

Roses are red. List of characters: Narrator, Anna (Madame) Johnsson, Fed-Up Member, Snotty Member, Worried Member, Fairy Member



Hanna Adolfsen



Rachel Grepp



Martha Tynæs



Adam Egede-Nissen



Madame Balabanoff



Zeth Höglund



Ole O. Lian



Martin Tranmæl



Kvinderforbundets Landsmøte (Women's Association National Congress) January 1918.

NARRATOR

Along the streets of the "grey-grey" city of Oslo, the scent of turmoil fills the air. Despite Norway's neutrality during the First World War it is clear from steadily increasing class divisions that there are always those who benefit and those who suffer. This day, the twenty-eighth of March 1918, would indicate a changing of tides within The Norwegian Labour Party. Mentalities were shifting and a majority vote that would be reached would hurdle the party into a process of radicalisation. The women of the party had reached a similar crossroads at their yearly congress some months prior. Yet had managed to maintain a rather moderate position contrary to the brewing opposition they were about to confront.

RACHEL GREPP

(Humming subtly to the tune of "The Internationale.")

NARRATOR

(Rachel's humming heard in the background.) Rachel Grepp waits patiently at Solli Plass for her fellow comrade Hanna Adolfssen. Both women have been actively trying to instill more radical thoughts within Arbeiderpartiets Kvindeforbund, the Women's Association of the Labor Party. Grepp through her writings in ***Vor Tid***, the weekly journal of her husband Kyrre, and Adolfssen with her needlelike belief (afterall: she was a seamstress) in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Her role within the Norwegian Tailors Association would give her the leverage she needed in

order to make her voice and the demands of female workers heard within the Women's Association, in which she always delivered with razor-sharp candor.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(Somewhat frantically but with her usual full-bodied raspy tone.) Rachel!.....Rachel! Sorry, I am so sorry to keep you waiting.

RACHEL GREPP

It's fine Hanna, no need to get flustered. We have more than enough time. Although we did just manage to miss the tram ... *(cheerful)* did you see it had a female conductor?

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Oh, it would have been delightful to ride down to the meeting with one of our female comrades. You see less and less of them on the tracks nowadays.

RACHEL GREPP

Yes, it's quite a shame that their presence is dwindling now that our men have less duties in regards to the war. Seems like all their hard work has gone unrecognized especially after having been met by such utter bigotry. Do you know what they had the audacity to call them in the newspaper?.....*(with disgust)* "Wild Birds", as if they were some kind of exotic animals wishing to be gawked at and made a spectacle of.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(slightly baffled due to utter appalment) Are you referring to the writings in the Norske Intelligenz-Seddeler!? Why am I not surprised, they've managed to turn that paper into an organ for Gunnar Knudsens god damn regime! Do you really *read* that nonsense?

RACHEL GREPP

I keep myself informed from all sides.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Well, it's one thing to be insulted in print, but I've heard the male conductors with my own ears. They call them "Trikiner".....right to their faces. As if they were prostitutes loitering on the streets. Absolutely despicable behavior amongst comrades.

RACHEL GREPP

(with a slight hint of sarcasm) Well Hanna, good thing we have something to do then, besides washing dishes. *(in a more sober tone)* Organizing the unions must be done in order to create better working conditions for *ALL* ... not just some.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Hear, Hear!

RACHEL GREPP

But to be honest, I much prefer to walk. Who knows what pestilences are jumping around in those cramped carriages. I wouldn't dare bring anything unexpected into our home, especially now with Kyrre's condition..... *(let's out a sigh)* Shall we then?

NARRATOR

As the two continue walking in the direction of Youngstorget, a strain of sorrow falls over Rachel's face. The Grepp's were hardly strangers to pestilence. Kyrre had been diagnosed with tuberculosis of the throat, the same disease that had claimed the life of his brother some years prior and the lives of two of the Grepp's children. It would be the cause behind his silence as he would lose his voice completely during the year of 1917, a year accompanied by frequent visits to the Gjøsegården sanatorium. Rachel would be left alone in Oslo to take care of running both *Vor Tid* and the household. A household struck by plague again and again. Nevertheless, the work for the party continued seemingly unremitted.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Yes, where is Kyrre anyhow? Did he already go ahead to meet Tranmæl? Making some last minute preparations for their coup d'état!?

RACHEL GREPP

Kyrre isn't coming.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Not coming.....what do you mean!?

RACHEL GREPP

He is having one of those bouts with his tuberculosis again *(takes a pause to contain a fragility in her voice.)* so he is resting, you know he can barely get out a word.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(with compassion) Oh, I am sorry to hear that, both for your sake and the party's. Tranmæl is going to feel lost without him.....But how are **you**?

RACHEL GREPP

I am fine.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(with a comforting spirit) Rachel my dear, you don't always have to be so amiable. The difficulty of political work and running a household is never to be undermined. *(reminiscent sorrow)* I am

a woman that has suffered loss and knows very well the pain of grief. Do let me know if you need anything.

RACHEL GREPP

Thank you Hanna.

Now, In regards to the fire starters at the congress, I can imagine there won't be too many opposing perspectives coming out of the woodwork. Besides, you know how Ole O. Lian is. He'll try to play on everybody's side just to smooth over the real issues to try and dampen the flames.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Perhaps. But I think you and me both know exactly how quickly things can escalate, especially with all those hot-headed men at the table. You know they are coming from all over the country. I have heard through the Tailor's Association that people are starting to wake up and realise Lian and his other moderate fools have been in power far too long. None of them seem remotely interested in addressing the issues that are gravely affecting our livelihood.

RACHEL GREPP

I see.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(swiftly continuing unphased by Rachels attempt to sneak in a word) Our needs, and those of female workers are being denied. We must confront the neglect of our male comrades.

RACHEL GREPP

This I couldn't agree with more, but I believe it's a problem of perspective. Things have been difficult, but I fear that becoming too vocal about the domestic space and women's needs will scare off the men.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(with a confident mix of sarcasm and anguish) Sending them into a state of sexist rage. Next thing we know they'll be calling us Wild Birds! Or even worse wannabe Bourgeoisie! Hah.....

(a bit more under your breath) under my dead proletariat body.....

RACHEL GREPP

(Swiftly cutting off Adolfsen from finishing her sentence.) Come on Hanna, we need to be strategic. The conservative leadership we see now is frightened by the potential of a separate movement both within the greater party and within the Women's association. The men can't expect us to be revolutionaries within both the party and in the home and that's why we need to work together. Politics occupies all these spaces as one, and affects everything that is daily life. This is something our bourgeois rivals could never understand.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(Again with a raspy encouraging voice) ... precisely! Our work goes beyond property, beyond inheritance and leaves no one behind.

NARRATOR

The two of them breathe deeply and clutch on to one another knowing very well what struggles lay ahead. There would be victories; such as full voting rights for women in 1919 along with the eight-hour work day. Yet there would also be defeat, as Youngstorget would become a symbol for the loss of momentum within the Labor Party during the twenties as less and less workers would gather.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(proud) And here we are..... at the heart and soul of our movement, the beat and pulse of our cause..... our dear Youngstorget.



RACHEL GREPP

Ah, look! There is Martha.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Looking quite bougie.....as usual.

NARRATOR

Martha Tynæs, chairwomen of the Women Association since 1906, had sensed the onset of a more radical tone developing within the party. She believed that these ideals would only ensue an even greater amount of hardship. Tynæs was an idyllic beauty whose coiffure revealed her cautious leadership and accommodating manner. Regardless of personal opinion, her ambition was executed with elegance and grace. Naive she was not. Tynæs had grown weary that her male comrades had been oblivious to the demands of her fellow women workers and had decided ...

MARTHA TYNÆS

(finishing the sentence.) ... enough is enough.

NARRATOR

Rather than attempting to rally her troops, which had never been her fort , she preferred to pursue a disparate path. She offered to step down and resign from her position as chairwoman. To her dismay she was overruled by gaining a majority vote over her more revolutionary runner up Adolfsen.

RACHEL GREPP

Good day Martha.

MARTHA TYNÆS

(Sounding slightly sceptic to their encounter.) Hanna.....Rachel.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Mrs. Tyn s.

MARTHA TYNÆS

I am afraid this will be the day those imbeciles will seize control of our dear party.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Oh c'mon Martha! Don't go on pretending like Bolshevism is the germ. You know very well that we need to see a change within the leadership. I mean, after all that's why you tried to resign, isn't it?

MARTHA TYNÆS

Why is it so difficult for you to understand my point of view? I just don't believe that the opposition and its revolution will put food on the table.

RACHEL GREPP

Enough. Ladies, there is no need to be hostile. We are on the same side, the least we could do is try to give each other some support during this congress.

MARTHA TYNÆS

No, it's fine Rachel.

I don't need to justify my actions to Mrs. Adolfsen. Besides, you two are hoping for a far-fetched utopia. A revolution ...? Here? I mean, do you think your esteemed colleague Martin Tranm el and his *(clears throat)* colleagues could whip something up to that magnitude? I doubt it, Mr. Tranm el isn't exactly the sharpest tool in the shed.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Oh, I believe he is, Martha. And I am (*saying the word a bit mockingly.*) appalled by how you dare to speak to us about our fellow party members. Fair enough he's surrounded by his male bunnies that seem to obey his every desire, but his sheer power speaks to the whole worker's movement. Not just the upper class of it.

I thought you believed in strength in unity! A few years ago you welcomed with open arms our dear comrade Alexandra Kollontai to rally up our female comrades. And you know what? Comrade Kollontai truly believes in Tranmæl.

MARTHA TYNÆS

We are changing, but change *must* be gradual. Mass protest will not get us anywhere and upheaval, (*pause*) even *further* away from bettering our society and our schools. Not to mention it was a rally for peace, not exactly the call to revolution you two are dreaming of.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

(*at this point very offended, but trying to keep her cool*) Oh....my, Kollontai would be so disappointed in you. Let me remind you, that it was *YOU* Martha who inaugurated the first Women's day in our dear Oslo. I'll never forget that day in 1915. Folkets Hus was filled to the brim, you couldn't squeeze one more inside that room. It was beautiful. Her words spoke to everyone but more importantly, so did yours! What happened to your spirit? You were even one of the first women to be elected into the city council!

MARTHA TYNÆS

(*Firm but a bit sarcastic*) Yes, and there we dabble in level headed decision making.

RACHEL GREPP

Ok ladies let's not forget, that was then-this is now. Today there are other matters to attend to. Martha, what will you be addressing on our behalf today at the meeting? Since it's clear that we are underrepresented.....

MARTHA TYNÆS

You don't need to worry about that, radical I am not. As a woman of my word there will be no surprises. I will bring up the points we have discussed previously at our meeting in regards to the use of physical disciplining within our schools. (*pause, contemplating and worried*) But you know, it's not me I am worried about....

RACHEL GREPP

You mean.....Madame Johnsson?

NARRATOR

Anna Johnsson. The worker, the woman of mystery with little historical remnants, yet as far as quotes go, Johnsson urged women to extend their intelligence as much as possible in order to meet their male comrades in the common struggle.

HANNA ADOLFSEN

Why the concern. We know where she stands. She's a strong voice with her feet on the ground.

MARTHA TYNÆS

(Annoyed.) Hmph.....Well c'mon then let's go inside, it's quite chilly out even for the end of March. Hope I don't catch anything.



(The Labour Party Congress in 1918.)