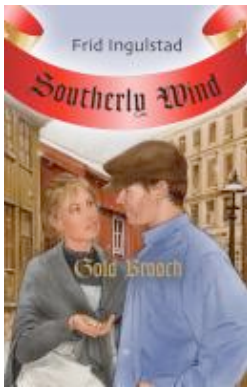


Frid Ingulstad

Southerly Wind

Gold Brooch

The illustration depicts a scene from a historical novel. A woman with blonde hair, wearing a grey shawl over a dark top and a white apron, is shown in profile, looking towards a man. She holds a small, ornate gold brooch in her hand. The man, wearing a brown flat cap and a blue button-down shirt, is looking back at her. They are standing in a snowy street. In the background, there are wooden buildings with windows and a street lamp. The overall atmosphere is that of a winter day in a historical setting.



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Southerly Wind

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Southerly Wind

Gold Brooch

FRID INGULSTAD

Translated from Norwegian by Wyonne Long
with Frid Ingulstad

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Chapter 1

Kristiania, Early January, 1905

“Get out of here right now! I don’t care if all your kids got the measles. That ain’t my problem.” The foreman’s right hand shot out pointing toward the door and his sharp, thundering voice was heard everywhere in the factory.

Elise stopped suddenly, scared, as she glanced over to the next room. Who was getting it this time? She shuddered, stood still and listened. Who was the poor soul whose children were all sick? She had heard the measles epidemic was spreading like wildfire over all of Sagene, and half of those who’d caught the measles had already died.

The foreman continued his rage, “Go to the office! Get your pay and don’t think for a minute you can work here anymore! What would happen to the spinning mill if all the workers just showed up when they felt like it?” His voice got louder and sharper. Elise was suffering along with the poor soul who was the object of his wrath, but she couldn’t see who it was. Should she sneak a few steps nearer and try to peek in?

She tip-toed quietly a bit closer and stretched to see. She had to know who it was. The foreman stood in the middle of the room, his face red as a lobster, his double chin quivering, a furious look in his eyes. Oline stood, with her back to Elise, head bowed, in front of him. Her fragile arms were tightly folded around her thin, sunken body as she stared at the floor, trembling trying to hold back the tears.

“It’s the second time this week you’re late and that’s it! Get out! I won’t have anything to do with such good-for-nothin’s.”

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Elise watched with increasing fright. Oline was a widow, the mother of four small children. If she lost her job, there would be no income, no money. They'd starve.

Elise held her breath when Oline dropped to her knees, pulling on the foreman's pant-legs, begging tearfully, "Please, I promise it'll never happen again. My little boy was delirious with fever and acting so strange. I thought he was going to die in my arms."

Furious, the foreman shoved her away, "Get out of here I said. It's not my fault you've brought so many kids into the world!"

Oline struggled to stand upright, turned and stumbled tearfully towards the door. Elise quickly moved back and pretended to be putting her shawl on when Oline came out. Inside, Elise was seething with a fury that almost took her breath away. Enraged, she thought how unfair it was. One day...one day he will suffer... She clenched her fists in anger.

Oline didn't look at her, but with tears in her eyes, her feet unsteady, she went to the office to get her pay. Elise wasn't sure Oline even saw her. Elise pulled her coarsely knit shawl tightly around her shoulders and pushed open the heavy factory door. Her only thoughts were about Oline's awful situation. There would be no way out for Oline but the poorhouse. How could she and her four children live on so little? Was it so strange that she couldn't leave her sick little boy? She had no one to care for the children, and now they were all sick.

Elise was hit by icy-cold, heavy snow flakes swirling through the air. She shivered and bent her head into the fierce wind. The winter cold was even worse when she was so thin. Her boots were worn through, the soles coming off. She hadn't trudged very far before the slush pushed in and froze

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her toes. Before she got home she would have frostbite, just as she'd had yesterday.

Elise thought about the daughter of the director. She had come waltzing into the factory, wearing a new warm winter coat, fur-trimmed, with matching fur cap and muff, and new, warm lace-up boots. She didn't suffer in the cold with a blue nose or red cheeks. She laughed and joked with the *verksmester* and didn't seem to have a care in the world.

But then she wasn't a factory worker, tied to a spinning machine until her dying day. Elise sighed. *She* didn't have to work from six o'clock in the morning until six or eight o'clock at night, with the ear-splitting noises from the machinery, drive shafts on the ceiling and hundreds of bobbins spinning around and around making you dizzy, a thick fog of swirling dust that clogged your mouth and nose, plus straining your eyes to make sure that threads didn't break. She didn't have to hurry home to a sick mother, two noisy little brothers, a younger sister worn out from a long day at her job as a bobbin girl at the spinning mill, and a father who squandered his wages for something far different than he should. The director's daughter sat in her warm living room, waited on by the parlor maid. She had fine clothes and dry feet, ate as much as she liked, and went to bed when she felt like it. It must be heavenly to live like that!

Secretly, Elise and her friend Agnes snickered at the director. He was short with a big pot-belly and looked unbelievably comical as he swayed through the factory each morning, smacking his pale lips in disapproval.

Doubled up against the sharp wind, Elise hurried over Beierbrua, the bridge they crossed over every day. It was unusual for the wind to be so sharp and strong this time of year, just after Christmas. Her worn and wet stockings rubbed against the inside of her boots, and she could feel new holes

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in the heels that hadn't been there this morning. She would have to darn her stockings again tonight. But poor Oline! What would happen to her? It had been hard before, and now it would be even worse.

Both the spinning and weaving mills had midday hour-long breaks, from twelve to one o'clock, and she had to hurry to the store on the corner and pick up a few things: milk, soap, coffee, coal for the stove, and kerosene for the lamps. They still had gas lighting on Sandakerveien, but on the other side of the river they had gotten electric lights. Agnes had told her that the director's home on Oscarsgate had electric lights in all the rooms. That must be like a castle in a fairy tale, imagine just turning a switch!

Fortunately she had cooked potatoes last night so she could just heat them up again. This morning before work she had gone down and gotten water from the pump on the corner, where all the women got their water. If she hurried, she would make it before she had to go back to work. She swung around the corner to hurry into the store, relieved to get away from the icy snow, when she saw Evert, her little brother Peder's best friend. He was struggling trying to push a cart full of things to sell. She stopped in surprise. "Aren't you in school today, Evert?"

Evert shook his head and was about to hurry on.

"Why not?"

"They won't let me." His voice was surly, as if there was something he didn't want to talk about. "The poorhouse said no," he shouted as he disappeared around the corner.

Elise stood still for a moment. Evert wasn't allowed to continue in school even though he was one of the smartest in the class. It was terribly unfair. Evert was an orphan and a pauper and had been placed with Hermansen, a derelict, who got money from the poorhouse to take care of him.

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Hermansen drank up both his wages and the money from the poorhouse so Evert was always hungry. Peder had told Elise he often shared his lunch pack with Evert. He would sneak a piece of bread into Evert's desk when no one was looking. Sometimes Evert would fall asleep in class because he had been working all night at the factory. Peder said when this happened, the teacher would get angry and pull his ear until it bled and almost fell off. Again Elise felt furious, and tramped angrily into the store.

A short time later, hurrying into the backyard at home, she was met with the horrid stench from the outhouse. The garbage cans were overflowing, oozing out from under the lids, more trash and junk heaped beside them. A rat scurried under the neighboring fence, but he would certainly be back when the yard was quiet again. She hurried in the door and up the stairs to the third floor.

It was cold in the kitchen. Before checking on her mother in the *kammers*, she fired up the wood stove, wondering why Hilda wasn't home yet. She had caught a glimpse of her before she left the factory, but hadn't taken the time to wait for her. She ladled water into a kettle, careful not to rattle the iron rings on the woodstove as she drew them aside. She put the kettle over the fire, and then cracked the door to the *kammers*.

Her mother lay with closed eyes, hands folded over the blanket, the way she usually laid every day.

"Mamma?" she said softly. She didn't want to wake her, but had to be sure she was still alive. Her mother's eyes flickered open, and she gave a faint smile.

"There you are," she said in a weak voice and closed her eyes again.

Elise went quietly back to the kitchen. There were only the two rooms in the small apartment, but she was grateful at

least they did not have to share it with another family as so many people had to. She wiped the table with a cloth, and set out the tin plates, knives and mugs. Hilda would surely be here soon.

Elise thought the noon hour was the best part of the day. It was a blessing to get away from the noise and dust at the spinning mill, and it helped her aching back to move around. With her brothers at school and Mamma in bed, she and Hilda were alone.

Hilda was sixteen, two years younger than she, with blond hair, freckles, an upturned nose and deep dimples. They looked a lot alike, but Elise had brown hair. Despite their age difference, they snickered and laughed at the same things, told each other secrets, and gossiped a little about the other girls at the spinning mill.

Of course they missed having their mother there. Before she got sick, she came home at noon, too, and they all three ate together. When Pappa was still working, he sometimes ate with them, too, but that was a long time ago. Nowadays he spent most of his time with his drinking cronies. She shook away thoughts of Pappa.

Elise heard steps in the stairwell and soon Hilda came in.

Elise turned to her. Her sister had become pale and thin lately. Maybe she'd gotten tuberculosis, too, Elise thought frantically. Was it any wonder that people got sick when they had to work from morning until night in all the noise and dust? She remembered what Mamma had said once, that there wouldn't be any real revolt against all the injustice until Norway became independent. Now there were rumors circulating that the union between Norway and Sweden would soon be dissolved. The father of Agnes, Elise's best friend, followed the news. Agnes was an only child and her father told her what he knew. Agnes talked about it with Elise

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so she, too, knew a little about their country's politics. She wondered if it would help if Norway got its independence, but doubted it would make much difference since those in power paid more attention to the rich than to those who had nothing.

"You aren't sick, are you, Hilda?" She looked at Hilda's pale face.

Hilda shook her head. "I'm freezing all the time. And I'm dizzy from all the noise. Agnes says we'll lose our hearing eventually. Several have already. We walked home together. She thought I looked terrible, too."

"Warm up by the stove, I'll hurry and get the food ready."

If Hilda gets sick, I don't know what I'll do, Elise thought. With Mamma sick in bed, Pappa hanging around in beer-joints, and Peder and Kristian in school, she wouldn't be able to make ends meet on her wages. She only made seven kroner (\$1.90) per week, and it all went to food, rent and fuel. Eighty øre (\$.23) for bread, syrup and coffee for breakfast, fifty-seven øre (\$.18) for fish, potatoes and carrots for dinner, fifty øre (\$.15) for milk, bread, butter and coffee for Saturday and Sunday dinners, twenty-five øre (\$.07) for oatmeal for the evening meal, three kroner and fifty øre (\$.95) for rent and one krone fifty øre (\$.41) for candles and fuel. Hilda had to give her the money she earned so they would have some money for clothes, shoes, soap, a newspaper now and then, and all the other stuff they needed. And she did, mostly without protesting, but still nothing was left over.

Last week she had to borrow almost half the rent money from Johan. She had no idea where he got the money, but he was as kind as the day was long and never refused when she asked him for something. She hated to ask for help. Life wasn't easy for Johan, either, with his father at sea, his

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mother working at the spinning mill and a sister crippled from polio. “She will never be well,” Johan had said sadly.

Johan had also lived in the Andersengården tenement building since he was little. When they were small he had been her only playmate, and when the other children teased her about her freckles and pug nose, he had always defended her and threatened to beat them up. Johan was the biggest and strongest of all the boys in Sagene and something else about him inspired respect. Even the teacher treated him differently than the other pupils, maybe because Johan had taught himself to speak more “properly” than the other kids in the street. Elise’s mother always said Johan had been born a grown-up. From the time he was a little boy of four or five, he had opened doors for all the women in the building, bowed politely, and asked if he could help them with anything.

Special warmth spread through Elise when she thought about Johan. They had become sweethearts last summer. Even though she had thought of him as a kind of big brother from the time she was little, suddenly something happened between them. It was on a Sunday, when they were on their way home from a meeting at the Salvation Army. Both their mothers attended the meetings there, and the kids had gone along, at least in earlier years. Now they didn’t have time as often, or, if she was honest, she had to admit they would rather be doing something else . . . She smiled remembering the sidewalk was slick and slippery after all the rain that day. She slipped and would have fallen if he hadn’t caught her. But instead of letting her go when she regained her balance, he stood holding her. Before she realized it, she felt his mouth on hers, two warm soft lips against her own. It was her first kiss! She had imagined it would be repulsive, an older girlfriend had told her that once, but then bragged about all

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those who wanted to kiss her and touch her. To Elise's astonishment, it felt good. Very good!!

There had been many kisses since that day. . .

She knew several of the girls at the spinning mill envied her. Some of them taunted her and wondered what Johan could see in a scrawny girl with freckles and a pug nose. She had gone into the *kammers*, looked at herself in the little mirror on the wall and had to agree that her face was boring and dull, at least when she was serious. But when she smiled, her dimples showed and that helped!

She had seen a couple of the girls hanging around the backyard in the evenings, snickering and laughing in the dark while they looked up curiously at Johan's window. She could tell he knew they were there, but he acted as if he didn't. Once Elise had asked if he didn't feel a little arrogant when girls chased after him like that, but he shrugged his shoulders carelessly as if the other girls didn't interest him. That made her happy and confident, filled with quivering warmth.

"I ran into Johan when I was coming in," Hilda said suddenly, as if she had read Elise's thoughts. "It looked like he was waiting for you."

Elise hoped he didn't need the money he had lent her. The thought upset her. The tenement manager was merciless. If the rent wasn't paid on time, there was no grace period. She put the potatoes and fish on the table. They couldn't afford carrots today. "I saw Oline get fired today."

Hilda looked up with alarm. "She was fired?"

Elise pressed her lips tightly together. "She was late for the second time in a week."

"But all her kids have the measles."

"I know. The youngest was so sick she was afraid he was dying."

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Hilda took only a small piece of fish and half a potato. “That was a horrible thing for The Frog to do.” She was referring to the foreman. They called him The Frog because he sounded like a croaking frog when he got mad and all worked up. And that happened often.

Elise nodded with concern at her sister as her anxiety grew. “You’re not eating much, are you okay?”

Hilda shook her head, “I just feel so strange.”

“In what way?”

“My ears are ringing, and sometimes I feel a little shaky.”

Elise didn’t say anything for a while, but then she said, “See if you can’t eat something anyway. That will help.”

Hilda forced herself to eat another bite, then gave up and put her fork down. “You can have the rest.”

Elise eagerly ate every bite, nothing would go to waste. “Go in to Mamma and tell her how you’re feeling. Maybe she will know what it is. And ask her if she would like something to eat.”

Hilda did as she was told, but when she came back, she seemed even more exhausted. She was so cold her teeth were chattering. “Mamma was tired and didn’t say much, but she mumbled something about the flu. She didn’t want anything to eat.”

“If you can’t go back to work, I’ll let them know.”

Hilda shook her head firmly. “Do you really think The Frog will tolerate my staying home? When he fired Oline for being late twice?”

Elise didn’t say anything. She knew that Hilda was right. The foreman didn’t put up with anyone staying home just because of a fever or a cough, no matter how bad it was. Many had been fired for less.

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As soon as Hilda left, Elise quickly poured hot water from the kettle into the dishpan and washed the two tin plates, cups, knives and forks. The wind was howling in the stovepipe, it must be even stronger now, and she dreaded going out. When she finished she left the soapy water in the dishpan; it was too good to throw out. She would scrub the floor when she came home again.

Out on the sidewalk, Elise almost lost her breath from the blasting wind. It cut through her clothes, stung her face and burned her ears. She bent over, wrapping her arms in her coarse-knit shawl and holding it tightly around her body.

Then suddenly she noticed something shiny amidst the broken twigs and old leaves swirling between clumps of snow. Could it be a coin? She bent down and snatched up the shiny object. She stood staring at what was laying in her hand. It was not money - not a five kroner coin, or even a one krone coin. It was something completely different, something she had never before seen close-up, and certainly never held in her hand. It was a glittering piece of jewelry, a beautiful gold brooch set with small sparkling stones.

Elise held her breath. Who could have lost such a valuable piece of jewelry? She looked around, searching. There was no one in sight. No one from around here could have lost such a valuable brooch, no one from Sagene. And nobody who lived along Akerselva.

There was only one person she could imagine owning such a valuable brooch, the director's daughter, but she was never in this area. Whenever she visited her father at the factory, she always arrived in a horse-drawn carriage. The director had even bought an automobile that could move without a horse pulling it. Johan told her the horse-drawn carriage drivers were furious. It had been bad enough when the electric trolleys replaced the horse drawn trolley cars

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fifteen years ago. The trolley horses had been so frightened by the noisy spectacles rolling through the streets that someone suggested placing a stuffed horse at the front of all the electric trolleys to calm the horses.

Elise glanced around again, and then hurriedly dropped the glittering brooch in her apron pocket. It felt as if it was burning - like a hot lead weight. Her heart raced. This is what a thief feels like, she thought suddenly. If the brooch was discovered, they would think she had stolen it. She would be sent to prison with a long, stiff sentence. No one would believe she had found it. The story was much too unbelievable! She couldn't tell Mamma. She was much too sick to worry about this. She couldn't tell Pappa. He would take it from her, sell it and drink away the money, as he did with everything he got his hands on. She didn't even dare tell her best friend, Agnes, though they shared all their secrets. Agnes would surely tell her father, and he too would think she had stolen it. No, the only person she could tell was Johan. She couldn't talk to him until late tonight, but he would know what to do.

Anxiety nearly strangled her, she gasped for air! Why had she been the unlucky one to find the brooch? And why had she been dumb enough to pick it up? She should have left it there.

Chapter 6

Finally the factory siren howled. Then came the sirens from the other factories, each with a slightly different sound, and then another, it sounded like the siren at Seilduken. That meant Johan was done for the day, too.

The girls streamed out of the hall, pale and weak from exhaustion. Elise saw her own misery, tiredness, hunger, cold and lack of sleep mirrored in their faces. She thought about Anna, lying in her bed, day in and day out, in the small dark *kammers*, quiet and helpless, and yet always talking about how lucky she was. She, who would never experience the joy of being kissed by a boy she loved, never be married, never have children, never lie in the warm moss, staring up into the cloudless summer sky, listening to the birds chirping and smelling the fragrance of flowers. Everyone walking here, no matter how tired and hungry, was lucky in comparison to Anna. "It's not what you have, but what you do with what you have," her mother used to say before she got sick. Anna was a living example of that.

I should be comparing myself with Anna rather than with the director's daughter, she thought. Comparing your life with someone who has it worse, you'll be grateful instead of bitter. She had heard enough stories about the street-girls down in Vaterland, about the girls on the fourth ward at Ullevaal Hospital with venereal disease, and about the drunken street-girls locked up Mangelsgården, and not even able to go to their mothers' or fathers' funerals without the shame of having a constable by their side. No, when she compared herself to them she was one of the lucky ones.

Anyway, she didn't have to make such comparisons, she had Johan!

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It'd been a long time since she had heard the waterfalls rushing as loudly as today. The cold bit her nose; it went straight through her winter shawl and the rough material in her clothes. It stung her skin, penetrated through to her bones, sent shivers of cold up her spine, ached in her ribs, arms and legs, like a nagging toothache. She hated the winter. When she and Johan became rich, they would embark on one of the huge steamships she had seen in the harbor and sail away to warmer lands. And they would live there for the rest of their lives.

The thought made her smile. She imagined herself like a lady she'd seen on a postcard, wearing a billowy, flowing white dress and a straw hat, swaying palm trees in the background.

Darkness had set in. The gas lamps were lit on Sandakerveien. Snowflakes danced in the lights like small elves dressed all in white. Thank God, Peder and Kristian were home so Mamma wasn't alone. Maybe Hilda was home, too. She had not seen her when everybody piled out of the factory, but it wasn't easy to recognize anyone in the stream of hundreds of dark-clad women. At least not when the winter darkness had settled over the city and the misty frost hung over the bridge.

She wondered if Johan had come...

Just then she heard quick steps coming up behind her. She turned her head.

In the low light from the gas lamp she spotted Hilda. Her face was red and she seemed happily excited, even though she must be feeling miserable.

"Where in the world were you this morning?" Elise heard both curiosity and scolding in her voice.

"I've got something to tell you, Elise." Her voice sounded unusually happy and carefree.

Elise stopped inspite of being very cold. Yesterday, Hilda had been so sick that she thought she had tuberculosis, like Mamma, and she had thrown herself on the bed, crying, after she had admitted to her 'condition.' "Is everything okay again then?" she asked with skepticism.

"No, I'm still coughing and have a fever, but it'll go away. There is something else, Elise. Something you just won't believe!"

Elise was so cold her teeth were chattering. "I'm so cold, can't this wait until we are home and inside?"

Hilda didn't say anything and they walked faster.

It wasn't until they were in the narrow stairwell between the first and second floor that Elise stopped and turned to Hilda. "Tell me now, before Peder and Kristian can hear us."

"I've talked to the *verksmester*, Herr Paulsen."

Elise's mouth dropped. "Were you furious with him?"

Hilda laughed with a twinkle in her eye, "Are you crazy? I was with him, in his office. We were alone and I told him what had happened."

Elise glared at her sister not comprehending a word of what she was saying.

Hilda laughed again. "He told me not to worry; he'll take care of everything."

"Take care of everything?" Elise looked at her, wrinkled her brow in confusion.

"No, it's not what you think!" Hilda impatiently threw up her hands. "He doesn't want anything to happen to me. I can keep on working at the spinning mill and when *that* day comes he said I can just put my destiny in God's hands and he'll take care of the rest."

"You mean he'll pay for it?"

Hilda shrugged her shoulders, irritated. "Do I have to spoon feed you everything?!"

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Elise turned away and continued up the steps. Something isn't quite right, she thought. The *verksmester* wasn't a charitable person. It was a miracle that he had even admitted to having something to do with Hilda's 'condition.' But what was he planning to do about it.....?

They were all the way to the third floor when Elise turned to Hilda again. "I think you're lying to me, Hilda."

Hilda was red in her face. "Lying?"

"Yes, I don't think you're as innocent in all of this as you want me to believe. If you were, you wouldn't have gone to the *verksmester* and been so calm. You would have chewed him out, yelling and screaming.

Hilda's eyes narrowed and she looked straight into Elise's eyes. "And what would that have helped?"

"Nothing at all."

"So why did you say such a thing?"

"Because I think you knew full well what you were doing, hoping to come away from living here in Sandakerveien."

To her surprise, Hilda looked away, marched past her and opened the door without answering. Elise had talked without weighing her words.

When she saw Hilda's reaction, she thought she might have been right. Hilda had voluntarily - at least almost voluntarily - gone to bed with the old middle aged, *verksmester*.

She was just sixteen years old! How could she? Wasn't she in love with Lorang, the errand boy? Did she really believe she would be happier with a few more *kroner* in wages, or the gifts she might get from the *verksmester*? And Mamma, such an honest and decent person, who had taught them Bible verses, sent them to Sunday School at the Salvation Army and brought them up to be proper, and God-

fearing. If she didn't die from tuberculosis, *this* would be the death of her!

Elise hurried into the kitchen, sputtering to her sister, "God help you if you tell this to Mamma!"

As she put the coffee kettle on the stove and found the sugar and milk, her thoughts shifted from outrage to incomprehension. What was it with Hilda?

After Hilda had been with Mamma, Elise went in the *kammers* and looked at herself in the little mirror hanging over the dresser. What she saw was a face similar to her sister's, thin and pale with freckles and a turned-up nose. Quite average. Kinda boring, she thought and made faces at herself. If only she had Hilda's beautiful blonde hair.

But then she smiled, and her dimples brightened up her face. That must be what attracted the *verksmester's* attention...the dimples and the blonde hair...that's why he had chosen Hilda.

Her own hair wasn't that bad. Even if the brown color was boring, it was thick and long. If only she could wash it more often, but she couldn't heat up water other than for Saturday baths, it took too much wood. Besides, she always braided her hair or wore it in a bun on the top of her head to keep it out of the machines. She used a *skaut* when she walked to and from work. When she and Johan were together they were either in the dark stairwell or it was dark. There wasn't much point in trying to look glamorous when you couldn't see more than the outlines of people.

The big question was, had the *verksmester* forced himself on Hilda, or had she voluntarily gone to bed with him? Actually it didn't make any difference. It was a shame and an accident no matter what. But what did it mean that "he would take care of the rest?" Was he willing to support them? Even if the workers along Akerselva didn't care if you were

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pregnant and not married, she had heard it was different among the rich people.

“I have a few *kroner* in my money box.”

Elise turned with surprise towards the weak voice in the bed behind her. Mamma lay there looking at her, worry in her eyes. “For material for a dress,” she whispered.

Elise understood. Mamma had thought she was looking at herself in the mirror because she was thinking of the wedding. She blushed. “It’s no hurry,” she mumbled. “It won’t be at least until summer.”

When she went back into the kitchen, she found flour and milk to make *grøt*. When she could afford it, she made the *grøt* with milk for her brothers. They were growing boys and needed it.

Hilda was helping Peder with his school lesson. He used his pointer finger to read every letter in the words, and it was slow going. Sometimes he mixed up the letters and said the first letters last. Elise thought his heart was bigger and better than his reading abilities. If he could just finish school, maybe he could become a minister? But ministers had to know how to read and write otherwise there wouldn’t be any sermons from the pulpit.

Kristian was the complete opposite. He had learned to read before he started school, had a good head on his shoulders and remembered what he had read. But something about Kristian worried her. He had been like this ever since he was small. All of a sudden, with no warning, he would pinch her arm or leg so hard that it hurt, and he would look at her with a hard dark look. He pulled his brother’s hair or pinched his ears when he thought no one was looking, and he looked so innocent when Peder started screaming. He swore

he had done nothing wrong. She had often thought Kristian had an evil streak.

But it was still Peder who got the most scolding from the teacher. He often brought home notes in his curled up little report book, saying he had done something wrong. But when Elise asked if the notes were true, he clenched his lips tightly and refused to answer. Twice she had noticed Kristian standing behind her making ugly faces at Peder.

She felt hurt for Peder. In school, the pupils who raised their hands with the right answers always got to sit up front. They were smart and knew the answers. The “dummies” were placed furthest back. Peder was one of them, but he wasn’t one who didn’t care. He wanted to do better. He’d told her about some pupils who threw spitballs around the room and whispered the wrong answers to them. They hid detective books like Nick Carter, Nat Pinkerton, Sherlock Holmes and Percy Stuart and comic books in their desks and read them when the teacher wasn’t looking. One teacher was nicknamed “The Ruler” because he reprimanded the pupils by hitting them with a ruler or giving them a sharp flick on the ear before sending them to stand in the dunce-corner. Peder didn’t dare to sneak-read and didn’t have comic books, but he was rapped on the knuckles with the ruler or hit with the blackboard pointer stick because he didn’t know the answers to the teacher’s questions.

A careful knock on the door, and Johan stuck his head in. “It’s Saturday tomorrow, Elise. Would you like to come with me to “The Pearl?”

Elise looked at him in surprise and blushed. “Can you afford that?”

“I should be able to go dancing with my favorite girl on a Saturday night,” he said, sounding a little upset.

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Elise regretted she'd said that. "Of course, I'll go with you, Johan. Would you like to come in?"

He took off his *skyggelua* and came into the kitchen. The room seemed smaller now when he stood there with his broad shoulders and big workman's hands. "How's it going, Peder?" he asked as he glanced towards the kitchen table where the boys were doing their school lessons. "When are you going to read to me?"

Peder didn't smile. "Hilda says I'm t'ick in my head."

"That's just because she's your sister. Girls always have to pretend they are better than us." He winked at Elise and she couldn't help but laugh.

Hilda stood up unexpectedly from the table. "Fine, you take over then!" she snapped angrily, grabbed her wool shawl and knit scarf from the hook on the wall and marched out the door.

With a puzzled look, Johan watched her leave. "What's wrong with her?" he asked when the door slammed so hard that the tin plates rattled in the dish rack hanging on the wall.

Elise shrugged her shoulders. "She hasn't been herself lately."

Kristian looked up from his arithmetic book. "I know why!"

Elise sent him a disgruntled glance. "No you don't. Hilda's not feeling well," she added quickly. "She's coughing, has a fever and really, she should be in bed."

"That's what I meant!" Kristian gave her a dirty look. "What else did'ya think I meant?"

Elise turned towards the cookstove, afraid of saying too much. "You want a *kaffesvett*, Johan?"

"Ja, please."

She set the coffee cup on the table in front of him, poured in a little milk and turned away quickly, pretending to be

looking for the sugar. She knew he had to be wondering. Hilda shouldn't be going out in the cold weather, not with a cough and fever.

Sooner or later she would tell Johan what had happened, but not quite yet. Not before she knew what they were going to do about it. And what the *verksmester* had decided.

Johan was so honest and respectable, so good in every way. When he found out the truth about Hilda, that she had possibly gone to bed with the *verksmester* voluntarily, maybe he would think Elise was just as bad. Maybe he would have second thoughts, and not want to marry her after all.

She poured weak coffee with milk in a cup for herself and sat down in Hilda's place at the table. "Do you know if there will be many others at "the Pearl" tomorrow?"

"Wow! Ja! It'll be packed-full!! It's not every Saturday night there's a dance there!"

"I'm not sure what I'll wear..."

"Don't worry about it. The others don't have anything else to wear, either."

"So, Kristian?" He turned to her brother. "Aren't you going to start delivering newspapers soon? Or get a job as an errand boy? I've heard you're real good in school, and think you can find time for your school lessons even if you get a little job."

Kristian sent him a disgusted look, clamped his lips together and stared down at his arithmetic book without answering.

Peder looked up at Johan with kindness and innocence in his eyes. "I can ask... If ya t`nk dat can help Elise."

Johan ruffled his hair. "I think you have to be a year or two older first, Peder."

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Peder looked disappointed. “Evert ain’t much older ‘an me.”

“But he’s not going to school, is he?”

Peder looked down at the page, put his pointer finger on the first letter in the word, and started to spell: “Paaappa reeeads thhhe neeewspaaaper. Maaamaa iiss bbaaakiing bread.”

“Just listen to him,” Kristian said mockingly. “He can’t even read a first grade book.”

“Kristian!” Elise sent him a lightning flash glance. “Peder might not be as tall or as strong as you, but he has a heart that’s much bigger. And he won’t read any better when you’re teasing him! But no matter, boys, its bedtime. You have to get up early and you need your sleep.”

Both got up obediently. They knew that tone in her voice; they knew when enough was enough.

“I gotta go down to the outhouse. I’ll race ya!” Kristian shouted and rushed to the door, Peder right behind him.

Johan smiled and winked at Elise. “Come sit with me a few minutes while we’ve got the chance.”

She snuggled close to him. The next moment she felt his lips on hers.

When they finally managed to pull themselves apart, he whispered in her ear, “I’ve been to see the minister. I ran out during lunch break.”

Elise looked at him, wide eyed. “What did he say?”

“All we have to do is decide on a date. I did say that a spring wedding would be best. No later than *St.Hansaften*, in Sagene kirke, our beautiful new church.”

Her thoughts returned quickly to Hilda. If the *verksmester* was really “going to take care of everything,” Elise had nothing to worry about, did she?

She leaned into his broad chest and whispered very softly, almost inaudible, "Hilda's going to have a baby."

Johan sat up abruptly. "What did you say?"

She lifted her face and looked into his eyes. "Hilda's pregnant, but you can't tell a living soul. Not yet. I don't even know if I'm allowed to say who the father is."

"Isn't it Lorang?" He looked at her questioning, his eye brows raised. "Hilda, she's only sixteen years old?"

She nodded seriously. "Mamma doesn't know yet. Neither do Peder and Kristian. I didn't even know until yesterday."

Johan seemed very upset, and normally he was the calm one. "Are you sure?!"

"No, we can't be, not for a while yet, but...but..." Elise shrugged her shoulders helplessly. "But it looks like she could be."

Johan sighed heavily. "Let's just hope she can keep her job, even if she has to quit awhile when her stomach gets big."

Elise nodded. She wanted to tell him it looked like Hilda would be able to continue working in the mill, but didn't want to say anything yet. Not before Hilda told her it was ok.

He sat there staring thoughtfully into the air, as if he'd had the wind knocked out of him. "Can you imagine..." he mumbled. "Only sixteen..."

"Don't think about it, Johan. I'm sure it'll work out okay." She sat quietly before whispering excitedly, "I told Mamma you proposed to me. She told me to say yes!"

Johan smiled, hugged her tightly and found her lips again.

They didn't let go of each other until they heard the boys coming up the steps. Elise hurriedly got off his lap and moved

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to the other stool. "Johan?" she whispered quickly before Peder and Kristian came in, "did you turn it in?"

For a moment he looked quizzically at her, not knowing what she was talking about. Then he nodded. "Everything has been taken care of, Elise, you can forget about it."

"Did you go to the police or to the director? What did he say? Was it his daughter's?"

"Ja...well, it wasn't really hers, but he recognized it. Don't think any more about it," he repeated.

He stood up. "I have to go down again. Anna's not feeling so good today."

"Say hello to her from me. Tell her I'll drop by tomorrow evening."

He nodded and left just as Peder and Kristian came storming into the kitchen.

"There was a huge rat by the outhouse door," Kristian shouted. "I tried to get him, but Peder scared him away."

"Kristian woud 'ave stamped on 'im 'til he died," Peder said, concern in his voice. "Dat ain't right, is it, Elise?"

"No, he can't do that," Elise answered, but her thoughts were in a completely different place.

"I could'a killed him with the axe," Kristian shot back. "If ya hadn't chased him away."

"Shhh boys, you've got to be quiet for Mamma."

They calmed down, got undressed and went quietly into the *kammers*.

"*Natta*, Elise."

"*Natta*, Peder. *Natta*, Kristian."

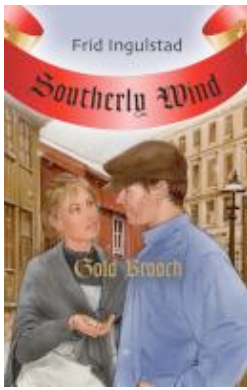
Elise dumped the dishwater into the scrub bucket, drizzled in a drop of ammonia and went out in the dark stairwell to scrub the steps. Her body ached from exhaustion. When Johan became a foreman, and he would soon, he would earn at least two *kroner* more per week. Then they could

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afford their own small place. Maybe, they'd have their own little kitchen that they wouldn't have to share with another family. It would be a complete little apartment. She would make it so cozy, with plants in the windowsills, a freshly starched tablecloth on the kitchen table and crisp, white curtains in the windows.

Or even better, maybe a small, painted red house just like the one down by the bridge, belonging to the old man who owned the spinning mill. It would have a porch warmed by sunshine in the summer, a fireplace in the kitchen, a small living room with a plush sofa, a shiny, polished table, and a steep staircase to the *kammers* in the attic. Warm summer Saturday and Sunday evenings they would sit out on the porch and listen to the whispering river, birds twittering in the big oak trees and happy childrens' voices coming from the grassy meadows below. Johan and she, just the two of them, and soft summer evenings. Thank you, God - what happiness...

And now she was rid of that pesky brooch for good. The director had taken it without interrogating questions; otherwise, Johan would have told her. Good, kind Johan....



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