

## THE DEAN OF TYNSET

By Jacob B. Bull

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In old days, if your aim was to be a Dean in the northern valleys, you had to own a voice of thunder and a fist of a sledgehammer. The Dean of Tynset had both.

A more determined man was not to be found. The other year in mid-winter at the keel of Tynset he got stuck in the snowdrift three miles away from the nearest house. The horse didn't manage to loosen the sleight from the snow. The Dean took the sleight himself, lifted it so determinate, the pole broke, and torn the body of the sleight.

But the sleight came loose, and so did the horse. The Dean stood still in the snow, wondering how to get on his way with these wrecked items. The horse was safe and sound. He could make it. But the sleight was useless in its torn condition, there were no ropes or branches of willow, and no one to send forward with a message, because he always went alone, and he was eager to make it to the church of Tyldalen. In those days they didn't have a priest there more than once a month. Well, then he thought he couldn't walk that long distance without bringing all these things; therefore he took to the road with the horse on loose reins and carrying the sleight on his shoulder the whole three miles to Tyldalen.

At the Tyldal church the surroundings were black of people. Every man, woman and child had to go, to cleanse their soul – it was short after the Christmas-celebration. But the time changed, from eleven to twelve, and no priest showed up. Eventually they started to think the priest had gone ill, But they couldn't really believe it, the Dean had not been ill once for the eighteen years he had been in the valleys, and the kind of body he had, was hard to intrude by any illness.

"You'll see he's in childbirth," one suggested. "No, then we would have heard his howl all the way here", someone else answered.

Well, then there was nothing left but the piles of snow up in the Tynset keel. He was probably stuck there; there had not been a snowplow there for fourteen days.

In the same moment they saw something, huge, strange, dark, coming heavily drawing up in the Oien bend. "Oh, in the name of Jesses, what's that?" A man yelled. And they were earthbound, staring, more and more of the church people, wondering, puzzled along the way.

"That's horse, boy," said another. "But, dear, what is he carrying dear?" the third asked.

"Damned, it's got to be the priest" one said, who has better eyes than the others. And a slow laughter of admiration spreads softly over the crowd at the front of the church.

It was indeed the priest coming. Glowing red faced with the horse at loose reins, carrying the sleight on his shoulder.

He came in a slow pace; but forward it went, the same pace he had had all the three miles through the snowdrifts.

Well arrived at the church, where Jo Steinmoen stands, the Dean leaves him the reins.

"Today I have been a snow-plough, Jo," he says. Then he takes the sleight carefully from the shoulder and places it standing upright along the church wall. Picks up a red handkerchief and wipes the sweat off his face. "So, in God's name, can we start, children," he said and made his way into the church, as he appeared there and then., in his robe of wolf-fur and everything. And as he was, he entered the preachers pulpit, where he held a unholy noise that came roaring around the vaults, about drunkenness, fighting and envy that existed in the Tyldals community; the sweat ran off him as he

went down. But then he drank the whole chalice of beer when he came to Oien to eat dinner. Yes, a more determined man hadn't put his feet in those neighbourhoods as far as men could remember – that's for sure!

He knew everybody, the old Dean; but long time went between each time he visited, he began to be old too, there were often misplaced names and happenings. Then it was one summer he was on his visit as priest in the Rendal. The visit was well over with, and down at the yard of the priests' farm many of the parishioners hung around, waiting to see and hear, as the old Dean was known to his straightforward behaviour and his cheerful mind.

Among the parishioners were also Funny-Jo. As it came by, the old Dean came out of the loft with his cap on top of his snowy white hair, huge and heavy across the yard on his way to the new hall. "Good evening, my friends," he said with his rumbling voice. There were greeted silently; - he went from one to another. Then he came to Funny-Jo.

"Isn't your name Jo?" he asked and shook his hand.

"Yes," Jo replied.

"Aren't you the son of Lars the cobbler?"

Yes, Jo was so.

"Oh, dear, then ask tell your father to come to fix half soles on a couple of boots; they can be found up in the priests' chamber."

Funny-Jo didn't answer. His father passed away years ago.

The others stood silent round about, but with a half smile, wondering where this will go. The old Dean sat down on the stairs.

"Well, don't you think he can do it?"

Funny-Jo scratched his head.

"No, I believe that will be hard for him."

"How so, my dear Jo?" the Dean asked.

"He lies down." Funny-Jo throws a glance at the others, quick as lightning.

"Oh, really! Is he in bad shape? Well, then I have to wait until he gets up again."

Funny-Jo scratches his head again, takes a glance at the Dean.

"No, when he gets up again, neither the priest or I needs to half sole our boots," he says.

"Really? It is *that* bad?"

The Dean shifts his feet, supporting his flat hand on his hip for better to draw air. He has asthma and arthritis. "No, one must believe he is fine," Funny-Jo answers again.

The Dean stares.

"Good? You just said he was laying down? I'll go talk to him." The Dean got up.

"Oh, no, that's not how to do it though," Funny-Jo answers.

He stands like before.

"Off course it's how to do it – I know him well, Lars the cobbler! Where is he laying?"

The Dean had come up close to Funny-Jo, stood still, waiting.

Funny-Jo looks up.

"He is laying in the graveyard," he answers, silently.

The Dean jerks.

"In the graveyard? – No! – is he dead, Lars the cobbler? When did he die, your father?"

Funny-Jo looks up again.

"It's ten years now, since he died," He says, motionless.

The Dean straightens his grand figure up.

“ten years! – time fly’s,” he mumbles, swaying and rising up the stairs. But in his strong face a smile is slowly building up, fold by fold, as he repeats the conversation in his mind.

At the top of the stairs he turns around. The powerful voice roars outwards.

“Well, Jo! Now you really have fooled your priest!” He shouted, laughed a powerful couple of laughs, supporting his hand on his arthritis-ridden hip, rising up the last stairs to the Dean’s chamber. But then a modest laughter broke out outside too.

Christianity didn’t have a strong place in people of Tynset and the other valleys up there. Especially the liquor was highly appreciated up there. In time before Christmas, when the Norsemen came home from Hamar or Roros with goods from the town on the load and always the liquor at the back, there were drinking along the saloons and a lot of noise and happy voices along the King’s country road.

The Dean made a thunderous speech in the church, to the extent that people got a good feeling in the soul. He thundered on about the men’s drinking, the women took to their chest and felt like this was never before heard, but little of a help it was; The Tynset men laid drunken in the ditches, singing psalms driving the sleighs, drinking in the winter nights. Worst of all was the fact that the Kings road passed close to the Dean’s farm.

But then the anger took to the Dean. One night he stood up, dressed himself and went straight out on the road to keep watch.

It was a starry night with a Northern wind; but the Dean stood there without a coat. He was broad as a barn door, and quite angry, it made his eyes icy blue under the thick brows.

Yes, there comes a Norseman, that’s easy to see! He heard their howling from far away, and the squeak of the hoofs on snow and the singing fought it’s way through the Northern wind.

There a long sleight with a yellow horse appeared; he could hardly see the horse from the snow! On the sleight a man was laying, singing; - it must be Simen Utigard; because he had such a horse. And he was drinking, that pig.

The Dean stood black in the middle of the road.

“Simen Utigard!” he yelled. And it was a voice not to be ignored. The horse threw his head up and jumped. He would not pass, and jumped to the ditch.

The man on the sleight raised his body half up and pulled the reins.

“Come on, you ass,” he yelled.

“Simen Utigard!” the Dean yelled, for the second time.

“Hoi!” Simen Utigard said; he rolled back on the cargo of the sleight and kept lying there on his back.

The Dean approached him, grabbed and lifted him up by the backside of his pants and his shoulder, and carried him in to the farmyard. Then the horse set off with the cargo and everything northwards on the road.

“Stop,” the Dean yelled.

Simen Utigard stood up and attempted to hit. Then the Dean took him for the second time, lifted him high up, as you carry a child, and took him straight to the pigs house.

“You stink like a pig!” he yelled.

Then he threw him into the pigs house, put the locking-pin in place and went straight to bed.

The next morning, when the stable boy went to pick up hay, he heard someone shouting in the pigs house.

He went there, took the locking-pin and took a glance inside.

There he saw Simen Utigard sitting.  
"I'll talk to the priest," he said; he was so angry his mouth were foaming.  
Then the stable boy laughed.  
"Hey, go'save me – how'd you get're? He yelled.  
Simen Utigard crept out.  
"Ask the priest or the devil himself," he said – he smelt like a pig.  
"What's the priest at? He turned to the stable boy, who laughed.  
"At the office," the boy answered.  
Simen Utigard went off.  
Then the boy shouted.  
"No, don't go there, boy – you'll be thrown out through the chimney!  
Then Simen Utigard turned and wobbled shamefully homewards.  
He looked and smelt like a pig when he got home.  
His wife clasped her hands together.  
"No, God save me, where do you come from?" she yelled.  
Simen Utigard headed to the loft.  
"From the priest," he answered.  
"no, never in the world that you can make me believe he's such a pig," said the wife.  
"you are more likely coming from the outhouse," she snapped at him.  
Simen Utigard did not answer. He pulled down the ladder to the loft, went up, and washed himself and put on clean clothes.  
But the smell of pig stuck to him for a week, and followed him wherever he went, outdoors or indoors, and his wife didn't easily forgive him.

Now you must not believe the Dean's business with Simen is over.  
One day they met at the churchyard which was crowded with people. The Dean grabbed his arm.  
"I'm saying hello from those at home," the Dean said.  
Simen Utigard stared.  
"From the pigs house, I mean!"  
Everybody started to listen. An occasional smile showed up.  
"You have contaminated the pig house for me, Simen! The pig will not lye there anymore; - it stinks too much of liquor!"  
Then he let Simen go, and rushed into the church and up in the pulpit. That day he held a speech of sinful drinking houses and allsorts of animalistic ungodliness.  
But Simen Utigard withdrew himself and went home.  
All of the church crowd stared after him.  
About a month later the Dean was at a party at one of the towns best men. Many people were gathered there, relatives and neighbours and among those last was Simen Utigard. The Dean walked around, shaking everybody's hand as was the custom. Spoke a couple of word to each one, so they could feel his deep voice rumble in the chest.  
When he arrived to Simen Utigard and grabbed his hand, he squeezed.  
"Good seeing you again, Simen," he said.  
Simen did not answer, just pulled back his hand.  
But the Dean squeezed harder.  
Then Simen got angry.  
He stood against the Dean and pulled backwards.  
The Dean squeezed and held firmly. And as a mitten Simen was pulled up and forward, as the guests around them stood surprised, wondering. "My dear Simen," the Dean said with a rumbling voice – he was still holding him firm as a vice; - "The devil too works

this way; if you give him the finger, he will take your very hand, and trust you me, he'll hold it and never let go!"

Then he let Simen go.

He looked at his hand and then at the Dean.

"No, I don't believe the devil is as mean as the priest anyway," he said.

And all around laughter broke through.

But it was no more howling and drinking along the Kings road near the Dean's farm since that day. The Tynset men drove the other way – across the iced lake. And the Dean was happy. He thought less and less people in Tynset needed to be converted.

When it came to people who were sick, the Dean of Tynset were mild as a child. The powerful voice were shivering, as he spoke to them, and he did the best he could for every one of them. He was especially captivated when it came to sick children; then his eyes got almost black of tenderness, and his broad fists caressed most gently.

Once he came by to see after a farm boy, who had got ill. The boy lay on his death bed, and the doctor said that he wasn't tended as he should be, where he lay. Because the farm was located north of the village, and the owner was well known for his cheapness; but his wife was even worse.

Therefore the Dean put his horse Storsvarten in front of the carriage and went north.

As he approached the farm, the farmer himself stood on the threshold of his entrance, staring.

The Dean held the carriage in front of the gate.

"Hoi, Tore! Open the gate!" he shouted with a roaring voice. The farmer jumped and approached the gate faster than he used to. "You'll not do well as the gatekeeper in heaven, my dear Tore," the Dean answered - he brought the carriage and horse inside. As he was well out of the carriage and had tied the horse by the barn bridge, he turned to Tore Rosten, heavy and big.

"So, where is the boy?" he asked.

The farmer looked at the Dean – half embarrassed.

"The priest must come inside and sit down first," he said.

"No, my dear Tore, the Dean answered with a full voice.

- "first I tend to those who are ill or full of sorrow – then you and I can talk."

Tore's eyes avoided the Dean's sharp blue eyes under the bushy brows.

"Yes, we can offer him but sparse housing," he said. Slowly he approached the house, the Dean followed, heavy breathing behind. His breath was always full of sound, when he walked; as a steam engine approaching, or as marching trolls.

They went between the outhouse and barn, and went into the cookhouse, which stood there, abandoned and poor now in high summer.

Tore Rosten went ahead and pushed open the cookhouse door. The Dean bent his high figure, following Tore. Deep inside the cookhouse, in darkness and misery the boy lay on a frame between an old sheep fur and rags; He lay staring at them out in the darkness as they came.

The Dean halted in the middle of the naked dirt floor and took his hat off.

"What? God safe us, Tore – is the boy laying here?" he shouted; He got red all over his head; his cap sat on the back of his grey hair; the veins at his temporal raised, bluish.

Tore didn't answer.

The Dean took two steps forward to the bed frame. "Poor boy," he said with a warm, compassionate hum.

"Poor boy!"

Then, suddenly, he bangs his fist into the baking plate, makes the table dance and the rolling pin jump to the air.

"This you will have to answer for at the day of judgement, Tore Rosten!" he shouted, so loud the whole room stood shaking.

The boy lay pale in the bed, staring; Tore was like a soaked dog where he stood, hanging his head, at the doorway.

The Dean put the hat on and went to the bed.

"Poor boy," he repeated.

Then he turned to Tore and stood as a giant of stone with his cold eyes fixed on the farmer.

"Open the door, Tore!" he shouted. Then he bent down, grabbed the bed frame with his powerful arms, lifted it high up, and carried the whole thing out the door. The boy lay thunderstruck and horrified in the bed. Well outside the Dean lifted the bed higher, and went through the farmyard, approached the winter house and put it all down at the door.

"Poor boy," he repeated, the voice was shivering soft as a deep tune of an organ.

"Have you had any pain?" he asked, he stood bent over the sick boy.

"Oh yes," – he said with a fragile, tired voice.

"You shall be well, my boy; you be sure of it." He gently stroke the white, skinny hands. Then he went outside and approached Tore Rosten, who stood by the pile of the firewood, staring at the saw.

"Hear me, Tore," he said – Tore felt the hurt of the big hand around his arm.

"If you keep on treating your boy like this, I'll deny you your altar's sacrament, the next time you come to church."

The farmer looked up at the Dean, defiant under the black brows. The Dean squeezed harder.

"The boy is dying," he said with a deep rumbling voice. "So are you," – he squeezed more, Tore felt his arm would go off; – "You better behave, Tore, so you can avoid laying in the *cookhouse*; that is my advice for you." He dropped Tore, turned slowly, went once again in to the boy and would not let go, but kept a sinful house with wife and maids, until the boy lay as other people, in a bed between clean sheets and furs.

Then he went to the barn bridge to loosen Storsvarten. "Tore!" he shouted.

Tore Rosten came, clenched, swinging.

"here's a drinking shilling for you, Tore," he said, took his pouch and gave him a whole mark. "But you, tend to that boy properly; for soon you are dying yourself, and it would be nice for you to have someone opening the gate!"

He sat down heavily in the carriage and drove off. The farmer stood with his shining silver mark in his hand, staring after the Dean.

But the boy got better care and died in peace.

Every man of the world has his superior, and the Dean of Tynset had his; every man on earth has his cross to bear, his pole through the flesh, and the Dean of Tynset had his, even closer than one would believe. The cross, the pole and his superior was his – own belly. With this belly he fought an infinite battle; it was his daily worry, his morning's anxiety and his evening's resignation sigh. The Dean proclaimed loudly, that his belly was the most stubborn sinner he had ever dealt with, and that said a lot. If he used force on it, it only answered with hardness, if he used good words and carefulness, it pretended as nothing had happened. To appeal to its soft capacity was futile, to threaten

it made the case even worse. Harder disposition and at the same time a more persistent case had never been seen among his parishioners.

Therefore you could never hear more sincere thanksgivings to our Lord from the mouth of the Dean, than when he came creaking forwarding the hallway floor behind the office and the stairs up after a relatively successful negotiation of action with this one, his tyrannical ruler.

"Oh, thank God and bless him," the girls in the kitchen heard him utter with his rumbling voice, as he went there in his own life blessed dwellings down at his office. And the one who met him after this business, he could most likely ask the Dean for a dollar, and would get one, though the Dean didnt have many.