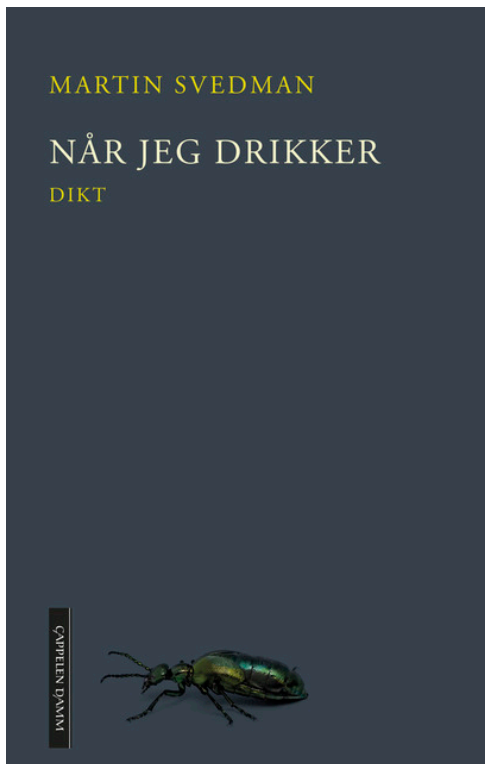


Cappelen Damm Agency *Spring 2019*



When I Drink

11-year-old Henrik stretches out on the bathroom floor after drinking vodka. He laughs, he cries, he discovers that he has a talent for ecstasy. When he as a young man starts his MBA his parents have been trying to deal with his alcoholism for years. He has been to rehab and in therapy. Henrik can stop drinking for a while. The problem is that he always starts drinking again. As a student he meets Sofie. Henrik likes that Sofie has a sense for numbers and complex calculations, and that she knows the piano concertos by Mozart. And he loves that she can drink just as much as he can. But when Henrik and Sofie move in together, Sofie changes personality. She stops drinking.

When I drink is a poetry collection that portrays an alcoholic through sad, euphoric, painful, hopeful, absurd, and pathetic episodes. Henrik becomes just as sick when he does not drink as when he drinks. In a precise, specific and at times playfully poetic language the author shows us the otherness and pain of the alcoholic, and the way that they react both mentally and physically in a different way to a substance that most of us have a relationship to - alcohol.

Inspired by the prose of Charles Baudelaire and talkative, narrative poets like Frank O'Hara, the author started writing poetry after being submitted to detox. He has not had a drink for 8 years.

Martin Svedman

b. 1977

Martin Svedman is from Oslo. He has an MBA from HEC Paris and has been a student at the writers course at the University in Tromsø. He made his debut in the anthology Signaler in 2018, and then published his first book, *When I Drink*, in 2019.



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When I Drink
Martin Svedman

Sample translation – Translation by the author

I lived in a warm
large house
that clattered

my father
came back
from trips
throwing the car keys
in a bronze dish

after school
I would go to the neighbours
sit in the kitchen
while the neighbour drink wine
two bottles
in the living room
his daughter switches on
melrose place
all day
I've been thinking about melrose place
I stick around
the kitchen

have not seen my aunt
for a long time
she's been given
permission
to come to my birthday
has knitted me a sweater
which suits me just right
she's happy
I'm happy
the last time she slept
in the guest room
she threw chairs
and busted a glass table

we
can have a drink or two
the feeling is pleasant
others
can not hold their liquor
my parents say
I want to find out
if I am
like them

I am 11
I have a drink of vodka
from the freezer in the basement
walk up the stairs
over the soft carpet
brush my teeth
lie down
on the bathroom tiles
I laugh
I cry
become concentrated
happy

I have
a flair
for ecstasy

there's a comic book series I like
it is imported specially
when he's away
my father buys it
I make a list of the issues
I'm still missing
the rare first edition from 1973
the controversial miniseries from 1985
my father looks up comic book stores
in phone directories
goes to them in cabs between meetings
I love my father
for this
I am protective of the comics
a friend wants the first edition
I say yes
if I can have whatever I want
from the liquor cabinet
at his house

I ride in
a wheelchair
from the emergency room
I am hungover
my cock hurts
from the catheter-thing
the buzz doesn't last
nothing lasts
in the parking lot
my dad stops pushing
goes to find the car

after three days
in rehab
I'm allowed
on the phone
my mom picks up
I cry
say that I am not like
the others
criminals
wife beaters
addicts
I want to go home
I love her
she has to pick me up
I promise not to drink
the same night
I'm back home

in the dorm room
I take two cans of beer
put them in my computer bag
in a toilet stall
after the morning sessions
I have the beers
buy a club sandwich
from the vending machine
don't want to be intoxicated
in class
don't want to be sober

sofie has pretty
intelligent
green
sad eyes
doesn't know
which classes to choose in the spring
she asks me what I like
about accounting
I tell her
I like it
when the numbers sing

on business trips cross-country
I drink all night
I enjoy these trips
gone for a week or two
calculate the number
of cured fish
in a storehouse in bodø
count the logs
stored outside of a mill
in halden
every night
I call sofie
talk about everything
and anything
I am myself
alone
over the phone
at night

after we move in
together
sofie has a
change of personality
she stops drinking

she sleeps better
than me
in the mornings
I take the trash out
go for a walk
smoke two cigarettes
put the tea mugs
from our date night
into the washing machine
after six days
sober
I get a magic marker
a huge piece of paper
draw up a schedule
with our names
tape the schedule
on the fridge
tuesdays and Thursdays
sofie is responsible
for putting the mugs
in the machine
on wednesdays and Fridays
it's my job to remove them
on the days I empty
it's important
that she's in charge of garbage
sofie says
it seems complicated
we need rules
I tell her

I knock on all the doors
along the apartment landings
in our building
sofie comes out
says it's ok
false alarm

pulls me into the bathroom
I fall asleep in there
sofie helps me
to bed
the next morning
she says she was up all night
threatens to call a
rehab clinic

the morning after
I shake
can't go to work
can't log on
from home
late in the afternoon
I'm able to hold down
a spoon of fish soup
when I drink again
it's like being saved

sofie comes
calls an ambulance
the doctor says
kidney failure

in my suitcase
I bring a dark suit black shoes
a dark tie embroidered
with pink hearts
if I die they can
bury me in that suit
with that tie
it's the middle of august
it is hot
inside the clinic
don't have any clean shirts
spend all summer
resentful about the suit
the bulk
in my case

my roommate
three weeks
sober
fell asleep in a chair
tipped face first
into the fireplace
was given a new face
stayed clean
while they were doing
the skin grafts

at the clinic
there's a saying
the disease
is jumping hurdles
running marathons
while we
rest
lift iron
do
pull ups
build muscle
so it can fuck us up

say yes to go for a hike
in the woods
by a lake
I'm in the back of a ford transit
the minivan won't start
it's ok it's stupid
to be inpatient in rehab
it doesn't matter one way
if we drive or wait
from the parked van
I can see a boy
running along the house next door
the lawn looks soft
the motor starts
we're rolling down a gravel path
past the birdbath
where I toss my cigarettes
the enormous house with its
lonely aura
windows with frilly curtains

my sister
comes to visit
give her
a tour of the rec room
point at the crochet
hooks
the balls of yarn
on the sofa table

my mother
thinks my drinking
is her fault
can't get out
of bed
shows no interest in
my nephews
in my sister
I take up a lot of space
in my family

at christmas we go to beitolstølen
it's our turn
to vacation together
while I was in rehab
sofie travelled on her own
to barcelona
during the days
we hit the slopes
in the evenings we eat dinner
and go to bed
don't drink anything
don't even think about it
go to bed early
want to use my lift ticket

after new years
our friends go home
we stay
an extra day
just us
the shops have opened
sofie goes to take a look
I find a liquor store
sofie says she will leave
if I drink again

I knock on all the doors
in the hotel corridor
sofie comes out
says its ok
false alarm

pulls me into the bathroom
I fall asleep in there
sofie helps me
into bed
next morning
sofie says she was up all night
we check out
of the hotel
sofie drives
drops me off
by the express bus

the movers have left
for the self-storage center at økern
it's so sad
to connect to
sofie and henriks wi-fi
the deep rooms are deforested
the network
is all that's left

reduce my drinking
by going to bars
drinks are smaller
the blackouts shorter

crap my pants in a minicab
what kind of a taxi
has white seats
the minicab had white seats

the aa-meetings
are held in a building
where no one lives
the flats are used by
phone marketers dentists
charities
in the staircase
the windows
are big and dark

I get there 30 minutes early
the room smells
like perfume

there's a woman
with discreet gold jewellery
grey cashmere sweater
she opens a
carton of
vanilla biscuits
I tell her I want to die
because I can't stop
she asks me to
open the cupboard
look for the instant coffee
says she wanted to slit her wrists
every day
for three years
after she stopped

daniel
who leaves his headphones
on
until the chairman starts reading
big ben
in shorts and sandal
little ben with new teeth
new glasses
jørgen with a foot
bracelet
the older ones
have nicknames
johnny the baker julia the comedian
they collect money
in a paper cup
for coffee
and self help books

I tell the lady
in grey cashmere
I want
to control my drinking
she says
control is like screwing your lover
for 20 seconds
waiting a week
screwing for 20 seconds more

Daniel
says he never found the bottom
stopped looking
the first two months
he was sad horny
suicidal panicked
shameful ecstatic born again
the feelings stopped
the next six months
he stayed up night
afraid to drink in his sleep
went to meetings
said his name
then slept hunched over the table
stuck yellow post its
on his walls have dinner put on shoes go to a meeting
stuck a note above his sofa
read the good book
he got a sponsor talked to a higher power
on his knees
read in the good book
god is as real as we are
he and god seemed unreal
he dropped people letters rang on doors
made amends
a week ago a monday
he felt
like he'd lost something
he stood
for a long time in front of a tree
in the park
was 10 times lighter

I am sober
eat indian take away
lie on the bed
watch a movie
fall
asleep
I am sober
under the covers

I dream of
getting up on a saturday
open the fridge notice that
the beers I bought on friday
still untouched
in the vegetable drawer

daniel celebrates
1 year sober
has bought
a new pair
of headphones
there's cake
in the tiny kitchen
daniel thanks
the group
without us
he would not have lasted
1 year
all the seasons

daniel shares
on sunday he went by himself
to a classical concert
during the break
he stood at the bar
Daniel
and a beautiful girl
were the only people
not drinking
right before it rang in
he asked her name
her name was sofie
after the concert
they walked together
from the middle of town

I have a breakdown
in a zen-center
the monks say
stop meditating

in aa
there's a rule of thumb
after one year of meetings
you can buy a plant
after two years you can buy a hamster
if the plant and the hamster
are alive at the start of the third year
you can
buy a cat
the rule is not for our sake
it's there
to protect the public

I pick up a plant
at the gardening center
it looks strong and healthy
I try to remember
whether my mom
likes tulips
I buy a beautiful bouquet

my mother
is happy
I am happy
ask
forgiveness

the sound
of the vodka bottle
on the porcelain
by the sink
calms my hands
it is enough
I don't drink
I wait
until after
I've shaved

I leave the phone
uncharged
lock myself in
to watch netflix
smoke cigarettes
not go anywhere
before the trembling stops
can't hold a glass
fill the sink with water
drink from the sink
after two days
I eat a spoon of fish soup
it's depressing
when I drink again
it's like salvation

I send an email to sofie
about seahorses
spend a long time writing it
I write that seahorses
originally had straight bodies
they drifted here and there
like tiny needles
then they changed
under pressure from the darkness
and the water
the seahorses grew a snout
a beautiful neck
a dimly glowing skeleton