

The Wind Tells About Valdemar Daae and His Daughters

The wind will rush over the grass, and a ripple will run across it as across water; it will rush over the field, and the field will heave like the sea. Thus dances the wind. And listen to its tales! It sings them, and its voice sounds differently: in the forest—so; in dormer windows, cracks and fissures of walls—otherwise. Do you see how it drives clouds across the sky, exactly like flocks of sheep?

Do you hear how it howls in open gates, as though a watchman blows a horn? And how strangely it hums in the chimney, bursting into the fireplace! The flame flares up and scatters in sparks, illuminating the far corners of the room, and to sit here, listening to it, is warm and peaceful. Let it alone do the telling! It knows more fairy tales and stories than all of us put together. Listen, then; it begins its tale!

"Ooo-ooo! Fly farther!"—that is its refrain.

"On the shore of the Great Belt stands an old castle with thick red walls," began the wind. "I know every stone there; I saw them all even when they sat in the walls of Marek Stig's castle. The castle was demolished, and the stones were used again; from them new walls were built, a new castle, in another place—in the manor of Borrebü, where it still stands today.

I knew both noble masters and mistresses of the castle; many generations passed before my eyes. Now I shall tell you of Valdemar Daa and his daughters!

He held his head high—royal blood flowed in him. And he knew not only how to hunt stags and drain goblets, but something better too; and what exactly that was—"we shall see in time," he used to say.

His spouse, clad in a brocade gown, stepped proudly across the shining mosaic floor. Luxurious was the wall hanging, dearly paid for the exquisite carved furniture. Much gold and silver ware the lady brought as dowry. In the cellars lay German beer—as long as anything at all was stored there. In the stables neighed well-groomed black horses. Richly they lived in Borrebü Castle—as long as wealth still held.

The masters had children, three tender maidens: Ida, Johanna, and Anna Dorte. I still remember their names.

Rich people they were, noble, born and raised in luxury. Ooo-ooo! Fly farther! sang the wind and continued its tale: "Here I did not see, as in other ancient castles, the noble lady sitting with her maidens in the great hall at the spinning wheel. No, she played upon a resonant lute and sang, and not only old Danish songs, but foreign ones, in other tongues. Here there was visiting and feasting; guests arrived from far and near, music thundered, goblets clinked, and even I could not drown them out! Here pride caroused with brilliance and clamor; here there were lords, but no joy.

It was a May evening," continued the wind, "and I came from the west. I saw ships breaking against the Jutland shore; I swept over the heath and the green wooded coast; panting and blowing, I rustled over the island of Funen and the Great Belt, and laid myself down only by the shores of Zealand, near Borrebü, in a magnificent oak forest—it was still whole then.

Lads from nearby villages wandered through the forest gathering brushwood and branches, the largest and driest. They returned with them to the village, piled them in heaps, set them alight, and with songs began to dance around. The girls kept pace with the lads.

I lay still," recounted the wind, "and merely blew softly upon a branch laid by the handsomest lad. It flared up, flared brighter than all the rest, and the lad was named king of the festival, and he chose for himself from among the girls a queen. What merriment and joy there was—more than in the rich lordly castle of Borrebü.

Meanwhile, a gilded coach drawn by six horses drew up to the castle. In it sat the lady and her three daughters, three tender, young, lovely blossoms: a rose, a lily, and a pale hyacinth. The mother herself was like a lush tulip and answered neither a single curtsy nor a single bow with which the peasants, having paused their play, greeted her. The tulip seemed afraid to break its fragile stem.

"And you, rose, lily, and pale hyacinth—yes, I saw all three of you—whose queens will you be?" I thought. "Your king will be a proud knight, or perhaps even a prince!" Ooo-ooo! Fly farther! Fly farther!

So the coach drove on, and the peasants resumed their dancing. The lady was making her summer progress through her estates—Borrebü, Tjæreby, all the surrounding villages.

And at night, when I rose again," continued the wind, "the noble lady lay down never to rise. What happened to her happens to all people; nothing new. Valdemar Daa stood for several minutes serious and thoughtful. A proud tree bends but does not break, he thought. The daughters wept; the servants too wiped their eyes with

handkerchiefs. Lady Daa hastened onward out of this world, and onward I flew too! Ooo-ooo! said the wind.

I returned back—I often return—sweeping over the island of Funen and the Great Belt, and laid myself down on the seashore at Borrebü, near the magnificent oak forest. In it sea eagles, wood pigeons, blue jays, and even black storks built their nests. Early spring it was. Some birds still sat upon eggs, others had already hatched their young. Ah, how the flocks of birds flew, how they cried! In the forest rang the blows of axes; the oaks were doomed to be felled. Valdemar Daa intended to build a costly ship—a warship of three decks, which the king had promised to buy. That was why the forest was being cut down—the sailors' landmark, the birds' refuge. Frightened shrikes flew in circles—their nests were plundered. Sea eagles and other forest birds lost their dwellings. Like mad things they wheeled in the air, crying from fear and rage. I understood them. And crows and jackdaws cried loudly and mockingly: "Crash! Out of the nest! Crash! Crash!"

In the midst of the forest, near the band of woodcutters, stood Valdemar Daa and his three daughters. All of them laughed at the wild cries of the birds, all except the youngest, Anna Dorte. She pitied the birds, and when it came to the turn of a half-withered oak, on whose bare branches a black stork's nest with already hatched chicks perched, she begged that the tree not be cut down; she begged with tears in her eyes, and the oak was spared for the sake of the black stork—was it worth arguing over a single tree!

Then sawing and chopping began—they were building the three-decker ship. The builder himself was of humble birth, but a man of noble soul. His eyes and brow betrayed intelligence, and Valdemar Daa gladly listened to his tales. Young Ida, the eldest daughter, fifteen years old, listened eagerly too. Yet the builder, while constructing the ship for Valdemar Daa, built also a castle in the air for himself, in which he and Ida sat side by side as husband and wife. So it would have come to pass had his castle been of stone walls, with ramparts and moats, with forest and garden. But where can a sparrow venture into the crane's dance! However clever the young builder was, he was nevertheless a poor man. Ooo-ooo! I sped away, and he sped away too—he dared not remain there any longer, and Ida reconciled herself to her fate; what else could she do?...

In the stables neighed black horses; they were worth looking at, and people looked at them. An admiral, sent by the king himself to inspect and purchase the new warship, loudly admired the spirited horses. I heard everything well, for I passed behind the nobles through the open doors and scattered golden straw at their feet, recounted the wind. Valdemar Daa wanted gold, and the admiral wanted the black horses; that was why he praised them so. But he was not understood, and the deal

fell through. The ship remained standing on the shore just as it had been, covered with planks—Noah's ark, which was not destined to set sail. Ooo-ooo! Fly farther! Fly farther! It was pitiful to look upon it!

In winter, when the earth lay under snow, floating ice choked the entire Belt, and I drove it onto the shore, said the wind. In winter flocks of crows and ravens arrived, some blacker than others. The birds settled upon the abandoned, dead, lonely ship standing on the shore, and croaked hoarsely about the ruined forest, about the plundered nests dear to them, about homeless old birds and homeless young ones, and all for the sake of this majestic junk—the proud ship never destined to go to sea.

I whipped up a snow whirlwind, and snow lay around the ship and covered it like raging waves. I let it hear my voice and the music of the storm. My conscience is clear: I did my duty, acquainted it with all that a ship ought to know. Ooo-ooo! Fly farther!

Winter passed. Winter and summer pass as I sweep by, as snow sweeps by, as leaves fall

Apple blossoms fall and leaves drop. Fly further! Fly further! Fly further! So it is with people...

But the daughters were still young. Ida continued to bloom like a rose, just as she had when the shipbuilder admired her. I often played with her loose flaxen hair when she stood thoughtfully under the apple tree in the garden, unaware that I was showering her with blossoms. She gazed at the red sun and the golden sky shining through the dark trees and bushes.

Her sister, Johanna, was like a slender, gleaming lily; she was proud and haughty, with a waist as slim as her mother's. She loved to enter the great hall where portraits of ancestors hung. Noble ladies were depicted in velvet and silk dresses and caps woven with pearls, covering their braided hair. How beautiful they were! Their husbands wore steel armor or costly mantles lined with squirrel fur and high standing blue collars. They carried swords not at their lower backs but at their hips. Where someday would Johanna's portrait hang? How would her noble spouse appear? This is what she thought about, this is what her lips silently whispered. I overheard it when I burst into the hall down the long corridor and, changing direction, rushed back again.

Anna Dorothea, still a fourteen-year-old girl, was quiet and thoughtful. Her large blue eyes, like the sea, looked serious and sad, yet a child's smile fluttered upon her lips. I could not blow it away, nor did I wish to.

I often met Anna Dorothea in the garden, on the road, and in the fields. She gathered flowers and herbs useful to her father: he prepared drinks and drops from them. Waldemar Daa was not only arrogant and proud but also learned. He knew much. Everyone saw this, everyone whispered about it. Fire blazed in his fireplace even in summertime, and the door remained locked. He spent days and nights shut inside, yet disliked speaking about his work. The forces of nature must be tested in silence. Soon, very soon, he would find the finest, most precious thing—pure gold.

That is why smoke billowed from the fireplace, that is why flames crackled and flared within it. Yes, yes, I had my part in it, recounted the wind. "It will come, it will come!" I hummed down the chimney. "Everything will vanish as smoke, soot, ash, cinders. You will burn out! Ooo-ooo! Fly further! Fly further!" Waldemar Daa stood firm.

Where had the magnificent horses from the stables gone? Where was the ancient gold and silver tableware from the cupboards? Where were the cows from the fields, all the wealth and estate? Yes, all this could be melted! Melted in a golden crucible, yet no gold obtained.

The storehouses, cellars, and attics grew empty. People diminished, mice increased. Windowpanes burst here, cracked there, and I no longer needed to enter strictly through the door, recounted the wind. Where a chimney smokes, food is prepared; yet here smoked such a chimney that devoured all food in pursuit of pure gold.

I howled at the fortress gates as though a guard blew a horn, but there was no guard anymore, recounted the wind. I spun the weather vane atop the tower, and it creaked as though a guard snored on the tower, yet there was no guard there either—only rats and mice. Poverty set the table, poverty settled in wardrobes and sideboards, doors tore from their hinges, cracks and fissures appeared everywhere; I entered and exited freely, recounted the wind—that is how I know everything that happened.

From smoke and ash, from worries and sleepless nights, the beard and temples of the lord of Borreby turned gray; his face yellowed and became furrowed with wrinkles, yet his eyes still sparkled in expectation of gold, the desired gold.

I puffed smoke and ash into his face and beard. Instead of gold came debts. I whistled through broken windows and cracks, blew into the daughters' chests where their faded, worn-out dresses lay—dresses they had to wear endlessly, without change. Yes, not such songs were sung to these girls over their cradles! Noble living had become wretched living. Only I sang there at the top of my voice!

recounted the wind. I covered the entire castle with snow—they say it is warmer beneath snow. There was no firewood to be had, for the forest had been cut down. And the frost crackled fiercely. I roamed throughout the castle, bursting into dormer windows and passages, frolicking above roofs and walls. The high-born daughters hid from the cold in their beds; the father crawled under a fur blanket. No food, no firewood—such was noble living! Ooo-ooo! Fly further! It will come, it will come! But Lord Daa was not satisfied.

"After winter comes spring," he said. "After hardship comes prosperity. One need only wait a little, wait. The estate is mortgaged; now is precisely the time for gold to appear, and it shall appear by the holiday."

I heard him whisper to a spider: "You, diligent little weaver, you teach me perseverance. When your web is torn, you begin anew and carry your work to completion. If torn again, you once more, without losing heart, take up the task. From the beginning, from the beginning! Thus it should be! And in the end, you shall be rewarded."

But then came the first day of Easter. Bells rang, the sun played in the sky. Waldemar Daa worked feverishly all night, boiling, cooling, mixing, sublimating. I heard him sigh in despair, heard him pray, heard him hold his breath. His lamp went out—he did not notice. I fanned the coals; they cast a red glow upon his chalk-pale face with deeply sunken eyes. Suddenly his eyes widened more and more until they seemed ready to pop from their sockets.

Look into the alchemist's vessel! Something glimmers there. Burning like embers, pure and heavy... He lifts the vessel with trembling hand; with a quivering voice he exclaims: "Gold! Gold!" His head spun; I could have knocked him down with a single breath, recounted the wind—but I merely blew upon the coals and followed him into the room where his daughters shivered. His doublet, beard, and tousled hair were sprinkled with ash. He straightened himself and raised high the treasure enclosed in the fragile vessel. "Found it! Obtained it! Gold!" he cried, extending the vessel toward them, gleaming in the sunlight—but then his hand trembled, and the vessel fell to the floor, shattering into a thousand fragments. The last soap bubble of hope burst... Ooo-ooo! Fly further! And I sped away from the alchemist's castle.

Late in autumn, when days grow shorter and fog arrives with its wet rag, squeezing drops onto berries and bare branches, I returned fresh and vigorous, ventilated and blew the sky clear of clouds, and incidentally broke off rotten branches—not much of a task, yet someone must do it. In Borreby Castle too, everything was clean, as if swept out, only in another manner. Waldemar Daa's

enemy, Ove Ramel from Basnæs, arrived with the mortgage deed for the estate: now the castle and all property belonged to him. I battered the broken windows, slammed the dilapidated doors, whistled through cracks and holes: "Ooo-ooo! Let Master Ove not wish to remain here!" Ida and Anna Dorothea wept bitter tears; Johanna stood proudly erect, pale, biting her finger until it bled. But what good did it do! Ove Ramel permitted Lord Daa to live in the castle until his death, yet no one thanked him for this. I heard everything; I saw how the homeless nobleman proudly lifted his head and straightened his spine. Then I struck the castle and the old lime trees with such force that I snapped a thick branch, not at all rotten. It fell beside the gate and lay there like a broom, in case something needed sweeping out. And indeed they swept out—the former owners.

A heavy day it was, a bitter hour, yet they remained resolute and did not bow their backs. Nothing remained to them except what they wore and the newly purchased vessel into which they gathered from the floor the remnants of the treasure that had promised so much yet given nothing. Waldemar Daa hid it against his chest, took his staff in hand, and thus the once-wealthy castle lord departed from Borreby with his three daughters. I cooled his heated cheeks with my breath, stroked his beard and long gray hair, and sang as best I could: "Ooo-ooo! Fly further! Fly further!"

Ida and Anna Dorothea walked beside their father; Johanna, upon exiting the gate, turned back. Why? After all, happiness does not turn back. She gazed at the red walls built from the stones of Marek Stig's castle and remembered his daughters. And the elder, taking the younger by the hand, set forth to wander with her across the world.

Did Johanna remember this song? Here were three exiles, and a fourth—the father. And they trudged along the road,

along which they once rode in a carriage, they now trudged out to the field of Smidstrup, to a wretched clay cottage they had rented for ten marks a year—their new manorial estate: bare walls, empty dishes. Ravens and jackdaws flew overhead and cried mockingly: "Crash! Crash! Ruin! Crash!" just as the birds had cried in the Borrebü forest when trees fell beneath the axes' blows.

Mr. Do and his daughters understood these cries perfectly well, though I blew into their ears with all my might—was it worth listening?

Thus they entered the clay cottage, while I sped away over marshes and fields, over leafless bushes and stripped forests, out to the open sea, to other lands. Whoosh! Fly farther! Fly farther! And so from year to year.

What then became of Valdemar Do, what became of his daughters? The wind tells:

"The last I saw was Anna Dorte, the pale hyacinth—already a bent old woman, for fifty whole years had passed. She outlived everyone and knew everything.

On the heath near the town of Viborg stood a new, handsome parsonage—red walls, a crenellated gable. Thick smoke billowed from the chimney. The gentle parson's wife and his beautiful daughters sat by the window, looking over the garden's thorn bushes onto the brown heath. What did they see there? They saw a stork's nest clinging to the roof of a half-collapsed hovel. The entire roof was overgrown with moss and wild garlic, and what covered the hovel chiefly was not the roof itself but the stork's nest. And only that one thing was ever repaired—it was kept in order by the stork himself.

One could only look at this hovel, never touch it! Even I had to blow here cautiously!" recounted the wind. "Only for the sake of the stork's nest was such a ruin left standing on the heath; otherwise it would long ago have been demolished. The parson's family did not wish to drive away the stork, and so the hovel remained, and inside it lived a poor old woman. She owed her shelter to the Egyptian bird, or perhaps vice versa: the stork owed her the fact that she had once pleaded for the nest of his black brother who lived in the Borrebü forest. In those days the beggar-woman had been a tender child, a pale hyacinth from a highborn flowerbed. Anna Dorte remembered it all.

'Oh-oh!'—Yes, people sigh just as the wind sighs among reeds and sedges.—'Oh-oh! No bells tolled over your grave, Valdemar Do! No poor schoolboys sang when the homeless owner of Borrebü was lowered into the earth!... Yes, everything, everything comes to an end, even misfortune!... Sister Ida married a peasant. That struck her father the cruellest blow... Her daughter's husband—a wretched serf whom his master could set upon the wooden horse. Now he too is surely in the ground, and sister Ida as well. Yes, yes! Only to me, poor soul, does fate send no end!'

Thus spoke Anna Dorte in the wretched hovel that stood only thanks to the stork.

Well, as for the healthiest and boldest of the sisters, I took care of her myself!" continued the wind. "She dressed in clothes more to her taste: disguised herself as a boy and hired on as a sailor aboard a ship. She was sparing with words, stern in appearance, but never shirked work—only she couldn't climb. So I blew her into the water before anyone recognized she was a woman—and I did well!

It was Easter Day, just as it had been when Valdemar Do thought he had received gold, and I heard beneath the roof with the stork's nest a song, the final song of Anna Dorte.

The hovel had not even a window, only a round hole in the wall. Like a golden nugget, the sun rose and filled the hovel. What brilliance there was! Anna Dorte's eyes could not bear it, nor could her heart. Yet the sun was not to blame; had it not illuminated her that morning, the same would have happened.

By the stork's grace, Anna Dorte had a roof over her head until the last day of her life. I sang over her grave too, and over her father's; I know where both lie, and no one else knows.

Now new times have come, different times! The old highway now ends at a fenced field; a new one runs across the graves, and soon a steam train will thunder through here, dragging a line of carriages and rumbling over graves as forgotten as the names themselves. Whoosh! Fly farther!

There you have the whole story of Valdemar Do and his daughters. Tell it better, whoever can!" finished the wind, turning another way.

And his trace vanished.