

**ELVERHØJ (“ELVES’ HILL”)**, by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1828). Translated by Philip E. Larson

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File VI.

**ELVERHØJ (“ELVES’ HILL”)**, by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1828).

Translators note:

*Elverhøj* is a "fairy-tale comedy" (eventyrcomédie), a type of musical comedy which mixes fantasy and reality. The play dramatizes the plight of an innocent young woman who has grown up in the Danish countryside, in the house of a peasant woman whom she believes is her mother. She is associated with nature, and with supernatural creatures. She is in love with a young man who also loves her, but who is destined for a marriage arranged for him by the king. The king, a character created as a compliment to the Danish king, recognizes her as a true aristocrat, and she is able to marry the man she loves.

This play entered the repertoire of the Bergen theatre in 1854-55, when Ibsen may have directed it himself. He wrote several plays in the style of eventyrcomédie, including the fragment "Rypen i Justedal," *Sancthansnatten*, and *Olaf Liljekrans*.

## “ELVES’ HILL”

Drama in Five Acts by J. L. Heiberg

Premiéred at the Royal Danish Theatre, November 6th, 1828.

## CHARACTERS

Christian IV, king of Denmark.  
Erik Walkendorff, master of Høistrup in Stevns.  
Elisabeth Munk, his ward.  
Albert Ebbesen, the king's sheriff in Tryggevælde.  
Karen, a peasant woman in Tryggevælde.

Paul Flemming,        courtiers in the king's  
Henrik Rud,         retinue.  
Agnete, Karen's daughter.  
Bjørn Olufson, chief steward at Høistrup.  
Mogens, a hunter.

Peasants, courtiers, pages, knights and ladies.

### FIRST ACT.

A region in Tryggevæld Township. In the background Stevns Township. The border between the two is a stream, which flows across the stage. A plain wooden bridge crosses the stream. On the other side of the stream a large thicket is visible. KAREN's farmhouse lies in the foreground to the right of the audience. A table and bench stand outside the house. It is early morning before sunrise; gradually the day dawns.

### MELODRAMA,

during which KAREN opens the door to her house and steps out. She leaves the door standing open; a lively fire can be seen burning in the hearth. She carries out several kitchen utensils, while seeing to the fire, adding firewood and blowing on it. From the left in the background a hunter's horn is heard; in the distance, trumpets. A little later MOGENS enters from the background over the bridge. Then from the left side the KING and FLEMMING enter, both in travelling clothes. In the meanwhile KAREN has seated herself outside the house and begun to polish some kitchen utensils. MOGENS carries his collecting box on his back; he walks slowly across the bridge, turning often and looking back. After he has crossed the bridge, he notices KAREN, stands and listens to her sing the following ballad. The KING and FLEMMING do not especially notice the other characters. They can be seen in conversation, FLEMMING pointing in different directions in the background and to the sides, as if to inform the KING about the vicinity.

### SCENE ONE.

The KING. FLEMMING. MOGENS. KAREN.

KAREN (sings at her work).

1.

I went into the forest late one summer evening,  
And drank a beaker from a gushing spring.  
But beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

2.

The bubbling wave sprang up from a green hill;  
All-at-once it grew still; it flowed without a sound.  
Now beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

3.

Then the air echoed with songs and strings,  
Three white maidens danced in the dew.  
Now beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

4.

Like fleeting mist over the meadow,  
The three became one and the one three.  
Now beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

5.

The elf-king appeared in the midst of the dance;  
Then he drew a costly ring from his finger.  
Now beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

6.

I grabbed for the ring, but he seized my hand,

The white maidens wove round us in a circle.  
Yes beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

7.  
Now I live in the hill as the elf-king's bride,  
And I venture out only when the mist falls.  
Since beware, o my girl, for the elf-king sees you!

(At the beginning of this ballad the KING and FLEMMING have left the stage in conversation. Towards the end of the song they come in again, and the KING becomes aware of KAREN.)

FLEMMING (to the KING).

I can assure your grace that this woman is a living archive for all our old superstitious songs: they still bloom on her lips, and are spread from there throughout the whole district. When she dies it will be the end of our folk-poetry.

MOGENS (to KAREN).

Karen! Good morning! You are up and about early.

KAREN.

I have to be, since there is to be a celebration here today.

MOGENS.

But why do you always sing such sorrowful songs?

KAREN.

I know plenty of merry ones; I shall sing you one immediately.

FLEMMING (to the KING).

If your grace will take note, you will hear what the woman considers "merry".

KAREN (sings).

1.

I laid down my head on Elves’ Hill,  
My eyes feigned a trance;  
Then two young maidens came toward me,  
And enticed me with song and speech.  
Eia! what a strange dance!

2.

Then the rushing stream grew still,  
That was wont to race.  
The little fish swam in the river,  
They played with their fins.  
Eia! what a strange dance!

3.

First they beckoned me and then they threatened me,  
I stood as though bound in chains.  
Then the cock crowed in a distant town,  
And the spell vanished.  
Eia! what a strange dance!

4.

Since then I advise every Danish squire  
Who wants to ride into the forest,  
Not to ride to Elves’ Hill,  
And lie down there to sleep.  
Eia! what a strange dance!

MOGENS.

Well, the tune is lively enough, but it deals with the same subject.

KAREN.

You know very well I do not sing about anything else.

MOGENS.

I can't blame you. Just this morning, a moment ago, I saw the elf-girl beyond the thicket at the foot of the hill.

KAREN.

Quiet!

MOGENS.

She disappeared between the trees as I approached. I walked no farther than that stone over there, since I had no desire to follow her tracks.

KAREN.

Quiet, I say! Don't you see there are strangers here?

(They continue in conversation.)

FLEMMING (to the KING).

Your grace, don't you think it's a shame about these old songs of elves, brownies and trolls; they have outlived the time when one believed them literally; so when these people put on a long face one does not know whether to laugh or cry.

KING.

Certain songs and legends please me.  
A small coin, which is no longer in circulation,  
But which the peasantry still collects  
In the hope that it will again become valuable,

Is a part of the national treasure.  
But who is the old woman, actually?

FLEMMING.

A cotter's widow, but still not poor;  
She receives her offerings just like the priest,  
Since around here she is considered an oracle;  
She does not merely sing about elves  
And the underworld; in Egnen they believe  
That she has converse with them. So powerful  
Is the esteem in which she is held, that  
If the cattle are sick, or if there is some evil afoot,  
They immediately seek Mother Karen's advice.

(Softly and secretly.)

She has a daughter who is very beautiful.

KING.

Well, well, Mr. Flemming! You are familiar  
With the local folklore, I see.  
You have profited from your stay here.

FLEMMING.

Why not, your grace? I visited

My friend, Mr. Ebbesen, during the hunting season;  
But one cannot hunt all the time,  
There is still time to joke.

KING.

Have you charmed  
The pretty peasant girl as a joke, perhaps?

FLEMMING.

No, your grace! She is not one to be charmed.  
She is as virtuous and as culturally refined  
As ladies of the court. I almost believe  
That Mother Karen knows a little witchcraft,  
When I consider her daughter's bearing.

KING.

Do you want to provoke my curiosity?

FLEMMING.

Well, it is just as easy to assuage it.  
The old woman will certainly jump with joy  
When the king inquires after her daughter.

(To KAREN.)

Good morning, Karen!

KAREN.

Well, look here!  
Mr. Flemming! Have you come out  
To visit Trykkevælde again?

FLEMMING.

Yes, my good woman.

KAREN.

And brought such a handsome knight with you?

KING (to FLEMMING):

She does not recognize me.

FLEMMING.

Tell me, Karen,  
Isn't your lovely daughter at home?

KAREN.

My lovely daughter? Well, if she is lovely,  
It is neither her fault nor mine.

FLEMMING.

Well said!... But tell me, isn't she at home?

KAREN.

By the Rood! What's the hurry? Don't rush!  
She is not at home to you at this time;  
It is still early, the child is sleeping.

FLEMMING.

How is that? She is sleeping, and you are up?

KAREN.

Young blood needs more sleep.

FLEMMING.

But she should help you with your work;  
You must reap some benefit from your daughter.  
I shall go in and wake her.

**KAREN**

(placing herself in front of the door):

Quiet,  
Sir Knight! This is no joking matter.

**KING.**

And it has been taken far enough already.  
I must agree with the old woman:  
She has a pretty daughter, and naturally  
She has to be clever at watching over her.

**KAREN.**

There speaks a sensible old man!  
Take your cue from him.

**FLEMMING.**

If I see correctly

You are making preparations for a celebration.  
You are considered to be the best cook  
In the township; I'll bet the peasants  
Have ordered a dinner again.

KAREN.

You hit it right. This evening the sheriff  
Is marrying Miss Munk in Høistrup,  
So the peasants are celebrating  
All day long; this evening they will accompany him  
To the bride's house, twenty miles away.

FLEMMING.

This evening, you say? That is impossible!

KAREN.

It is?

KING.

The woman is right again,  
It is this evening.

FLEMMING (aside).

Heavens! What news!

KAREN.

Aren't the two gentlemen going to Høistrup?  
It will be jolly, you can count on that.

MOGENS.

And elegant.  
They say the king will be there.

KAREN.

Who says so? That is only rumor and gossip.

MOGENS.

That may well be. Still... the king is the  
Godfather of the bride; so it is reasonable that  
He would come to her wedding.

KAREN.

How you talk!  
I am telling you, the king is not coming.

MOGENS.

I don't believe it, either; but they say...

KAREN.

They say! They say so many things.  
You gentlemen, who have just come from the city,  
You must know; am I right?

FLEMMING.

(with a glance at the KING):

I don't know....

KAREN (to the KING):

Well, what do you say, Sir Knight?

KING.

I must agree with the woman for the third time,

Since the king is not coming.

KAREN (to the OTHERS).

You see?

(To the KING.)

But can you tell me the reason why he is not coming?

KING.

Well, he has other things to think about.  
He has been on a tour in Vordingborg,  
And is going all the way to Copenhagen.

KAREN.

No, sire! That is not the right reason.

KING.

Is that so! Then let me hear the right one!

KAREN.

Yes indeed, noble courtiers can learn something  
From peasants after all.

KING.

I have often experienced that.

KAREN.

Well, then listen: the real reason  
Why the king is not coming to Høistrup...

KING.

Well?

KAREN.

Is because he does not dare to come.

KING.

What? He does not dare?

KAREN.

That's it.

KING.

Well, what is he afraid of?

KAREN.

Has he ever at any time set foot  
In Stevns Township?

KING.

No, he hasn't;  
But still it could happen.

KAREN.

No, never!

KING.

But, say....

KAREN.

Look at that stream that flows past here:  
It separates Stevns from Tryggevælde Township.  
I tell you: the king dares go no farther  
Than to the place where you stand;  
He does not dare to cross this bridge.

FLEMMING.

Now I have heard everything!

KING (softly):

Be quiet, Flemming!

(To KAREN.)

What danger threatens him in Stevns?

KAREN.

The king in Stevns will not tolerate his presence.

KING.

The king will not tolerate the king's presence?

MOGENS.

She means the elf-king.

KING.

The elf-king?

FLEMMING.

Ha ha ha ha!

KING.

She keeps coming back  
To her legends.

FLEMMING.

Ha ha ha!

KAREN.

(seriously and solemnly):

Ever since the time of Arild an elf king has ruled

From the stream here to Stevns' high sea-cliff.  
He tolerates no other king's presence.  
Our kings know that very well,  
And therefore none of them comes there.  
If you do not believe me, then ask whoever you like,  
Everyone in Egnen will agree with what I say.

(To FLEMMING.)

And you, my merry young knight!  
When I need anything to laugh at,  
I can look for it in your mirror,  
But not in the wise talk of old people.

(In the meanwhile she has collected her kitchen utensils, goes into the house with them and slams the door after herself.)

SCENE TWO.

KING. FLEMMING. MOGENS.

KING (to FLEMMING):

Now you have made the old woman angry,  
And I shall not get to see her daughter.

FLEMMING.

It was impossible for me to contain my laughter,  
The whole conversation was so preposterous.

MOGENS.

The good gentlemen may find it rather peculiar,  
But still, that's how it is.

FLEMMING.

Look, now he  
Wants to convert people, and swears on a  
Stack of Bibles.

KING.

I wish I knew where Ebbesen was.... Perhaps he  
Rode to Høistrup to see his bride.

FLEMMING.

Possibly.

MOGENS.

You ask about Ebbesen?

He is around here somewhere.

KING.

Where?

MOGENS.

I saw him  
Over in the elf-thicket;... I'll tell you,  
He was stealing slowly after the girl.

KING.

What? Which girl?

MOGENS.

The elf-girl.

KING.

What? You are starting in again about the elves?  
I believe the whole township is under a spell.

MOGENS.

As true as I am alive, I saw the girl myself,  
And Ebbesen was stealing after her,  
But both of them disappeared behind Elves’ Hill.

KING.

Now that is going almost too far!

MOGENS.

It is well-known  
That the sheriff often trails her  
In the evening at twilight and in the morning.  
As a hunter I have to be aware of it. I see him  
Very often wandering there in the elf-thicket.

FLEMMING.

Oh yes, sure he does! A man who is going to marry  
Miss Munk this evening has a rendezvous  
With a girl in a thicket.

MOGENS.

Oh, but he is clever!  
He does not allow himself to be captivated so easily.  
I think he has another purpose.

KING.

And what is that?

MOGENS.

Well! I'll tell you:  
They believe that a treasure is buried yonder  
At the base of Elves' Hill, since the girl sits  
There so often, as if she were guarding something.  
I think the treasure attracted him there.

FLEMMING.

I think the girl is enticing him.

MOGENS.

That could be.  
It is not easy to know what to believe about that.  
He will surely be here soon, since the cock crowed  
A long time ago; it is almost light,  
And then the elf-girl leaves. However,

Will the gentlemen be good enough to keep quiet  
About what I have told them? Farewell, then!

(He leaves.)

**SCENE THREE.**

**KING. FLEMMING.**

**KING.**

What is one to think about these people?  
I do not know whether they fear God  
And honor the king, but their belief in  
Legends about elves is unshakable.

**FLEMMING.**

The culture here is primitive.  
I think your grace ought to  
Burn this whole thicket from here over.  
Perhaps the elf-king himself would come out  
In embarrassment, having no money to pay the rent.

**KING.**

There's something behind all this, believe it!  
Why does Ebbesen wander around on those hidden paths?

FLEMMING.

And so close to the wedding! Still,  
I can scarcely contain my puzzlement,...  
The old woman must inform me,...  
Why was the wedding decided on so quickly?

KING.

I could have told you that myself, Flemming!  
It is taking place on my orders.

FLEMMING.

And is that why  
Your grace travelled here to Tryggevæld?

KING.

In order to bring the sheriff my best wishes myself.

FLEMMING.

My liege! Have you lost your confidence in me?

KING.

Why do you ask that?

FLEMMING.

Since your grace  
Did not confide in me the reason for our  
Journey, on the whole way here.

KING.

I have my reasons, but calm down,  
An honorable mission awaits you:  
I shall depart this evening; you will stay,  
And continue on to Høistrup in my name,  
And bring Miss Munk my wedding present.

FLEMMING (perplexed).

That is too much... all-too-great an honor...

KING.

When I stood as godfather to Elisabeth,  
Your sainted father was the one who  
Represented me, who brought my godfather's gift  
To the child's cradle. Now you will  
Represent the king at her wedding.

FLEMMING.

My king! This favor....

KING.

Hush! who is coming  
Across the bridge there!

FLEMMING.

It is Ebbesen.

KING.

Ah! Is he coming back at last, then?

SCENE FOUR.

KING. FLEMMING. EBBESEN comes across the bridge.

FLEMMING.

Hey, Albert! It's about time you arrived!  
Come over here and see!

EBBESEN.

Heavens! Is it possible?  
My exalted king! You have come to visit me,  
And I was not present when you arrived!  
But I had never imagined this favor....

KING.

It is my custom to surprise people.

EBBESEN.

Oh! If only a premonition had told me....  
I hope you have not had to wait long.  
Flemming, when did his exalted majesty arrive?

FLEMMING.

About an hour ago....

EBBESEN.

An hour!  
A minute would be too long!  
Did his majesty stop by the castle?

FLEMMING.

Yes.  
But nobody knew where you were. At first  
They searched for you in the bedroom, but in vain.  
They were surprised that you had gone out  
So early, when they had assumed that you still  
Lay in the arms of sleep.

EBBESEN.

Heavens!  
Did your grace find a room and a bed,  
Attendants, breakfast?.... I shall hurry ahead  
To arrange everything....

KING.

There is no hurry.

Just stay; my retinue here is not large,  
And does not need many rooms. Besides,  
I am going to Copenhagen this afternoon;  
But Flemming will appear in my place at Høistrup.  
Are you satisfied with that?

**EBBESEN.**

My exalted king!  
Your will was ever mine.

**KING.**

Where have you been this morning?

**EBBESEN.**

I have been out walking.

**FLEMMING.**

Is that so?  
In the elf-thicket yonder?

**EBBESEN.**

Yes, it is cool there!

FLEMMING.

And solitary.

EBBESEN.

Certainly.

KING.

But aren't you  
Afraid of the elves?

EBBESEN.

I can see  
Your grace will have his joke.  
Egnen is full of all sorts of elf-legends.  
In the church-wall at Great-Heddinge  
There is an arch which is bricked up;  
It is called the elf-king's dark chamber.  
The simple folk believe he has his day-bed there;  
While at night he wanders here in the thicket  
In moonlight and gentle summer breezes.  
But if a storm rages, or if the sea grows wild,

Then he sits on Stevns' white sea-cliff,  
As the king of the sea-cliff, with his spear in his hand,  
And watches with delight whenever ships run aground.

KING.

And isn't it true that he does not tolerate it  
If I cross over the bridge into his district?

EBBESEN.

Has your grace heard that already?  
Yes, there are a thousand stories about him!  
It is not worth taking such things to heart.

KING.

Certainly not! That does not trouble me any more  
Than the legend that is going around about you.

EBBESEN.

About me?

KING.

Well, they say that you  
Commune with the elf-girl in the thicket.

**EBBESEN.**

Oh, what foolishness!

**KING.**

It certainly is foolishness,  
Especially on your wedding day.

**EBBESEN.**

Who has been so bold as to say such things to you?

**KING.**

It was a hunter, one of your people.

**FLEMMING.**

Think, what a shameless hunter's lie!

**EBBESEN.**

Do they gossip about me, Paul?

FLEMMING.

By no means. But do not be angry  
With the hunter, if he has given you away,  
Since he has also provided you with a good excuse:  
He said it was not the girl you were looking for,  
But rather the treasure she was guarding. Yes indeed!  
She has a treasure, that is what you want.

EBBESEN.

But I do not understand....

KING.

Is that so, Albert?  
Do you know that when a treasure is found,  
Half of it belongs to the King?  
You will not deprive me of my rights?

EBBESEN.

Good grief! I shall be as honest  
As Esau, when he bought Jacob's birthright.

I cannot express how happy it makes me  
That your grace has such a merry humor.  
My humble self is happy to serve  
As the target for wit's keen arrow,  
When my exalted king amuses himself in this way.  
But permit me to lead you to the castle,  
And I shall entertain you as well as I can.

KING.

I accept your offer.

EBBESEN.

My king!  
This is the way, we must go to this side.

FLEMMING.

(to EBBESEN, as they are going):

You got off that time, but do not celebrate just yet;  
I don't believe your confession is quite complete.

(All three go out to the left.)

SCENE FIVE.

AGNETE comes across the bridge. She walks slowly, with soft steps, and looks off to the side, where the preceding characters went out.

AGNETE.

I wonder what that was about, those two gentlemen who waited for him and went off with him? Probably a couple of knights who are going to accompany him to the wedding in Høistrup.... Oh! The wedding, the wedding! It makes me more and more anxious.

(She sits down in a meditative position outside the house.)

SCENE SIX.

(AGNETE. KAREN comes out with two large earthenware crocks in her hands.)

KAREN.

Are you here at last? Is it finally time to come home?

AGNETE.

Is it late?... My God! I see it is daylight, I had hardly noticed.

KAREN (aside).

Now she is in her dream-world again. (Aloud.) Agnete, when you go to Elves’ Hill, you must keep track of the time and not stay away for so long. Two strange knights were just here...

AGNETE (jumps up quickly).

I saw them. Who were they?

KAREN.

You saw them?

AGNETE.

I hid on the other side of the bridge until they were gone.

KAREN.

Good. I did not want them to see you. One was Mr. Flemming, he asked about you in his usual nosey way, but I said you were not up yet. Then Mogens came, and said that he had met the elf-girl. He was still rather frightened by it. Haven't you met the king in the thicket yet?

AGNETE.

No, Mother, I have never seen him.... But tell me, who was the other knight?

KAREN.

How do I know? He was a modest reasonable old man.

AGNETE.

They are probably both coming to the wedding, don't you think?

KAREN.

I suppose so.

AGNETE.

And are you having a celebration today also? The peasants want to drink to...

KAREN.

Well, why don't you say it? To Mr. Ebbesen's and Miss Munk's health.

AGNETE.

Yes, of course!

KAREN.

Agnete! Wake up! It is as if you were sleepwalking. You sigh, you look around, you hardly hear anything I say. Come, child, there is plenty to do here today. Give a helping hand, and stop brooding.

AGNETE.

Yes, dear Mother! What do you want me to do?

KAREN.

Move all the plates and tankards out here onto the table, and look after the house as well; meanwhile I am going to the castle to fetch the mead. We already have enough beer and cider, but they must toast the bridal couple with mead.

AGNETE.

Oh, yes!

KAREN.

Now, what do you have to sigh about? Go inside, my child, and be quick about it, then you will be in a better mood.

(Agnete goes into the house.)

**SCENE SEVEN.**

**KAREN** alone.

Poor child! She does not know herself what makes her so moody, and what draws her continually to Elves’ Hill. I hope she never finds out!

(Goes out to the left.)

**SCENE EIGHT.**

**EBBESEN** and **FLEMMING** come in from the left side, but by another way than **KAREN** went out. A **PAGE** follows them.

**EBBESEN.**

My friend! The king has lain down to take a nap, to rest after the trip. If it is as important to you as you say it is to visit Mr. Rosenkrantz in Vemmeltofte, then do not waste a moment, but go there immediately so as to be back before the king wakes up.

FLEMMING.

I shall follow your advice; but in case I am delayed for a few minutes, I count on your making excuses for me. The king will not miss my company, as long as he has you. Today you are the object of all his thoughts, his favors, his fatherly affection....

EBBESEN.

You are right. But still, see that you come back at the right time. I have saddled my fastest horse for you. Then wait on the other side of the bridge. My page will conduct you to the place. Hurry! Be off!

FLEMMING.

I can hardly get time to say two words to you in private. You lucky fellow! Do you realize that you received your bride from our noble king's own hand?

EBBESEN.

How can you ask that? Certainly I recognize his kindness. But hurry! Do not waste time!

FLEMMING.

**ELVERHØJ** (“**ELVES’ HILL**”), by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1828). Translated by Philip E. Larson

And yet what is even such happiness compared to love, to the blessed thought of loving and knowing oneself loved?

**EBBESEN.**

Yes, that is true happiness. Oh, my friend, if you knew...

**FLEMMING.**

What? How greatly you are loved?

**EBBESEN.**

Yes, exactly, how greatly I am loved. If you knew, if you dreamed....

**FLEMMING** (aside).

I must go at once to Høistrup. I must speak with her, I must have a settling of accounts....

**EBBESEN.**

What are you saying?

**FLEMMING.**

That there is not a moment to lose.

**EBBESEN.**

No, that is just what I am saying. Hurry, hurry!

**FLEMMING.**

Farewell!

**EBBESEN.**

Farewell!

(**FLEMMING** goes across the bridge, followed by the **PAGE**.)

**SCENE NINE.**

**EBBESEN** alone.

He finally left. And now to Høistrup!  
There is not a moment to lose.  
I must make an end of this relationship;  
I shall go and get a refusal from Miss Munk,  
And bring it back to the king

As honesty requires.  
He will be angry, I can foresee that;  
But it can't be helped!

(He looks towards KAREN's house and kisses his fingers.)

First a departing kiss  
To you, straw-thatched hut, simple dwelling,  
The goal of my longing, my desire's paradise!...  
The door is opening!... Oh, there she is!

SCENE TEN.

EBBESEN. AGNETE comes out of the house and sets a pile of tin plates on the table.

EBBESEN.

Good morning, Agnete!

AGNETE.

Nice to see you, Mr. Sheriff!

EBBESEN.

So busy so early?

AGNETE.

Yes, sir!  
And it is for your sake.

EBBESEN.

For mine, you say?

AGNETE.

There will be a banquet here today, and they will drink  
Your health. So you can easily see  
That my work is for your sake.

EBBESEN.

Agnete!...

AGNETE.

And there will be dancing here. You can well believe, Mr. Sheriff,  
That I shall dance. When you see me,  
You will think about the elf-girl's dance

In the evening at twilight, and in the morning.

EBBESEN.

But Agnete! Just listen...

AGNETE.

But beware, your lordship,  
When I ride to your wedding,  
That I do not draw a circle around you, and lure  
You into it, and put a spell on you!

EBBESEN.

You cast that spell a long time ago!

AGNETE.

Am I a witch? I cannot cast a spell on you;  
You yourself are an overpowering sorcerer,  
Who cancelled my conjuration,  
And leaped out of the charmed circle.

EBBESEN.

Agnete!  
Just listen to me...

AGNETE.

I don't have time. There is  
So much to do here; as you must be aware,  
I shall serve you on your wedding day.

EBBESEN.

Is your mother there in the house?

AGNETE.

No, she is busy, she has gone out.

EBBESEN.

Is nobody else in the house?

AGNETE.

Nobody at all.

EBBESEN.

(rushes over and embraces her).

My elf-girl! You, I love only you,  
And I believe I want to stay with you.

AGNETE.

(tears herself loose).

Stop, stop, Mr. Sheriff!  
Yes, there are lots of people in there.

EBBESEN.

Are you making a fool of me?

(He runs over and looks into the house and returns.)

You witch,  
You are just making fun of me.

(He runs after her, she runs away.)

AGNETE.

Hush, hush! Remember,

This is not Elves’ Hill.

EBBESEN.

Oh, my Agnete!

Wherever I see you is Elves’ Hill for me.  
When I am near you a blessed dream awakens in me;  
I am intoxicated by you, like the man  
Who has lain his head down on Elves’ Hill,  
And sees the moon over the meadow's mists.

AGNETE.

Oh! Do you want to remind me of that offense?

EBBESEN.

What offense? Have I not approached your  
Innocence modestly and piously, whenever you  
Met me in confidence by Elves’ Hill?  
Have I concealed that the King had decreed  
My union with Miss Munk long before  
I knew you, before you knew me?  
But still I never spoke of love  
To her, nor does she love me.  
As a knight it was not proper that I  
Throw over our engagement, but she,  
As a lady, can do it.

I hoped to make everything right,  
When suddenly I received the news  
(It was only yesterday)  
That the marriage was set for this evening.  
But I am going right now to Høistrup;  
In two hours I shall return here again,  
And I shall bring back a refusal  
As good as an honorable suitor can desire.

AGNETE.

Now you are telling me what I want to hear.

EBBESEN.

I said the same thing this morning  
By Elves’ Hill.

AGNETE.

But when I came back,  
And saw these preparations,  
And saw two knights waiting for you,  
Who I thought were coming to your wedding,  
Then my uneasiness was aroused again.  
I know well enough, despite your promises,  
You cannot marry me, a peasant -girl;  
But I can still love you, my lord,

In silent thoughts, modestly, as it ought to be;  
But to see you as another's bridegroom! No!  
I cannot do that.

EBBESEN.

Do not doubt my word!  
Did not a worthier knight than I,  
The noble Tycho Brahe,  
Marry a simple peasant-girl?  
What I have sworn, I swear again:  
I shall have no rest, no peace, until I  
Have led my elf-girl to the altar.

AGNETE.

Do not call me that!

EBBESEN.

That is what you should be called.

AGNETE.

It only reminds me again of my sin.

EBBESEN.

What sin? What offense?

AGNETE.

That I have concealed  
My love from my mother. I do not know  
What thoughts she has when she sees me  
Walking towards Elves’ Hill. She knows very well  
That many who have seen me yonder in the thicket  
Take me for an elf-girl.  
But she believes completely in the old legends,  
She believes I have converse with the elves.  
Therefore I have deceived her!...  
And if it were true, if these beings  
Truly exist, will they not  
Be angry at the brazen girl who plays  
Frivolously with their secret power?

EBBESEN.

Be calm, my Agnete! For a loving heart  
Nature is magic, and magic is nature.  
Agnete! You are the elf-girl herself:  
Your spirit animates the silent thicket there,  
The quiet hilltop; and when I see the white mists  
Glide vaguely over the meadow,  
Then I believe it is your handmaidens, girl,

Who want to shape themselves into your noble image,  
But sink powerlessly back again.

AGNETE.

I do not understand you; but I feel  
Calm, since you have comforted me.

(They hear music in the distance.)

EBBESEN.

What is that?

AGNETE.

Our guests are coming now.

EBBESEN.

Then I must leave.

AGNETE.

Farewell!

EBBESEN.

Farewell! My horse  
Will carry me to Høistrup as swift as lightning.

AGNETE.

Do not forget the refusal!

EBBESEN.

No, I shall fetch that.  
But tell me, Agnete. Do I dare exchange it  
Later for a kiss? You will not be angry,  
When I request the payment?

AGNETE.

First, my Lord, let us see if you bring it!

(AGNETE runs into the house, EBBESEN walks quickly out on the opposite side.)

SCENE ELEVEN.

PEASANTS come over the bridge and from both sides. They are heard in the distance before they enter.

CHORUS.

1.

Quickly to a gay party,  
Dancing and singing  
We all hurry.  
The peasant is the sheriff's guest,  
The flute's whistle  
Will call us  
To the wedding in the beech grove.

2.

The silent night  
Sinks over valley  
Fields and cottages;  
Yonder from his elf-thicket  
The king will  
Listen quietly  
To the party in the beech grove.

3.

Quickly to the banquet hall  
Young and old  
Walk with delight.  
Here by the sunny crossing  
The sound of happiness  
Will gather us

To the wedding in the beech grove.

(They go into the house.)

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## SECOND ACT.

A salon at Høistrup. On the left side in the foreground is a window which opens onto the garden. On the same side in the background an entrance to a side room.

## SCENE ONE.

BJØRN OLUFSON, alone, stands at the open window and speaks out into the garden.

BJØRN.

I beg your pardon? Hush! Hush! You do not need to talk so loud. The walls have ears.... Now you understand. Yes, Lord God! You must take the opportunity as it comes.... I beg your pardon?... Can I be quiet? Do not ask me that. I am a man who has grown gray in service. I have been chief steward here at Høistrup for 33 years; in that whole time I have had the confidence of everyone: the sainted wife, the lord, the young lady and many other noble lords and ladies. I am full of important secrets, which neither my words nor

expressions have divulged or in any way shall divulge. If I were to tell you everything I know, your nose and mouth would drop off from astonishment. But see if I do.... What?... Am I shouting?... (Looking around.) There is nobody here.... Now, yes, yes, it will not be noticed now.... A letter?... Can it be delivered?... Yes, let me see.... (Looking around again.) You can throw it in through the window; but it must be quick!... Listen, you must tie a stone to it... You don't need to?... Take it easy, do not hit me in the face with it. (He jumps aside, a letter is thrown in through the window, he walks over and picks it up and walks over to the window again.) No signature! Yes, that is discreet, I can manage that. (He puts it in his pocket.) It will be taken care of, and you can count on my discretion. But now get out of here. Out of the way! Someone is coming. (He closes the window.)

SCENE TWO.

BJØRN. ELISABETH.

BJØRN.

Good morning, mistress! Up so early?

ELISABETH.

It's not so early.

BJØRN.

For me and those like me, who have their hands full with the preparations for the wedding, it is certainly not early, but for the bride, for the noble bride, who from dancing and merriment will not close an eye tonight, for her it is early, much too early.

**ELISABETH.**

If I am causing any inconvenience, good Bjørn, then I shall gladly be on my way.

**BJØRN.**

Causing inconvenience? Good Bjørn? Well, I am a good Bjørn (Bjørn = bear), a gentle, domesticated good Bjørn, who has too much breeding to speak discourteously to my noble young mistress.

**ELISABETH.**

I do not consider it a discourtesy. But you are as secretive as the Sybil, and I cannot tell whether my arrival at this moment interrupts you in some plot, perhaps.

**BJØRN.**

Gracious mistress! I am secretive, but it is not my fault if I have been deemed worthy of being entrusted with secrets. I know my duty and the importance of

my post; never will any rose sink down at having gotten me to run in fear ("løbe in fælden"). (?)

**ELISABETH.**

No, certainly not. Actually, to tell you the truth, you are simply an annoying person that one can never learn anything about. These days I see you and my guardian all the time putting your heads together, and talking in riddles about the king's presence at or absence from my wedding. You are afraid that either he will come or he will not come. I cannot be sensible about it while I am infuriated by watching your secretive gestures.

**BJØRN.**

But, gracious mistress! Do not take it amiss, but you are rather hotheaded. I have never dared to make gestures to Mr. Walkendorff, and he has never honored me by making gestures to me. We have talked about the king's coming here, that is true, and we have been anxious at not knowing whether his royal grace will enhance the party with his presence, or whether we dare expect this happiness. That is true, but that is all.

**ELISABETH.**

You are lying, you are deceiving me. Your anxiety betrays a more significant reason than you give. You are trying to hide some important secret from me, but you cannot control your face and your expressions.

**BJØRN.**

God help me! What are you saying, Miss! I cannot control my face, I, who since my earliest youth have committed myself to rule over every wrinkle in it?

**ELISABETH.**

It does not obey your orders.

**BJØRN.**

Mistress! For heaven's sakes! You make me tremble all over! What does my face reveal? What kind of secret would it be?

**ELISABETH.**

That is just what I insist you tell me.

**BJØRN.**

But if I have nothing to say?

**ELISABETH.**

Liar!

BJØRN.

If something were entrusted to me, should I tarnish my honor, which I have earned by silence, by revealing it?

ELISABETH.

You see? You admit it.

BJØRN.

For heaven's sake! No! Stop teasing me!... What would you say if I revealed a secret, if you yourself had told it to me?

ELISABETH.

Be quiet!

BJØRN.

Yes, there we have it. You say "be quiet," and I am quiet, and that is just my merit. (He takes the letter out of his pocket.) What would you say if I delivered this letter to someone other than yourself?

ELISABETH.

Give it to me! Hurry up, in case somebody is coming!

BJØRN.

There we have it. Now you yourself recommend silence to me.

ELISABETH.

There is no signature.

BJØRN.

But you can depend on it, it is for you. I am no more guilty of confusion, than of gossip. (ELISABETH has opened the letter and reads it to herself.) But to get to the point: Mr. Flemming is here; he says he positively must speak with you tête-à-tête, and that nobody must know he is here. He is down in the garden, hiding behind the trees, and he is waiting for your answer.

ELISABETH.

(who in the meanwhile has read the letter).

I know all that, it is in the letter.

**BJØRN.**

Well, then I did not need to say it. But, noble mistress! You say that you cannot be sensible with me? It is I who cannot be sensible with you. Where will all this lead? What kind of unfortunate passion do you harbor for someone other than your proper bridegroom? How can you dare on the very day of the wedding to receive a letter from him, and grant him a rendezvous? Where will it all end?

**ELISABETH.**

I do not know that myself. But I must make a decision today.

**BJØRN.**

Certainly it cannot be postponed any longer.

**ELISABETH.**

That is why I must speak with him.

**BJØRN.**

I shudder to imagine the outcome. If it had not been for coming into possession of one more secret, and in order to serve you, noble mistress, then I should not have taken upon myself so dangerous a mission as to be love's postman between you and your secret lover.

ELISABETH.

But, Bjørn, you will be loyal to me, and help me?

BJØRN.

My gracious mistress must command me. What fidelity requires....

ELISABETH.

I know, I know! Listen, you must keep my guardian away.

BJØRN.

That is not difficult! I shall tell Mr. Walkendorff that I have a secret to discuss with him.

ELISABETH.

Yes, you can certainly say that without lying.

BJØRN.

Or take him down to see the outdoor preparations for the wedding, for example the torches in the great avenue.

**ELISABETH.**

Splendid! But first you must take a message to Flemming from me, and tell him that when my guardian is gone I shall give him a signal from the window.

**BJØRN.**

Very well.

**ELISABETH.**

But... I just want to write him a couple of words, and I shall bring them to you.

**BJØRN.**

Quiet! Here comes Mr. Walkendorff.

**SCENE THREE.**

The preceding. **WALKENDORFF.**

**ELISABETH** (aside to **BJØRN**).

How shall I give you the letter?

**BJØRN** (aside to **ELISABETH**).

Quiet! Don't let him notice anything!

**ELISABETH**.

Just tell me! Hurry!

**BJØRN**.

Careful! Careful!

**WALKENDORFF**.

What is this? What kind of secrets do you two have together? You are hatching some plan or other, which I am not supposed to know about. I have observed for some time...

**BJØRN**.

How can my gracious lord believe...

**WALKENDORFF.**

I know what I believe. You, my dear Bjørn Olufson, are the most secretive person under the sun. You should never come out except at night, walking in felt stockings, and with your finger on your lips, as they depict the god of silence.

**BJØRN.**

Gracious lord! How can you reproach me with the silence for which you have always have praised me? If I had not been silent...

**WALKENDORFF.**

Be quiet!

**BJØRN.**

Now you yourself demand silence of me.

**WALKENDORFF.**

You will be silent with my secrets, but you will not have secrets with my ward.

**ELISABETH.**

**ELVERHØJ** (“**ELVES’ HILL**”), by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1828). Translated by Philip E. Larson

You see, Bjørn, I am right? Now my guardian himself admits that you have secrets with each other.

**BJØRN.**

It is not my fault. I have never admitted it, and I shall never admit it.

**WALKENDORFF.**

Be quiet!

**BJØRN.**

With pleasure.

**ELISABETH.**

It is not necessary, since I am leaving you, dear gentlemen, so you can speak loudly and freely about your secrets.

(She goes.)

**WALKENDORFF.**

Elisabeth! What do you mean?

SCENE FOUR.

BJØRN. WALKENDORFF.

WALKENDORFF.

She is already gone. Bjørn! Bjørn! You have not let her notice anything?

BJØRN.

I, sire? Have I forgotten my 33 years' service?

WALKENDORFF.

She is an impetuous, headstrong girl. It is my desire to get her married today, and then my responsibility is finished!

BJØRN.

Yes, I wish it were finished!

WALKENDORFF.

What did you say?

**BJØRN.**

I have a premonition that it is not going to come off.

**WALKENDORFF.**

Why is that?

**BJØRN.**

I do not know myself. But I dreamed last night that the king came here to attend the wedding, and that he asked why the bride did not wear the jewel which he had given her as her godfather.

**WALKENDORFF.**

Be quiet! You should never mention that subject, even tête-à-tête with me. God be with my noble sainted wife, but she committed a black sin.

**BJØRN.**

Carelessness is not a sin.

**WALKENDORFF.**

But carelessness which has such consequences? I loved her greatly, but I console myself for her death by remembering that now we two are the only ones in on the secret.

**BJØRN.**

In that case my gracious lord also wishes that I were dead and gone.

**WALKENDORFF.**

Certainly not, Bjørn! You have been faithful and devoted to me, but a woman's silence is nothing to depend upon.

**BJØRN.**

But, sire, what do you say then to my dream?

**WALKENDORFF.**

Oh, that! A dream!...

**BJØRN.**

But what if I tell you that it is already beginning to come true?

WALKENDORFF.

What?

BJØRN.

Well, it is a secret, but you shall hear it. The king is in Tryggevæld.

WALKENDORFF.

What did you say!

BJØRN.

The truth, sire!

WALKENDORFF.

But how do you know that?

BJØRN.

It is a secret. It is enough that I know it.

WALKENDORFF.

Damn your secrets!

BJØRN.

He arrived there last night, but I shall confide to you that it is said he will not attend the wedding feast.

WALKENDORFF.

I was sure of it!

BJØRN.

Then why did you become so anxious, sire?

WALKENDORFF.

Because one never knows.... Still... one can know, there is no danger. The king is not coming. He has never been to Stevns, and there is an old legend that he does not dare to come.

BJØRN.

Do you mean that the king is afraid of the elves?

**WALKENDORFF.**

Certainly not! But there is a venerable old legend, which he will not openly defy. He knows and understands that one should not suddenly disturb the common people from their beneficial superstitions. No, I am calm about the situation. The king is not coming.

**BJØRN.**

Well then, I shall be calm also.

**WALKENDORFF.**

He did not come to Elisabeth Munk's baptism either, but sent the sainted Mr. Flemming in his place.

**BJØRN.**

And this time he will send the young Mr. Flemming.

**WALKENDORFF.**

Are you sure of that?

BJØRN.

Fairly sure.

WALKENDORFF.

How do you know that?

BJØRN.

A secret, sire.

WALKENDORFF.

A secret! A secret! I always get that answer. Well, I shall not cross-examine you, one is usually able to depend on you, and the information is excellent, if it is true.

BJØRN.

Positively.

WALKENDORFF.

Well then, the danger is past. So let us be merry, and think only about the celebration! Have you invited all the guests on the list?

**BJØRN.**

(taking a paper out of his pocket).

Everyone is invited. I have put an "X" next to the name of everyone that has permission to come.

**WALKENDORFF.**

(looking at the paper).

Oh, that's fine! There will be plenty of guests, both invited and uninvited. Let me see now, you are arranging everything for the best. I must go into the dancing salon in order to see how everything is arranged, and then I shall go to the forest, where the peasants are having a feast. I must also see if they have supplied themselves generously.

**BJØRN.**

Gracious lord! I flatter myself that nothing is lacking. But you do well to look after it yourself.

**WALKENDORFF.**

In the meanwhile, do not forget what you have to do.

**BJØRN.**

No, you do not need to worry about that.

(WALKENDORFF leaves.)

**SCENE FIVE.**

**BJØRN** alone.

He is gone. If the young lady were here now, then this would be the most convenient time for her to pursue her intention. I do not know how all this will end, but I have a premonition that the whole wedding will end in an uproar, and in that case is it not good to have everything ready for a new one?... Ah, here is the young lady.

**SCENE SIX.**

**BJØRN. ELISABETH.**

**ELISABETH.**

See here, Bjørn, here is the letter. (She hands him the letter.) Hurry now! Away!

**BJØRN.**

I am hurrying, my lady, I am hurrying. You can be sure that your guardian is occupied with all kinds of arrangements for this evening. But just so you will not be taken by surprise by anyone else, let me first reconnoitre the terrain.

**ELISABETH.**

Yes, you do that!

**BJØRN.**

What signal have you arranged with Mr. Flemming?

**ELISABETH.**

I have written that when he hears me sing, he can come in.

**BJØRN.**

Very well, but then I must open the window, since otherwise he cannot hear it.

**ELISABETH.**

I thought of that.

BJØRN.

But do not sing before I come back and have informed you that everything is secure.

ELISABETH.

No, certainly not, but just hurry! You hurry!

BJØRN.

I am hurrying, I am flying!

(Walks slowly out.)

SCENE SEVEN.

ELISABETH alone.

Now I am alone, let me collect myself!  
My head is so confused that I scarcely  
Know where I am.... Still... let's see....  
I have heard it often enough, it is like this:  
The king wants to marry me to Ebbesen;  
But why should the monarch choose for me?  
Does my heart not dare to choose for itself? Ah, no!

Freedom is not compatible with the favor  
Which the king has shown the abandoned child,  
Whose mother died when she was born,  
Whose father soon followed her in death.  
I know, when my father was preparing  
To visit the North Pole for the second time,  
The king reproached him with angry words  
Over the outcome of his first voyage,  
And the loss of the ships and men.  
He answered rashly, one word provoked another,  
The embittered king struck him with his cane.  
There is an ancient legend, that he whom King Christian  
Has touched in anger cannot live;  
My father has confirmed that once again:  
Early in my tender childhood I was alone,  
All I inherited was his famous name.  
That awakened the king's mercy towards the weak,  
He gave me gold, stood godfather to me,  
Entrusted me to Walkendorff at Høistrup  
And to his noble wife, whom I still remember  
With deep reverence. This evening  
He will take the last step in the effort  
Of providing for me.... But will his favor  
Then become coercion? Will my inclination  
Not be asked for its vote, where it matters?

(Pause.)

By now Bjørn must have brought the letter!  
He could have done it ten times over!

(Goes to the window.)

I do not see him  
Anywhere yet.

(Listens.)

I do not hear him either.  
Ah, my patience is at an end!... Well then,  
I shall sing my song, then the time will pass,  
And he cannot hear me out there.

(Sings.)

1.  
Now the leafy-bower is shadowed  
And the day is long  
Where little birds nest  
In the blooming meadow.

2.  
Only the god of love  
Is blind, poor fellow;  
He flutters towards the windowpane.  
They let him in.

(Impatiently.)

Yes, truly, if he flutters towards the window,  
Then I let him in! There is no end to it!  
Bjørn is not coming! How long shall I wait?

(Sings with noticeable impatience.)

1.

A knight rambles among green trees,  
Roses and delightful flowers.  
A thrush sings, he stands so near it,  
It greets midsummer with its chirping.

2.

He listens with pleasure among green trees,  
Roses and delightful flowers,  
He muses and leans silently on his sword,  
While the bird welcomes midsummer.

(She opens the window.)

3.

Now a maiden opens the window towards the trees,  
Roses and delightful flowers.  
She sings like the bird, he stands near her,  
Then his breast feels it is summer.

(Drawing away little-by-little from the window.)

4.

Then his hope sprouts like the green trees,  
Roses and delightful flowers.  
He beholds the beloved, she is so dear to him,  
He greets his hope in midsummer.

SCENE EIGHT.

ELISABETH. FLEMMING.

FLEMMING.

I greet my hope, when I see you.  
But it is not midsummer for my hope.

ELISABETH.

Why not?

FLEMMING.

Can you ask that?  
Elisabeth! What am I to think?  
You know how long I have loved you,  
You know how often you have flattered my hope...  
Excuse my words, but the truth matters here...  
You have given me more than one proof  
Of your love; and now?... Do you know  
That the king has come to Tryggevæld?  
That I shall represent his royal person  
At your wedding? That he has suddenly  
Decided that this evening?... This evening!...

What will you do, tell me, what is going to happen?  
Have you forgotten me, do you no longer love me?  
Is Ebbesen not merely the king's choice,  
But your heart's as well? Even he tells me  
That he loves you, that you love him.  
My God, what shall I believe, what shall I think?  
Oh, speak! Answer! Free me from my fear!

**ELISABETH.**

For heaven's sake! Do not ask so many questions!  
Where shall I start? Where shall I stop?

**FLEMMING.**

I am impetuous, I know that, but I would be  
A wretch, a villain, if I were calm now.  
I have fought with myself, I have dissembled  
With superhuman strength. Neither the king,  
Nor Ebbesen, nor anyone else has suspected  
That I worship you, that I have courted you  
For so long. Since to others I am disguised,  
Then in your house I must speak, I must  
Give my heart air, give rein to my bitter complaint,  
And gain strength for new dissembling.

**ELISABETH.**

You say I have flattered your hope,  
Have given you proofs of my love;  
Why then do you meet me with such violent doubt?

FLEMMING.

Because the time I fear approaches  
With swift steps. In a few hours I shall  
See you as the bride of another! Oh, heavens!  
And he has told me that you love him!

ELISABETH.

But are you more terrified than I myself  
By the news about this wedding,  
Which comes much sooner than I had expected?  
I had hoped that there was enough time,  
And had based my whole hope on time.

FLEMMING.

But you are wrong there; one must act,  
One must act oneself, and not depend on time.  
Why have you not let me step forward  
As your bridegroom before the eyes of the world?

ELISABETH.

That is impossible! What would the king say?

FLEMMING.

Why have you not let me ask  
The monarch about his will, tell him  
Without evasion how the matter stands;  
And beseech his favor for us both?  
Oh, he is good! He has a kindly heart!

ELISABETH.

But he is also firm in his decision;  
Believe me, it is not possible!

FLEMMING (with bitterness).

You know better!

ELISABETH.

My whole plan is to gain time.

FLEMMING.

Oh, what a bad plan! What use is time,  
When one does not take advantage of it?... Elisabeth!  
If time is all the hope you can give me,  
Then my hope has been finished for some time.

ELISABETH.

Have patience...

FLEMMING.

With what? With time,  
Which is almost passed? Oh, if I did not have  
So much faith in your word,  
I could be tempted by the bitter thought  
That Ebbesen is right in what he says;  
You love him... do not be angry.... Understand me....  
I do not mean that you love him exactly,  
But he pleases you; you nearly  
Love him;... and I! Oh heavens!  
I believe you also love me only halfway!  
You are undecided, you do not know what you want,  
And stretch time out.

ELISABETH.

You insult me.

FLEMMING.

I would not do that for all the world.  
Forgive me! You are good, you love me,  
I know that. Oh! If I did not know it,  
It would be all over for me! But you are impetuous,  
Heedless, unpredictable, you would rather tease  
The poor bird which you hold by the wing;  
You know it is stuck fast, and cannot fly.

ELISABETH.

By heaven! I do not believe it, did you come here  
Only to speak discourteously to me?  
If I have as many faults as you say,  
Why do you want to court my hand?

FLEMMING.

Forgive me! I have no control over myself!  
Do not put any weight on what an impetuous lover  
Says in his despair! Let us  
Not waste time with useless complaining,  
But come to some resolution!

ELISABETH.

I have come to mine:  
I shall not hear anything more from your mouth.

FLEMMING.

Are you giving me a refusal?

ELISABETH.

Take it  
Any way you want, but go!

FLEMMING.

Now then! By heaven!  
You will be sorry that you teased me!

SCENE NINE.

The preceding. BJØRN.

BJØRN.

My young lady! Ah! What has been going on here!  
You have sung your song too early.

**ELISABETH.**

Why so?

**BJØRN.**

Why didn't you wait  
Until I had told you that it was time?

**ELISABETH.**

What's the matter?

**FLEMMING.**

What is going on?

**BJØRN.**

That is a secret.

**ELISABETH.**

Old fool!

If it is a secret, then do not mention it.

**BJØRN.**

Yes, I must mention it, it cannot be kept quiet.

**ELISABETH.**

Then speak!

**FLEMMING.**

Yes, speak!

**BJØRN.**

A knight is standing outside,  
And demands to speak with you immediately.

**ELISABETH.**

Who is it?

**BJØRN.**

A secret, mistress!  
He has entrusted his name to me alone,  
He is incognito.

ELISABETH.

I believe secrets  
Rain down on you from heaven.

BJØRN.

And since I never use an umbrella against the rain,  
Then surely I must be drenched.

FLEMMING.

It couldn't be Holger Rosenkrantz  
From Vemmeltofte?

BJØRN.

If I said the name  
Of each and every person that it is not, you could  
Conclude from my manner who it is.

ELISABETH (to FLEMMING).

Why are you afraid to meet him in particular?

FLEMMING.

When I rode away from Tryggevæld, I told  
Ebbesen that I was going to see Rosenkrantz.  
If that is who is coming now,  
Then I must ask him not to  
Betray me to Ebbesen.

ELISABETH.

Mr. Flemming!  
You cannot go out through the door now;  
The stranger must not see you.  
Go into the side-room for the time being.

FLEMMING.

But make my suffering short, I beg you.  
I must hurry back, so that  
The king will not miss me.

ELISABETH.

Yes, just go, go!

(FLEMMING goes into a side room on the left.)

SCENE TEN.

ELISABETH. BJØRN.

ELISABETH.

Now you can speak, Bjørn! Who is the knight?

BJØRN.

Ah, mistress! He who comes most inconveniently  
Of all the knights on earth.

ELISABETH.

Then it must be Death.

BJØRN.

Death, mistress,  
Is not a knight.

**ELISABETH.**

Well, then who is it?

**BJØRN.**

It is Mr. Ebbesen.

**ELISABETH.**

What's that? You say...

**BJØRN.**

Himself.

**ELISABETH.**

Splendid! He comes most conveniently.

**BJØRN.**

How do you mean? I do not understand you.

Conveniently! Just now Mr. Flemming...

ELISABETH.

Relax!  
Go, good Bjørn, and let him enter immediately!  
I await him with impatience.

BJØRN.

Immediately! Immediately!

(Aside, as he leaves.)

There is a secret hidden here.

(He goes.)

SCENE ELEVEN.

ELISABETH alone.

Now I shall show Flemming I can act,  
And that I do not sit idle,  
And expect time to do everything. But as punishment  
For his impetuosity, he shall not know  
The plan I make. Ebbesen is the man!  
He is steady, I shall entrust myself to him;  
The other by his impulsiveness could

Spoil the whole game.... Ah! There he is!

SCENE TWELVE.

ELISABETH. EBBESEN.

EBBESEN.

You are no doubt wondering, my noble young lady,  
Why I approach you so secretly;  
The king does not know of my errand,  
Nor should anyone else know of it.  
I heard terrified that your wedding  
To me, which is scarcely worthy of success,  
Was scheduled to be held already this evening.  
It weighed heavily on my conscience  
That I had not yet asked for your hand.  
Our marriage has been decided by the king;  
But it would be unchivalrous, unmanly of me  
To take advantage of that, when first I ought to  
Find out if your love is so inclined.  
You have never told me that you love me,  
And truly, when I consider it myself,  
Then it seems very reasonable  
That you can make many better choices.  
Therefore I swear to you, as an honest man;  
I should rather expose myself to the king's wrath,  
Than marry you against your will.

ELISABETH.

You speak as befits a knight.  
If your intention is half as good as your speech,  
I am content.

EBBESEN.

How is that, my young lady?  
Do you doubt the sincerity of my words?

ELISABETH.

I have not said that, or even thought it.  
But you seem somewhat reserved;  
And yet, if we are to act jointly,  
Then we should meet half-way.  
Now you are standing still, you do not move,  
But only signal to me. Do you expect  
Me to walk the whole way to you?  
You make the first step, I shall make the next.

EBBESEN.

What do you mean?

ELISABETH.

It appears to me  
You are courting a refusal. If I gave it,  
The thing would be most comfortable for you.  
Then on my responsibility alone, you could say:  
"Miss Munk has given me a refusal; I cannot  
Lead her to the altar by force; Heaven knows,  
How deeply the refusal grieves me!"

EBBESEN.

My noble young lady! Do not misunderstand me!  
That knight on whom you bestow your hand  
Is blissfully fortunate in the highest degree...

ELISABETH.

If he loves me.

EBBESEN.

Oh! He who resists your charm,  
He is made of stone...

ELISABETH.

Ah! You yourself are stone.

EBBESEN.

Elisabeth!

ELISABETH.

Hush, hush! Understand me rightly!  
I mean, you are as immovable  
As stone; you are standing completely still now,  
Instead of approaching me handsomely.  
What you were pleased to say to me  
Was flattery, and there is no time for that.  
My charm, as you have called it,  
Is easy to resist, doubly easy,  
When one already has another love.

EBBESEN.

What? You believe...

ELISABETH.

I shall not inquire  
How well-founded is the story circulating,

That you have conference with the elf-girl.  
I have often laughed at it when I have heard it.  
I do not ask about it, do not want to know about it;  
I do not require any confession,  
And you will not question me either,  
Whether my heart had already made a choice.  
In this we shall both keep silence.  
But there is one thing of which we must speak,  
Which we must be completely clear about!  
Do you dare to assure me that you love me?

EBBESEN.

My lady! I asked you first.

ELISABETH.

I see that one does not get anywhere with you.  
Do you believe I am so foolish  
As to think that every man should sigh for me?  
You are practicing a false gallantry here  
For which there is neither time nor place.  
Well then, I shall sing in your key:  
You love me, I do not doubt it....  
To madness, it cannot be less.  
But if now I had decided not to reciprocate,  
If I gave you a refusal, or made  
The whole wedding go on the rocks....

(Ironically.)

Answer me candidly, would you then despair,  
Shoot, hang, drown yourself, and so forth?

**EBBESSEN** (in the same tone).

This question deserves a straightforward answer:  
No, my young lady, no! It would not take me even a day;  
I believe I should then search for life,  
And see what comfort it could possibly bring.

**ELISABETH.**

Now, the Lord be praised! I had expected that,  
I see you are a reasonable man....  
I believe we understand each other.... So  
Now joking aside! You will meet here  
At the wedding place this evening, taking part  
In all the festivities, as a bridegroom.  
You must dance with me, you must show me  
Great care and attention.  
Now... the matter will be easy for you,  
Who love me so much. But when the time approaches  
For the church to join our hands,  
I shall feel ill, falling in a faint.  
Once the celebration is upset, we gain time.

EBBESEN.

But if you can also...

ELISABETH.

Just be calm!

I shall play my role; follow my plan;  
It is not the first time I have fainted.

EBBESEN.

You are fascinating!

ELISABETH.

Yes, of course!... But silence!  
So nobody notices...

EBBESEN.

You can count on me.

ELISABETH.

Then abide by the agreement. Farewell!

Now hurry away, and do not let anyone see you!

EBBESEN (as he kisses her hand).

Your jest in earnest is most charming.

(ELISABETH leaves.)

SCENE THIRTEEN.

EBBESEN alone.

It is a good plan; now my heart is light.  
This evening the king will leave again.  
He who gains time, soon will win more.

SCENE FOURTEEN.

EBBESEN. FLEMMING enters from the side room.

FLEMMING (aside).

I was listening; they walked away, so I must go after!  
I must talk with her one more time,  
Whatever it costs!

EBBESEN.

What am I seeing? Flemming!

FLEMMING.

What! Albert! Ebbesen? You here?

EBBESEN.

You rode to Rosenkrantz at Vemmeltofte?

FLEMMING.

You stayed home, in the company of the king?

EBBESEN.

Time can seem long to a bridegroom,  
But what are you doing here?

FLEMMING (aside).

He loves her,  
He loves her!

EBBESEN (aside).

Might he be her lover?

(To FLEMMING.)

We must away! It is high time!

FLEMMING.

Away! Away! The soles of my feet are burning! (?)

EBBESEN.

What is wrong with you? What is the matter? Say something!

FLEMMING.

Leave me in peace! I am barely conscious from grief!

EBBESEN.

Be happy! You will dance at my wedding.

(They go out.)

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THIRD ACT.

The meadow in Tryggevæld Township, outside KAREN's house, as in the first act.

SCENE ONE.

The PEASANTS who entered in the first act, are standing with tankards in their hands, and drinking. MOGENS is standing in their midst. KAREN pours for them. AGNETE allows herself sometimes to look among them. It is evening, yet before sunset.

MOGENS (sings).

1.

Now the day wears on so even, so plump,  
Already the moon stands over Stevn's sea cliff.

The beaker gleams,  
Happiness beckons us,

While coolness waves from the trees' garland.

The dew falls  
With lustre of pearls,  
The evening calls

To song and dance.

CHORUS.

The beaker gleams, etc.

2.

Now the girl sits in the elf-thicket,  
And silently watches over the golden treasure,  
The king alone  
Peeps behind a branch,  
He glimpses our merriment, hears our song,  
Listens to the noise  
All by himself,  
Hears from the height  
Our beakers' ring.

CHORUS.

The king alone, etc.

MOGENS.

3.

Soon the moon, no longer pale, will tend  
Its night-light high over beech and oak.  
The stars will glitter

Soon in the darkness,  
When the evening is adorned for the festival.  
Freya will twine  
Her golden hair,  
We shall find the way  
To the wedding-garden.

**CHORUS.**

The stars will glitter, etc.

**MOGENS.**

Then let us now drink a toast to our sheriff!  
Long live him and his bride!

**PEASANTS.**

Hurrah! Long life!

(They clink their tankards.)

**AGNETE** (aside).

Oh, what torment! Now it is wearing on towards evening,  
He is not coming!

MOGENS.

What is wrong with our Agnete!  
Why does she look out on the banquet so dejectedly?

KAREN.

Leave the girl in peace! What does it matter  
To you if she is dejected?

MOGENS.

Well said! I intend nothing bad.  
On such a day everybody should be merry.

(He mixes among the PEASANTS.)

KAREN (to AGNETE).

Control yourself, do not let anybody notice anything.  
Why are you so distressed, child?  
It is early yet, soon the others will leave,  
You can still go to Elves’ Hill.

AGNETE.

No, mother, no! I shall not go there this evening.

KAREN.

Agnete! But how are you feeling?  
I hardly recognize you. Are you going to the wedding,  
Instead of to Elves’ Hill? Well then,  
Let us both accompany the others.

AGNETE.

To the wedding! No! I’d rather go to Elves’ Hill!  
But I shall stay here, in your house, Mother!

SEVERAL.

To dancing! To dancing!

MOGENS.

Let the dancing begin!

KAREN (to AGNETE).

Pull yourself together, child! We’ll talk later.

MOGENS.

But if there is dancing, then Karen must sing.  
Sing, Karen, one of your old songs,  
And let our young people create a roundel.

KAREN.

Very well, but you must sing along.

MOGENS.

I'll be glad to.

SEVERAL.

To dancing! To dancing!

MOGENS.

Let the dancing begin!

(The PEASANTS dance during the following song.)

KAREN.

1.

Deep in the sea, which foams with strong waves  
Against Stevns' white mountain,  
A mermaid hides herself in the depths  
In the fresh, cool, blue world.

KAREN and MOGENS.

But when the pale moon hangs over mirror-clear river,  
She ascends, and softly plays the harp.

KAREN.

Hush! Hush! What a delicious sound!  
Far over the waves sounds the mermaid's song.

BOTH.

Far over the waves sounds the mermaid's song.

KAREN.

The sea-cliff king gazes out from  
His white throne, recalling vanished pleasure.  
"You who enrapture me with the harp's tone,  
Oh, my bride! Come to this breast!"

KAREN and MOGENS.

But she blushes warmly through the clear wave,  
The harp's tone dies, she stammers out her answer:

KAREN.

"Hush! Hush! Hush! I am not your bride!  
The wave is cold, it quenches love."

BOTH.

The wave is cold, it quenches love.

KAREN.

3.  
Sorrowfully he wanders away from the mountain,  
He searches for peace in the elf-thicket,  
Wanders alone there by the spring-world,  
In the blue, moon-clear night.

KAREN and MOGENS.

There he keeps watch silently, and weaves his nets,  
Wrapping so many innocent children in his embrace.

KAREN.

Hush! Hush! Hush! He is certainly near us!  
He has heard everything concealed behind his trees.

BOTH.

He has heard everything concealed behind his trees.

(The dance comes to an end.)

MOGENS.

I am left feeling strange, Karen,  
At these songs about our elf-king.  
Soon it will be evening, then it will get dark,  
And we shall pass close by Elves’ Hill.

KAREN.

Then you aren't afraid, when you stroll  
In such a company?

MOGENS.

It makes me shudder  
Every time I think about the golden treasure  
The elf-girl guards.

KAREN.

Are you crazy?  
Then you do not have the courage to dig it up?

MOGENS.

What? Courage? I shall show you I have courage.  
Hurry up! Fill my tankard! Courage comes later.

KAREN

(as she pours for him).

You are drinking more than you can hold, Mogens!

MOGENS

(after having drunk).

And if I get drunk, what of it?  
It can happen today to the best of men.  
Fill the tankard again, it makes me brave.

(She fills it, he holds it in his hand and drinks from it now and then.)

Tell me, Karen,... you understand it...  
Tell me again, what is it a man will do,  
When he wants to unearth a treasure yonder in Stevns?

KAREN.

I have often told you that.

MOGENS.

Tell me again.

KAREN.

Well, then...

(Aside.)

Perhaps it will frighten him.

(To MOGENS.)

You know the church on Stevns' sea-cliff?

MOGENS.

Yes, Høierup.

KAREN.

A skipper built it  
Who had been in distress, about to be shipwrecked  
On Fælskov's reef; he promised heaven then  
That if his life was spared he would build  
A church on the sea-cliff. He was rescued,  
And built the church far out, near the edge of the cliff.  
Now the waves of the sea wash against its foot,  
And tear great pieces out of the cliff;  
Soon the church will topple down, if every  
Christmas Eve they do not move it inland,  
By as much as a handsbreadth.

MOGENS.

I know that!  
Now continue!

KAREN.

But the churchyard gives way  
Continually before the sea's power.  
The long knuckles of the buried dead

Are exposed to the light on the cliffside,  
And many arms, as pale as mountain chalk,  
Point with withered fingers out over the sea.

MOGENS.

I know that! Continue!

KAREN.

If one goes there  
At midnight, one creeps up onto the cliff,  
But it is steep, and the sea is down below,...  
Mark this well! It can cost your life...

MOGENS.

I know that! Continue!

KAREN.

If then one unearths  
Three knuckles, and brings them down to the place  
Where the treasure is buried; one digs it up,  
And no witchcraft can then conceal it  
From the eye or the hand.

MOGENS.

That is right.  
That is how you told it to me before.

(Aside.)

I have supplied myself with what I shall need.

KAREN.

Why do you stare so wildly?

MOGENS.

Fill my tankard,  
And don't ask me!

KAREN.

The sheriff is coming!

MOGENS.

Then pour! Pour! Now we must really drink.

(KAREN fills the beakers for him and the others.)

**SCENE TWO.**

The preceding. **EBBESEN** and **FLEMMING**, both in festive dress, come from the left side. Two pages follow them.

**EBBESEN.**

Good evening, my friends! Have they  
Taken care of you, as I would have it?  
Have song and dance and clinking tankards delighted you?

**PEASANTS.**

Yes, sire, yes!

**EBBESEN.**

I am pleased.

**AGNETE** (aside).

It is he!  
In handsome wedding clothes! Oh, so he betrayed

Agnete's trust! Now it is all over!

(She runs out.)

**SCENE THREE.**

The preceding, except **AGNETE**.

**EBBESEN.**

You pages! Come here!

(The **PAGES** approach.)

Do not forget  
What I have charged you: Pay no attention  
To these peasants while the king is here.  
I have told you, his grace will have it so.  
He is leaving here before midnight,  
And will not waste time receiving  
The greetings and good wishes of these people.  
You know his will, see to it!

(The **PAGES** bow and step back.)

**KAREN** (brings two tankards).

Mr. Sheriff, you must drink a tankard handsomely  
With our peasants! You too, Mr. Flemming!

FLEMMING.

What? I? No, old woman, save your mead!

KAREN.

Why so? I believe you are still angry.  
You became angry this morning; do not let the sun  
Go down on it.

FLEMMING.

Old woman! Leave me alone!

EBBESEN.

Oh, do not bother about him! He is a little upset;  
It will pass, but he needs to  
Move his legs in the dancing salon.

FLEMMING.

Be quiet! Do not make fun of me.

**EBBESEN.**

Consider, my dear friend,  
You shall appear on our king's behalf,  
You do not resemble him at all with such a face.

(KAREN meanwhile has poured for EBBESEN and the others.)

**MOGENS.**

Long live our sheriff! Long live his bride!

(They empty the tankards.)

**EBBESEN.**

Yes, I shall empty this for my bride.

(He empties the tankard. Aside.)

Where is she? I have been looking for her in vain!...

(To the PEASANTS.)

I thank you, friends!... Is it true!...  
Will you accompany me to Høistrup this evening?

PEASANTS.

Yes, sire, yes!

EBBESEN.

I thank you all!  
I expected it, and therefore I ordered  
My carriage to drive some distance ahead,  
It waits on the other side of the bridge;  
I shall walk there with you on foot;  
Then I shall get in with Flemming, we shall drive  
In haste to the bride's house, and later  
We shall see you again at the celebration.... Now, away!

PEASANTS.

Away! Away!

EBBESEN (aside).

Where is Agnete?  
Oh, if I could only reassure the beloved  
With a friendly word before my departure!

CHORUS of PEASANTS.

1.

Now when the sheriff departs,  
We accompany him to the bride's house.  
There we shall have new celebrations,  
Once more they shall fill our tankards.

2.

We shall know the way by the moon;  
The house itself has a starry radiance;  
The wedding lights and burning lamps  
Beckon so clearly to a nocturnal dance.

3.

Light streams through a distant window,  
Yonder is a proud knight's room.  
Hurrah for the bridegroom! Hurrah for the bride!  
Hurrahs will fill forest and valley!

(During the latter part of the chorus, **EBBESEN** and **FLEMMING** cross the bridge, followed by the **PAGES** and all the **PEASANTS**.)

**SCENE FOUR.**

**MOGENS. KAREN.**

**KAREN.**

Why aren't you going with them? Hurry up;  
Consider, that if you are walking alone,  
The elf-girl can take you by the neck.

MOGENS.

I am going, but fill my tankard once more,  
So I can work up courage for my stroll.

KAREN.

What? Do you want to drink still more?

MOGENS (seizes the tankard).

Fill it! Fill it!

KAREN.

Well!

(She fills it.)

MOGENS.

Soon the night will fall.

(Drinks.)

Hurrah for the elf-girl and for the treasure!

(Walks quickly across the bridge.)

**SCENE FIVE.**

**KAREN** alone.

How wild he is! He has drunk far too much....  
Now I must speak with Agnete.... Poor thing!  
Every day she grows more preoccupied,  
And loses herself in deep dreaming....  
Where did she go?... Here she comes.

**SCENE SIX.**

**KAREN. AGNETE.**

In the meanwhile it has grown darker. In a little while it is evening, but the moon shines brightly.

**AGNETE.**

Mother!  
Has everyone gone?

KAREN.

Yes, they have gone!  
One can still hear their shouting in the distance....

AGNETE.

Oh God! Then my last hope is gone.

KAREN.

What do you mean?

AGNETE.

I love Ebbesen!  
Now I have said it! Come what will!

KAREN.

Agnete! Are you crazy? But...

AGNETE.

Mother!

I have often been about to confess it to you,  
But fear suppressed it.

KAREN.

Are you dreaming?

Do you mean our sheriff, who is marrying  
Miss Munk this evening?

AGNETE.

Spare me, spare me!

I feel my humiliation; but yet...

Even though he has faithlessly betrayed his oath,

I still believe that he loves me.... Believe it?

No, no, I know it!... Even if he said to me:

"I do not love you any more," I would answer boldly:

"You lie, sire! I am still your beloved!

KAREN.

Agnete! Ah, I am trembling! Yet tell me,

When have you talked with the sheriff, and how?

AGNETE.

In the evening at twilight, and in the morning,  
On Elves’ Hill.

KAREN.

On Elves’ Hill! Agnete!  
You terrify me!... Unlucky girl!  
You yourself do not recognize your offense!

AGNETE.

Mother!  
For heaven's sake! What do you mean?

KAREN.

Ah, do not call me  
Mother! I am no longer your mother.

AGNETE.

Is your anger so cruel? Am I not unfortunate  
Enough already? Shall I also be burdened  
With being cursed?

KAREN.

My child!  
Would I curse you? Come, Agnete!  
Come to my heart! It beats only for you.

AGNETE.

(throws herself into her arms).

Let me gather faith at your breast!  
But what did your words mean? You said  
I must no longer call you Mother?

KAREN.

Ah, dear child! I am not your mother.

AGNETE.

How is that?

KAREN.

Unfortunate girl! You must know,  
As a child you were kidnapped by the elves,

Your bridegroom is the elf-king.

AGNETE.

Oh, Mother!

KAREN.

Oh, if only it could still remain hidden from you!  
But now you must know it.

AGNETE.

Oh, tell me!

KAREN.

I had a child who was called Agnete,  
But in early infancy she died.  
One evening I walked away from the little dead one  
Out into the forest, grieving. Suddenly  
By Elves’ Hill I heard a child crying;  
I went over there; I found you lying  
In the grass, picked you up and carried you home,  
Buried the little corpse in silence, concealed  
The matter carefully and gave you out  
To be my Agnete. Child! You are a heathen,

You have not received Christian baptism!  
Therefore the elf-king could steal you.

AGNETE.

Oh, heavens!

KAREN.

You wore a chain around your throat,  
On which was a ring with large diamonds  
That sparkled like stars. This treasure  
Carried the elf-king's symbol;  
Since he is rich in diamonds and jewels.  
He entices the young by the sight of gold,  
And with a precious ring he betrothes himself  
Forever to the easily deceived child.

AGNETE.

Mother! You terrify me!

KAREN.

My cottage  
Was too humble for such a treasure,  
Which thieves could steal, or fire destroy.

I put the ring in a jar, buried it  
In silence at the foot of Elves’ Hill,  
In the same place where I had found you,  
In the same place where an instinct,  
Which you yourself did not understand, so often  
Drew you in the twilight, while everyone  
Who saw you turned aside for fear of the elf-girl.

AGNETE.

No, Mother, no! The instinct which drew me  
Was love. I met Ebbesen there,  
Since the place is frightening, and therefore solitary.

KAREN.

You have committed a double sin, Agnete!  
Since Ebbesen is a bridegroom, you are a bride,  
The elf-king's bride!... Unfortunate!  
And by his hill, where he lurks concealed,  
There you have met your love!... Ah, Agnete!  
Has he not touched you with outstretched sceptre?  
Have you not heard his complaining sigh in the spring,  
His bitterness in the wind? Have the white mists  
Which weave on the meadow never  
Embraced you with a moist and clammy cold?

AGNETE.

No, Mother, no! I have never seen him.

KAREN.

(seizes a little stick, and extends it to AGNETE).

Then go, go immediately to the place where he rules!  
But go alone! Then perhaps he will come.  
Take this stick; the sharp iron tip on it  
Was forged by witchcraft; dig up the treasure,  
It lies under the greensward, by the bank,  
On the right side, quite low down. Invoke him!  
Call him at the foot of the hill and at its top,  
In bush and thicket, by the spring and by the stream;  
And if he comes, give the ring back to him,  
Request your freedom; if he does not take the ring,  
Then throw it to him, turn quickly around,  
Take flight immediately, and do not look back!

AGNETE.

Oh, great God!

KAREN.

What? Do you not have the courage?

AGNETE.

Yes, I have courage for everything in order to be free.

KAREN.

Then go!

AGNETE.

I am going!

(As she goes.)

Now give me strength, o heaven!

KAREN (shouting after her).

Be brave! Be brave! I shall wait for you in the cottage.

(AGNETE goes over the bridge. KAREN goes into her house.)

SCENE SEVEN.

The **KING** enters from the left side, followed by **HENRIK RUD** and a **HUNTER**.

**KING.**

Mr. Henrik Rud! Now you know my will.

**RUD.**

Yes, sire! Your courtiers are following you; they are  
Already on the way: they will be here in a little while.  
A hunt in moonlight is something rare.  
Yet the spoils will scarcely be large;  
Perhaps here and there a badger in the thicket.

**KING.**

Be that as it may! I need a pretext here,  
And a hunting party can serve well for that,  
Even if there were no moon in the sky.  
How quiet everything is! Already Ebbesen has gone  
To Høistrup with Paul Flemming; the peasants  
Are also gone, the time is convenient.

**RUD.**

Now certainly the elf-girl is losing herself in the thicket.

KING.

She is just the one I am looking for. Isn't it so, Henrik?  
Haven't you noticed it: this morning Flemming  
Was happy, but this evening completely dejected,  
And Ebbesen, who was dejected this morning  
Was happy this evening?

RUD.

That cannot be denied.

KING.

As they say, there is something hidden in it. The girl  
By Elves' Hill is certainly part of the game.  
They want to deceive me; I do not trust them.  
But I shall follow the track.

RUD.

Your grace  
Is wont to see with your own eyes, hear  
With your own ears.

KING.

I shall still do that.  
They believe I do not dare cross the bridge?  
Who knows? Perhaps they depend upon that themselves?  
Well then, I shall show them.

RUD.

I hear  
Your hunters.

KING.

Then let us hurry,  
Before they have reached us. Do they know  
That I have gone ahead?

RUD.

Yes, sire!

KING.

Well then, away! I am not Cæsar,  
And these waves are not Rubicon;  
But yet I say: *jacta est alea!*

(Goes quickly over the bridge, followed by RUD and the HUNTERS.)

SCENE EIGHT.

The COURTIERS of the king's retinue come in from the left side, all in hunting dress.

CHORUS.

1.

Glorious, a summer night  
On the way to an elf-thicket,  
Rest by the cool spring!  
Luna's silver band  
Winds around Endymion,  
Spying in bush and in valley.

2.

If you meet a nymph,  
Leave her to herself!  
Hunter, o let her go!  
Remember that Actæon was  
Punished for a bold glance!  
Hunter, o you take care!

3.

Walk on the safe road,

Do not get lost and lose yourself,  
Hunter, in case you are taken!  
But if you have lost our track,  
Listen to our hunter's chorus,  
That will call you back.

(They cross the bridge.)

-----

#### FOURTH ACT.

A meadow in the thicket. A stream flows from a spring, and curves around the foot of the hill. It is a clear moonlit night.

#### SCENE ONE.

MOGENS with a spade in his hand.

So now I have become a treasure-hunter.  
Be brave! This is the critical moment!... I have  
Never before been at this place so late.  
I always walked around it at a distance,  
And very often saw the elf-girl on the hill....  
There she is!... No, it was only the moon,  
Playing upon a bush. Moonlight  
Is no good; I like the dark better,

Real pitch-black gloom,  
In which one cannot distinguish anything. This light  
Confuses the eye with so many images.  
Here that is not possible; but on the other side,  
Where the elf-girl likes to sit,  
Where the treasure is buried.... Oh! I am shaking!  
What if she is sitting there when I arrive,  
And frightens me away from my work?  
Cheer up! Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

(He goes behind the hill.)

**SCENE TWO.**

**AGNETE.**

(comes in with the stick in her hand).

You beings, who hover about these places!  
If your power is more than magic tricks,  
Then spare the unlucky one, who laments  
That she belonged to you from birth!  
You king, who rules this thicket,  
Show yourself to me, but in gentle beams,  
So that my eyes may endure the silver gleams  
As easily as the moon's radiance tonight!

You mist-images, whose dance entertains  
The monarch who lives here in the hill!

Will you regard me as your sister,  
And include me in your graceful chorus?  
Forgive me! Even if I am the cause:  
I have wandered here as elf-girl,  
Have approached your hidden riches,  
Have felt your threatening attraction pass by.  
Here, far from the mobs and the noise,  
I have met my beloved in this silent grove,  
Heard oaths of fidelity from his lying mouth.  
No, I shall not see this place again,  
Which was the graveyard of my young happiness,  
Where now I tread on the withered myrtle,  
Which was planted by a faithless friend!  
And yet... yet it is there the earth conceals  
My birth-ring in its hiding place.  
I must go there!... What is that I see?  
Yonder it sounded like the noise of a spade!  
Is this sound perhaps the elf-king's message?  
Will he imprison me with that ringing iron?  
But if I come, perhaps he will threaten me  
With an outstretched finger, and call me his bride.  
I am confused, let me seek rest!  
My thoughts swarm and my feet are weak.  
By these waves, which rush murmuring  
From the hill out through the dark thicket,  
I shall seek peace for my fear, for my sorrow.  
From the king's deep dwelling in the springs.  
O small waves, will you tell me  
A story from your ruler's castle!

**ELVERHØJ** (“**ELVES’ HILL**”), by Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1828). Translated by Philip E. Larson

(She sits on a tree-stump at the foot of the hill, and falls asleep. Then the following dream, visible to the audience, is presented: The ELF-GIRLS dance in the meadow in the moonlight. They notice AGNETE, and draw the ELF-KING over to her. He moves quite close to her, shows her a sign of love, and extends to her a diamond ring. AGNETE awakens, gets up, and is about to take the ring, when the ELF-KING sinks into the earth, and the ELF-GIRLS disappear.)

AGNETE.

My God! Was that a dream?

(She holds her hands in front of her eyes.)

SCENE THREE.

AGNETE. MOGENS comes in from behind the hill. He has a diamond ring in his hand; he looks at it attentively as he steps forward, so that he comes to stand quite near AGNETE without seeing her.

MOGENS.

A precious ring!  
Truly, a rare treasure!

AGNETE.

(taking her hands from her eyes).

Yet... I saw  
The golden ring so clearly; it sparkled  
With large diamonds.

(She turns and see MOGENS holding the ring in his hand.)

Yes, that's it!

(She reaches out her hand and takes the ring.)

MOGENS.

Ah! It is the elf-girl! Heaven help me!

(He runs away.)

SCENE FOUR.

AGNETE (alone).

Who was he who brought me the ring?  
Why did he run away?

(Contemplates the ring.)

How strange! Just like  
I saw it in the dream!... Now I have it!  
But the king? How shall I find him?  
And I wonder if he will take it back?  
In my dream he was so friendly towards me,  
He bowed to me, gave me the ring,  
As if he betrothed himself to me a second time...  
Someone is coming! Where shall I hide?

**SCENE FIVE.**

AGNETE standing in the foreground to the left. The KING enters in the background, followed by RUD and the HUNTERS.

KING (still in the background).

It must be this place.

RUD.

I should say so!  
Will your grace observe that  
A girl is standing over there, lighted by the moon,  
So fine a creature, so bright, even transparent,  
That whoever saw her could boldly swear  
He has actually seen the elf-girl.

KING.

As true as I am alive!... Stay back, Rud!  
Be careful! Let us not alarm her;  
She could disappear like a mist,  
She looks so evanescent. Stay here,  
I shall leave the path by myself.

(RUD and the HUNTERS remain in the background, the KING steps forward.)

AGNETE.

They are approaching!

(She wants to hide.)

KING.

Good evening, lovely girl,  
Be calm! You have nothing to fear.  
I am a stranger who does not know the way.  
Will you give me directions?

AGNETE.

Yes, sire!  
What are you looking for?

KING.

I am looking for the elf-girl.

AGNETE.

The elf-girl!

KING.

Isn't it true that she rules  
In this hidden place, and shows herself  
In moonlight to the wanderer?

AGNETE.

Oh, sire!

KING.

Why are you so disturbed? Tell me, beautiful child,  
Am I already standing at the goal I am seeking?  
Aren't you yourself the elf-girl?

AGNETE.

Oh, do not mock me, sire!

KING.

Mock you?

By heaven! No, I wish to pay homage to your beauty  
By this question. They have told me  
That the elf-girl often shows herself here,  
And you, you look so charming to me,  
As if you were made of snow and mountain air.

AGNETE.

No, sire, I am only a mortal,  
Not the elf-girl, I would not be that  
For all the gold and diamonds in the world!  
Oh God! I myself walk here with a frightened heart,  
For fear of the elf-girl, who perhaps  
Lies in wait for me unseen.

KING.

Is there  
Another elf-girl here, then?

AGNETE.

So they say.

KING.

What? Then I have not yet found the right one?

AGNETE.

No, it is not I! Not I.

KING.

My child,  
Who are you then, if not the one I am looking for?

AGNETE.

I am a poor peasant girl, sire!  
My mother's name is Karen, her cottage  
Stands by the river in Tryggevæld township.  
I am not lying, sire! If you inquire,  
You will learn that I have told the truth.  
My mother is a cotter's widow, sire,  
But well-known.

KING.

My child! I do not doubt you.

(Aside.)

Ah! It is she of whom Flemming spoke.

(To AGNETE.)

But tell me, child, what are you doing here so late?

Have you made an assignation with your lover?

AGNETE.

My lover, sire! I have no lover!

KING.

Then what has attracted you so late  
To this hidden place? You say yourself  
You walk here with a frightened heart!... Girl,  
What are you looking for here?

AGNETE.

Oh God!

KING.

Speak boldly!

You can entrust your thoughts to me calmly,  
Are you in trouble? Have faith in me,  
Perhaps I can help you to accomplish something.

AGNETE.

Yes, sire! You appear to be good and noble,  
You have a manly bearing, inspiring trust  
In the breast of the abandoned. And yet...  
There is something stern in your look....  
No... not stern... I do not know what to call it,  
But I am almost shy before your glance;  
It gives me confidence, but it also fills me  
With fear... with veneration, I mean,  
With deep respect. See, there is the word!

KING.

In truth, this language is no peasant's.  
My child, where have you learned to speak so well?  
If I awaken fear and trust in you,  
Then forget the first, let the second prevail!  
By heaven! You are already precious to me!  
Speak out, what are you looking for?

AGNETE.

Ah, noble sire...  
But you will laugh at me.

KING.

No, dear child!  
Speak boldly! Tell me everything!

AGNETE.

I am looking for the king.

KING.

As true as I am alive! That answers itself, oddly enough:  
You are looking for the king, and you are standing in front of him.

AGNETE.

What?

KING.

As I say.

AGNETE.

No, sire!

You have broken your promise, you are mocking me!

KING.

I am telling the truth; is that so incredible?

AGNETE.

You are like one of us, of flesh and blood.

KING.

My child! Is not a king of flesh and blood?

AGNETE.

No, sire, no! He is a fleeting mist,  
Who hovers for a whiff in the evening breeze;  
His heart has no blood, his bones have no marrow,  
He has no resemblance to you.

KING.

God's death!  
I call that a pretty conception of a king!

AGNETE.

You are getting angry!

KING.

No! No! Now I have it!  
Do you mean the elf-king?

AGNETE.

Yes, who else?

KING.

Who else?... Can you ask that, my child?  
Is there no other king known to you,  
Than the one your superstition has created?

AGNETE.

You will not lead me to believe, sire,  
That you are King Christian?

KING.

Lead you to believe?

AGNETE.

Since that would be even more incredible.

KING.

And why is that?

AGNETE.

King Christian does not dare come  
To Stevns; the elf-king will not tolerate him.

KING.

My child, your innocence makes me smile.  
Now you can see that the king is in Stevns,

And that your elf-king must tolerate him.  
You can learn from this, that from now on  
The elf-king's authority is at an end,  
And you have nothing more to fear from him.

AGNETE.

No, sire, no! I dare not believe that!  
Since my early childhood I have heard  
That the king does not dare come to Stevns.

KING.

God's death! I am losing my patience.  
You do not recognize here any other king  
Than the one which your imagination has created.  
It is time I deposed him,  
And show you, you fool, who governs.  
You believe in something that is only a figment of the imagination;  
And I, who am standing visibly before your eyes,  
You dare to deny me life and truth?  
Let go of this ignorant thought!  
If something sorrowful weighs on your heart,  
If some desire lies in your bosom,  
Then turn to the king, before whose countenance  
You are placed here! Confide your sorrow to him,  
Express your hope, your fear to him!  
That was always the custom in Denmark;  
I can see the future in spirit: thus it shall be!

AGNETE.

(throws herself down before his feet).

O God's anointed! I recognize you!  
How my eye was blind to your radiance!  
Now I feel it: The fire in the glance,  
Which inspires faith and trust in my bosom,  
While it also bows me in the dust  
Before your feet; even that noble wrath,  
Whose lightning flash blazes in your speech's thunder,  
Everything says to me that you are the monarch!

KING (raising her up).

Stand up, my daughter! Tell your errand  
To him you first named with the name of a king.

AGNETE.

Oh, he is powerless from this hour!  
Before the Skoldung\* sun he and all the mists  
Recede, which suck nourishment from the moon.

(\*The name of the Danish royal family.)

KING.

What do you want with him, then?

AGNETE.

Oh God!...

To give him back this ring.

KING.

Give it to me!

(AGNETE gives him the ring.)

What am I seeing!

My gift as godfather to Elisabeth!

How did you come by this ring?

AGNETE.

My liege! The woman yonder by Tryggevæld

Is not my mother; she found me

Here as an infant, and this ring

Was on my necklace.

KING.

What am I hearing!... Follow me  
To Høistrup! There is no time to waste here.

AGNETE.

To Høistrup! O my liege! No, spare me....

KING.

Why?... Listen, child! You love Ebbesen!...  
Are you silent? Answer truthfully!

AGNETE.

Yes!

KING.

Has he  
Sworn to be true to you?

AGNETE.

Yes!

KING.

Then come, my daughter!  
Now I shall be a guest at Høistrup! Quickly!  
If only we do not come too late!

HUNTERS (back in the forest).

If you meet a nymph,  
Leave her to herself!  
Hunter, o let her go!  
Remember that Actæon was  
Punished for a bold glance!  
Hunter, o take care!

KING.

(as soon as the first two lines are sung).

Ah! The hunters are looking for me... Henrik Rud!

(RUD steps forward.)

Send a hunter down  
To the farmhouse yonder by the bridge; let him  
Bring the old woman, she must accompany me  
To Høistrup at once and without delay.  
I shall wait for her at my carriage.

RUD.

At once, sire!

(The HUNTER leaves.)

KING.

And now, away!

(To AGNETE.)

Give me your hand!

AGNETE.

I am coming.

KING.

What the darkness hides will come to light.

(Walks with AGNETE by the hand, followed by RUD.)

HUNTERS (back in the forest).

Walk on the safe road,  
Do not get lost and lose yourself,  
Hunter, in case you are taken!  
But if you have lost our track,  
Listen to our hunter's chorus,  
That will call you back.

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FIFTH ACT.

An illuminated and festively decorated salon at Høistrup.

SCENE ONE.

WALKENDORFF. ELISABETH. EBBESEN. FLEMMING. KNIGHTS and  
LADIES.

As the curtain goes up, a large magnificent ball is seen in full course. KNIGHTS and LADIES perform different dances. Then some YOUNG GIRLS step forward, and during an appropriate dance, formally present ELISABETH with the bridal wreath. She appears undecided whether to receive it. FLEMMING observes her closely; EBBESEN also has directed his attention towards her. Finally she takes the wreath, though with trembling hands. The YOUNG GIRLS step back. The ball begins again, as the KNIGHTS and LADIES, who were spectators of the YOUNG GIRLS' dance, again take up positions in

new quadrilles. All the principal characters present stand meanwhile in the foreground in front of the dancers. FLEMMING, who has struggled with himself for a long time, steps forward, and takes the wreath out of ELISABETH's hand, which must happen a moment after she has received it. ELISABETH and EBBESEN stand surprised by that. WALKENDORFF appears astonished and annoyed at FLEMMING's audacity. FLEMMING and ELISABETH are seen to implore his forgiveness and protection for their love. WALKENDORFF expresses his fury, that he will not have anything to do with it.

This whole action must be conducted in such a way as if the characters really spoke with each other, so that the audience can imagine that they cannot hear the words on account of the loud dance-music. Little-by-little everything falls into disorder, the quadrilles are interrupted, the guests run amongst each other, all give signs of their confusion. Suddenly the HUNTERS' chorus from the third and fourth acts is heard, not singing, merely performing on the hunting horn outside. Everything grows quiet in the salon; they listen with tense expectation.

## SCENE TWO.

The preceding. BJØRN enters quickly.

BJØRN (to WALKENDORFF).

O sire! I have important news to report:

The king is here.

SEVERAL.

The king!

OTHERS.

The king!

OTHERS.

The king!

WALKENDORFF (aside).

May heaven have mercy on my sins!

(Rushes towards the exit to receive the KING. Everyone flocks around him.)

SCENE THREE.

The preceding. The KING. RUD. FOLLOWERS.

KING.

Mr. Walkendorff! I salute you! I come  
Unexpectedly, I assume, but I beg you,

Do not let my arrival disturb your celebration!

WALKENDORFF (very embarrassed).

Disturb!... Your majesty! This favor,  
So great, though it is unexpected, still must  
Infinitely enhance the celebration's joy,  
If it were not already disturbed.

KING.

What do you mean?

WALKENDORFF (pointing to ELISABETH).

She will not accept him,  
She has another.

KING.

Walkendorff! You are joking.

WALKENDORFF.

No, your grace! I assure you I am now  
In no mood to joke.

ELISABETH and FLEMMING.

(kneeling before the king).

Hear us, noble King...

KING.

What do I see? You, Mr. Flemming! Is it you  
Who have filled her head with fancies?  
You are supposed to appear to her on my behalf,  
As your sainted father represented me of old  
At the child's cradle. Know, my young gentleman,  
You represent the king most unworthily,  
And resemble your father not at all.  
Stand up, ungrateful one! Away with you!  
I shall have nothing further to do with you.  
You have both deceived my trust,  
You have concealed your love from me,  
Instead of confessing it at the right time.

(ELISABETH and FLEMMING stand up.)

Mr. Ebbesen! You stand so silent in the corner.  
Yet this sight cannot be welcome to you.  
Come here! As sure as I am the king, I promise,  
You shall receive compensation for all the injustice  
Which you received here.

EBBESEN.

Be lenient, your grace!  
I require no compensation. If you would favor me,  
Grant me a request: bestow on those two  
The favor of which you just now deprived them,  
And let them go to the altar. I swear:  
I should not, cannot marry Miss Munk.

KING.

I have not asked for your advice, Mr. Sheriff!  
What kind of words were those which escaped you?  
You do not require compensation? Is it possible?  
Perhaps you yourself have a part in their alliance?  
Perhaps you have already given someone else  
A promise of fidelity?

(EBBESEN looks down embarrassed.)

I shall show you  
The meaning of things!... You have sworn  
Not to marry Elisabeth? Well then,  
I believe my oath is just as good as yours:  
I swear by my royal word:  
You will lead Elisabeth to the altar,  
The same person I stood godfather to, and bestowed  
A rare diamond on as a cradle gift....

Elisabeth! Take the glove off your hand,  
Display the ring.

WALKENDORFF (aside to BJØRN).

Ah! I am perishing with terror!

ELISABETH.

Your majesty! I do not understand you.  
Do I have a rare diamond that you bestowed on me?

KING.

Can you ask that?.... Mr. Walkendorff,  
On a day when the bride is so festively adorned,  
Why is she not wearing the King's gift?  
Go, fetch it immediately.

WALKENDORFF.

Ah! Your grace....

KING.

Well?

What is the matter?

WALKENDORFF.

The ring... is gone.

KING.

How is that?

WALKENDORFF.

Sire! The fault is mine.  
I was abroad, my sainted wife  
Carelessly let the child go with the ring  
On a chain around her throat: it was stolen.

KING.

How easy to cast the blame on your wife,  
When she is dead, and cannot defend herself!

WALKENDORFF.

I swear, your grace....

KING.

How do you know  
It was stolen? Who was the culprit?

WALKENDORFF.

A miserable hunter was suspected, noble sire!

KING.

What? Suspected? How do you know that?

WALKENDORFF.

They saw him  
Sneak it secretly out of the castle.  
At Tryggevælde he was later followed  
By hunters; they seized him there,  
But he had nothing that gave evidence against him.  
Presumably he had thrown the ring away  
From fear of his pursuers, had later wandered  
To the place again, found it, and sold it.

KING.

But wasn't the child stolen with it?

WALKENDORFF.

What? No, Elisabeth is standing here.

BJØRN (aside).

Now it pinches!

KING.

That seems to me incredible.  
They have told me that the chain was made of steel,  
And was fastened firmly to the child's throat,  
That it was not easy to get it loose.

WALKENDORFF.

Ah! How do you know that!

KING.

(gives a sign to his FOLLOWERS. To WALKENDORFF).

Can you prove

That this girl here is Miss Munk?  
Assurances are not enough. I maintain:  
The one who has the ring is Elisabeth.

**SCENE FOUR.**

The preceding. **AGNETE** enters fearfully, followed by **KAREN**.

**EBBESEN.**

Agnete! What am I seeing!

**KING** (to **AGNETE**).

Come, my child!  
Stretch out your hand! See, here is the diamond!  
This is Elisabeth, Munk's daughter!

**WALKENDORFF.**

Mercy!  
I concealed it out of fear, my lord!  
I have not spared time, nor labor, nor diligence,  
To trace the vanished child,  
But everything was in vain.

KING.

Who is the girl  
Who is given out to be Miss Munk!

WALKENDORFF.

My niece, sire! I came home  
From abroad with her, as a ward,  
My brother left her to me at his death,  
When he gave up the ghost in Strasborg. The girl  
Was newly left motherless, she was  
About the same age as the lost child,  
And called Elisabeth, like her.

KING.

Ah! You see,  
How the work of darkness seeks the light?  
I ought to punish you, punish you all,  
But I shall let mercy pass for justice....  
Now, Ebbesen! Which of us swore the truth?  
Will you still not marry Miss Munk?

EBBESEN.

Forgive me, my liege!

KING (unites EBBESEN and AGNETE).

Be happy!

(He unites FLEMMING and ELISABETH.)

My wish applies also to Mr. Flemming  
And Miss Walkendorff.

ALL.

Long live the king!

CHORUS.

Protect our king, great God!  
Protect his family!  
Let the noble and exalted stock of Skjoldung  
Always grow fresh shoots!  
Protect our king, great God!  
Protect his family!  
With flowers in his silver hair,  
And strengthened year by year,  
He bears the weight of his crown,  
As easily as in his youth's Spring!

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