

Purloined Letter by Arild Tveito

My voyage through the air was now ended. I lay for a long time entirely immovable, awaiting my fate with the approach of day. I now observed that the wants and weaknesses of humanity, which, during my passage had ceased, now returned. I was both sleepy and hungry. Fatigued in mind and body I fell into a deep slumber. I had slept, as far as I could judge, about two hours, when a terrible roar, which had previously disturbed my slumbers, suddenly waked me. I had dreamed some curious dreams; in one, I thought myself to be in Norway, at the church in my native town, listening to the singing of our clerk, whose voice was really unpleasant from its roughness. My first impression therefore, on recovering myself was, that this man was indulging in an extraordinarily ambitious strain. In fact, on opening my eyes, I saw a huge bull within a few feet of me. At the same moment, a vigorous roar from this animal convinced me that I did not listen to church music.

Many former associates had a right to expect and demand help from me, and of course they did demand it. In the fifteen years that I have been playing Society's game, I have many times had one foot in a jail as the result of trying to reconcile the underworld and upper world codes... I have been asked to send pistols and explosives and narcotics into jails by men who had a right to demand them because they had done favours for me in the past. Fortunately I had influential friends in the upper world who understood both codes and helped me to pay my debts in a legitimate way. The man who wanted a pistol was given instead a chance at parole or probation - a chance to make good in the upper world. Instead of sending opium to the addict who supplied it to me when I was locked up, my friends sent him to a hospital where he could take the cure. Some of my debts had to be paid in kind, and no one could help me. I owe my life to a thief who risked his life to take me out of jail. He smuggled me saws to open my cell, then came in the night to cut the bars out of the window and lifted me out through the hole when I was so weak from tuberculosis that I could barely walk. He sheltered me and fed me and finally sent me away where I was safe and free to get well. Years afterward, when I had cured myself of the dope habit, served my sentence, and won immunity from the law, and was just beginning to feel a little secure in my respectability, my telephone rang in the small hours of the night...

It was a day in springtime. Birds were uttering their chirruping song and mankind, going about their various chores, were bathed in the sanctity of weariness. Everything was working towards its destiny: the trees, the plants, the sharks. All—except the Creator! He was stretched out by the wayside, his clothing in ribbons. His lower lip hung down like a sleepy cable. His teeth were unbrushed and dust mingled with the flaxen waves of his hair. Stunned by a heavy drowsiness, crushed against the stones, his body was making useless efforts to get up. His strength failed him, and he lay there feeble as an earthworm, impassive as the bark of a tree. Streams of wine filled the ruts hollowed out by the nervous jerking of his shoulders. Swine-snouted Scottishness covered him with protective wings and cast loving eyes upon him. His slack-muscled limbs grovelled in the dust like blind masts.

Blood flowed from his nostrils: as he fell he had struck his face against a post. . . .

He was drunk! Horribly drunk!

Drunk as a flea that has swallowed three barrels of blood during the night! He aroused the echoes with words that I will not repeat here. If the Supreme Drunkard does not respect himself I must respect mankind. Did you know that the Creator got drunk! Pity on that lip, befouled in the goblets of an orgy!

A passing hedgehog stuck its spines into his back and said: "That for you. The sun is half way through its orbit. Work, sluggard, and eat not the bread of others. Wait a while and you'll see what will happen if I should summon the cockatoo with his crooked beak."

A woodpecker and a screech-owl, passing by, buried their beaks in his belly, saying: "That for you. What are you doing here on earth? Did you come to offer this lugubrious farce to the animals? I assure you neither the mole nor the cassowary nor the flamingo will imitate you."

A passing ass gave him a kick in the temple, saying: "That for you. What did I ever do to you that you should have given me such long ears? All creatures down to the cricket scorn me." A passing toad spat in his face, saying: "That for you. If you had not given me such a huge eye and had I seen you in the state you are in now, I would have chastely concealed the beauty of your limbs beneath a shower of buttercups, myosotis and camellias, in order that none should see you."

A passing lion inclined his royal visage, saying: "As for me I respect him, although his splendour appears to be momentarily eclipsed. You others, affecting haughtiness when actually you are nothing but cowards since you attacked him while he was sleeping, would you be happy in his place if you were subjected to the insults of passers-by—insults you have not spared him?"

A passing man stopped before the displaced Creator and, amid the applause of the crab-louse and the viper, defecated for three days upon that august countenance. Woe unto mankind for that insult! For he had no respect for an enemy laid out in a mess of filth and blood and wine, defenceless and almost inanimate! . . .

Eventually the sovereign God, awakened at last by all these vicious insults, got himself up from the ground as best he could and staggered over to a large stone where he sat down, his arms pendant like a consumptive's testicles. He looked around him with glassy, lack-lustre eyes upon the whole of nature, which belonged to him. O mankind! You are wicked children; but I implore you to spare that Great Being, who has not yet slept off his disgusting liquor, and, not having the strength to support himself erect, has fallen heavily back on to the rock where he was sitting like a wayfarer. Notice that beggar passing by. He saw that the dervish was holding out a skinny arm, and, without knowing upon whom he was bestowing his charity, he threw a piece of bread into that hand beseeching pity. The Creator acknowledged the gift with an inclination of his head.

O, you will never know how difficult a thing, it becomes to be holding constantly the reins of the universe! Sometimes the blood rushes to the head as one strains to wrest a new comet from nothingness, with a new race of beings. The Intelligence, stirred to its very foundations, escapes like one overcome in battle, and may very well fall for once in life into the aberrations of which you have been a witness!