

# KAREN

## A NOVEL

**T**HIS woman Karen was a norwegian. She was dressed in heavy men's clothes, the trousers put down into boottops. She was not old, she was not ugly, she was workworn.

She stood looking through a crack in the barn door up at the farmhouse on the hill. Dorothea was dead... Dorothea. The daughters would be coming up to the funeral tomorrow. Dorothea had slipped and fallen on the icy ground. Karen had heard the doctor telling the neighbours at church; but no daughters had come to take care of her. All the week before Dorothea died Karen was tortured with a longing to do something for her. She wished she had the courage to go to her, to offer to serve her, to die for her. But they were fine people, they had not come from her part of the country, there was something about her that made people shun her.

Early in the morning she had begun watching the house up the road. Hours and hours passed and she did not move. A harsh low day outside. Inside the sound of cattle chewing, blowing, sleeping, the smell of hay, wet bran and strong manure. Thoughts scratched across Karen's brain like long thorns or spread out thin and were nothing when she tried to hold them. Only pictures and feelings turned and turned in her mind today. She pictured Dorothea in church...the pastor saying her name twice when he spoke to her...calling her Fru. A little flat white lacepiece on black black hair, thin slant eyes, dark skin, cheekbones, lappblood...reindeer lapp. Jewelry: a carved silver scentbottle, heartshaped with a crown on the top, chain and rings. Long hands folded on the black dress...not listening to the pastor...Dorothea brooding for the old country, filling the church with quiet brooding. She sat beside arrogant redhaired Andreas. Karen did not listen to the pastor either. It was not like church since he had taken off his collar...everything in this new country was the same. She watched Dorothea, she could not take her eyes away. Dorothea always nodded goodday to her. Karen knew that it was