



Swede Poems

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Main text set in Kepler 11 point.

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from

Stranger Kin

Goodman Holmgöt had it raised
over Odendisa his wife
none better than whom will come
to see to the farm Hassmyra
Rod-Bälle did the carving
Odendisa was a good
sister to Sigmund too

we walk on the crunch gravel out
to the cemetery to read
the unknown names on cross or
monument the question over-
taking us what would we be
if church and tombyard did not keep
high random watch on the land
all our going and coming

we stand in front of the small
wood church of Järnboås that sits
high unadorned with a hint
of the majestic the lovely
in its very humbleness

neat meager landscape that spreads
before our eyes a worn table-
cloth and invites us to its
little lakes a wan-green edge of
meadow to one side a grove
to the other maybe a few
dark pine trees in the distance

roomy houses are to be
found out along the railroad track
where the immigrant may have
free accommodation while he
gets his own home in order
these regions offer to him a
most healthy climate and rich
soil with excellent water not
to mention inexpensive
land free schools good wages and good
market places or access
to superb hunting and fishing

nature is a shy wood nymph
untalkative and tactful who
does not go out in public
where she would not be treated well

you wanted to get away to the West
where were no kings or carping clergymen
where you could sleep eat meat and potatoes
and shine your boots with grease for nothing

this meat is bad, we can't eat it
there isn't any other
we have to complain
do that
all passengers have to go below, a storm's coming
I can't, I'm so sick I can't even stand up
we're going to die down here, it's so stuffy
oh there's no danger
now the storm's gone
what's that land we see out there
Newfoundland
all passengers have to break open their mattresses and throw
the haulm in the water
what are those white boats
pilot boats
now we can go ashore
does this place have a name
it's Castle Garden

you do not come home to a
land that you have never seen but
arrive at a home to come
they who were living here have
not turned out to greet or kill you
a waiting army prairie fort
tells why and a garrison
hutment on river will direct
you to the not many men
of Västmanland who foreran you
to work dark richer tilth than
anyone could have dreamt to own

the hut stood high at neck of an
oxbow that you would have to
fence on but one side to keep them
in that had wanton run from
you during herdboy days would
log it to meadow sneck them all
in not have to worry at
flood river that it would reach the
hut you would let them out and
pen them here if you had to

gotten you a lank woman
Maria Cara taller than
most men not you with a flick
of the wild in eye and mind the
spartle spraddle of her on
the hay or lamplit tick how she
would laugh an invitation
not quit long-legged to withe
and sneck you in until she
had wrung a mere man you to death

oxbow lengthened into
the dark purgatorial east
where no hidden one would get
seen or caught but had an open
ravine on which grew

vide

vill-oh they said

or the willow

many the sapling you took
to lighten yard of the death hut but
river woods the caws of it
anywhat might happen in them

Maria would laugh at night
but not to mate you it would be
when to wake whole house awrong
she would take to the rocker

styv

all day not cook wash tend the
children see to her own body
or meet your eye would smile at
nothing and the woman work had
to get done nor Johannes
nor you had time one afternoon
of cold the mock suns out you
walked to Julin two womanhood
daughters he had and begged some
help were lucky that good Kajsa
was willing to come who would
chirk the dimmened home you with it

who had timed the task did not
pretend to carry on with it
though everyone knew to
hang the winter bedding out when
days got warm no she stared you
in the eye reclined halfway on
tatty tick was wearing no
anywhat under dress and made
you take push into more live
woman than you would have dreamt to
river woods the caws of it
you heard child laughter way away

a change in the world did not
make it any foreigner the
sun's hard blow on your head a
new pale road advancing or the
men that wrapped you in iron
and had to act as if they did
not know you none of it meant
revelation oh but what does

 a night in jail on the way
mean have they committed him too
sorrow was only a joke
oh well who wept is wept for now

you were hewing in the late
autumn with dead leaf cold no snow
on the ground and could make out
through naked wicks of tree a smoke
the chimney at Julin you
had loved that one in haymaking
not since but what grew within
her you would have to love as blood

dark-eyed Jensina a true
beauty had more than milk enough
an Edenström had gotten
the child on her not yet decided
if or what to do they said
but you would not look at this one
either and knew when Julin
sleigh turned south along the river

whichever called you have to
look now the sun will hit in
a minute not let you make out
the right direction another

you have put seed in the dark
of earth that will want to return
to day you too will go from
night to noon everyone will

he might have grown to be your
match a man to steady the plow
one-handed had the knack of
numbers too might have managed what
you and his brethren only
worked have made to richen your time
of age this very Johan
whom you hack earth to bury now

if one of the women you
could smell were on your tick tonight
what needed grass widower
to do you would to have a taste
of her the sweet the sweaty
oh if the wild one had not had
to go away or the mild
one you would not be in to town

will morrow to the west a
time of your off- and afterspring
land without limit in the
Johnson name and you can see it
the old famine country seems
like a bad night dream to you now
these many miles into day
if only you were not alone

one of them you brought into
day is gibing you now
riding the humpty
gubbe
to earth and night where it started

who thwarted you has coyed at
you too a child turning woman
at threat of hit unafraid
has taken the bottle and drunk

let him be that mind not know
the worse the way she took to tweak
you to her will you did him right
want him respect the man you were

hummed words were all she said to you
none after that morning on Big
Stone Lake would have had you come and
see her one only time at least

the dark wild beauty you met
in heyday of Eau Claire had a
family but you do not
know where could not write anyway

make it to see the willows
leaf you will not have to worry
the sun will burn whatever
has thriven in the dark of you

Maria is in the room
to goad the living and you would
have her bide with you instead
watch willow leaf to sallow light

you would have had them keep the
child at home get in a nanny
had you stayed yet it only
happened because you could not do

even foreseeing it would
you have stuck to the dark country
with Holmgöt Odendisa
immemorialized famine
no you would have sailed any-
way taken a train ride with chance
to the west railhead then have
walked on to make a place in light

Note:

NOTE: These are selections from the narrative poem 'Stranger Kin'. Some, in a way, might be considered "found poems." 'Goodman Holmgöt' is a runestone inscription. 'We walk,' 'neat meager,' and 'this meat' come from nineteenth-century historical writings; 'you wanted' is from an emigrant ballad of the same time. 'Roomy houses' appears on a broadsheet for prospective emigrants. The runestone men probably intended their work as poetry. The rest of these were "found" in later Swedish and translated; only the ballad stanza, originally in or as a poem. 'You do not' et seq. are the musings of an immigrant man but for 'change of,' his mad wife's.

styv: stiff

gubbe: old man

R.N.