Lilac and Linden

A lamp is lit.

Until this moment, when the flame of the lamp flares blue, then settles to steady yellow inside its ornate globe, the young man had been impressed by the profound darkness into which, upon his late-night arrival at the palace of Rosenborg, he had suddenly stepped. Tired from his long sea journey, his eyes stinging, his walk unsteady, he had been questioning the nature of this darkness. For it seemed to him not merely an external phenomenon, having to do with an actual absence of light, but rather as though it emanated from within him, as if he had finally crossed the threshold of his own absence of hope.

Now he is relieved to see the walls of a panelled room take shape around him. A voice says: "This is the *Vinterstue*. The Winter Room."

The lamp is lifted up. Held high, it burns more brightly, as though sustained by purer air, and the young man sees a shadow cast onto the wall. It is a long, slanting shadow and so he knows it is his own. It appears to have a deformity, a hump, occurring along its spine from below the shoulder-blades to just above the waist. But this is the shadow's trickery. The young man is Peter Claire, the lutenist, and the curvature on his back is his lute.

He is standing near a pair of lions, made of silver. Their eyes seem to watch him in the flickering gloom. Beyond them he can see a table and some tall chairs. But Peter Claire is separate from everything, cannot lean on any object, cannot rest. And now, the lamp moves and he mustfollow.

"It may be," says a tall gentleman, who hurries on, carrying the light, "that His Majesty, King Christian, will command you to play for him tonight. He is not well and his physicians have prescribed music. Therefore, members of the royal orchestra must be ready to perform at all times, day and night. I thought it best to advise you of this straight away."

Peter Claire's feelings of dismay increase. He begins to curse himself, to berate his own ambition for bringing him here to Denmark, for taking him so far from the places and people he had loved. He is at the end of his journey and yet he feels lost. Within this arrival some terrifying departure lies concealed. And suddenly, with peculiar speed, the lamp moves and everything in the room seems to rearrange itself. Peter Claire sees his shadow on the wall become elongated, stretching upwards for a few seconds towards the ceiling before being swallowed by the darkness, with no trace of it remaining.

Then the end of a corridor is reached and the gentleman stops before a door. He knocks and waits, putting a finger to his lips and leaning close against the door to listen for the command from within. It comes at last, a voice deep and slow, and Peter Claire finds himself, in the next minute, standing before King Christian, who is sitting in a chair in his night-shirt. Before him, on a small table, is a pair of scales and by these a clutch of silver coins.

The English lutenist bows as the King looks up and Peter Claire will always remember that, as King Christian first glimpses him in this dark middle of a winter's night, there comes into His Majesty's eyes a look of astonishment and, staring intently at the lute player's face, he whispers a single word: "Bror."

"I beg your pardon, Sir ...?" says Peter Claire.

"Nothing," says the King. "A ghost. Denmark is full of ghosts. Did no one warn you?"

"No, Your Majesty."

"Never mind. You will see them for yourself. We are one of the oldest nations on earth. But you should know that it is a time of storms here, of confusion, of incomprehension, of bitter boiling muddle."

"Of muddle, Sir?"

"Yes. This is why I am weighing silver. I weigh the same pieces over and over again, to ensure that there is no error. No *possibility* of error. I am trying, piece by piece and day by day, to reimpose order upon chaos."

Peter Claire does not know how to reply to this and he is aware that the tall gentleman, without his noticing, has gone from the room, leaving him alone with the King, who now pushes the scales aside and settles himself more comfortably in the chair.

King Christian lifts his head and asks: "How old are you, Mr. Claire? Where do you come from?"

A fire is burning in the room, which is the *Skrivestue*, the King's study, and the small chamber smells sweetly of applewood and leather.

Peter Claire replies that he is twenty-seven and that his parents live in the town of Harwich on the east coast of England. He adds that the sea in winter can be unforgiving there.

"Unforgiving. Unforgiving!" says the King. "Well, we must hurry on, pass over or skirt around that word. *Unforgiving*. But I tell you, lutenist, I am tortured by lice. Do not look alarmed. Not in my hair or on my pillow. I mean by cowards, rascals, liars, sots, cheats and lechers. Where are the philosophers? That is what I constantly ask."

Peter Claire hesitates before answering.

"No need to reply," says the King. "For they are all gone from Denmark. There is not one left."

Then His Majesty stands up and moves towards the fire where Peter Claire is standing, and takes up a lamp and holds it near the young man's face. He examines the face, and Peter Claire lowers his eyes because he has been warned not to stare at the King. This King is ugly. King Charles I of England, King Louis XIII of France, these are handsome men at this perilous moment in history, but King Christian IV of Denmark—all-powerful, brave and cultured as he is reported to be—has a face like a loaf.

The lutenist, to whom, by cruel contrast, nature has given an angel's countenance, can smell wine on the King's breath. But he does not dare to move, not even when the King reaches up and tenderly touches his cheek with his hand. Peter Claire, with his blond hair and his eyes the colour of the sea, has been considered handsome from childhood. He wears this handsomeness lightly, frequently forgetting about it, as though almost impatient for time to take it away. He once overheard his sister Charlotte praying to God to be given his face in exchange for hers. He thought, It is really of little value to me; far better it were hers. And yet now, in this unfamiliar place, when his own thoughts are so sombre and dark, the lute player finds that his physical beauty is once again the subject of unexpected scrutiny.

"I see. I see," whispers the King. "God has exaggerated, as He so often seems to do. Beware the attentions of my wife, Kirsten, who is a fool for yellow hair. I advise a mask when you are in her presence. And all beauty vanishes away, but of course you know that, I needn't underline the self-evident."

"I know that beauty vanishes, Sir."

"Of course you do. Well, you had better play for me. I suppose you know that we had your Mr. Dowland here at court. The conundrum there was that such beautiful music could come from so agitated a soul. The man was all ambition and hatred, yet his ayres were as delicate as rain. We would sit there and blub, and Master Dowland would kill us with his furious look. I told my mother to take him to one side and say: `Dowland, this will not do and cannot be tolerated,' but he told her music can only be born out of fire and fury. What do you think about that?"

Peter Claire is silent for a moment. For a reason he can't name, this question consoles him and he feels his agitation diminish by a fraction. "I think that it is born out of fire and fury, Sir," he says, "but also out of the antitheses to these—out of cold reason and calm."

"This sounds logical. But of course we do not really know where music comes from or why, or when the first note of it was heard. And we shall never know. It is the human soul, speaking without words. But it seems to cure pain—this is an honest fact. I yearn, by the way, for everything to be transparent, honest and true. So why do you not play me one of Dowland's *Lachrimae*? Economy of means was his gift and this I dote upon. His music leaves no room for exhibitionism on the part of the performer."

Peter Claire unslings his lute from his back and holds it close against his body. His ear (in which he wears a tiny jewel once given to him by an Irish countess) strains to hear, as he plucks and tunes. King Christian sighs, waiting for the sweet melody to begin. He is a heavy man. Any alteration of his body's position seems to cause him a fleeting moment of discomfort.

Now Peter Claire arranges his body into the stance he must always adopt when he performs: leaning forward from the hips, head out, chin down, right arm forming a caressing half-circle, so that the instrument is held at the exact centre of his being. Only in this way can he feel that the music emanates from him. He begins to play. He hears the purity of the sound and suspects that this, alone, is what will count with the King of Denmark.

When the song is over he glances at the King, but the King doesn't move. His wide hands clutch the arms of the chair. From the left side of his dark head falls a long, thin plait of hair, fastened with a pearl. "In springtime," Christian says suddenly, "Copenhagen used to smell of lilac and of linden. I do not know where this heavenly scent has gone."

Kirsten Munk, Consort of King Christian IV of Denmark: From Her Private Papers

Well, for my thirtieth birthday I have been given a new Looking-glass which I thought I would adore. I thought I would dote upon this new Glass of mine. But there is an error in it, an undoubted fault in its silvering, so that the wicked object makes me look fat. I have sent for a hammer.

My birthday gifts, I here record, were not as marvellous as the givers of them pretended they were. My poor old Lord and Master, the King, knowing my fondness for gold, gave me a little gold Statue of himself mounted on a gold horse and bearing a gold tilting pole. The horse, being in a prancing attitude, has his front legs lifted from the ground, so that the foolish thing would fall over, were it not for a small Harlequin pretending to run beside the horse, but as a matter of fact holding it up.

And furthermore, I didn't ask for yet another likeness of my ageing husband. I asked for gold. Now I will have to pretend to love and worship the Statue and put it in a prominent place et cetera for fear of causing offence, when I would prefer to take it to the Royal Mint and melt it into an ingot which I would enjoy caressing with my hands and feet, and even take into my bed sometimes to feel solid gold against my cheek or laid between my thighs.

A message attached to this gift read: *To His Heart's Dearest Mousie from Her Lord, C4*. This I tore up and threw into the fire. Long ago, when I was his girl bride and I would tickle him with my small white fingers, he found this nickname "Mouse," it being at that time perfectly endearing to me and causing me to laugh and snuffle and pretend to do all manner of scuttling mousie things. But those days are past. They are gone so absolutely that I have trouble believing that they ever were. I no longer have the slightest desire to be a "mousie." I would prefer to be a rat. Rats have sharp teeth that will bite. Rats carry disease that will kill. Why do husbands refuse to understand that we women do not for long remain their Pet Creatures?

At my birthday feast, to which were invited a great crowd of the ambitious Nobility, most of whom ignored me utterly, I had some moderate sport by drinking a vast quantity of wine and dancing until I fell onto the log pile and then, finding the logs to be as comfortable as any bed, rolling around on them back and forth and laughing with the whole of my Being until I heard the assembled preening company fall silent and saw them all turn to watch me and begin murmuring evil words about me.

Then the King commands that I be helped to my feet and brought to his side and settled upon his knee, in front of all the jealous Gentlemen and their nasty Wives. He gives me water from his own chalice and generally makes such a fuss of me, kissing my shoulder and my face, to show the world that, whatever I do, they cannot plot against me to have me banished, because I am the King's Wife (even though I do not have the Title of Queen of Denmark) and he is still in slavish love with me.

And that he does this makes me bold in my ideas. It makes me wonder what I could do—to what length and breadth of wickedness I could go—and contrive still to remain here in Copenhagen, inhabiting the palaces, and keeping all my privileges. I ask myself what thing is there that would cause me to be driven away? And I answer that I do not think there is Any Thing that I could do or say which would bring this about.

So I go further and begin to wonder whether I shall cease to be so secret and furtive in my love affair with Count Otto Ludwig of Salm, but on the contrary make no bones about my Passion for him, so that I can lie with him whenever and wherever I choose. For why should I, who have never been accorded the Title of Queen, not have a lover? And furthermore, when I have been a few hours with my beautiful German man and he has given me those things I need so badly and without which I really cannot live, I do find my own behaviour towards the King and towards my Women and even towards my children to be much more kindly. But this kindness lasts no more than a few hours, or at most one single day, and then I become vexed again. And so it follows that if I were able to see the Count and have a little sport with him every day or night (instead of perhaps once in a fortnight) why then I would be always and eternally Kind and Sweet to everyone else and all our lives would go on much better.

But dare I risk confessing my love for Otto? Alas, upon reflection, I do not think so. He was a brave Mercenary soldier and fought in the recent Wars on the side of my husband against the Catholic League, and risked death for the Danish cause. He is a hero and much liked by the King. Such a man should be given all that he requests and all that he desires. But I do think that men give to each other only those Possessions that they are somewhat weary of and do not fiercely love. And if or when they are asked to give away those things by which they set great store, they refuse and fly immediately into a fury. Which would be the case if now I should suggest that my lover be admitted here to my bed. And so I conclude that the very thing which makes me bold in

my ideas of what I could ask—namely the King's love for me—is also the very thing which does prevent me from asking it.

There is but one course to follow, then. I must arrange matters so that, little by little, day by day and cruelty by cruelty, King Christian falls into a State of Indifference towards me. I must contrive it so that within a year or less my husband no longer hopes for nor expects by right or inclination any mousie thing from me as long as we both shall live.

The Closed Window

Denmark is a watery kingdom. People dream that it is the ships of the great navy which tether the land. They imagine hawsers ten miles long, holding the fields and forests afloat.

And in the salty air, an old story still drifts on the sea breezes: the story of the birth of King Christian IV, which happened on an island in the middle of a lake at Frederiksborg Castle.

They say that King Frederik was away at Elsinore. They say that Queen Sofie, when she was young and before she had begun her habit of scolding and cursing and hoarding money, loved to be rowed in a little boat to this island and there sit in the sunshine and indulge in secret in her passion for knitting. This activity had been proscribed throughout the land as tending to induce in women an idle trance of mind, in which their proper thoughts would fly away and be replaced by fancy. Men called this state "wool gathering." That the wool itself could be fashioned into useful articles of haberdashery such as stockings or night bonnets made them no less superstitiously afraid of the knitting craze. They believed that any knitted night bonnet might contain among its million stitches the longings of their wives that they could never satisfy and which in consequence would give them nightmares of the darkest kind. The knitted stocking they feared yet more completely as the probable instrument of their own enfeeblement. They imagined their feet becoming swollen and all the muscles of their legs beginning to grow weak.

Queen Sofie had, from the very first, transgressed the anti-knitting edict. Yarn was shipped to her from England in boxes labelled "goose down." At the back of her ebony armoire lay concealed a growing quantity of soft garments of many colours for which she knew that one day she would find a use. Only her maid Elizabeth knew her secret and she had been told she would pay with her life if it was ever revealed.

On the morning of the twelfth of April 1577, a day of pale sunlight and a tender blue sky, Queen Sofie, eight and a half months pregnant with her third child, set out at nine o'clock with Elizabeth to cross the lake and spend the morning knitting. Her chosen spot was a clearing in the woods, a little shaded by some hazel bushes and rose briars, where she would set down cushions on the mossy grass. Here she was sitting, putting the finishing touches to a pair of underdrawers while Elizabeth worked upon a sock, with the coils of yarn unravelling moment by moment between them, when the Queen felt a troublesome thirst come upon her. They had brought no provisions, only the secret knitting in a wooden box, and so Queen Sofie asked Elizabeth if she would row back across the lake to the castle and return with a flagon of beer.

And it was while her maid was gone that the Queen experienced the first pang of labour—a pain so familiar to her since the births of her two daughters that she paid it almost no heed, knowing the process would be long. She went on knitting. She held the underdrawers up to the sunlight to inspect them for dropped stitches. The pain came again and this time it was severe enough to make Sofie lay aside the drawers and lie herself down on the cushions. She still thought that many hours of labour lay ahead but, says the old story, Christian knew in advance of his being that Denmark needed him, that the kingdom was floating free at the mercy of the polar storms and

the hatred of the Swedes across the Kattegat Sound and that he alone would be the one to build enough ships to anchor and protect her. And so he fought to be born as fast as possible. He kicked and struggled in his mother's waters; he headed for the narrow channel that would lead him out into the bright air that tasted of the sea.

When Elizabeth returned with the flagon of beer, he had been born. Queen Sofie had severed the umbilicus with a thorn and wrapped the baby boy in her knitting.

The story goes on. People no longer know what is true or what has been added or taken away. The Dowager Queen Sofie remembers, but the story is hers. She is not a woman who makes gifts of what she owns.

They say that Danish children born at that time were at risk from the devil. They say the devil, driven out of the churches by the implacable Lutherans, began to seek unbaptised souls to inhabit and that he flew round the crowded cities at night, sniffing for the odour of human milk. And when he smelled it, he would flit unseen through the window of the infant's room and hide in the darkness under the cradle until the nurse slept, and then he would reach out a long thin arm and with his threads of fingers find a passageway, via the little breathing nostrils, to the brain, at the core of which lay the soul, like a single nut of a pine cone. And he would gather it between his finger and thumb. With infinite care he would extract his hand, now slippery from its passage into a living organ, and, when the soul was out, pop it into his mouth and suck it until he felt arrive in his being a shuddering of ecstasy and joy that would leave him exhausted for several minutes.

Sometimes he was interrupted. Sometimes the nurse would wake up and sniff the air, and light a lamp and come towards the cradle just as the soul came out, and then the devil would have to drop it and flee. And wherever the soul landed, it would be swallowed by the matter around it and lodge in that place for all time. If it fell into the folds of a blanket, there it would stay, so that there were at that time a great quantity of children who grew up with no soul in them at all. If it fell onto the baby's stomach, in the stomach it would remain, so the infant would always and for ever have one thought, which was to feed the flesh of its hungry soul and so grow to a huge fatness ultimately fatal to the heart. The worst thing, so the women said, was the soul's falling onto the genitals of a baby boy. For then that child would become the very devil of a lecherous man who would in time betray his wife, his children and everyone who should have been dear to him just to gratify his soul's yearning for copulation and might in his lifetime commit infamy with more than a thousand women and boys, and even with his own daughters or with the poor creatures of the hearth and field.

Queen Sofie knew she must not let her son's little soul be stolen by the devil. They say that after he was rowed with her across the lake, and washed and laid in his crib (the bloodstained knitted drawers being consigned hastily to the fire), she ordered, all brilliant as the April morning was, that the window of his room should be closed and a lock be fastened to the casement so that it could not be opened day or night. The nurse protested that the baby Prince would suffocate for want of air, but the Queen would not be moved and so this one window in the castle was closed for six weeks until the child had been baptised at the Frue Kirke on the second of June.

And the King goes now and then to this room where he lay as a baby and looks at the window or at the dark night sky beyond and, knowing he is in possession of his soul, thanks God that the devil never came in to steal it.

It is also reported that, at the same time, King Frederik II and Queen Sofie sent for the great astronomer Tycho Brahe and showed their son and heir, Christian, to him, and asked him to make predictions concerning the future King's existence on the earth. Tycho Brahe consulted the stars. He found Jupiter ascendant and told the King and Queen the boy would have a fruitful life and be accorded honour and dignity throughout the world. He had only one warning: trouble and danger would arrive in 1630, the year following Christian's fifty-second birthday.

A Trapdoor

It is snowing at Rosenborg. The snow began to fall in northern Jutland and now it is blown southwards, carried on an icy wind.

Peter Claire wakes in a hard bed and remembers he is in Denmark and that today will be his first day as a member of the royal orchestra. He has slept for only three hours and the anxiety that accompanied his arrival seems scarcely to have diminished with the coming of the new day. He rises and looks out of his window onto the stable yard, where the snow is beginning to smother the cobblestones. He watches it fall, in gusts and flurries. He wonders how long this particular Danish winter will last.

Hot water is brought to him and, shivering in the cold room above the stables, he shaves his face and cleanses his skin of the dregs of its sea journey—of stale sweat and salt, of flecks of tar and oily grime. He puts on clean clothes and a pair of black leather boots made in the Irish town of Corcaigh. He combs his yellow hair and refastens the jewelled ear-ring to his ear.

Bowls of hot milk and warm cinnamon bread are served to the musicians in a refectory. Those already there, warming their hands on their milk bowls, turn and stare at Peter Claire as he enters: eight or nine men of different ages, but mostly older than he, all soberly dressed in suits of black or brown cloth. He bows to them and, as he announces his name, an elderly person with a quiff of white hair, sitting a little apart from the others, rises and comes towards him. "Herr Claire," he says, "I am Jens Ingemann, Music Master. Be welcome at Rosenborg. Here now, have your milk and then I will show you the rooms where we perform."

The King is out hunting. To ride in the forests, following the scent of a wild boar as the snow falls, is one of His Majesty's chief delights. "You will see," says Jens Ingemann to Peter Claire, "that when he comes in, he will be roaring with the rapture of it and ravening with hunger, and we will be asked to play for him while he eats. It is his belief that certain pieces of music aid digestion."

They are in the *Vinterstue*, the shadowy room where the lamp was lit the previous evening. Now, in the daylight, Peter Claire sees that what he took for plain wood panels on the walls are in fact oil paintings of sylvan scenes and sea prospects, framed in gold, and the ceiling above them is adorned with ornate stucco painted gold and blue. In a corner of the room is an arrangement of music stands.

"Well," says Jens Ingemann, "this is where we play sometimes. The days when we play here are good days, but they are few. Look around the room and tell me if you do not find anything unusual in it."

Peter Claire observes a fine marble fireplace embellished with the King's coat of arms, the silver lions which looked upon his arrival, a throne upholstered in dark-red brocade, two oak

tables, numerous chairs and footstools, a line of bronze busts, a gathering of heavy candlesticks, an ivory model of a ship.

"No?" says Jens. "Nothing unexpected?"

"No ..."

"Very well. We shall go on, then. Follow me."

They walk into the hallway and turn left into a stone passageway. Almost immediately Jens Ingemann opens a heavy iron-studded door and Peter Claire sees steps, set in a narrow curve, leading downwards.

"The stairs are dark," says Jens. "Take care that you do not miss your footing."

The stairs turn round a vast stone pillar. They end at a low tunnel, along which Jens Ingemann hurries on towards a distant flickering light. Emerging from the tunnel, Peter Claire finds himself in a large vaulted cellar, lit by the flares from two iron torches bolted to the walls. The cellar smells of resin and of wine, and visible now are hundreds of casks, lying like miniature ships in dry dock on curved wooden supports.

Jens Ingemann walks on slowly, his footsteps echoing slightly on the brick floor. Then he turns and gestures to the empty space between the lines of casks. "Here we are," he says. "This is the place."

"The wine cellar."

"Yes. There is wine here. And in a cage over there some poor hens that have never seen sunshine nor any green thing. Do you note how cold it is?"

"I would expect a cellar to be cold."

"So you will get used to it? Is that what you're predicting?"

"Get used to it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't suppose I shall be spending much time down here. I am not really a connoisseur of—"

"All your time."

"Forgive me, Herr Ingemann ..."

"Of course His Majesty did not tell you. No one told you, or perhaps you would not have come. But this is where we have our existence. This—except for those few precious days when we are called up to the *Vinterstue*—is where we play."

Peter Claire looks disbelievingly at Jens Ingemann. "What purpose can an orchestra serve in the cellar? There is no one to hear us."

"Oh," says Ingemann, "it is ingenious. They say there is nothing else like it in all of Europe. I asked you if you saw nothing unusual in the *Vinterstue*. Did you not notice the two iron rings bolted to the floor?"

"No."

"I cannot remember if they had their ropes attached or not. Probably not, or you would have noticed them. Now, you see, we are directly under the *Vinterstue*. Near the throne, a section of the floor can be raised or lowered by means of the ropes. Beneath the trap is a grille and beneath that is an assemblage of brass ducts or pipes, let into the vaults of this cellar, and each one fashioned almost like a musical instrument itself, cunningly curved and waisted so that the sounds we make here are transmitted without distortion into the space above, and all the King's visitors marvel when they hear it, not knowing whence the music can possibly come and wondering perhaps whether Rosenborg is haunted by the ghostly music makers of some other age."

Jens Ingemann has walked on while talking, but Peter Claire stays where he is, looking around, noting that the torches are not the only source of light in the cellar, but that two narrow slits in the wall give out onto the garden at ground level. They are not windows, only reticulations in the brickwork, their spaces open to the air. And now, as Peter Claire stares at them, he sees a few snowflakes, like an errant coterie of summer gnats, come clustering in.

Ingemann reads his mind. "If you are thinking that we would be warmer down here if the room were not exposed to the outside world, then of course we all agree with you, and I personally have asked the King to have boards nailed across those apertures. But he refuses. He says the casks of wine need to breathe."

"And we can freeze to death, it's of no consequence to him?"

"I sometimes think, if one of us were to die, then he might be moved to rehouse us, but it is difficult to come by a volunteer for this role."

"How can we concentrate if we are so cold?"

"We are expected to get used to it, and I'll tell you something surprising: we *do* get used to it. For the Mediterraneans in our little company, Signor Rugieri and Signor Martinelli, it is the hardest. The Germans, the Dutch, the English and of course the Danes and Norwegians survive tolerably well. You will see."

Buttons

The child Christian, after his baptism, was taken away from his mother.

It was the custom of the time to put the baby into the care of an older woman—usually the mother's mother—because it was thought that older women, who had fought with their own mortality for a greater amount of time, were better prepared than their offspring to wrestle with death on the infant's behalf.

Queen Sofie was consoled by her two daughters and by her illegal knitting, but it is thought that the beginnings of her quarrelsomeness and her desire to amass a great and secret fortune of her own date from this time, when she was deprived of the baby son on whom she had already begun to dote.

For Prince Christian's little life was put into the care of his grandmother, the Duchess Elizabeth of Mecklenburg, at Güstrow in Germany. She hired two young trumpeters and positioned the boys, turn and turn about, outside the Prince's door. When the baby cried, they were to blow their trumpets and the Duchess or one of her women would come running. That the trumpeting disturbed the whole household counted for nothing with Duchess Elizabeth. "All that matters," she said impatiently, "is that the boy does not die. The rest of everything is chaff."

He was swaddled, with a wooden rod laid into the swaddling to force his back and his limbs to grow straight. Day and night he cried and the trumpeters blew. When one of the women suggested the rod should be removed, the implacable Duchess accused her of indulgence and mawkishness. Yet in her own kitchen she supervised the making up of an ointment from comfrey leaves to heal the tender skin where the rod had chafed it. And when the Prince's milk teeth began to bud she ordered that the gums should not be cut but allowed to be "pierced of their own accord, as the earth is pierced by the pale snouts of spring flowers."

When the swaddling was gradually loosened and the stout legs permitted to move and kick, and the plump little hands to explore the objects that lay within their grasp, the Duchess would often sit the child on her own lap and talk to him. The language she talked in was German. She told him about the way the heavens and the earth were arranged, with God and his saints high up in the vast blueness of the sky and all his angels floating among the white clouds. "And so you see," she explained, "because Denmark is a watery kingdom with a thousand lakes, it therefore follows that reflections of heaven are here more numerous than anywhere else on earth, and these reflections, being seen with the eyes of the people and kept in the hearts of the people, make them love both God and nature, and so they are quiet, and when you are King you will be able to rule them and have their trust."

He would, while she talked, play with the tresses of her hair, which she unwound for him and wove into plaits. And some people whisper today that the King has confessed a strange thing: he believes he can remember the long golden plaits of his grandmother the Duchess of Mecklenburg, and when he is in a state of agitation he caresses his own plait, his sacred elflock, between finger and thumb, and this stroking of his own hair calms and soothes him. Yet no one seems to know whether this is true or, if it is true, to whom it was confessed. It might have been to Kirsten. Or Kirsten might have invented it.

He began to talk very early, but of course it was in German that he talked. He had a voice so loud that, when he cried out, the sound could be heard two or three rooms away, and it was thus soon decided to dismiss the daytime trumpeter, for whom there was no longer any need. The night trumpeter remained, however. Duchess Elizabeth was terrified of the power of dreams. If you did not console a child after a nightmare it would grow perpetually to confuse visions with reality and so fall gradually into a state of melancholy.

The night trumpeter was given a new instrument and a new set of instructions. He was not merely to blow if Prince Christian cried in the dark hours, but to play a sprightly melody to chase away the child's terrors.

And this, too, they say that Christian never forgot. Sometimes, at three or four in the morning, musicians are roused from their beds above the stables and summoned to the King's bedroom, where they embark upon quadrilles and capers.

At the age of three, talking constantly and unstoppably in German, interspersed with a little French he had picked up from his visits to the laundry room at Güstrow, where the French laundresses would pick him up in their hot, plump arms and smack fat kisses onto his cheeks, Christian was returned to his parents, King Frederik and Queen Sofie, at Frederiksborg. He saw for the first time that his mother, too, had long golden hair.

To calm his incessant talking he was given red and black chalks, and encouraged to make drawings of the things which surrounded him: dogs and cats, wooden soldiers, statues, model ships, fire-irons, fountains and water-lilies, trees and fish. This skill he mastered very quickly, and so to the great store of chatter housed in his small frame was added yet another topic of conversation: discussion of his drawings. Nobody was allowed to escape the subject. Visiting nobility were shown sheet after sheet of scarlet soldiers and charcoal trees, and required to pronounce upon them. The King of France, on a sumptuous State visit, was amused to be addressed (in his own language) thus: "This is a picture of Nils, my cat. Does Your Majesty think it is a good likeness?"

"Well," said King Louis, "where is the cat? Bring me the cat and I will judge."

But the cat, Nils, could not be found. Hours passed, with servants calling its name from the gates and round the vegetable gardens, but still it could not be discovered. Then, in the middle of the State banquet, His Majesty of France suddenly felt a tugging at his embroidered sleeve. By his elbow stood Prince Christian, in his night-shirt, holding in his arms his cat, who wore around its neck a blue satin ribbon. "Here is Nils," he announced triumphantly.

"Ah, but alas," said King Louis, "now I do not have your drawing by me."

"You do not need the drawing," said the boy. "Kings remember everything. That is what my father says."

"Oh, yes, too true," said King Louis. "I had forgotten that we remember everything, but now I remember it. Well, let us see ..." He took Nils from the boy and set the cat on the table between a bowl of fruit and a flagon of wine, and stroked it while the assembled lords and ladies smiled indulgently upon the scene.

"What I think," said the King of France, "is that the likeness is fair and correct in all but one thing."

"What thing?" said the boy.

"Your picture does not purr!"

The dinner guests laughed noisily at this jest.

That night, intent upon the King of France's observation and having no one with him, Prince Christian opened the door of his room and asked the trumpeter if he knew how one might make a picture that could utter sounds.

"Are you dreaming, Your Highness?" asked the young man anxiously. "Shall I play a jig?"

At the age of six Christian began to travel about the kingdom with the King and Queen.

He spoke Danish now, but had not forgotten his German nor his French. His memory for everything on earth seemed prodigious.

The travelling had two essential purposes: that the King might collect the tariffs and payments in kind from the fiefs and towns that resided on Crown lands, and that he might go freely about those towns, entering the places of commerce and manufacture to make sure that skills were being properly performed and goods made to a high standard. He told his son: "There is something we

must eradicate from Denmark if we want to hold our heads high and trade with the world. And that is shoddiness."

The boy didn't at first understand this word, but its meaning was explained to him thus by his mother: "If you discovered," she said, "that the buckles of your shoes were of uneven size, when they were intended to be of the same size, you would conclude that the person who made them was guilty of lazy workmanship and this is what we call `shoddiness.' You would be forgiven for tearing them off your shoes, or even throwing away the shoes altogether. We must have perfection here, you see. We must rival France and the Netherlands and England in all that we make and in all that we do. And when you are King you must take any shoddy thing to be an insult to our name and punish the persons guilty of its manufacture. Do you understand?"

Christian said that he understood, and it was not long before he came to believe that his parents had explained this matter to him because he had his own important task to perform with regard to it. For whenever he now went into a workshop with his father, whether that of a glove maker, cobbler, brewer, engraver, carpenter or candle maker, he saw that he stood at precisely the right height to stick his head just above the work benches and so get a close and level view of the articles laid out for inspection—a view that was unique to him. Everyone else saw these things from above, but he beheld them face to face. He regarded them and they regarded him back. And his draughtsman's eye was as sharp as a new-minted coin. It constantly aligned, matched and measured. It sought out the smallest errors: loose threads in a bale of silk; a smudged rim on an enamel goblet; uneven stud work on a leather trunk; the lid of a box that did not fit perfectly. And then, quite unperturbed by the dismay on the face of the craftsman or merchant, he would call over the King his father, draw his attention to the imperfection no one but he had spotted and whisper solemnly: "Shoddiness, Papa!"

One day, in the town of Odense, the royal party visited a button maker. This button maker was an old man, known to the King since his boyhood, and he greeted the young Prince with an elaborate display of emotion and affection, and put immediately into his hands the gift of a sack of buttons. There were buttons made of silver and gold, of glass and pewter and bone and tortoiseshell. There were iron buttons and buttons of brass, copper, leather, ivory and pearl. And Christian was entranced by this gift of the button bag. To plunge his hand into it and feel the great quantity of buttons slip and tumble through his fingers created in him a shivery feeling of unalloyed delight.

When he returned that night to his lodgings in Odense, and he had eaten his dinner and was alone in his room, he placed a lamp on the floor and tipped out the whole contents of the button bag into the area of light. The buttons glimmered and shone. He crouched down and moved them slowly around with the tips of his fingers. Then he knelt very near them and put his face into them, feeling their cold, smooth surfaces against his cheek. He liked them more than any present he had ever been given.

It was only the following morning that he remembered the King's sacred command concerning shoddiness. In the cold white light of an October dawn in Odense, Christian spread the buttons in a wide arc over the floor, patiently turned each one of them face-side up and began to examine them.

He was shocked. For every perfect button—smooth-edged, evenly polished, showing no crack or chip, with its eye-holes symmetrically positioned—there were four or five or even six buttons which exhibited evident and undeniable defects. He felt sorrowful. The buttons seemed to look beseechingly at him, to beg him to overlook their individual imperfections. But he ignored their sentimental entreaty. He had been told that the future of Denmark lay in the eradication of shoddy work and he had promised his father to help root it out wherever and whenever it was discovered. He had discovered it here, and now he would act accordingly.

He made a pile of all the defective buttons, called for a servant and asked him to take them away. At some future time he would report to the King that the work of the old button maker was extremely poor and suggest that the man be deprived of his livelihood.

Back at Rosenborg a few days later, Prince Christian took out the button sack (which now contained only perfect buttons) from his trunk and plunged his hand into it. Because there were so few buttons left, the feeling of pleasure he'd got from this when he had first done it was entirely absent. From being the most marvellous gift he had ever owned, it had now become a thing of no consequence whatsoever and he soon laid it aside.

Yet he found himself very frequently thinking about it. It confused him. He couldn't find the key to it. He knew that what he had been given was nothing but a bag of imperfect objects and yet it had dazzled and excited him. He had loved it. This meant that what he had loved was flawed, a disgrace to Denmark. He knew that all this had to have an explanation, but he just could not perceive what it might possibly be.