott's office. It was about the account they had at the bank: it had of course been run up a tad. "Sit down, gents," the lawyer said. "I can just as well
say it straight away: the books are going to have be closed now. We’ve been skating on thin ice and now we’ve got to backtrack before it ends in disaster.”

“I mean, we’re certainly good for what we owe,” Anders Toft felt. “Yes, today,” the lawyer said. “But what do we know about one another tomorrow? If you gents want to speculate, you’ll have to find another bank. We have to have that account closed.” “It’s not the right time to sell,” Mads Lund said. “I spoke to the stockbroker on the telephone, he advised not to.” “I don’t know the slightest thing about stocks,” the little lawyer said maliciously. “In that area you farmers are far greater authorities. But in all humility, I’ve been assigned the task of winding up certain accounts for the bank. This account has got to go; I have authority from the bank’s board to make an arrangement.”

Mads Lund banged the table and spoke harshly to him. This stuff here was impudent behavior, in fact if anything it was brute force. If they were forced to sell, it’d be with big losses. But attorney Schjøtt refused to budge. “You’re scolding me now, but maybe the day will come when you’ll thank me,” he said. “You should never throw good money after bad.” There was no alternative: the shares had to be sold and there’d be a loss. The farmers would have to give their farms as security—the bank wanted to be on the safe side. “So you see,” Mads Lund said. “No matter how things go, we’re always the ones to pay. We now have more debt than we had before the war and everything has gone up. I almost wish I were rid of the whole thing. Let ’em just come and take it all at once.”

Attorney Schjøtt had made money on the big real estate agents, but during these years he felt even better. He summoned people on the bank’s behalf; he didn’t give advice, but orders. And if they weren’t obeyed, the attorney hit hard—that was his duty. It gave him a feeling of power. You could see by looking at him that he had authority, and Mrs. Marja was closer to admiring him than she’d ever been. Mrs. Marja was no longer religious, and the hectic world of business had lost its attraction; she’d found her true field and that was literature. Secretly Mrs.
Marja was working on a novel about women’s destinies in which she collected everything she’d experienced, all of her life’s sorrows and disappointments. Every evening she read a chapter aloud to Schjøtt, and often he was troubled. “That just won’t do, damn it,” he said. “That description is too daring. You’ll be convicted of pornography.” But Mrs. Marja wasn’t afraid, and besides, the book would appear under a pseudonym.

Schjøtt had started as a small lawyer—nobody had reckoned with him. But they’d been forced to; he’d brought the world to its knees. He sat on banks’ boards of directors and boards of other firms; he was becoming the big man in Færgeby. He no longer drank port during office hours—those days were gone.
For working people these were good times. Cilius was satisfied and agreed with Børge sen—the great advance was near. The hours of work had been reduced, as the workers had been demanding for many years. Before, a day laborer had toiled from early in the morning till late; now he had to serve only eight hours for his daily bread. And wages had risen: they were higher than ever before. It was going the right way: it had turned out that the bigwigs had to give in when ordinary people stuck together. “And it can get even better,” Cilius said. “We definitely can’t be content. We’re going to have our cake and eat it too. It won’t be many years before we’ll be implementing socialism. That’s the way it’s headed.”

And Cilius wasn’t alone in that belief. Political meetings were held, and the local party organization, which Børge sen was chairman of, was growing nicely. Speakers traveled over and explained the policy that should be followed. Because politics had to be in everything: you had to put your own people in the Parliament and parish councils, in labor unions, yes, even in the parish church councils. “Solidarity,” that was a word Cilius used often. “Damn it, it’s solidarity we need. It’s the same thing like when in the old days we used to say that ordinary people had to stick together. But it’ll be a hot time if you people get me elected to the parish church council. It’s been twenty years since I’ve heard a minister preach, except for a funeral.”

But politics alone wouldn’t do it. Education was also needed. A man traveled over and gave a lecture; he spoke of study circles. “We’re certainly going to be learned folk,” Cilius said. “You know, I’m too old for that. I learned what I could at work and in pubs. The schooling I got was plenty bad. But nobody’s allowed to tread on me—I picked that teaching up but quick.” No, study circles weren’t anything for Cilius; he wasn’t a bookish man. “The book I’m sticking to is the union book,” he said. “It’s of more use to us than the Bible and all the prophets
put together.” But Børjesen got study circles going—he was himself a great reader. And some of the young workers met in the evening and studied politics in Cilius’s meeting house. After all, it was in fact built to promote public education.

But there was something Cilius couldn’t forget and that was that the government had made schnapps expensive. It wasn’t just a political misstep, it was a downright disgraceful deed. Cilius’s face turned somber when it came up. “They took schnapps away from us and gave it to the rich,” he said. “There’s no getting around that for us. And how did it hurt any of us? We were able to hold what we drank. I really lose my temper when I think about what a bottle of schnapps costs now. No, boys, down with indirect taxation and let’s get our schnapps back again.”

On rare occasions it happened that Cilius bought a bottle of schnapps or went to the inn. After all, you couldn’t completely forget how that strong drink tasted. And now Cilius had made a decision: he was going to celebrate his silver wedding anniversary with Frederikke and there’d be beer and schnapps. He’d put aside money a long time beforehand because no expense was to be spared. When Cilius invited you to a party, it wasn’t a meeting with hymn singing in the Mission house followed by coffee.

“I really don’t think there’s that much to celebrate,” Magda said. “Because, I mean, what kind of life have those two had together? I thank my God and maker I haven’t had a husband like Cilius.” “Well that’s good you’re satisfied with the one you’ve got,” Line Seldomglad teased. “Then there can’t ever be any quarreling between you and Frederikke. Because, of course, it’s possible that she doesn’t begrudge you Andres either.” “Surely everybody knows that Little-Jep isn’t Cilius’s child,” Magda said. “That’ll be a strange silver wedding anniversary—you think the lad’ll sit in between them?” “You’re so well informed,” Line said. “Maybe you were there back when Little-Jep was conceived. I certainly wouldn’t put it past you, because the place hasn’t been invented where you don’t stick your nose.” “I’m allowed to have an opinion like other people,” Magda said,
in tears. "But you people are always coming down on me."
Since Andres had lost his money, Magda was even more easily moved to tears.

Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary celebration was going to be held in the meeting house because there wasn’t enough room at home in his and Frederikke’s house. It was an unheard of piece of arrogance, but that’s just the way Cilius happened to be. A woman was hired to cook the food and Cilius invited good friends to the party. He didn’t have relatives and Frederikke didn’t have any close family in the area either. The cook and Frederikke decided what they’d have for dinner. Soup, roast, and cake. And with it they’d drink genuine schnapps, Cilius declared, and not temperance beer and soda water, as had now become the custom even among the farmers.

It didn’t go unnoticed that Cilius had ordered many bottles of aquavit. "No doubt he can help himself," Skifter said. "After all, he’s chairman of the consumer co-operative. I mean, that’s the way that works." But Konrad explained that Cilius paid cash and didn’t owe anything at the co-op. Mads Lund’s women found a pretext for going to the cook—it was a recipe she’d once promised them. "And now you’re going to cook . . . indeed, at Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary," they said in a chorus. They were told about the party and came home indignant. "It surely must be costing several hundred crowns and he’s a common unskilled laborer," they jabbered away. Mads Lund had just finished his midday nap and reached out for his pipe. "Yeah, that’s the way times are now," he said. "I’m sitting here on a good, big farm and am about to die finding the money for taxes, interest and principal, and wages and crap. But a worm of an unskilled worker can invite people to a party with three courses and expensive schnapps. When was the last time we had guests in our house if I might ask?" "The last time was . . . let’s see . . . yeah, it was the last time you people held a meeting of the consortium," his women replied. "You know I don’t want to hear about that consortium," Mads Lund said peevishly. "But that’s the way times are. Working people earn money like dirt and they don’t think of anything but squandering it. A little while ago I
was out in the stable—the farmhand was there in a new dress
shirt . . . ."

Those were good calm days in the fall. Everyone had work and there was a good market for cement. On the cliff the men worked under a pale-blue fall sky; all colors were bright in the cool air and you could see inland for miles. At the factory the machines ran in their confident rhythm, the conveyor belts glided along as if they'd never stop. There was no lack of coal and the silos were filled with cement and never became empty, even though sacks and barrels were filled and wheeled in the warehouse on wheelbarrows. Foreign ships docked and barrels were hoisted aboard—cement for South America or Australia maybe. Everywhere outside and inside people were busily at work, unskilled laborers and stokers, machinists, engineers.

Hønper was sitting in his office, leaning back in his chair. He'd just lit a fresh cigar and the delicate blue smoke snaked around his haggard, energetic head. He was holding a piece of paper in his hand and reading the figures. It was the income statement for the last quarter. Laurids from America came in to give a message, but he remained standing at the door with his cap in hand.


He got up, flung the piece of paper on the table, and went with Laurids. Now Laurids from America knew that Hønper was going to go out and find something to grumble about. That's the way it usually was when Hønper had that expression on his face. But today Hønper walked absentmindedly next to Laurids through the kiln department, stood a bit and looked at the huge rotary kilns, popped into the slurry station briefly, and then he went back toward the block of offices. Suddenly he stopped and cursed. "It's going to hell, Laurids," he said. "We're operating at a roaring loss. The price of cement is falling every week—there's got to be a change or else we'll have to stop."

Hønper walked on into his office and Laurids was left standing with information that didn't bode well.

Cilius's silver wedding anniversary was celebrated and it
was a great party. The day laborers were there whom Cilius had worked with from the very beginning, and some of the new people who had come to the factory. There was no lack of schnapps: Andres counted up the bottles and figured out what it had cost. Oh, in all the world, all that money thrown out for no purpose—after all, it was many, many days’ wages. He mentioned it to Marinus, who was sitting across from him, and Marinus didn’t disagree with him. That kind of lavishness made a fella the talk of the town.

Factory worker and union chairman Cilius Andersen sat at the middle of the table with his wife, flushed, as in the old days, with schnapps and irrepressible spirits. “I jumped into bed with Frederikke,” Cilius said. “I came to the farm twenty-five years ago without a shirt on my back, and afterward I drank the farm away. I was a navvy—that’s the way we were back then. But now times are different, folks, now we’ve got it damn good.”

Marinus and Andres nodded: for once they agreed with Cilius. They’d known the old days and knew what the new ones were worth. Now the unskilled laborer was respected and the poor were provided for. “Drink a little schnapps, Marinus,” Cilius said. “I recall back then, you had to give up the farm. Back then we emptied a bottle of schnapps together.” “Yeah, yeah,” Marinus nodded, but he really hadn’t downed much schnapps since that time. Marinus hadn’t been able to afford to drink—he had to provide for his many children. But now that was over with, most of his children had left home and were thriving, and one of them was on the way to becoming a doctor of Virgin Mary ballads. Now Marinus could surely take an extra drink.

The young people were standing outside in the dark autumn evening and waiting. Cilius liked to do things in a big way: he’d hired a musician, and when they’d finished eating in the hall, the young people were going to have it for a dance. Cigarettes glowed in the dark; you could hear affectionate squeals from the girls. Finally they’d slipped in and the music began, while Cilius’s guests gathered in the other rooms of the meeting house.

“Now we’re going to have coffee with schnapps,” Cilius’s voice resounded. “There’s plenty of schnapps, folks, if you’ll
just do Frederikke and me the honor of drinking. We celebrate a silver wedding anniversary only once.” Cilius was getting boozed up, but of course a fellow was allowed to do that on an occasion like this. The rest of them, too, had had a drop too many. Even Marinus’s eyes shone with an unusual sparkle. “Now let’s get the copperware polished up,” Cilius shouted. “Bring that bottle—I want a coffee with schnapps in Frederikke’s honor. When she let me in her bed, she did a damned smart thing.”

“Listen to how he’s humiliating her,” Magda whispered over to the crowd of women. “I’d sink into the ground if somebody spoke about me that way. But I didn’t let any menfolk into my bed either when I was a young maiden.” “Then you’ve learned how since,” Tora laughed. “It seems to me I heard about somebody who was under your down quilt. And as far as anybody can understand, it was warm.” Line Seldomglad and Dagmar Horse laughed, and Magda burst into tears. “You people always have to be pecking at me,” she said. “I can’t ever utter a word before you’re all over me. A body might almost wish she were mute.” The others comforted her, because the point wasn’t for her to be having to grieve on a festive day. But Magda kept crying, very quietly and inconsolably. It wasn’t what Tora had said, because Magda was used to being teased. It was the thought of the silk dress, sewn in a fashionable style, she could have had on today if Andres hadn’t frittered away his money.

You could hear the music and the dancers’ stamping in the hall, and Black Anders and Thomas Trilling looked at each other. Now they were playing Matilde’s piano. “Have a drink, Boel-Erik,” Cilius shouted. “And take one for yourself, Andres, you’re getting it free, it won’t cost you anything.” Andres poured himself a decent portion of schnapps, because although this wastefulness was a disgrace, Cilius was, of course, right that a fella was getting it as a gift. Andres sat by himself for a bit with his eyes half shut, his lips were moving, he was quietly talking to himself. His savings bank book had begun to grow again, and in idle hours it was Andres’ delight to calculate how much there’d be in a year, in two, in ten, if the Lord granted him
such a long life. But once in a while he started up, frightened, and had to hurry outside to empty his receptacle.

Now Cilius was having a discussion with Børgesen, the big, calm machinist. “If it was up to me, we’d strike once every year,” Cilius said. “It’s fine with that tug-of-war stuff, but I’d rather have a fight.” “But haven’t we gotten far with that tactic?” Børgesen asked. Cilius turned soberly thoughtful. “Of course, indeed we have, Børgesen, I can’t complain,” he said. “If things keep up the way they’ve been going, we’ll wind up with the power. When I was a navvy, we beat up a contractor who was going to lower our wages. And when he turned up with strikebreakers, we threw them in the water.” “That was those methods,” Børgesen said. “Now we make progress by the peaceful process of negotiation.” “I trust you, Børgesen,” Cilius said. “You’re my friend any time.”

“Yeah, Søren is indeed going to be a doctor, that’s what they call it,” Marinus said to Black Anders. “It’s in something they call the ballads of the Virgin Mary, and that’s probably like a kind of old-time hymn, if I understand it right. He’s gone a long way, that lad, and Ulriksen said: he’s been a credit to us, we’ve spent our money well. But it’s Tora he has his talents from—I’ve never been gifted. I’m just an uneducated man.”

Marinus was in a good mood and now he preferred to talk about Søren. He took out the newspaper clipping with Søren’s picture and showed it to everybody who’d look. “And his wedding, which I was at, oh boy, what great doings,” he said. “Yeah, yeah, this one here is certainly a nice party, too, don’t get me wrong,” he added quickly. “But Søren’s wedding, I mean that was with the bigwigs.”

Andres sat by himself, but he didn’t forget to drink. He sat with a sly little smile around his toothless mouth. It occurred to him that if he’d hung himself, as he’d thought about for a moment, when he was sitting at the meeting with Bregentved at the bank, it would’ve been a nasty loss. In a year he could put so and so much aside, and it would amount to a lot of money in ten years. Andres felt good—it was as if he’d cheated fate.

“Drink, brothers, drink, it’s not every day we get together
with the bottle on the table,” Cilius shouted. “I’ve been there when people were drinking schnapps, trust me. I beat a man till he was a cripple in my youth. But now I’ve become a well-off man . . . I only wish you well, pour yourselves a coffee with schnapps, boys, and let’s be merry.”

Cilius’s silver wedding anniversary celebration lasted till the small hours; that party was talked about for a long time. It ended up with even Andres’ shaking a leg on the dance floor, but cautiously, because it wasn’t easy with the receptacle. The lights were on all night in the meeting house, but the light was also shining in the roaring factory, and the glow from the smokestacks could be seen far inland.