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"Three Square Stories"

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Translator's Preface

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Louis Jensen is one of the most well-known and prolific authors currently working in Scandinavia. He has written and published over 60 books, ranging from picture books to young adult novels. He has also published books of poems, and two novels for adults. Among his many awards and prizes, he has won the 1996 Nordic Children's Prize and the 1998 Hans Christian Andersen Stipend; and he has been nominated for both of the most prestigious awards in children’s literature, the Hans Christian Andersen Award and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Prize.

The author is currently engaged in an ambitious effort to write 1001 "firkante historier," or “square stories.” Each of these stories is a few sentences long, and they are arranged, one per page, in the shape of a square. Beginning in 1992 with his first collection, *Hundrede Historier*, he has published six volumes (and thus six hundred) of these magical, amusing tales. These stories are from his fourth volume, *Hundrede Firkante Historier*, (Gyldendal 2002).

As an English professor who teaches fiction and poetry, I was drawn to these stories by both their rich evocations of traditional fairy tales and their modernist simplicity. Jensen is calling upon the literary tradition of the fairy tale to bring his readers into a world that is at once deeply familiar and entirely strange. In these translations, I try to capture his simple, conversational style, while including some familiar set phrases from the fairy tale tradition, such as, “lived happily ever after.”

A three hundred and sixteenth time, there was a boy who sat on the bottom of the sea. Winter came. Ice covered the sea. But the boy hunched his back and pushed against the ice until it cracked. He stood up in the hole and looked around, while a thin layer of water froze into ice on his body. He was as white as a star. Arms outstretched. Shining.

"Three Square Stories" by Louis Jensen
From Hundrede Firkantede Historier (Gyldendal, 2002)

Translated by Lise Kildegaard
En tre hundrede og tyvende gang var der en Konge og en Dronning med hvidt hår og blå øjne, der levede lykkeligt resten af deres dage, undtagen de dage (og det var mange) hvor Kongen var sur på Dronningen, og de dage (og det var endnu flere) hvor Dronningen var sur på Kongen, og de dage hvor kongekronen faldt ned på Kongens næse og slog hul, og de dage hvor det regnede ned gennem det Kgl. Tag, og de dage hvor prinserne og prinssesserne blev forvandlet til henholdsvis skambisser og frøer.

A three hundred and twentieth time there was a King and a Queen with white hair and blue eyes, who lived happily ever after, except for those days (and there were many) when the King was mad at the Queen, and those days (and there were even more) when the Queen was mad at the King, and those days when the King’s crown slipped down and scraped the royal nose, and those days when it rained on the palace roof, and those days when the princes and princesses were changed, respectively, into dung beetles and frogs.
En tre hundrede og toogtyvende gang var der en alfabet-rytter. Om morgenen red han ud af stalden og lige ind i den opgående sol på et stort A. Ved middagstid skiftede han A'et ud med et skinnede sort H og galopperede af sted, mens han råbede vildt omkring sig. Om aftenen red han sagde hjem på et stort A. Han græd, for det gør alfabet-ryttene, når natten kommer.

A three hundred and twenty second time, there was an alphabet-rider. In the morning, he rode out of the stable and right into the rising sun on a big letter A. At noon, he traded the A for a shining black H and galloped away, shouting wildly. In the evening, he rode slowly home on a big Z. He wept, for that's what alphabet-riders do when the night comes.