



2015

Four Poems from The King's Coin: Danish-American Poems

Finn Bille

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge>

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Regional Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bille, Finn (2015) "Four Poems from The King's Coin: Danish-American Poems," *The Bridge*: Vol. 38 : No. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol38/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Bridge by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Four Poems from
The King's Coin: Danish-American Poems

by Finn Bille

HIJAB IN SORØ

"You are sick," she said,
the Danish doctor,
in perfect English.
"Ja, jeg er syg," I said.

In the waiting room
talk hummed, muted,
pages fluttered, rustled.

When a patient left
all muttered "farvel"
looking up.

When a headscarf
entered, murmurs ceased
eyes averted, rustlings rose.

When the doctor's door hissed
closed behind the scarf,
talk resumed as strident chatter.

Hijab came out. All voices stilled.
Hijab retreated, exited
with a click and a thud, the outer door
let in, cut off, the clanging of church bells.

"Farvel," I said as I rose
"Farvel," they muttered, looking up.

I left in search of a pill
against infection.

GRANDDAD'S SONG BOOK

My grandfather's hand
has worn down the gold
on his song book's leather spine,
but the Danish *sang* and *bog* still glow.

My thumb finds the spot,
where his thumb has worn through
many layers of cardboard paper,
their edges sealed with sweat.

He carries this hoard of lyrics,
spine on palm, thumb on cover,
through his island village
to the meeting hall to sing.

In step with neighbors—
farmers, blacksmith, teacher—
they arrive under cloudy skies
bundled in grey and black.

Creased, coffee-stained
pages open to the text
of beloved songs whose melodies
they know and sing in brightest hues.

They sing of Dannebrog in red and white.
In green, they praise the island's beech groves
then raise blue voices for the sea
embracing, cradling Denmark's shores.

Now back in Tennessee,
I clutch his song book and recall, I feared
my granddad's calloused hand, but I never
knew the man who sang these songs.

EVERY TIME I SEE A KITE FLY

The war is over when I am four years old.
My dad brings out the kite that he has built
in secret, hoping, believing that it will soar
above the copper crosses of Copenhagen,
higher than the twisted spire of Our Savior's Church,
launched on a shifting wind now blowing from the west,
freed at last from its covert attic workshop,
his pigeon released from its dovecote.

Cold wind stirs dormant grass on our commons.
My clog boots crush liberation fliers in the mud
as we try to launch the monster kite, father pulling,
mother holding, me clinging to her skirt.
She wrestles the buffeted kite, thrusts it heavenward.
I feel a lift in her dress. I hear the crash.

THE KING'S COIN

In memory of Christian X, King of Denmark 1912-1947

I know I promised to keep King Christian
safe in my pocket on his Danish coin,
but I lost it on the Greyhound bus
between Chicago and L.A.

I have gone back to Copenhagen
between castle and canal
where I, then five years old, had held
the flag and mother's hand
as his empty-saddled horse
rang steel on granite cobblestone.

The coin shop clerk ransacked his drawers
until he found King Christian's *krone*,
apologized for smoothed-out edges,
the king defaced and pocket-worn.
He did not understand when I said,
perfect!