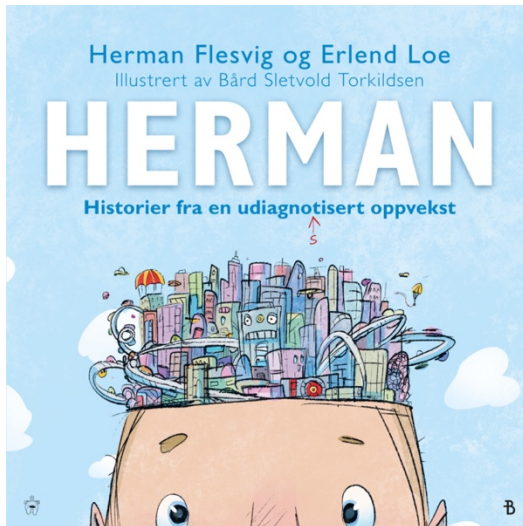


# Cappelen Damm Agency *Spring 2023*



*"Inside my head you will find the largest city in the world, traffic is humming day and night, the streets have no names and I play one hundred instruments at the same time."*

Welcome inside the head of Herman. This is a head not quite like all others. As a child Herman is a little bit different. A little too much. Someone who cannot pay attention, learn quickly enough, do what he's supposed to. But inside Herman's head, things are moving so much faster than for other people. He is Mr. Miyagi, he has a whole world inside his t-shirt, he has a triangle on his weenie, he fights with a samurai sword in the forest. The thing is, though, that no one else knows this. They are busy with listening to what the teacher is saying.

## Herman - Tales from an undiagnosed childhood

Herman is a book for children – and those who once were children. This is a story for anyone who has ever felt a bit different and alone. And for all others, too. The book is written by Erlend Loe and illustrated by Bård Sletvold Torkildsen.

NORLA SELECTED TITLE SPRING 2023

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Herman - Tales from an undiagnosed childhood  
Erlend Loe, Herman Flesvig and Bård Sletvold Torkildsen (ill.)

CAPPELEN DAMM AGENCY

## Herman Flesvig & Erlend Loe

**Herman Flesvig (b. 1992) is multi-talented creator, who is active as a comedian, actor, podcaster and screen writer. He has made huge success in Norway with TV series, which he has written and acted in, and with his podcasts.**

**Erlend Loe (b. 1969) is one of Norway's bestselling authors. He writes for both children and adults. His children's series about Kurt is hugely successful, and for Who Buttocked the Brown Cheese? Loe received BolognaRagazzi Award - COMICS (2022).**



# Translation

**Herman Flesvig and Erlend Loe**  
**Illustrated by Bård Sletvold Torkildsen**

**HERMAN**  
**Tales From an Undiagnosed Childhood**

**Translation © Kari Dickson (2023)**

**This translation has received a support grant from NORLA.**

Thank you to all the teachers who saw me, listened to me  
and helped me. Jorid, Willy, Ingebjørg,  
Runar, Sissel, Øystein and Elin.

p.12

Illustration: WELCOME TO HERMAN'S HEAD

p.13

I have the biggest city in the world in my head. The traffic never stops, the streets have no names – I play a hundred instruments all at the same time.

p.15

I'm named after my dad's dog.

He loved that dog.

'The dog was more obedient than you,' Dad says.

But he likes me a little too.

I'm almost certain of that.

p.16

I think I'm a bit much.

When I knock on my friends' doors, I hear the grown-ups sigh: 'It's Herman again.'

And when I've left, they'll say: 'Is there no one else you can hang out with?'

p.18

Dad gives me a coin to go and collect the post.

It's 150 metres to the mailbox.

When I get back, he asks: 'Did anything happen along the way?'

p.19

'I met an elk and a fireman,' I say.

'Great. What actually happened?' Dad asks.

p.20

'There was a fire in the neighbour's house and I put it out and got a medal and cake at the city chambers.'

'But what actually happened?' asks Dad.

Illustration: HOORAY, HERMAN!

p.21

'A girl from my class was tied to the train tracks and I saved her and she kissed me.'

'Good job,' Dad says. 'Sounds like you've earned that coin.'

p.22

If the teacher says "elephant", the others in the class only see one elephant.

I see seventy in all different colours with hats and unicycles and party crackers.

My head's just like that. I can't do anything about it.

p.24

I learn to read, but don't take anything in.

The teacher looks at me and says: 'Read the homework twice.'

I run home and read:

Once once  
Upon upon  
A time a time

p.27

I learn to write, but write back to front.  
You're obviously not supposed to do that.  
It's wrong.

Illustration: LEAVE  
IEH GEJ RETEH

p.28

I fight in the forest with my samurai staff.  
No one stands a chance against me.  
They might think they do, but they're wrong.  
Because I've saved time on reading and done more practice than them.  
I'm so cunning it makes me laugh.

p.30

My fingerprints mustn't be left anywhere.  
That's important.  
I wipe everything I've touched with the sleeve of my sweater.  
It works.  
No one will know that I've been here.

p.31

One day I realise I can wear white gloves. Like Michael Jackson.  
That's smart. Then I won't need to wipe the fingerprints away.

p.33

Mum says:  
'Herman, I want you to take off those white gloves and touch the door handle without wiping it afterwards.'  
I don't like that at all, but when Mum uses that voice, I have to do what she says.  
Mum comes with me to watch me do it.  
'Good,' she says. 'And now you can go to bed.'

p.35

I go to bed.  
But I toss and turn for hours.  
I hate that my fingerprints are out there on the door handle.  
That's not what's supposed to happen.  
Anyone could check and see that I've been there.

p.37

At three in the morning, I sneak down to wipe them off.  
Mum's sitting in the living room, waiting.

She knows me.  
'Forget it,' she says.  
I go back to bed.  
I don't sleep a wink for the rest of the night.  
The next morning, when Mum has gone to work, I wipe the door handle clean and heave a sigh of relief.

p.39

When my head goes too fast, I turn into Mr Miyagi.  
He's calm and in full control.  
I want people to think I'm mystical and wise.  
Illustration: WOW  
Wonder what he's thinking?  
Herman is SOOO mystical.

p.40

But I'm neither mystical nor wise.  
It will take me another twenty years to realise that I'm me, and nothing will ever change that.

p.42

When it all gets a bit much, I escape into my t-shirt.  
I take an extra break.  
A t-shirt break.

p.43

But I can't stay there for too long.  
Because then I'll just be the weirdo with his head inside a t-shirt.  
And I don't want to be a weirdo.

p.45

All kinds of things happen inside the t-shirt.  
When I pop out again, the whole class is sitting quietly, working.  
What's up?  
Was anything said while I was away?

p.46

It's boring when everyone works.  
Then I've got no one to talk to.  
I swagger around the classroom.  
Put pencils up my nose and make all the others laugh.  
Suddenly the teacher says it's time to put the pencils down and deliver.  
Huh? Deliver what? No one told me.

p.47

It's not fair to give instructions when people are sitting inside their t-shirts.  
What kind of a society is this?

p.48

I've been a bad pupil.  
I haven't paid attention.  
I've caused a distraction.

Later that evening, I send a message to the teacher:  
"There's a new boy coming to school tomorrow. He's really excited."  
I send this message several times a week.  
Every time, the teacher sends an encouraging message back:  
"That's good," she writes. "I'm excited too."  
But it's always the same old boy who turns up.

p.50

On the last day before the holidays, I pick up a tin of something sticky that's standing beside a digger.  
I smear it all over the door of the playhut in the playground.  
It stays there all summer, getting harder and harder, and when the holidays are over, the door can't be opened. The janitor works on it all day.  
In the end he has to pull the whole thing off and put in a new door.  
I pretend to know nothing.  
Illustration: SERIOUSLY STICKY! DO NOT SMEAR ON THINGS THAT NEED TO BE OPENED/CLOSED

p.52

Dad helps me to tidy my head.  
'You need lists,' he says.  
'So people know you're in control.'  
'Can't they just see that I'm a good guy?' I ask.  
'That's not how it works, Herman,' he says.  
'You need papers. It's important to have papers.  
Then you can get a job and have a good life.  
And to get papers, you need to be in control.  
And to be in control, you need lists.'

p.53

Illustration: HOW TO SHOW (THAT) YOU HAVE CONTROL  
MAKE LISTS  
GET PAPERS  
BE IN CONTROL  
IN SUMMARY: LISTS → PAPERS → IN CONTROL

p.54

I quickly learn to write lists.  
I make a new list every day.  
It says what I have to do and when.  
If it's not on the list, I don't do it.  
For example, it says on the list that I have to go to the loo at a quarter to two.

p.55

At sixteen minutes to, I put up my hand.

‘Yes, Herman?’ the teacher says. ‘I need to go to the loo,’ I say.

‘But we’ve just had a break,’ the teacher says.

‘But I didn’t need to go to the loo then.’ ‘Well, you’ll just have to wait until the end of the class.’ ‘But I can’t.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Because I need to go to the loo at a quarter to two. Look, it says on my list.’

The teacher looks at my list. ‘Well, okay,’ he says, eventually. ‘If that’s what it says on your list.’

p.56

One day, a special teacher turns up. She asks me to write words on a piece of paper. And I do what she tells me.

‘Goodness, you’re left-handed,’ she says.

Suddenly, everything is clear to me.

‘That’s why I can’t follow. That’s why I can’t do my times tables. That’s why I can’t remember anything I read. Of course. It’s because I’m left-handed.’

She laughs.

She doesn’t seem to believe that’s the reason.

p.58

‘Read and understand the text as fast as you can.

Ready, steady, go.’

The teacher starts the stopwatch.

I read for dear life, and get super stressed when I see the others turn the page.

p.59

And then after, I have to answer questions.

I make wild guesses. Dog! Carrot! Farmer! Pluperfect!

None of my answers are right.

p.61

I don’t want to be the one who only reads books with fourteen pages and big letters.

I’d rather be the one who reads bigger books than everyone else.

I take an encyclopedia to school. Carry it with me all day long.

‘Hey, Herman’s started to carry an encyclopedia around.’

People look at me differently. I’m in the process of becoming a nerd. Someone who reads everything.

I borrow *The Lord of the Rings*, in English, and read three hundred pages. This is the new me. Look, I’m reading this book and I think it’s really interesting.

I carry *The Lord of The Rings* with me down the corridors at school.

p.62

I’m now the boy who always has big, exciting books with him.



But sadly, I have no idea what all the writing says.

There are so many words. A crazy number. And in English, as well. A completely different language.

I get that there's something about a ring and volcano. And quite a few horses and creatures with strange names.

I eventually get bored of it and couldn't care less if they throw their stupid ring in the volcano or not.

p.64

I don't give up. The library has a Book Worm project.

If I read fifty books in a year, I'll win a prize. It might be a troll, or even a magnifying glass.

I really want a magnifying glass. So I borrow a whole stack of books. Then another. Borrow and return. And again. "Guinness Book of Records" and all kinds of things.

p.65

And every time I argue with the librarian about which books are allowed, and how many pictures there have to be for them not to count.

It's a struggle.

But finally, I get my magnifying glass. Whenever I use it in the classroom, everyone thinks: "Wow, Herman's read more books than most."

Illustration: ONLY PICTURES, PHOTO BOOK

p.66

But being a book worm isn't enough.

I also want to be good at maths.

I take a test on the internet ten times.

Eventually I know all the answers off by heart and can do it almost without a mistake.

Then I print off a diploma that says: Congratulations, you are a maths genius.

p.67

I hang it up in my room in a frame.

Mum and Dad laugh and laugh.

I don't care.

People have always laughed at geniuses.

p.68

Illustration: (works) WATER PISTOLS, FIRST AID, COMICS, DRAWING STUFF, (...), WATCHES, GAMES, INSECTS, SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT, (ger), GAMES, (er), DIVERSE, MARBLES, PAPERS, NICE STONES, (... CROSSES), (...), STAMPS, LISTS, SWEETS

p.69

My room is immaculately tidy. With labels on all the drawers.

Small things. Keys.

Pencils. School things.  
Survival equipment.  
Money.  
No one has a room as tidy as mine.  
It'll pay off in a crisis.

p.70  
(upside down)  
For a year, I walk on my hands.  
The world is different.  
It suits me well.

p.73  
I melt the soles of my Cherrox boots with the iron.  
Then slide down the snowy slopes at breakneck speed.  
I survive.  
Only just.  
As usual.

The family Cherrox budget is blown.

p.74  
I have a cuddle cloth with me.  
Everywhere. All the time.  
It's got blue checks and is really soft.  
Mum and Dad tease me that I'll be the only one who's ever done military service with a cuddle cloth.  
And I don't want them to be right about that.

With ENORMOUS effort, I stop when I'm twelve.

p.75  
Illustration: CUDDLE CLOTH 1992-2004 "CUDDLE IN PEACE"

p.77  
I see double and have to go to the optician's.  
'You've got astigmatism and will need to wear glasses,' the optician says. I'm super happy.  
I choose some round glasses. Everyone will know that I'm super smart now. Soon no one will laugh at my magic abilities.  
Dad doesn't understand why I'm glad to wear glasses.  
He really doesn't understand anything.  
I put on my glasses and go to the library.  
Now the librarian will see how smart I am.

p.78  
I ask for books about science.  
She asks me to elaborate.  
Elaborate?

‘Science can be so many things,’ she says.

p.79

Goodness, how hard can it be? I need books about science now!  
People need to understand how smart I am as soon as possible.

p.80

I’ve forgotten I have to do a presentation in social studies.

Yikes.

Today was the day I was planning to excel.

I run into the photocopy room and fold a lot of paper airplanes in no time at all. I’ve made some of the airplanes before, but most are new to the world.

Then I walk into the classroom, smiling, and talk for thirty minutes about the history of paper airplanes.

I’m soon on a roll and make up lots of Japanese names and dates. The class are impressed.

They don’t understand how I’ve managed to learn about something so complex, and remember it all by heart, and speak so freely.

The teacher is over the moon. I get an A. For once I like my own head.

Illustration: ZHOU DYNASTY, SHANGI DYNASTY, HAN DYNASTY

p.82

I’ve seen the Harry Potter film and swap my cuddle cloth for a wand.

I rub a pillow against my hair until the static sparks.

Then I run out into the living room, and shout: ‘Shit! You know what? I’ve got magic powers! For real!’

Mum and Dad don’t believe me. Grown-ups lead such boring lives.

I must never, ever grow up.

p.84

I join the Scouts.

I turn up every week in full uniform. Rucksack. Thermos. The others are just in their normal clothes.

They don’t take the Scouts seriously.

p.86

I join a brass band and hang the triangle from my willy.

p.88

Suddenly everyone seems to think I’m the sort of person you need to keep an eye on.

I leave the brass band.

p.90

I start cross-country skiing.

I stop cross-country skiing.

I start playing handball and football.

I stop playing handball and football.

I start going to circus school and riding a unicycle.

I start and stop all kinds of things.

Illustration: HERMAN 8 YEARS, HERMAN 10 YEARS

p.92

I struggle to control my impulses.

Sometimes words come out that I didn't know were coming.

Often it doesn't matter.

But sometimes it's just really awkward.

Like this:

I've known for a long time that my teacher is a single mother. One day she takes her daughter with her to school, and I squat down and say: 'I am your father.'

The teacher is really upset.

And I really hate that.

I don't want anyone to be upset.

p.94

Suddenly I'm sitting in a room being assessed.

They try to find out what's going on in my head.

Good luck with that.

p.96

They discover that my head works faster than other heads.

I already knew that.

I'm all over the place. I'm here. I'm there.

It happens so fast that normal eyes don't see it.

I live at the speed of light.

Illustration: PAINT YOUR FEELINGS.

BUILDING BLOCKS

DO NOT PRESS

p.98

They give me a pill to make my head slow down.

For the first time, I hear what the teacher is saying.

Wow, is this what it's like for everyone else?

It must be so simple being them.

But I'm no longer me. I'm somebody else. I don't want to be someone else.

I'm Herman, after all.

p.99

Illustration: THE THREE "S"s: SIT, STILL, SEE

PLUPERFECT: plus quam perfectum

"When Adam came home, Eva had already eaten the apple."

FUTURE PERFECT PARTICIPLE

p.100

My feelings own me.

I struggle to tidy my head.

p.101

I get tired.

Negative thoughts paralyse me.

No one gets as sad as I do.

p.103

But there's no one who can be as happy either.

I can work super hard.

And I have crazy amounts of love in me.

p.104

People know me as the person who plays hundreds of roles on TV.

But they don't know that in stressful situations I have to count to thirteen lots of times, or that when I drive past the restaurant called "The Happy Pig", I have to shout: 'Look! The Happy Pig.'

If I don't, the building will burn down and everyone will die.

p.105

Illustration: Why didn't you shout "Look! The Happy Pig!"?

p.106

I get letters from children who have a head like me.

They write: "I've seen you on TV and I have the same thing as you."

Good luck, my friends, I write, and fasten your seatbelt, because it's going to be a bumpy ride.

It will be extremely tiring, and a lot of fun, and never, ever boring.

And everything will work out – somehow.