

Lammeskyer

a story by

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n all her sixteen years, never had Terese witnessed violent rage so transfigure the face of a man. As the horrid gargoyles atop Copenhagen's gaslights had once poised to strike her down—her earliest knowledge of a darker world—the man towered over her, grotesque with fury, his fiery breath speckling her with acid venom. The child's instinct had been to flee, but the young woman would stand fast, for this monstrosity was her father, and if her own father would smite her, then so be it.

"*Forbandet være du, Peder!*" he thundered in vain, for the young man who would court his Terese had surely crossed him, but many men had crossed him before. Solutions are more readily found among one's own sex, as an angry sea is yet a familiar one when patterned along the comfort of one's own shore.

No familiarity would provide his way with Terese, however. No reckoning would guide them home. No reason at all might prevail, for reason had forsaken them from the beginning. Nothing at all mattered, save his dreadful wrath.

She had disobeyed him. She had defied him.

No less, she had violated him.

When Peder had first come to Skagen—that had been trouble enough. As on nearly all days during the cod season, Terese had been with the townswomen, baiting the long lines. The women were in unusually good spirits on that warm October day, as the North Sea storms had been strong that year and stronger the previous, driving rich waters east into the Skagerrak. The season would be profitable. At such times, the spirits of the Skagen men rose as well, inasmuch as the hard life of a fisherman might allow, and so the day's sing-song of lighthearted gossip and good-natured teasing owed itself as much to a radiance within as it did to the rays of the sun. Otherwise, how could her aunt have behaved so!

Leaving the Skagen Church, the meddlesome woman had spied the boy making his uncertain way up from the strand. Quickly, she'd made him her business. Terribly shy, he'd eventually responded in a Swedish tongue, and though the Swedish coast lies only several leagues to the east of Skagen, so that the extremities of the two peoples' tongues are nearly as enmeshed as their Scandinavian roots, still the

shyness of the boy created some confusion before she was able to understand that he was looking for a girl he'd last seen off the Göteborg Archipelago, aboard the fishing boat *Dorete*.

She'd recoiled at his mention of the boat named for her sister, and further from the brashness of this young Swede who would come calling in such an unexpected manner, but soon a wry smile crossed her lips as she realized that the situation offered an opportunity of some pleasure to be had at her brother-in-law's expense. She'd led the boy to a dune overlooking the women at their work, merrily singing "*Klappe, klappe, kage*" along the way, as she had to baby Terese so many troubled ages ago.

"And does your sea-elf dance with the fish below, young Peder?" she'd asked, bringing a blush to his fair cheeks. How innocent he seemed! Yet there he was, his delighted eyes having found their match. As it had happened once before, Terese saw him first.

She'd been just six when her father had first taken her to sea, astonishing the townsfolk, even the eldest of whom unable to recall witnessing such folly. Appalled by the dangers being borne by such a young girl, not the least of which being an unseemly intimacy with captain and crew on such a tiny vessel, her aunt had led the women of the village in insisting that Terese be removed from her father's care. No less appalled, still the townsmen feared Terese's powerful father more than even their own wives, and the matter was ignored—buried beneath Skagen's relentless, shifting sands.

Much as the crew of the *Dorete* surely objected to having Terese or any other female on board, they would not have dared to cross her father, nor were they fool enough to abandon Skagen's most successful boat. Instead, a grudging acceptance of the girl's presence formed over time, in more generous moments even suggestive of a closely kept admiration of her character, for despite the drudgery and danger, Terese loved the sea and did not shirk from hard work. Even when howling gales sprang upon the tiny vessel, driving her across the Kattegat toward certain destruction upon the rocky Swedish coast, Terese was not afraid. Life existed from her father. She knew nothing but to be with him. Were he lost, she would also cease to be.

So things remained until the day a careless skipper ventured too closely astern the *Dorete*, threatening to cross her lines. It wasn't unusual—many boats plied the favored banks of the Archipelago, and her father was as likely as any captain to risk boat, crew and gear in pursuit of an advantage. Yet the curses he bellowed were unusually virulent that day, causing Terese to look up from her tray. The boat

was unremarkable—fishermen shared favored grounds and were rarely unknown to each other. While her father continued his damnation of this counterpart, Terese, accustomed to the variability of his ill winds, shrugged her shoulders and turned back to her tray.

The voice that volleyed in return—a Swedish voice no less colorful and enthusiastic—was not a familiar one, so again Terese lifted her gaze. Her father’s most prized vulgarities were being cast upon new ears—even a seven-year-old girl understands these things when all her world is of men. It was nothing more than two old seadogs marking. She raised her head only to note the identity of this new rival—the barking was of little concern to her.

Something golden caught her eye. The downy hairs on her forearms began to bristle—a very odd and exhilarating sensation. Her breath danced before her. Her hands—hands that even in sleep would continue to curl the baited line across the tray—shielded her eyes as she strained to see.

He appeared to be her age—perhaps slightly older. His skin was as tan as his trousers, which were short and tattered. He was barefoot and wore no shirt. His hair was medium length, wild and impossibly fair—the color of the creamed butter her aunt cut into apricot cookie dough at Eastertime. She watched him move about the crowded boat, which had crossed the stern of the *Dorete* and was slipping away to starboard.

Her father was braced upon that rail, glaring at the departing Swedish vessel. Terese kept a steady eye on him as she reached back to where a spyglass hung in its cowhide sleeve. Despite the terrible risk, for this prized possession of her father was forbidden to all, she slipped it from its sleeve and brought it to her eye.

The boy was smiling, engaged in conversation with one of the fishermen. A tray sat before him, but the boat was not setting her lines. At first, Terese had remained wary of her father, should he abandon his fixation on the retreating vessel and discover her transgression. Very soon, though, there was only the boy—only his beautiful face suspended in the small orb of light contained within that magical instrument. And when he turned to face her—when his laughing, blue eyes seemed to focus directly upon her—she’d felt discovered, her heart leaping so suddenly that she nearly dropped the glass, eliciting a gasp that surely did catch her father’s attention.

Too stunned was she even to have feared her father looming over her, his haggard, red-bearded cheeks drawn up into a deeply set squint, as if unsure whether or not to look upon her sin. He reached out his massive hand for the spyglass, put it to his eye for a moment, and then lowered it slowly. Turning again to Terese, he regarded her for another long moment. With an enormous sigh, he replaced the glass gently into its holder and took up the tiller, homeward bound, while Terese returned to her tray, her spirit stretching thinner along every league of the Kattegat left behind.

He'd spoken no words to her along the sail home, and few in the days to come. He would relent somewhat to her aunt's desires after the encounter, and as the years went by, Terese would spend fewer days upon the sea. Only twice among those fewer days had the *Dorete* encountered the Swedish vessel. On both occasions, Terese was certain she had seen the boy, but her father had made an obvious point of steering well clear. She would never again dare to reach for the glass, despite the ache in her heart.

So sudden it had been, eight years later, the day the young man appeared with her aunt at the crest of the dune—only a silhouette in the late morning sun, but Terese had known him instantly.

“This is Peder,” her aunt told her. “He has crossed the sea from Hvudik in search of you.”

He was so grown, yet exactly as she remembered him! Exactly as she would have him be! He was very shy, but when at last his eyes found hers, they would not turn away. To her shame, her skin had reddened with a flame so hot that she feared she might ignite the marram grass flowing across her ankles.

“We will walk awhile,” her aunt announced at last, “and perhaps Terese will find her tongue.”

The three of them walked along the strand, but when her aunt fell back in hushed conversation with a woman hurrying to overtake them, the two increased their pace as one. He'd offered his hand. When she accepted, all had become forever.

They'd walked a long while, eventually turning back in reluctant agreement. Terese scanned the western skies before saying softly, “You must go, now,” even as her eyes, locked deeply with his, revealed her unhappiness that it was so. “Word will reach my father, and there is no telling what he will do. You must find the other shore before dark. The wind is favorable, but it is less than six hours until sunset. The gathering sky will conceal the stars, and the lights of Sweden are not so powerful as the greys we build here. Where is your boat? Will you wait until morning? Do you have something to eat? Something warm to wear?”

On and on she continued until he interrupted her with a laugh.

“I will find my way,” he said, peering deeply into her eyes, “and then I will find my way back.”

His certitude reassured her, but strengthened her own resolve.

“You must go, Peder!” she insisted.

He’d flinched at that, but his smile returned.

“You will kiss me once, and then I will go,” he told her.

How quickly his shyness vanishes, she’d thought, but looked back to her aunt and beyond before kissing him, only slightly longer than she had intended.

“Now go!” she told him, but she could not contain her smile as she laid her hand lightly upon his forearm, struggling to maintain her bearing.

“I will see you tomorrow, then,” he told her.

“You will not!” she insisted, releasing him and turning to walk away. He was impossible! After what she considered a safe interval, she’d looked back. He hadn’t moved an inch. Though flattered, she wasn’t entirely amused—certain things needed to be taken more seriously.

Her father had indeed been alerted and made his way down to the racks from the Inn, but his inebriated bearing held no sway with those women on that playful day, who gathered their feminine wit tightly around the girl, leaving him only to stomp away as best as one might manage in such deep sand.

Peder! From that day, he was a name and a hearty laugh. He was a warm touch and a teasing manner. His light shone so brightly that even the darkest of her father’s ways would not blot it out. Her father spoke little to her in the days that followed the visit, except to threaten now and then to send her to school in Copenhagen. It was what her aunt wished as well, but Terese knew such a thing would never come to pass. He would never provoke her absence, for he knew no better than she whether he could survive it.

“I will find my way, and then I will find my way back,” Peder had promised.

As she believed his words, so would his promise be kept as surely as she had held his hand. When the delivery boy approached her on the Søndervej, she’d thought there must have been some error—how might such an important thing as a telegram be intended for her? The boy insisted, and she’d finally accepted it from his outstretched hand. Though she thought of Peder endlessly, never had it occurred to

her that she might receive a message from him. There was the Kattegat that lay between them, and then he beyond. Just those two things, and no remedy existed but to be walking by his side again. Though she'd heard of a cable newly laid across the Oresund, she'd never considered the possibility of any lesser connection than his touch, and his kiss.

It would occur to her that she'd been foolish and forlorn, and to thank whatever gods-may-be for Peder's more intrepid nature, but not until she had read the message many times, seated on the ground, as her knees were incapable of supporting her. At dawn on Sunday, should the weather be favorable, he would be where they'd parted on the strand. He would wait for her.

In a trance, she'd found herself at the telegraph desk, wishing to send a response.

"Hvudik?" the clerk asked, his sweaty, pocked face broadening into a salacious grin. "What possible business could a young girl like you have in Hvudik? Andelen I could manage, and maybe the post from there. It would take time ... and money.

"And I don't see where you're carrying any money," he added, continuing to look her over.

She'd endured such treatment thousands of times, crossing the street her entire life to avoid the drunken worst. She'd simply waited. He would get down to business or have her standing at his desk until hell froze over, is all.

"So?" he asked at last.

"So ... how much time and how much money?" she fired back impatiently.

Sagging, the man considered her defiance before reaching wearily for a ragged, tea-stained booklet.

"Is this some sort of family business?" he asked in too curious a tone.

"I've changed my mind, I think," she announced in as friendly a tone and pleasant a face she dared expose to the lecherous old man. Turning away, she'd walked out into the sunlight. As Peder would wait, so would she, she'd told herself, her sobriety recovered.

Three days of a thousand hours each she'd endured. Her father landed Saturday at dusk, laden with cod for the frames, and Terese had been happy to have the work to occupy her—all the better to be kept out of her father's eye until he left to celebrate at the inn. When work was done, a thousand hours

more she'd waited before easing past her father's room and slipping out the back door just before dawn. Afraid to breathe, she'd made her way toward the strand, and Peder.

The bottoms of clouds scattered along the eastern horizon had just begun to glow the color of rosehips as she saw his dory, so slight against the expanse of sea, sand and sky. He was tending a fire, watching for her. She walked faster. He began to run toward her, calling her name.

"Terese!"

The sound of it was wrong. Alarming. Just as she felt her own limbs gather into a run, a strong hand clamped down hard upon her shoulder, stopping her thoroughly—bringing her to her knees.

She watched Peder continue to run toward her, her hopelessness cascading in tears from eyes she could not turn away even as demon shapes converged in the gloom, gathering around him. She shouted to him not to fight them as her father lifted her across his massive shoulders and carried her toward home, leaving Peder's fate to her horrified imagination. All the way back, she'd flailed and bit at her father, repeating over and over every curse he and his crew had ever uttered in her presence. When he set her down upon a kitchen chair, she bolted for the door. He caught her, set her back hard onto the chair, and again she tried. He set her down even more roughly, threatening to bind her, should things come to that.

Just so, these things led to our beginning, when Terese stood again but did not run, enwrapped with her father in a raging fury rendering their two beings nearly indistinct.

"I am not your chattel, dear father," Terese uttered in a growling, animal tone. "And I am not your *Dorete*, that you can command at your will!"

He recoiled slightly from that, but she was not finished. She stood as tall as she could, that her eyes would be hard upon his, and with all the gravity of one life lost for another, shouted as she had never before, "And I am NOT my mother!"

Having said it, she felt herself growing smaller, but she would no longer run from the gargoyles, nor to her Aunt's hand. Forever more, only one hand would she accept.

Her father lurched for the door and tore it open. Struck blind, a hulking shadow framed by the astonishing light of the Skagen morning, he turned back to Terese, who had fended his will and run through his heart, so what remained but to stagger out into the blinding light to his *Dorete*?

Terese would let him go. Only if he could reclaim her mother's soul from the shadows would he begin to heal.

She ran to Peder as fast as she had ever run in her life. Dismayed by the many, many footprints along the way, she found where his keel had been dragged down to the water. With a mariner's keen attention, she scanned the sea, but there were no sails. She ran back to the house—she would retrieve the spyglass and try again.

All that day, Terese trod the wet sands, occasionally climbing the dune to better scan the sea horizon, but to no avail. She had no food or drink, and awoke the next day to a terrible fever that lasted three days. Another three days later, when her father returned from the sea, she made his dinner and collected his soiled clothing. They did not speak that night, nor in the days to come. She baited the lines with the women and laid out the catch to dry. She did not go near the *Dorete*.

As soon as she was able, she stuffed Peder's telegram with a few provisions into a bag and set out for Frederikshavn—a full day's walk, but clearly the Skagen telegraph office was not to be trusted. From there, she sent a reply. She asked only if he were returned safely, explaining that she would inquire in a week, and again in another week, for any reply. There was great danger for a girl alone, but she managed, darting off the road whenever peril approached. She spent the overnight without a fire, tucked under firs standing between the shore and the road, those whispering to her the fate of Pyramus and Thisbe while Leo hung in the sleepless night.

And when she undertook the journey the second week, her feet bloodied and blistered in what remained of her shoes, she came to a point so overwhelmed with despair and exhaustion that she could go no further. She sat by the side of the road and wept.

Quite some time passed before her senses recovered sufficiently to mark distant thunder. She looked up. A man stood on the road, not more than five feet from where she sat. By his apparel, he appeared to be a gentleman, but those men could be the very worst, a thing she'd learned while retrieving her father from the inn in the late night. The man regarded her with a twinkling eye, seemingly amused by the situation.

Terese was not amused.

“Best you take your grin down the road, old man, while the footing is still dry,” she said to him glumly.

The man regarded this with considerable curiosity, his smile all the more genuine, before replying to her, “Such a direct and yet clever comment, young lady. It’s reassuring to behold your wit faring better than those feet of yours.”

She looked down at those and began to weep again.

“Hold now, my dearly distressed. Where did you intend to go?” he asked, offering a silk handkerchief.

“To Frederikshavn,” she told him, surrendering to his soft, grandfatherly eyes.

“Well then,” he said, extending his hand down toward her, “that’s easily solved, so let’s be off before the approaching storm muddies the footing for both of us.”

She asked, “I suppose you’re going to carry me then, old man?”

He laughed heartily at that, and motioning to a spot a few yards down the road, said to her, “Why would I do that, *min guldklump*? I have a horse!”

He had a horse.

Her surrender not entire, she feared her outcome once or twice along the short ride remaining, but when they arrived at the gentleman’s townhouse, his wife was kinder to her even than he’d been. The woman served her a delicious broth before tending to her feet, gently bathing and swaddling them. She remembered being led to a beautiful bedroom, and then only the softest of white clouds.

In the morning, she told them her story. Terese had objected, but then surrendered again as the woman dressed her in clothing that was young and stylish—once the property of a niece, she was told. What had been left of Terese’s ragged old shoes disappeared, replaced by smart but practical boots. In all the fuss, Terese had lost track of the woman’s husband until he appeared at the bedroom door. In his hand was a slip of paper.

Still, she might have been dreaming. Peder was safe! He would come in three days’ time to the very same place on the strand, when they would sail back to Sweden together.

Although she thought she might burst of happiness, the day offered more wonder, for Terese, who had known only the brutal carters’ wagons dripping with fish entrails, would be transported back to

Skagen by her gentleman in the most elegant buggy imaginable. On the way, they'd sent a reply to Peder. He should not return to that darkened sand ever again. He should come to the gentleman's house in Frederikshavn. They would send word, and she would come to him.

And so, Terese came to ride into Skagen, her head high. She directed the gentleman to the inn, wishing her father to witness her providence, but it was a fine day and he was surely aboard the *Dorete*. Nevertheless, every idle eye witnessed the polite kiss she bestowed upon her elegant escort's cheek after daintily stepping down from the buggy. While men gathered in knots to praise the merits of a vehicle about which they knew nothing, and women huddled to opine expertly on couture they'd never seen, Terese stepped toward home as haughtily as she might manage, considering her yet very tender feet. The gentleman drove off, Terese closed her door behind her, and all of Skagen went silent for a moment as the broken swell of attention backwashed over the town, inevitably to gather again.

For two days, Terese trembled like a fawn, when even that trembling might be her undoing, but she was fortunate not to have to bear her father for any considerable time. He spoke not a word to her, even of her notorious return from Frederikshavn, of which waggish reports surely must have found his ear.

She had a dreadful dream on the final eve. She and Peder were opposite each other, spinning in a fierce whirlpool, lightning and thunder crashing around them as they cried out to each other, but they could not make themselves heard. Faster and faster they spun as they slipped below the surface, growing closer but unable to lift their arms toward each other. Deeper they sank into the abyss until she could not see him, or call to him, or reach him—until he wasn't there.

She awoke, and everything was wrong. Her father had not gone down to the *Dorete*. She could see only the lee sky from her window, mostly clear, but she feared the worst. She went into the kitchen, where her father was drinking his coffee. "Why are you not fishing, today, Father?" she asked him as casually as possible, yet the sound of it startled them both, this shattering of a silence so deeply set.

He did not look up. When recovered from the sound of her voice, he said gravely, "There will be storms today." It was clear these would be his only words.

She feared her own beating heart—that he would hear it and suspect, so she retreated to her room and closed the door, Flopping down onto her bed, she felt ill, a cold sweat gathering at her nape and in the

small of her back. Again she went to the window, but little could be seen. She'd had no response, and couldn't know whether Peder had received her message. She had to make her way to the dunes, where she could properly scan the sky, but couldn't imagine passing so near her father without revealing all.

What if Peder had sailed the previous day, or in the night, and was already waiting for her on the strand? What if he decided to come searching for her? What would her father do then, who had lost his beloved and now stood to lose his only redemption, clung to all the more tightly in his despair? What then would befall her Peder at the hands of her father's associates, or even of her father himself?

While Terese stood at the window her father had nailed shut, summoning her courage, she heard the kitchen door slam. Quickly, she grabbed an oilskin and several biscuits, and after making sure her father had truly left, slipped out the door. Satisfied he was heading down to the *Dorete*, Terese looked to the sky.

Her heart stopped altogether. The *lammeskyer*! All who sailed had a name for it, and knew not to venture far from land under such a sky, for storms would surely appear in less than a day. And when the *lammeskyer* began to lower and ripple, as this had done, and the wind had already backed to the southeast, the storms would come sooner—perhaps as soon as in the afternoon.

If Peder had set sail on such a morning, surely he would know to turn back. Knowing and doing were two very different things, though, and Terese knew in her heart that Peder might continue on, recklessly set upon the approaching storm's favorable reach to propel him all the more swiftly to her shore. She strode quickly up the strand and down, hoping against hope to see his dory, but he had not landed. Exhausted as she was from excitement and fear and lack of sleep, she could walk no further. She settled into some heath at the top of a high dune and ate one of her biscuits. For a long time, she scanned the sea for sails. Several passed, but none approached. Peder was out there—she was certain of it, but her tired eyes were sore from the sand blowing from the south. She lay down out of the wind and closed them, just for a moment.

She dreamt of his landing below her on a golden summer's morn. He stood by his boat, smiling the smile of the gods and beckoning her. She tried to run to him, but the sands were too deep. Still he smiled and beckoned, but she could not reach him. The tide rose, lifting his boat out to sea, yet on he

stood, smiling, and still she could come no closer, until the sea began to rock him off his footing. She could only scream his name again and again as he slipped, still smiling, into the sea.

She awoke to find the storm upon her. Through the driving rain, she could not see the shore. How could she have slept so? Her mind flashed wildly as the lightning crashed all around her—searching for her—the end of everything. She had failed her Peder. He would have made his landing, but her foolishness—her weakness—would leave her undone for him. There was nothing left but to gather the oilskin around her wretched existence and await her sorry fate.

Suddenly in that maddening night, the rain stopped, the clouds retreated, and a full moon lit the strand nearly as day. If she were dead, the dead were thirsty, and the drops of foul fish-water she collected from the folds of the oilskin were not possibly heaven-sent, she was certain of that.

To the north, a boat lay cast like a shadow upon the beach.

She ran. It was his boat, it wasn't, it was again, and still she ran. There was no mast. No freeboard. There were no oars. Still she ran, circling the empty shell. There was no Peder! Stopping, she turned to scan the roiling grey seas, her despair overtaking her—washing over her in increasing swells until she crawled into the boat, wishing herself lost in his stead. Flailing with grief, she fell, her forehead cracking hard onto the edge of a bench.

The lightning found her at last, and she did not dream.

A high sun woke her, her throbbing head slow to gather the miseries of her existence. She considered launching the hull—she would not last long adrift upon the indefinite Kattegat currents—but she doubted her strength. She clambered out of the hull and made her way listlessly up the dune, where she slept again.

A fevered mélange of frightful shapes swept over and through her as she lay in neither this world nor the next. She tasted the sea and knew that she was drowning, tossed to and fro or up and down—no distinction was possible. She saw her father, his face madly distorted through a torrent of tears flowing from her own eyes.

She began to sense a jolt or two in all the tossing, unexpectedly annoyed. There was a cottony, salty mass in her mouth, and she spat it out, gasping for air. It would never end. Her father put the cloth back into her mouth, and despite her yearning for completion, she struggled.

“You must restore yourself patiently, Terese, and you will survive,” her father said gently.

Suddenly, she understood. He had found her. Revived her. A forlorn voice rose to object, but she could not speak.

“Don’t try to talk just yet, Terese, as difficult as that may seem,” he said, startling her with a humor long-forgotten, and again she thought it must be a dream as he added more of the mildly salty water to the cloth from a bucket on the floorboards of the cart they rode. “Take this cloth again, *min eskelde datter*, and I will explain all that has happened.”

Despite such astonishing affection from her father, she struggled to sit up so she might look away, inconsolable.

“Peder is alive,” he told her.

She jerked back to him instantly, her eyes beseeching him intently as she made a horrible sound intended to implore, “Tell me, Father!”

“Quiet, then,” he said, patting her knee, and then he told her everything. He told her how a villager had found Peder’s boat, and of his being certain that she had been lost along with Peder while attempting to set off for Sweden ahead the storm. Finding no trace of the two of them, he had sent people from the town down the coast to search. Near Aalbæk, they had found Peder washed up on the strand, unconscious and still clinging to the mast of his dory. He was badly injured, but he was said to be recovering more completely than such a reckless lad might deserve.

Recovering further, Terese found that she could not dispute the point.

Her father then told her how he’d returned to the strand with twenty men to search the dunes, though she was easily found, for which there was no limit to the guilt he’d suffered as they gently bore her back to town. And then, when it was apparent that she would recover, he had hired the cart in which they were riding. They were on their way to Aalbæk, to retrieve Peder.

She looked ahead, and then back to him, afraid to believe it. He put a finger to her lips.

“You will have this and everything else in the world you desire, if only you will promise never again to frighten me so. It is all I will ever ask ... except perhaps for a grandson.”

She leaned toward him and kissed his cheek, which was salty and quite warm.

They entered Aalbæk, soon pulling up to a brightly lit house. Immediately, Terese sprang from the cart, but her legs were not yet with her and she fell to the ground in a heap. Gently, her father lifted her back onto the seat.

“You must wait for me, Terese. I will fetch him.”

Still she tried to follow him, only to drop to her knees beside the cart’s wheel. He emerged at last, carrying a bundled Peder, whom he placed gently into the back of the cart. Though heavy cloths had been arranged to cushion a ride that would be difficult, Peder would have none of it, struggling to sit himself up against the side of the cart, smiling as best he could through the stabs of pain at his ribs.

Her father helped Terese up into the cart. She kissed Peder gently before settling on the opposite side—desperately wishing to embrace him. She just stared at him, gathering the truth of their being together from all her keepsake places for wishes.

On they drove toward home. On Peder smiled, regarding her with those laughing eyes until she couldn’t be certain he understood how nearly they’d come to losing each other. Her voice beginning to return, she asked him, “Did you receive my telegram?”

His smile slipped just a bit as he considered the point of her asking, before he answered, “Yes, I did.”

“Why then, Peder? Why did you attempt the crossing under the *lammeskyer*?”

The pain of his efforts breaking her heart, he dragged himself over to her side. Slipping his arm around her shoulders, his lips only inches from her ear, he told her, “I was halfway across, my Terese, and Frederikshavn was too distant, but nothing—no evil sky, no angry sea, no wicked man nor evil beast walking the land—nothing at all will ever make me turn away from you.”

As he would never do otherwise, she would never again expect he should.

He kissed her, and she had her embrace at last. Over Peder’s shoulder, Terese turned a shy look up to her father. He seemed intent on his driving, but he had surely heard them. Regarding him more closely, she could see tears streaking his face. Cruel, she thought, how one love might begin only at the limit of another.

There would be more goodbyes soon, she understood, but not on that night. Peder had fallen asleep. Terese settled him as carefully as possible on the floor of the cart before climbing over the boards to sit at her father's side.

Under a forgiving night sky, they drove on.