



POET DAN TURÈLL (ABOVE L.) WITH WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS,  
COPENHAGEN, 1983. PHOTO BY GORM VALENTIN.

## Thomas E. Kennedy Translates Dan Turèll

In March 2016, Thomas E. Kennedy received the prestigious Dan Turèll Medal, from the Turèll Society of Denmark, for, as the Society states, “the tireless efforts of the American-born Danish-resident, writer and translator Thomas E. Kennedy, to promote Dan Turèll (and numerous other Danish poets and writers) in the English-speaking world.” *New Letters* is proud to have been the first American publisher of Turèll’s poems, in our winter 2009 issue, and we are delighted to include in this issue the first English version of Turèll’s memoir “Vangede Pictures.”

Dan Turèll (1948–1993) has become among the most beloved poets in modern Denmark, for the vibrancy of his verse and his devotion to the people of Copenhagen. In the *New Letters* 2009 issue, vol. 75 nos. 2&3, one can find extensive details of Turèll’s life and three of his poems, including the brilliant “A Tribute to Everyday.”

—R.S.

# Vangede Pictures

DAN TURÈLL

Vangede is a section of Gentofte, in Greater Copenhagen. Vangede was the place in Gentofte where the dump and the insane asylum and homeless shelters were located, where all the two-room apartments in the municipality were gathered, wall to wall, and where the new middle-class row houses began tentatively to sprout.

Vangede was a rhubarb neighborhood—a place where there were alkies, fights, vending machine burglaries, motorcycle gangs and unruly Saturday nights, a bar that had to shut down temporarily and a disproportionate amount of the crime in Gentofte.

Vangede was a place whose inhabitants had come from the city, from Copenhagen, whose inhabitants had moved from the north side (Nørrebro) and the west side (Vesterbro) and continued to be northsiders and westsiders and never became nice, Gentofte citizens.

Vangede was Gentofte's "wild west side." Vangede was Gentofte's Harlem—Gentofte's only working class neighborhood, the municipality's worst tax district and the only voting district in the municipality where communists won votes. The parents of Vangede have been heard to tell their kids, "For the sake of God, don't say you're from

Vangede! Say you're from Gentofte!"

Vangede was the shadow between Gentofte and the beginning of suburban Copenhagen. Vangede Street runs from Lyngbyvej Motorway to Søborg Main Street. Vangede is the area between these streets.

The greengrocer in Vangede had a shop near the square on Bygaden [the city street], midway between the butcher and the baker, and he pulled a dirty trick. He sold the business, which was going well, a good, ordinary greengrocer, which everyone in the quarter shopped at (Where the hell else would you buy greens or potatoes? This was ten years before supermarkets—Irma or Hami—came to Vangede.) . . . He sold his business to a man named Hansen and moved over to the other side of the street and bought what used to be a little allotment garden there and opened a new greengrocer. He knew all the people around there so he brought the customers with him across the street, except for some who thought what he pulled was too dirty and who therefore bought from Hansen.

The tobacco shop in Vangede was owned by a man named Børge, and he was a big, fat ruddy-faced man who was always ready for a couple with the guys right from six in the morning when he trudged, heavy and coughing, to the shop to read the morning papers, by turns spit and swore and chewed his cheroot and talked about how often his automatic vending machines were broken into and destroyed and asked whoever was in the vicinity whether he knew who it was, which you sometimes knew and sometimes didn't, but naturally never told. Later he sold his business to a man named Skjold Burne and withdrew, and shop assistants in suits began to man the counter (shop assistants in suits in Børge's shop!), and one of them died of cancer, and that was *that* winter's joke in Vangede. . . .

The baker in Vangede had a specialty, and it was called student-bread—you know that stuff you just crush together, old bread and remains and cakes from last month, plus the things you sweep up off the floor and then put a thick layer of frosting on it and sell it for ten øre—a couple of pennies—and it fills up your belly and is popular with the kids.

The baker in Vangede had student-bread as his specialty, and he messed it all together any old way. The baker's student-bread was Vangede's surprise bag and wheel of fortune—you could always find something or other special in there; there was always one or another foreign body in that pasty dough: a matchstick or a rubber band, a butt of a smoke, the hair from the baker's head, when it began to fall out (but that stopped when he was finally utterly bald), or—as it once happened for me—a 25-øre coin—a 25-øre coin!—that you were about to crack your teeth on, but naturally a good business deal, as student-bread cost only 10 øre, like about two cents.

The baker in Vangede baked every morning from 5 a.m. in the kitchen that looked out to the courtyard. He stood there with the rolling pin and rolled the dough with a cigar in his gob. The courtyard was pretty breezy, and dirt and smudge from the yard blew into the open window, but what the hell? Otherwise he'd have to stand in the baking heat.

And the baker in Vangede was completely cool-headed, and one time when my mother nearly snapped a bread knife on a French bread he sold her, and it turned out that a half broom handle was in the French bread, and when she went over with the bread and the broom handle, he just said, "Oh, thanks a lot—it was damned delightful you found it and brought it here, Mrs.—you don't have any idea how I've missed that flower stick. . . ." And my mother didn't even get another bread.

Vangede's ice cream man was called Villy, and he had his little wood hut right midway between the dirty-trick

greengrocer's new little business and Børge's tobacco shop—a little stroke of an artist's brush on Bygaden, twenty meters from the church and the post office.

Vangede's ice cream man couldn't be bothered to make change so people could buy cigarettes from Børge's vending machines alongside the ice cream shop—"Not when I don't know you, pal." Not when they were just stragglers on the way up to the local movie house named Villabyernes-Town House Cities Theater—not if it was someone whose children bought their ice cream sticks and candy snuff and salt-licorice sticks from an ice cream man in another neighborhood.

And Villy knew everybody in "his" neighborhood, and knew how families were made up. And Villy actually lived "privately" in Gladsaxe, although it was hard to imagine that he had anything "private"—he who sat there every day in his wooden shed with coffee in a thermos bottle and the day's newspapers from early mid-morning to late evening and saw everybody go past on Vangede Bygade and spoke with everyone who walked by and wanted a box of licorice pastilles or an ice cream or only wanted change for a 10-pack of Cecil smokes (if it was someone he knew) or simply wanted to chat a little with Villy. For Villy was always up to a little chat to pass the time, and many of Vangede's political discussions took place under the awning of Villy's ice cream hut—"Villy's Place"—and often the voters got excited during a heavy debate about "whether the social democrats had turned conservative" or "what in the hell had happened in China."

With that and the newspapers Villy passed most of his day, just until he carefully at midnight swept up the ice cream wrappers and cellophane bags, and with a broom and dust pan swept the square and the sidewalk in front of the ice cream hut and locked the hut and bicycled home to Gladsaxe.

Villy was in his ice cream shop twelve-fourteen-sixteen

hours a day (a little more in summer than in winter) and chatted with people and sold chocolate bars and licorice and kept sometimes two or three conversations going at once. Villy was red and didn't hide that fact, and he read newspapers the whole day and always knew everything that happened, both big and small, "home here" as "in other countries," so you never asked him in vain about something he had maybe heard something about—Villy always knew everything about it. When Villy discussed, and he did that incessantly, he spoke and thought of himself as "a little man"—that expression he always returned to every third sentence. Villy and he or them he spoke with were "the little man," and all the little men had to stand together, and that was most important of all.

The guy who had the hut before Villy, he was called Christian and was an old boxer. And he won the lottery, and then he closed the shop.

Just outside the ice cream shop was the most central bus stop for Vangede's only bus—the bus that runs from Søborg to Klampenborg and through the whole of Vangede on the way, the bus that you inevitably have to take no matter where you have to go from Vangede, the bus you inevitably come the last part of your way *to* Vangede with, no matter where you started from. No matter whether you have to go "into the City" or maybe rather "out to the City" or you have to travel to a foreign country for a while or you just have to go to the amusement park at Bakken—no matter where you have to go, it was *that* bus you had to take.

And the bus was called Stephansen and was always nicknamed Step-Hansen, and the stop was just outside Villy's ice cream hut, so he and all them that always hung around there could follow who came and went from Vangede—who had been out on Friday, who came home late on Saturday, who visited a family out of the neighborhood on Sunday with flowers and gifts and children, and who was with the

special late-night bus that always was stuffed with singing and shouting people who'd been to Bakken and were snot-slinging soused.

The bus ticket for Step-Hansen you bought at the dry cleaner's in Vangede and during the dry cleaner's summer vacation at the Vangede shoemaker known as Schou.

The shoemaker in Vangede was a low-legged, sinewy, incredibly bony and completely bald man who no doubt had once been a seaman and who looked Slavic with his dark complexion and his tight jowls. He had his little shop in a semi-basement just across from Villy's ice cream hut, and he had those two small semi-basement rooms, three steps down from the sidewalk: an entry room with a counter and cash register and new shoes and a back room for where he repaired shoes and such.

He was usually in the backroom when you came in, and a bell on the door rang, and he came out a little after that—always came a *little* begrudgingly and reproachfully with a wounded gaze as though he knew full well that you were there on personally spiteful grounds. . . .

The shoemaker in Vangede was completely on his own trip. When you had to go and collect some shoes he had repaired the day he said they would be ready, they were never done or either he couldn't find them or couldn't find one of them. Then you got a new pick-up day, and everybody knew this in advance—but what the hell, you came by anyway—right?—and you could as well stick your nose in. That was just his manner, and if you got sour about it, he got insulted and then you could just take your shoes and go.

And when you came down again next time, it could also happen that the shoes *still* were not done, but he found them and patched them together right then and there, on the counter in the entry room, with shoe nails between his teeth, and mumbled, "Yeah yeah—two and a half," with an unchanging poker face—and delivered a biting remark like,

"Tell me—what do you *use* those shoes for anyway? Not just to *walk* in—then they wouldn't look like that . . ." Or "That *could* have been a nice shoe, couldn't it?"

And *if* the shoes were ready when you came the second time, then he delivered a performance of top quality. He folded his arms across his chest and looked sharply at you and *through* you with a hard, concentrated gaze (and with the cheroot in the corner of his mouth motionless) and said, without moving his body or his eyes: "I have to tell you straight out, sir . . ." (He said "sir" to everyone he had a hen to pluck with, even to children—his own distant, half-reproachful, completely democratic "sir," as though the person he spoke to simply wasn't worthy of being called anything more intimate—"I have to tell you, sir, straight out . . . Listen here: those shoes have been *abused* . . . You cannot permit yourself, sir, to treat your shoes that way. I've never seen such abuse of shoes. You don't *deserve* a proper shoe at all, and I *shouldn't* have repaired them, just so you know it, sir. As a self-respecting craftsman, I should not have even touched that sort of mess . . . Shoes should be *polished* . . . Oh, you don't take care of your shoes, sir. You can't claim that to *me*. You know what you should do, sir? You should be ashamed of yourself, sir. Shoes cannot be treated like that . . . *You* should be treated like that, sir. *You* should, sir," he said.

Suddenly he turned to one of the shelves and snatched your shoes with an expression of utter disgust and held them in his hands as though they were dog turds or some other undelicious things, a thing he would not touch with a pair of fire tongs, and yet at the same time as though they were the final evidence in the nerve-racking last scene in the court room in a Perry Mason film on TV, the final proof that Paul Drake came running up with through the rows of spectators to the judge's bench—and looked at the shoes, until after a moment when it had finally sunk in, as though they were a defenseless animal—small young birds with

broken wings, small young birds that were abused by an evil and gruesome world, but which therefore so much more had a need for care and loving tenderness. . . .

And at that moment, you were *very* ashamed and tried feverishly to be allowed to pay, to get *away* and meditate in solitude about the sadistic shoe abuse and the possibility of beginning a new life. Oh, you wanted to get away. You wanted to get away immediately. And he knew that and looked sharply at you and said something like: "This has to stop. Otherwise I won't repair them anymore, sir. Now, you have to really take more care of your shoes, sir!"—And you promised it and had decided firmly to stick to your promise, and then you could meet his eyes again and pay, and moreover buy a shoe brush and a can of shoe polish—and leave with your shoes, go home and place the shoes *carefully* in the closet until the next day when your promise was forgotten.

. . . But when he didn't give you a dressing-down, he was completely quiet, and sometimes when you came by and there was a *Back in a Minute* sign in the window, he sat and drank a beer on the square with the butcher and tobacconist and greengrocer, and when you passed them, it was never the shoemaker who said anything.

The previous shoemaker in Vangede, him who was there before *him*, he was also a strange guy and said very little, but he was fond of his wife. My mother had seen them together, and he was *very* fond of her, she said. And he shot himself a couple of days after she "had been unfaithful to him" with somebody or other, or maybe, moreover, "a lot"—the wives on Vangede Bygade said that, anyway. He went and wept for a couple of days—you could see it; he always had wet eyes: He sat all day in his shop and wept, and his eyes were still wet when he came out to the counter. He shot himself in the afternoon a couple of days after he'd heard about his wife's unfaithfulness—he shot himself behind the counter

with an old hunting rifle. The bang could be heard over Bygaden. The blood sprayed out over the counter and out over his bag lunch that lay there and wasn't paid for when he shot himself out of sorrow for his wife's unfaithfulness.

And the butcher had sold out when the book printer came by a couple of hours later and heard the news and wanted something to eat. So the butcher fetched the shoemaker's bag lunch again and sold it to the book printer for half price, for "what the devil did a pair of blood stains mean."

The book printer in Vangede, him that bought the shoemaker's bag lunch, he didn't work at all as a book printer, because what need did Vangede have for a book printer? But he had a basement room there in the building where he lived, and in his basement, he bound books on a little machine, and the books he bound were always the school's because they had all the books that had to be bound in Vangede. In the summer when school books had to be repaired, then he had a Vangede wife or two to help, or a pensioner who needed a little to do, or maybe "a bright schoolboy," and the talk went like that, and the door to the cellar stood open so anyone could go past and see whether they did anything (so went the talk and the door to the basement stood open so anyone could go past and see if they *did* anything).

The book printer in Vangede had Vangede's only antique automobile, an impressive old Mercedes that he polished every Sunday and washed and dried and babied and very, very rarely drove because it couldn't take being driven so much. And the book printer in Vangede was one of the quarter's most zealous debaters, and when he wasn't in his basement, then you saw him always stand with his arms up and wildly gesticulating hands on one of Vangede's street corners, explaining something or other to someone or other, his opinion on something or other that had happened—the (as he said) "informed opinion" about it, "the meaning behind it . . ."

The man at the dairy in Vangede was called Tage, a ruddy man with blinking eyes. He had had his dairy on Bygaden as long as anybody could remember, and still he drove out every morning himself with his milk when he was in his late sixties, so you could often see him in full swing, jovially rounding a corner on his Long John delivery bicycle with the clanking bottles in their cases at six in the morning when you came home after a night in the city.

The dairyman in Vangede had a damn good sense of humor and rattled off jokes at an enormous tempo and spoke to one and all and was always talkative. The dairy man in Vangede knew it, and was often the first to know it, when one of the families was on its butt, when the father or the mother lost their job, or when something special had happened at home. The dairy man knew who of his customers drank too much and who of them he could count on, and the dairy man in Vangede was very calm about credit if he knew you were from a Vangede family, if he knew your parents or friends or in short knew "who you were . . ."

The dairyman in Vangede was near-sighted and couldn't read what was written on the packages or the bills unless he stuck them right before his eyes. He was almost blind, twice operated for cataracts, and that was just one thing he could entertain you about over the counter, while he noted prices on a long roll of paper with a for all others illegible scrawl and simultaneously took wares from the shelves with what seemed to be seven or eight rapidly-swinging octopus arms. . . . The dairyman in Vangede was interested in everything, and in his dairy was an endless discussion with ever changing participants all day through. The debate in Vangede took place in the dairy; it was there you stated your opinion about things and spoke your "letter to the editor" over the counter.

And in the evening the dairyman watched television in the backroom because he was divorced from a wife in a house in the environs, divorced a long time ago from his wife

and a couple of daughters he sometimes spoke about. So in the evenings he sat there in his backroom in Vangede, and he was there also next morning when the milk had to go out and he sat there in the meantime and saw the television and smoked cheroots, and everybody knew that. And you could ring the bell at the backdoor and always get a bag of beers for a marked-up price late in the evening, later than it was allowed to sell package beers, and on the cuff moreover if you needed that. But he was rather nervous if you came in the evening, nervous about the police. So he had a complex system with his three doors; you rang on the kitchen door and got the beer at the basement door and then paid at the front door while his blinking eyes wandered shiftily to right and left, watching out for possible cops on their way down Vangede Bygade. . . .

The dairyman in Vangede had confidence in people, and people had confidence in him. He seemed to have always been there.

So it was as though Vangede Bygade never was completely itself again when he, after the second cataract operation, slowly and at a peculiar pace, with shortened and irregular opening hours some months, had to close his dairy. It was as though no one really would believe that he wasn't there any more, standing behind his marble counter, talking and laughing. It was a whole other feeling to walk along Bygaden and come past a dead shop and know that it was Tage's and that Tage was in a home of some sort, where old Vangede friends visited him once in a while on Sunday and took a walk with him in a little garden and told him news from Vangede. It was unbearable.

(The remarkable thing is that no other merchant ever used his shop. The shop is empty and still has its "Dairy" sign on the front with an old advertisement for Schulstad butter and KB Crisp Bread, so it's as if Tage's shadow still

stands behind the counter in the old dairy just across from the church where he lived day and night. . . .)

The barber in Vangede lived in a run-down small house up on Bygaden toward Lyngbyvej Motorway—those houses are all torn down now. The barber in Vangede had a single little room with three stools for those that waited and places for two being clipped and an old friend that sometimes came and helped him.

The barber was white-haired and had curls and big apple cheeks and wore a black jacket with a vest and had *Ekstra Bladet*, the raciest of the two morning tabloids lying on one chair and talked all the time about soccer and entertained customers about tax and the soccer pools, while he fussed around with them with perfumes and flasks, and the hair silently floated down over the white sheet. . . .

The barber in Vangede did not understand much of young people's wishes with regard to haircuts, but he had a supply of newspapers and magazines and Donald Duck, and you came there just once in a while, and there in the strangely greasy air you heard the regular customers' conversation on the rare occasion when you would make your parents happy or had blackmailed them with some promise in exchange for this unnatural but very entertaining torture.

The librarian in Vangede, the only one who was permanent at Vangede Library (which was a three-room apartment alongside the bookstore and on top of Vangede Groceries)—the librarian in Vangede was a gray-haired older lady who wore glasses and looked forbidding, and it was always as though she was already sour when you got there, as though it bothered her that you came in to her library: She blamed you always for something or other—to have stolen some books or clipped in some magazines in the reading room or something like that, and often quite rightly (if there was a delicious picture of Brigitte Bardot

in the weekly *See and Hear*). She was called Mathilde, and no one knows why. She didn't live in Vangede, and no one knew what her name actually was, but everyone knew who you meant when you said Mathilde—that was her who sat there behind her desk in Vangede Library every day from 2:00 to 8:00 (Saturday, though, 10:00 to 2:00) and hissed and looked in catalogues and looked forbidding.

And the librarian in Vangede always hastened into the reading room and shushed anyone who started to laugh over something or other.

She regarded a book returned late a fateful omen for your future, a fateful sign of bad karma. And she looked as if she really always had expected that you would go to the dogs in nameless censure and degradation when she received her two kroner fine.

Vangede Bookstore alongside the library had grown a lot over the course of the years. First it had shared a shop with a hardware store; then the hardware store moved out and then Vangede Bookstore doubled in size and expanded wildly and began to stock photo equipment and posters and the like. And the old book seller retired, and his son who always had been there with his father and mother took over the business with his wife and his brother, and now *he* is the book seller in Vangede.

Vangede Groceries was alongside merchant Christoffersen's shop, and it was one of them that always had the soccer team's poster on the door, and it was one of the businesses that always gave prizes to the soccer team's lotteries, so you could win wares from Kolonial Grocers if you scored a prize in the Summer Wheel of Fortune.

Merchant Christoffersen was also our neighbor, and they had three children, and one of them was a daughter, Susanne, who was the only one in our row of houses, the only one of some thirty children, who went to high school—

and she wore glasses and looked very wise. Her little brother was called Churchill and was Vangede's undisputed Champion Spitter, and her big brother was named Jørgen, and once saved my little sister from drowning when she as a kid drifted around alone on an ice floe in Nymosen; otherwise every Sunday afternoon he repaired eternally changing scooters and motorcycles on the garden walk out in the front of his house with the radio playing out the kitchen window. He moved later to a room over the library and Kolonial Groceries where he still bought from and got a discount on beers and smokes, and he was, even later, Vangede's first representative in the Balloon Park on Amager island, just across from and a part of Copenhagen, the island that Copenhagen airport is on.

His father, the old Christoffersen, was active in the soccer team for many years and known throughout Vangede as "Stoffer," the plural of "Stuff." And he had a brother who helped in the shop together with his wife's sister, and *he* also lived in Vangede and hung around as an attendant down with the soccer club and drank beers with the sausage man.

Vangede's sausage man was named Erik and arranged the summer parties in Nymosen and stood all day in his sausage wagon on Bygaden. And Erik's daughter often helped in the wagon if Erik and his wife had to do something. Erik's daughter was a shop assistant at the baker in Vangede, and she married the red-haired shopkeeper in the tobacco shop, and they had in any event *one* child. . . .

Vangede's movie house is known as Villabyernes-Town House Cities Theater—and when it opened there was a competition in the neighborhood to name it, arranged by the owner of the local newspaper, and everyone suggested it should be named *Vangede Theater*. There were 200 identical suggestions, and the name decided on was Villabyernes-Town House Cities Theater.

And the burger grill that opened on Vangede Bygade in

the 1970s, during the recent year's wave of burger grills, was named, naturally, Villabyernes-Town House Cities Grill.

In Gentofte, there is a conservative culture, and everybody knows that everyone who lives in a town house or villa is conservative, and that all of the conservative politicians and CEOs live there. In Gentofte there is a conservative culture, and there they read the conservative newspaper, *Berlingske Tidende*.

In Vangede there is a social democratic culture—and *old* social democratic, which would be like left of the socialist party—and *there* you read the late morning tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* and curse and spit and drink beers without a glass, straight from the bottle.

When they say "The Association of Voters" in Gentofte, it's the conservative party association. When you say "The Association of Voters" in Vangede, it's the social democratic party, the *old* social democratic party.

Many times someone tried to set up a photo shop or a perfume or fashion shop or a coffee salon one place or another in Vangede, but they didn't last more than three months, and everybody in the quarter knew that in advance. "There's no market for that sort of thing in Vangede. . . . There's just *no* market for *that* in Vangede. . . ." Vangede bookstore and Vangede Men's Shop were and continued to be the most advanced specialty stores.

The flatwork roller man in Vangede had light, curly hair, and he had a fantastic sense of humor. When he drove out to deliver sheets and table cloths that had been through the roller, he sang and shouted on his delivery bike so that you could hear it over the half of Vangede. And when he didn't roll or cycle with flatwork, he always stood in the door of his basement shop and smiled and waved and greeted people and talked with people who were walking past.

The flatwork man had Vangede's first TV set, the very first TV set in Vangede, and he had won it in a drawing run by the newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*. And every evening, people went down to the flatwork man's in order to see what was on this evening, and when it was a soccer match on the screen, then half of Vangede was packed in the flatwork man's on top of each other in the flatwork man's little two-room apartment and cheered and were noisy.

The flatwork man in Vangede had a really hard time of it. First he lost the one leg and then he lost half of the other and then he had to have "leg prosthetics" and he limped around on crutches and finally he had to close the shop and draw an invalid pension.

Even if he had to close the shop and couldn't ride his delivery bicycle any more, he still stood there at the corner of the house right outside his old shop (that was now a flower shop) every day and greeted people and chatted from the very same place. And he is still there; it is *his place*. . . . He stands there every day still and smiles, and he is always in a particularly good mood on Friday and Saturday late mornings when there are especially many people shopping on Vangede Bygade.

Our flatwork man has had a long and hard life, occupied by work, endless work. He was born in Vangede. He was a milk boy while he went to school. He was a messenger for Vangede co-op as soon as he got out of school. He was a construction worker. He was one of the workers who laid asphalt on the municipalities' first road. He was one of the workers who laid asphalt on Gentoftegade—Gentofte Street—in 1926, he who never could afford a car. He dug sewers. He dug the roads up to lay in the cables when "the wireless" appeared. He had a forty-eight hour work week (strictly outdoor work in all kinds of weather), he got 54 kroner a week for that, and from that, he gave 20 kroner for food and the rest for house rent and tax. That was in 1929.

Later, he became a grave-digger in Mariebjerg Cemetery.

He was a gravedigger for fifteen years, and he was the one who sold Christmas savings seals for 1 and 5 kroner that people glued in booklets all year and drew their money out in December.

In 1947, then, he opened his flatwork shop on bygaden—that flatwork shop he and his wife ran for 23½ years, as he said. 23½ years until they had to close it because of the two legs he lost and the arthritis he had in his back after many years of construction work.

Vangede's flatwork man can't do much more today. He has to sit in most of the day. "And that's not easy, when you've always been *out*," he says.

Vangede's flatwork man has worked all of his life, and the work has destroyed his body. Who got anything out of it? It wasn't him.

Vangede's flatwork man has worked and labored all his life, and now it won't be long before it's over and done.

We called her "The Lady in Black" long before we knew what her name was, and the grown-ups said she suffered from a "persecution complex"—an old bag who always wore a black dress with a black knit jacket because she mourned her family—father, mother, and apparently some siblings who were all dead long ago. She always walked alone in those black clothes, day out and day in, and ran around all the time and complained to the shoppers on Bygaden—Main Street—or to the mailman or even to the children—complained ceaselessly over oranges that were rotten and meat that was spoiled and letters that weren't delivered.

She lived in one of Vangede's oldest houses, an old farm with a large field where there once had been mangers and stalls before the others in the family died. She had a fixed idea that the neighbor had stolen some square inches of her land, and therefore she tried to rouse "The Property Owners—to fight!" against "the violation of

fencing obligations" with enormous hand-painted signs in her garden, without anyone apparently ever having reacted to it, even though she displayed an ancient post deep in the ground, a post from Christian IV's reign—back in the fifteen-sixteen hundreds—which she always dug out as final evidence.

And she heard voices, they said. She was a spiritist and sat every evening with drawn curtains and a pair of candles and held long conversations with her whole dead family, sat there alone and spoke with them long into the night, while cars sped past outside. She had led cows along Bygaden in her youth. . . .

And she had a fantastic beautiful old yew path that was several hundred years old and a small extra building on her grounds, an old overseer house or some such, where a pair of older guys always hung around shuffling cards and had beers and told each other stories all of them already knew. And they could always be seen from the street, out from Vangede Bygade, and always sent greetings to everybody with energetic waves of their arms.

And they were fired and had to go to an old age home when she found it necessary to sell part of the grounds. And the yew path was cut down, and the ground sold to the local speculator, a lumber merchant who built a supermarket with condominiums over the field to her old grounds.

And Vangede's drunkard was called Crabby and was a big-bearded man, and there were surely other drunks, but he was the one who belonged mostly in Vangede. He lived down in Nymosen and slept generally on the "The Love Bench," on the edge of the lake, and he sat on that bench most of the day, and because of him the name of the bench changed from "The Love Bench" to "The Drunkard's Bench." There he sat and drank spirits that he thinned out with red soda water and later with a cola when you could get that. The kids couldn't ever understand why he wouldn't give them a sip. . . .

Crabby almost always sat there in Nymosen on his bench and drank, but was never really drunk and was never mad or excitable. He sat and told the children stories about his experiences, and around there, he was invited often to dinner because folk felt he probably could do with something warm and solid. And now and then he helped the butcher and the grocer and got a little for that, and the women in The Yellow House used to hire him as a baby sitter when they had to shop. Then they brought the children to the bench where Crabby sat, and he talked to them and gave them something to eat or ran around and played ball or washed his shirt in bog water or the like.

Crabby was okay. Crabby was almost my brother Ken's guru, and for years Ken concluded all family discussions over the dinner table, concluded them all for his part, with the words: "Crabby says . . ." and that was his final judgment in the case.

Crabby was a fast runner; he could really move, and often he won a round at Vangede Tavern by betting with someone who didn't know him, whether he could run from them when they were on a bicycle or a motor bike. Then you saw him suddenly shoot down Mosegårdsvej with a motor bike on his arse while they cheered and clapped from the tavern, and then you knew that Crabby was about to quench his thirst.

Crabby was an old athlete and always attended Gentofte-Vangede Sports Association matches and often went to the track meets at Gentofte Stadium, and once when he was going to a meet there, he bet with the others whether he could run faster than the runners in the race. And he climbed over the fence and stepped in on the track and jumped into the 500 meter and ran along in his shabby rags, stinking of alcohol—and *won*.

And Crabby died at the Trotters, on the trotting track in Charlottenlund where he slept that evening and was found as a corpse next morning, cold and stiff between the bushes, ten years ago.

Miss Fanny Fiehn was a midwife—a little, old, stooping lady with sparkling, wriggling eyes, always in white pants (“Oh, dresses are so impractical.”) and with a calotte on her skull and her shirt hanging out of her pants, and a voice so deep and coarse that you believed she was a drunken man—and she cursed “like a Turk.”

Miss Fanny Fiehn was a midwife, and she was a vigorous woman. She worked in the County Hospital in Gentofte, but she also had her own clinic in an old nursery garden on the swanky Parkosvej in Gentofte, and there she had a lot of pro bono patients, and some of the girls helped in the clinic and paid in that way.

Miss Fanny Fiehn was the municipality’s guilty conscience. She spoke out tirelessly about more money for social causes and better conditions for them who had it bad. She was a fantastic provocateur—a provo, the square little lady with the beery bass voice. She got the Salvation Army to establish a “birth station” with help for the poor, because she thought the municipality did too little, and *that* gave a little kick in the municipality’s fat arse to see west-side slum sisters in Gentofte.

Miss Fanny Fiehn worked something near 24/7, and her own economy was always tottering. She toiled and struggled all her life for people who needed her help, and anyway she was regarded as a hard banana. “Let the rich pay,” she always said. “Let the rich pay, it’s them that have the money. . . .”

Miss Fanny Fiehn gave birth to half of Vangede. She was sixty-seven when she was midwife for my oldest little brother. She was seventy-four when she was midwife for my youngest little brother. She was midwife for all my siblings and most everybody we knew. She was the municipality’s guilty conscience, and after *her* death the power mongers in Gentofte sat more easily in their chairs.

And behind one of Vangede's doors was the coal trimmer, who rose every morning at six and hacked and coughed and spat, you could hear him through the wall, and knocked about and shortly after cursed his way down the stairs and out to the coal wagon and started his day. He had once been an independent trucker, but had lost his driver's license for drunken driving, and you never saw him or his wife sober. Every single evening the bottles rattled in there, and they sat and drank with Svend the trucker and his wife who lived a couple of stairways farther down.

And they yelled and screamed and drank and argued, and sometimes they Goddamn fought so the blood sprayed down over their faces, and the neighbors called the cops. But anyway the neighbors could never really butt in, and the coal trimmer and Svend and the wives always came to their senses when they were calm again and sat crying over their own foolishness so the cops quickly disappeared, and they could begin all over again with the fight.

This was just how it always went, and you got used to it and began to follow the scenes in the show and not take it so seriously when they suddenly at three in the morning turned over a table with bottles and glasses and roared in demented delirium, "God's angels are floating in the air," three hours before the coal trimmer had to go to work again.

And behind one of the doors the lady had blond bobbed hair and a six-year-old son, and "her husband" was very rarely home, and you smiled a little about her "my husband" in the neighborhood. Once in a while when you sat alone late in the evening, she suddenly rang your bell and stood there in a nightgown and asked if you happened to have a beer.

And behind one of the doors lived a lady who was alone and half invalid. She couldn't really walk, but could just totter the ten meters to the shops on Bygaden and probably

never came farther away. You couldn't decide what age she was, and she sat all day by her window and smoked cigarettes and looked out to the courtyard and saw, in all the stairways, who came home from work, who came to visit, and who lugged beers home. . . .

She sat there all day and smoked cigarettes at the window, and the only time I spoke to her, she came over and rang my doorbell and begged my pardon that she bothered me—but she'd seen that there was a light on—and asked if I could lend her a few matches because she'd run out and couldn't smoke and "It's so nice with a smoke, when you sit there alone so much, you understand, sir. . . ."

And that "you understand" I could understand, and ever since that day we always greeted one another on the street and nodded to each other when one of us went by in the courtyard outside the window.

Behind the door to a furnace room in the basement lived Wolmer, a guy in his late twenties who was given an invalid pension and otherwise just rambled around. He was good friends with the superintendent, and therefore he had got that furnace room to sleep in during winter—just as his father also got a room like that, his father who was a drinker and played fiddle down in Nymosen. . . . Wolmer slept in the furnace room in winter and in Nymosen during summer. Otherwise he cycled around over most of the country or went on tours, long tours, down through Europe, with his one-man tent on his bike's baggage carrier.

And behind one of the doors an older woman lived alone; she was a friend of Wolmer's late mother, and she invited him often to dinner, and he stayed now and then a couple of days with her. And they drank a bottle of whiskey together, and it generally ended up in a big argument, and some sort of peculiar argument that always ended with one of them (the winner) locking the other in the other room

the next day—and they were both to blame. And she called him “a cad,” and he called her “a disgusting bitch,” and they were very fond of each other.

And behind one of the doors, two middle-aged women lived with a giant Christ figure in porcelain in the window, and there was something or other with them which you later found out was called “lesbian.” The one was rather masculine, with broad shoulders and a voice of military command, and the other was little and thin and had a cautious bird-like voice, and they lived together and went to town together, and you never saw one of them without the other.

They were both god-damned religious and each belonged to her own crazy sect—the one, the broad-shouldered one, apparently Pentecostalist, the other—the thin one—a more flipped-out “belief,” which among other things forbade its members from having too many worldly possessions or having excessive happiness over what they had. The sect taught her that, and she could see that it was right. So when she came home from a meeting, she gathered up all the possessions she was very happy about—her jewelry and strings of pearls, her finest clothes and some porcelain and a couple of posters—and packed it all in newspaper and threw it in the garbage can. But a curious neighbor saw the packages in the garbage and lifted them out and found out they were hers, and when he heard the story, he thought it was too much. And he forced her to take the things back again—he carried it all up and put it in her living room, so it ended that she sold all the crap to a second-hand shop in Lynnbgy and donated all the money to the sect.

At last she went totally into it and left the other woman because *she* wouldn't become a member. So the thin one moved in with the sect and died a year later and willed it all she had. The other, the broad-shouldered one, she took

up with another friend, a little thin gray Swedish woman who looked exactly like the one who had moved out, and she moved in instead of her, and then they went to town together. . . .

Vangede is something you drive through, and as a quarter Vangede has been cut up and diminished many, many times, simply to make it easier to drive through. Vangede has become a little smaller every time Lyngbyvej Motorway has grown a little larger.

To most Copenhageners, Vangede is a place to drive through, down over Søborg and in to the city, or a place you maybe just see on a street sign or with a quick look down Bygaden when you pass through Vangede on the Motorway.

But we lived there. We lived there.

—*Translated from Danish by Thomas E. Kennedy.*