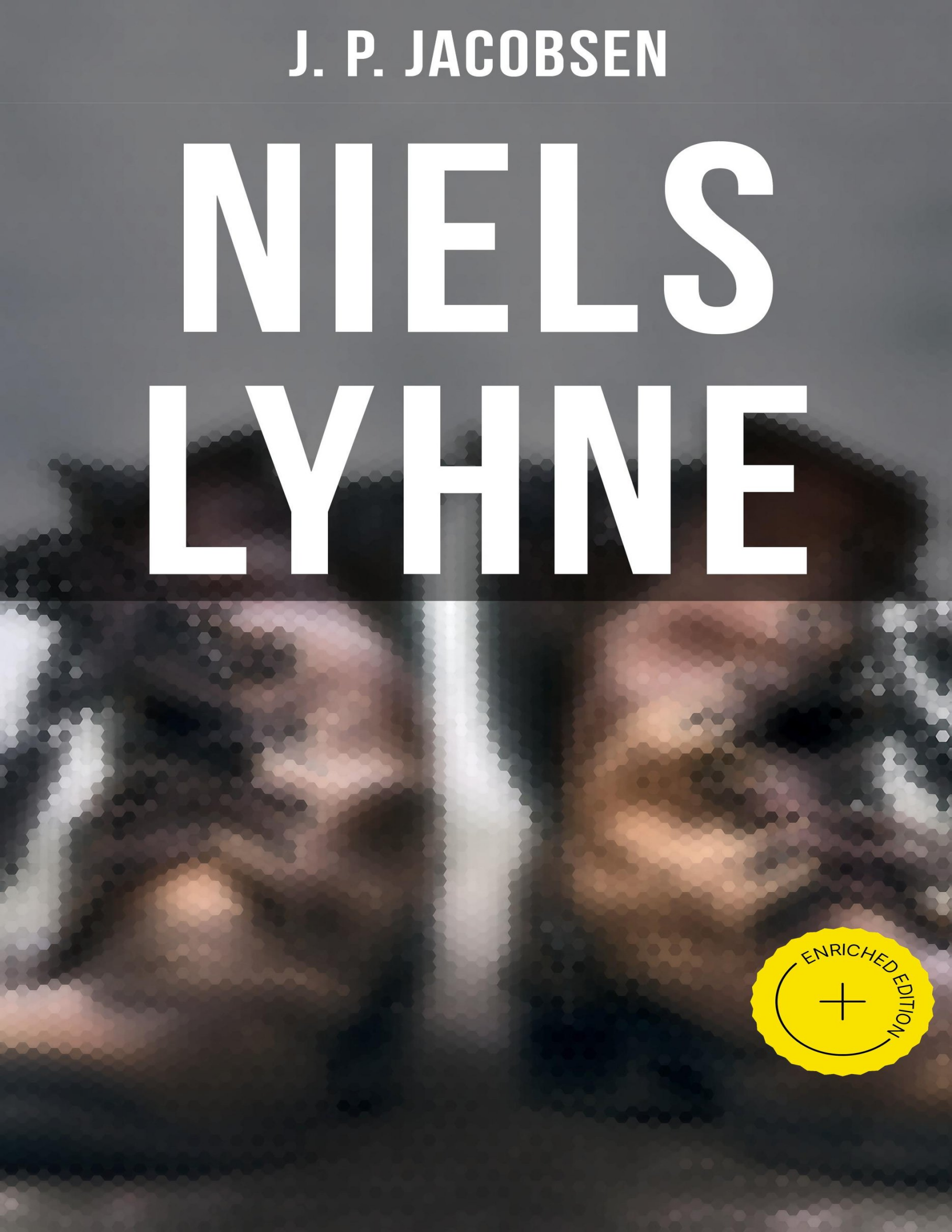
J. P. JACOBSEN

NIELS LYHNE



J. P. Jacobsen

Niels Lyhne

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Cedric Haynes

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Introduction

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Between the yearning of a self that seeks meaning without transcendence and the inescapable contingencies of love, time, and society, Niels Lyhne unfolds as a sustained inquiry into how ideals are born in solitude, entangled in desire, and measured against the stubborn grain of reality, following a sensitive consciousness as it tests its freedoms, negotiates obligation and ambition, and discovers that conviction can be a posture of courage as much as a wound, while the world’s quiet pressures—family, friendship, art, and history—press upon a life that would prefer to remain purely imagined yet is compelled to be lived.

First published in 1880, J. P. Jacobsen’s novel belongs to the realist and naturalist turn of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough, bringing psychological subtlety and social candor to a coming-of-age narrative set largely in nineteenth-century Denmark. Its world is one of manor houses, town apartments, studios, and parlors, where education and sentiment shape a young man’s aspirations and limits. Jacobsen, a poet as well as a prose stylist, composes scenes with sensuous attention to detail, but the book’s core is interior: it is a Bildungsroman that traces formation rather than adventure, charting the growth of a mind amid the mores of a changing society.

At its simplest, the premise follows Niels Lyhne from youth into adulthood, an imaginative, skeptical, and aesthetically inclined Dane who longs to be a poet while navigating family expectations, friendships, and the allure of love. The

narration cleaves closely to Niels’s perceptions, shifting with the tides of his moods, yet it remains composed and observant, preferring suggestion to overt judgment. Scenes accumulate quietly rather than crescendoing into spectacle, and the style is lucid, occasionally luxuriant, attentive to light, weather, and the textures of rooms. The tone is reflective without resignation, offering a reading experience that is intimate, unsentimental, and steadily absorbing.

One of the book’s governing concerns is the contest between faith and unbelief as lived, not argued: Niels embraces a secular outlook that promises freedom, but the narrative investigates what such freedom demands when confronted by the ordinary trials of intimacy, responsibility, and uncertainty. Rather than staging debates, Jacobsen shows how convictions harden or soften under pressure, how courage can resemble obstinacy, and how consolation may arrive from art, memory, or the natural world. The result is an exacting portrait of intellectual integrity strained by experience, attentive to the difference between professing a stance and inhabiting it over time.

Equally central is the friction between art and life. Niels’s vocation calls him toward an existence devoted to imagination and beauty, yet commitments to others, the claims of work, and the urgencies of feeling draw him into compromises that complicate any pure artistic ideal. Love appears in different registers—adoration, companionship, infatuation—and the novel tracks how desire can both enlarge and distort a self. Jacobsen’s sensibility remains tangible in concrete images: gardens, interiors, and landscapes that register the seasons of a mind. Through these moments the book examines the promises and perils of aestheticism within the stubborn necessities of everyday life.

For contemporary readers, Niels Lyhne remains striking for its clarity about dilemmas that feel current: how to sustain conviction without dogma, how to honor love without losing autonomy, and how to make a life in which work, care, and creativity coexist. The book’s measured tempo counters a culture of distraction, rewarding attentiveness with granulated feeling and ethical nuance. Its skepticism is neither cynical nor triumphant; it treats the modern hunger for meaning with seriousness and tact. In an age suspicious of absolutes yet haunted by their absence, Jacobsen offers a patient study in responsibility, freedom, and the costs of living by one’s ideals.

Approached as both character study and moral experiment, the novel invites slow reading, allowing its insights to emerge from the accumulation of ordinary scenes and finely shaded judgments. Its power lies less in incident than in the way perspective ripens, so that a glance, a hesitation, or a passing landscape comes to carry the weight of a decision. Without prescribing answers, the book equips readers to ask their own questions more precisely. That is why it endures: a lucid, patient, and unflinching account of a human being learning what it means to choose, to doubt, and to persist.

Synopsis

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Niels Lyhne, published in 1880 by the Danish writer J. P. Jacobsen, follows the formative years of a young man whose ideals of art, love, and truth are tested by experience. The novel blends psychological realism with lyrical description, tracing a modern consciousness as it seeks coherence without recourse to religious certainty. Across shifting scenes of family life, friendships, and public upheaval, Niels's inner life remains the central terrain. The book's narrative moves with patient precision rather than sensational turns, presenting the quiet drama of conviction under pressure and the costs of sincerity in a world that often rewards compromise over candor.

The story begins in the Danish countryside, where Niels is shaped by contrasting influences at home. A dream-prone, aesthetically minded parent nurtures his sensitivity and longing for beauty, while practical expectations demand steadier aims. Early impressions of nature, storytelling, and household rituals establish both his appetite for transcendence and his alertness to life's ordinary textures. Small episodes of attachment and disappointment teach him how desire and reality diverge. From the outset, the novel couples intimate observation with a cool analysis of character, framing the question that will accompany him: whether a life of imagination can endure the tests of responsibility and loss.

As Niels matures, he gravitates toward literature and the arts, sketching verses and debating ideas with companions

who embody different paths: social conformity, aesthetic retreat, and engaged ambition. Encounters in town and city broaden his scope, but they also expose an irresolute streak. He hesitates between creating and merely contemplating creation, between staking a claim and drifting. The bustle of cultural life tempts him with models of recognition and purpose, yet he remains restless. Jacobsen charts these uncertainties not as youthful indecision alone, but as signs of a deeper conflict between longing for absolute authenticity and the contingencies of circumstance.

Central to Niels’s identity is his atheism, formulated not as provocation but as an ethical commitment to truth as he sees it. Conversations with believers—some affectionate, some strained—clarify his refusal to accept consolation he cannot affirm. When illness, grief, and family appeals press him toward conventional gestures of faith, he resists hollow rituals, even at personal cost. The novel presents this stance soberly, showing both its dignity and its isolating aftershocks. Rather than staging doctrine against doctrine, Jacobsen studies how a creed of doubt behaves under duress, and how integrity can harden into solitude or soften into compassion without surrendering its core.

Love tests Niels no less than belief. He experiences the exhilaration of attachment and the attrition of misalignment, including entanglements complicated by disparity in age, status, and existing commitments. Moments of intimacy promise a harmonizing of art and life, only to falter against timing and temperament. Domestic prospects beckon with their own order and meaning, yet they also require a rebalancing of ambition and attention he struggles to achieve. Across these relationships, the book avoids melodrama, emphasizing the slow accumulation of choices and chances. In this arena, too, Jacobsen measures

how an idealist learns, and sometimes fails, to translate vision into durable companionship.

Public events eventually intrude, drawing Niels from private dilemmas into the larger currents of national conflict. The movement from salons and sitting rooms to barracks and frontiers confronts his refined sensibilities with urgency and hazard. Friendship acquires a new cast amid discipline and fear; language that once described moods and landscapes must now address duty and survival. The test is not only physical courage but coherence: whether the convictions that guided him in quiet hours can orient him when contingency is brutal and swift. Jacobsen treats these scenes with the same tempered clarity, keeping spectacle subordinate to moral and emotional reckoning.

Niels Lyhne endures as a portrait of a secular modern self—ardent, skeptical, and vulnerable—seeking a steady rule of life without metaphysical shelter. Jacobsen’s prose allies sensuous detail with analytical calm, giving the novel an uncommon balance of tenderness and reserve. Its questions—what we owe to truth, how we love without illusion, how art and duty can coexist—remain unsettled by design. Without relying on a climactic revelation, the book accumulates resonance through fidelity to experience, inviting readers to consider the price and possibility of living by conviction in a world that resists absolutes. Its quiet audacity has kept it vital well beyond its century.

Historical Context

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Niels Lyhne, published in 1880 by the Danish writer J. P. Jacobsen, emerged from a late-nineteenth-century Denmark marked by rapid cultural debate and political recalibration. Set among provincial estates and urban salons, its world reflects the institutions that shaped Danish life: a Lutheran state church, a constitutional monarchy, and universities and periodicals that channeled new ideas. The novel belongs to the era known in Scandinavia as the Modern Breakthrough, when writers turned from romantic nationalism to realist inquiry. Jacobsen's disciplined prose and psychological focus register a society negotiating science, secular ethics, and bourgeois respectability in the decades after mid-century reforms and upheavals.

In 1871 the critic Georg Brandes delivered lectures at the University of Copenhagen urging that literature should place problems under debate, a manifesto that catalyzed the Modern Breakthrough across Scandinavia. Jacobsen moved within this milieu and anchored his art in scientific naturalism. Trained in botany, he conducted algae research and became Denmark's early interpreter of Charles Darwin, translating On the Origin of Species (1872) and The Descent of Man (1874) into Danish. Those efforts disseminated evolutionary thinking and scientific naturalism in Danish letters. Niels Lyhne's treatment of belief, doubt, and heredity registers this intellectual climate, refusing consolatory metaphysics and conventional pieties.

Mid-century politics reshaped Jacobsen’s Denmark. The 1849 constitution established a constitutional monarchy and civil liberties, but the 1866 revision curtailed democratic representation. Most searing was the Second Schleswig War of 1864, in which Denmark was defeated by Prussia and Austria and lost Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg. The territorial contraction and mourning that followed fostered cultural introspection and suspicion of grand nationalist rhetoric. Military service and questions of loyalty became part of everyday discourse. Niels Lyhne’s world bears the imprint of this trauma: it prefers inner resolve and ethical self-scrutiny to patriotic spectacle, registering a smaller nation negotiating limits and responsibilities.

Religion remained institutionally dominant through the nineteenth century. The Evangelical Lutheran Church was the established church, with clergy woven into public life from schooling to rites of passage. Yet revivalist energies diverged: N. F. S. Grundtvig inspired folk high schools and a culturally affirmative Lutheranism, while Inner Mission advanced stricter pietism after 1861. Against these stood an urban intelligentsia increasingly receptive to secular ethics and scientific skepticism. Newspapers and journals amplified disputes over blasphemy, marriage, and clerical authority. Niels Lyhne speaks from within this ferment, articulating a specifically Danish confrontation between inherited faith and a modern, self-authorizing conscience.

Society was being reorganized by education and urban growth. Literacy expanded, and folk high schools cultivated civic participation among rural populations. Copenhagen’s middle class set new norms of propriety, leisure, and domestic order that realist writers examined critically. Women’s rights activism gathered institutional form in 1871 with the Danish Women’s Society, fueling debate about marriage, autonomy, and work. Across Scandinavia the

“woman question” entered the stage and novel, exemplified by Ibsen’s A Doll’s House (1879). In Niels Lyhne, relationships unfold within these changing expectations, testing the claims of passion, vocation, and respectability without conceding the moral authority of convention.

Literary method aligned with European realism and naturalism. Writers such as Flaubert and Zola modeled impersonal narration, psychological exactitude, and the scrutiny of social milieus; Scandinavian contemporaries including Ibsen, Alexander Kielland, and Amalie Skram advanced similar aims. Jacobsen adapted these resources to a distinctive lyrical naturalism—attentive to sensation, landscape, and the minute causes of feeling. Danish publishing and translation networks linked Copenhagen to Berlin and Paris, enabling rapid circulation of new aesthetics. Niels Lyhne’s restrained style and analytic descriptions fit this program, refusing melodrama in favor of observed motive and consequence, and situating intimate lives within impersonal historical pressures.

Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847–1885) was born in the market town of Thisted in Jutland and educated in Copenhagen, where he pursued botany before turning decisively to literature. His scientific articles and translations of Darwin made him a public intellectual of the 1870s. Tuberculosis, diagnosed in 1872, imposed long periods of seclusion and curtailed his output to two novels—Fru Marie Grubbe (1876) and Niels Lyhne (1880)—alongside stories and poems. He moved in Georg Brandes’s circle and wrote with deliberate economy, revising extensively. The fragility and precision of his work reflect a life shaped by inquiry, illness, and sustained engagement with contemporary debates.

Upon publication and in subsequent decades, the novel was read as an emblem of the Modern Breakthrough’s ethical

seriousness. It tests the authority of church, family, and nation without caricature, staging conflicts among faith, art, desire, and duty that preoccupied Scandinavian society after 1864 and under Darwin’s shadow. German translations soon carried Jacobsen to a wider audience; Rainer Maria Rilke later praised Niels Lyhne and recommended it to young writers. Through its secular candor and unsentimental psychology, the book crystallizes the era’s shift from inherited certainties to self-authored values, offering a lucid critique of respectable ideals and their emotional costs.

Niels Lyhne

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CHAPTER I

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She had the black, luminous eyes of the Blid family with delicate, straight eyebrows; she had their boldly shaped nose, their strong chin, and full lips. The curious line of mingled pain and sensuousness about the corners of her mouth was likewise an inheritance from them, and so were the restless movements of her head; but her cheek was pale; her hair was soft as silk, and was wound smoothly around her head.

Not so the Blids; their coloring was of roses and bronze. Their hair was rough and curly, heavy as a mane, and their full, deep, resonant voices bore out the tales told of their forefathers, whose noisy hunting-parties, solemn morning prayers, and thousand and one amorous adventures were matters of family tradition.

Her voice was languid and colorless. I am describing her as she was at seventeen. A few years later, after she had been married, her voice gained fullness, her cheek took on a fresher tint, and her eye lost some of its lustre, but seemed even larger and more intensely black.

At seventeen she did not at all resemble her brothers and sisters; nor was there any great intimacy between herself and her parents. The Blid family were practical folk who accepted things as they were; they did their work, slept their sleep, and never thought of demanding any diversions beyond the harvest home and three or four Christmas parties. They never passed through any religious

experiences, but they would no more have dreamed of not rendering unto God what was God’s than they would have neglected to pay their taxes. Therefore they said their evening prayers, went to church at Easter and Whitsun[1], sang their hymns on Christmas Eve, and partook of the Lord’s Supper twice a year. They had no particular thirst for knowledge. As for their love of beauty, they were by no means insensible to the charm of little sentimental ditties, and when summer came with thick, luscious grass in the meadows and grain sprouting in broad fields, they would sometimes say to one another that this was a fine time for travelling about the country, but their natures had nothing of the poetic; beauty never stirred any raptures in them, and they were never visited by vague longings or day-dreams.

Bartholine was not of their kind. She had no interest in the affairs of the fields and the stables, no taste for the dairy and the kitchen—none whatever.

She loved poetry[1q].

She lived on poems, dreamed poems, and put her faith in them above everything else in the world. Parents, sisters and brothers, neighbors and friends—none of them ever said a word that was worth listening to. Their thoughts never rose above their land and their business; their eyes never sought anything beyond the conditions and affairs that were right before them.

But the poems! They teemed with new ideas and profound truths about life in the great outside world, where grief was black, and joy was red; they glowed with images, foamed and sparkled with rhythm and rhyme. They were all

about young girls, and the girls were noble and beautiful—how noble and beautiful they never knew themselves. Their hearts and their love meant more than the wealth of all the earth; men bore them up in their hands, lifted them high in the sunshine of joy, honored and worshipped them, and were delighted to share with them their thoughts and plans, their triumphs and renown. They would even say that these same fortunate girls had inspired all the plans and achieved all the triumphs.

Why might not she herself be such a girl? They were thus and so—and they never knew it themselves. How was she to know what she really was? And the poets all said very plainly that this was life, and that it was not life to sit and sew, work about the house, and make stupid calls.

When all this was sifted down, it meant little beyond a slightly morbid desire to realize herself, a longing to find herself, which she had in common with many other young girls with talents a little above the ordinary. It was only a pity that there was not in her circle a single individual of sufficient distinction to give her the measure of her own powers. There was not even a kindred nature. So she came to look upon herself as something wonderful, unique, a sort of exotic plant that had grown in these ungentle climes and had barely strength enough to unfold its leaves; though in more genial warmth, under a more powerful sun, it might have shot up, straight and tall, with a gloriously rich and brilliant bloom. Such was the image of her real self that she carried in her mind. She dreamed a thousand dreams of those sunlit regions and was consumed with longing for this other and richer self, forgetting—what is so easily forgotten

—that even the fairest dreams and the deepest longings do not add an inch to the stature of the human soul.

One fine day a suitor came to her.

Young Lyhne of Lönborggaard was the man, and he was the last male scion of a family whose members had for three generations been among the most distinguished people in the county. As burgomasters, revenue-collectors, or royal commissioners, often rewarded with the title of councillor of justice, the Lyhnes in their maturer years had served king and country with diligence and honor. In their younger days they had travelled in France and Germany, and these trips, carefully planned and carried out with great thoroughness, had enriched their receptive minds with all the scenes of beauty and the knowledge of life that foreign lands had to offer. Nor were these years of travel pushed into the background, after their return, as mere reminiscences, like the memory of a feast after the last candle has burned down and the last note of music has died away. No, life in their homes was built on these years; the tastes awakened in this manner were not allowed to languish, but were nourished and developed by every means at their command. Rare copper plates, costly bronzes, German poetry, French juridical works, and French philosophy were every-day matters and common topics in the Lyhne households.

Their bearing had an old-fashioned ease, a courtly graciousness, which contrasted oddly with the heavy majesty and awkward pomposity of the other county families. Their speech was well rounded, delicately precise, a little marred, perhaps, by rhetorical affectation, yet it

somehow went well with those large, broad figures with their domelike foreheads, their bushy hair growing far back on their temples, their calm, smiling eyes, and slightly aquiline noses. The lower part of the face was too heavy, however, the mouth too wide, and the lips much too full.

Young Lyhne showed all these physical traits, but more faintly, and, in the same manner, the family intelligence seemed to have grown weary in him. None of the mental problems or finer artistic enjoyments that he encountered stirred him to any zeal or desire whatsoever. He had simply striven with them in a painstaking effort which was never brightened by joy in feeling his own powers unfold or pride in finding them adequate. Mere satisfaction in a task accomplished was the only reward that came to him.

His estate, Lönborggaard, had been left him by an uncle who had recently died, and he had returned from the traditional trip abroad in order to take over the management. As the Blid family were the nearest neighbors of his own rank, and his uncle had been intimate with them, he called, met Bartholine, and fell in love with her.

That she should fall in love with him was almost a foregone conclusion.

Here at last was some one from the outside world, some one who had lived in great, distant cities, where forests of spires were etched on a sunlit sky, where the air was vibrant with the chimes of bells, the pealing of organs, and the twanging of mandolins, while festal processions, resplendent with gold and colors, wound their way through broad streets; where marble mansions shone, where noble families flaunted bright escutcheons hung two by two over

wide portals, while fans flashed, and veils fluttered over the sculptured vines of curving balconies. Here was one who had sojourned where victorious armies had tramped the roads, where tremendous battles had invested the names of villages and fields with immortal fame, where smoke rising from gipsy fires trailed over the leafy masses of the forest, where red ruins looked down from vine-wreathed hills into the smiling valley, while water surged over the mill-wheel, and cow-bells tinkled as the herds came home over wide-arched bridges.

All these things he told about, not as the poems did, but in a matter-of-fact way, as familiarly as the people at home talked about the villages in their own county or the next parish. He talked of painters and poets, too, and sometimes he would laud to the skies a name that she had never even heard. He showed her their pictures and read their poems to her in the garden or on the hill where they could look out over the bright waters of the fjord and the brown, billowing heath. Love made him poetic; the view took on beauty, the clouds seemed like those drifting through the poems, and the trees were clothed in the leaves rustling so mournfully in the ballads.

Bartholine was happy; for her love enabled her to dissolve the twenty-four hours into a string of romantic episodes. It was romance when she went down the road to meet him; their meeting was romance, and so was their parting. It was romance when she stood on the hilltop in the light of the setting sun and waved him one last farewell before going up to her quiet little chamber, wistfully happy, to give herself up to thoughts of him; and when she

included his name in her evening prayer, that was romance, too.

She no longer felt the old vague desires and longings. The new life with its shifting moods gave her all she craved, and moreover her thoughts and ideas had been clarified through having some one to whom she could speak freely without fear of being misunderstood.

She was changed in another way, too. Happiness had made her more amiable toward her parents and sisters and brothers. She discovered that, after all, they had more intelligence than she had supposed and more feeling.

And so they were married.

The first year passed very much as their courtship; but when their wedded life had lost its newness, Lyhne could no longer conceal from himself that he wearied of always seeking new expressions for his love. He was tired of donning the plumage of romance and eternally spreading his wings to fly through all the heavens of sentiment and all the abysses of thought. He longed to settle peacefully on his own quiet perch and drowse, with his tired head under the soft, feathery shelter of a wing. He had never conceived of love as an ever-wakeful, restless flame, casting its strong, flickering light into every nook and corner of existence, making everything seem fantastically large and strange. Love to him was more like the quiet glow of embers on their bed of ashes, spreading a gentle warmth, while the faint dusk wraps all distant things in forgetfulness and makes the near seem nearer and more intimate.

He was tired, worn out. He could not stand all this romance. He longed for the firm support of the

commonplace under his feet, as a fish, suffocating in hot air, languishes for the clear, fresh coolness of the waves. It must end sometime, when it had run its course. Bartholine was no longer inexperienced either in life or books. She knew them as well as he. He had given her all he had—and now he was expected to go on giving. It was impossible; he had nothing more. There was only one comfort: Bartholine was with child.

Bartholine had long realized with sorrow that her conception of Lyhne was changing little by little, and that he no longer stood on the dizzy pinnacle to which she had raised him in the days of their courtship. While she did not yet doubt that he was at bottom what she called a poetic nature, she had begun to feel a little uneasy; for the cloven hoof of prose had shown itself once and again. This only made her pursue romance the more ardently, and she tried to bring back the old state of things by lavishing on him a still greater wealth of sentiment and a still greater rapture, but she met so little response that she almost felt as if she were stilted and unnatural. For awhile she tried to drag Lyhne with her, in spite of his resistance; she refused to accept what she suspected; but when, at last, the failure of her efforts made her begin to doubt whether her own mind and heart really possessed the treasures she had imagined, then she suddenly left him alone, became cool, silent, and reserved, and often went off by herself to grieve over her lost illusions. For she saw it all now, and was bitterly disappointed to find that Lyhne, in his inmost self, was no whit different from the people she used to live among. She had merely been deceived by the very ordinary fact that his

love, for a brief moment, had invested him with a fleeting glamor of soulfulness and exaltation—a very common occurrence with persons of a lower nature.

Lyhne was grieved and anxious, too, over the change in their relationship, and he tried to mend matters by unlucky attempts at the old romantic flights, but it all availed nothing except to show Bartholine yet more clearly how great had been her mistake.

Such was the state of things between man and wife when Bartholine brought forth her first child. It was a boy, and they called him Niels.

CHAPTER II

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In a way, the child brought the parents together again. Over his little cradle they would meet in a common hope, a common joy, and a common fear; of him they would think, and of him they would talk, each as often and as readily as the other, and each was grateful to the other for the child and for all the happiness and love he brought.

Yet they were still far apart.

Lyhne was quite absorbed in his farming and the affairs of the parish. Not that he took the position of a leader or even of a reformer, but he gave scrupulous attention to the existing order of things, looked on as an interested spectator, and carried out the cautious improvements recommended, after deliberate—very deliberate—consideration, by his old head servant or the elders of the parish.

It never occurred to him to make any use of the knowledge he had acquired in earlier days. He had too little faith in what he called theories and far too great respect for the time-hallowed, venerable dogmas of experience which other people called practical. In fact, there was nothing about him to indicate that he had not lived here and lived thus all his life—except one little trait. He had a habit of sitting for half hours at a time, quite motionless, on a stile or a boundary stone, looking out over the luscious green rye or the golden top-heavy oats, in a strange, vegetative trance. This was of the old Lyhne, the young Lyhne.

Bartholine, in her world, was by no means so ready to adapt herself quickly and with a good grace. No, she first had to voice her sorrow through the verses of a hundred poets, lamenting, in all the broad generalities of the period, the thousands of barriers and fetters that oppress humanity. Sometimes her lament would be clothed in lofty indignation, flinging its wordy froth against the thrones of emperors and the dungeons of tyrants; sometimes it would take the form of a calm, pitying sorrow, looking on as the effulgent light of beauty faded from a blind and slavish generation cowed and broken by the soulless bustle of the day; then again it would appear only as a gentle sigh for the freedom of the bird in its flight and of the cloud drifting lightly into the distance.

At last she grew tired of lamenting, and the impotence of her grief goaded her into doubt and bitterness. Like worshippers who beat their saint and tread him under foot when he refuses to show his power, she would scoff at the romance she once idolized, and scornfully ask herself whether she did not expect the bird Roc**[2]** to appear presently in the cucumber bed, or Aladdin’s cave to open under the floor of the milk cellar. She would answer herself in a sort of childish cynicism, pretending that the world was excessively prosaic, calling the moon green cheese and the roses potpourri, all with a sense of taking revenge and at the same time with a half uneasy, half fascinated feeling that she was committing blasphemy.

These attempts at setting herself free were futile. She sank back into the dreams of her girlhood, but with the difference that now they were no longer illumined by hope. Moreover, she had learned that they were only dreams—

6 "Niels Klim" refers to the protagonist of Ludvig Holberg’s satirical novel Niels Klim’s Underground Travels (original Danish title from the 1740s), a well-known 18th-century work of Scandinavian fiction about a journey to an underground world.

7 Mungo Park (c.1771–1806) was a Scottish explorer noted for his late-18th/early-19th-century expeditions in West Africa, especially his investigations of the Niger River; accounts of his final expedition contain some uncertainty about the exact circumstances of his death.

8 In this 19th-century Lutheran context, "the Catechism" denotes a standard book of religious instruction (notably Luther’s Small Catechism, widely used since the 16th century) that teaches basics such as the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the sacraments to children and converts.

9 The Danebrog is the national flag of Denmark; by tradition it is said to have appeared in 1219 and is often cited as one of the world’s oldest national flags, used as Denmark’s emblem since the Middle Ages.

10 Paolina (Paulina) Borghese (1780–1825) was Napoleon Bonaparte’s sister and the subject of Antonio Canova’s famous marble statue "Paolina Borghese as Venus Victrix" (c.1808–1810); the text’s reference evokes being posed or depicted in the manner of that well-known neoclassical sculpture.

11 "assessor pharmacia" is a Latin-form professional title historically used in Scandinavia for a formally qualified pharmacist or pharmacy official; in 19th-century Denmark it indicated a recognized rank or certification within the pharmaceutical profession.