

LOST

Helen Eriksen (2005)

The marrow in my bone was complaining that I had not dressed for the weather but for the occasion. Dressed like someone else, like a raven hopping around from one foot to the other, I stood outside the church and breathed the crisp air deep into my lungs. Words froze in my throat when I tried to mutter anything of substance. I can remember thinking to myself, "I am too cold to speak; my lips will not do my bidding. These words could drown me"

This was the only place to go, I was freezing.

I pushed my shoulders against the heavy oaken doors to find that they slid apart like someone had cut them with a blade. The warm air hit me at the same time as the buzz of the organ. Thoughts of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and Jules Vern's reality. How he needed to escape, far below into deep space, far beyond the other continents. The last breath of the organ signalled a silence beneath the vaulted roof and I was alone with myself.... in this thinking place.

Images surrounded me, small carvings with gold leaf, angels, leaves, double eagles, Madonnas and their children. Ah.... the sheer adornment of it all. At least I could understand that, I cannot understand everything which annoys and confuses me. I try constantly to unpick these knots in my head space; they are sort of like little woolly patches where things get clogged up. Often it just gets worse; a mental ball of wool that a playful kitten has unravelled beyond recovery and more likely to be discarded than transformed into a winter hat.

That day, happy at my recognition of the image, I wanted to remember the first verse I ever learnt as a child. I took off the only warm article of clothing that I was wearing, my gloves, and placed the palms of my hands together like the novices I had just been watching. Not the lazy gesturing of nonchalance of the clenching together of fingers making the hands into a huge fist but fingers pointing upwards. Head bowed, breathing shallow; let me remember, let me remember; how does it begin again? The smell of aged wood brought the words back and drew air deeper inside me as I was about to submerge.

I dived into memory, struggling to recount the words; these words that every child who had heard of Christ would surely know, or not, as may be! The words emerged slowly before me, they strung themselves together into the coherence of a pearl necklace with a beginning and end. The circular motion of the verse revealed itself as I was stopping, repeating, hearing, listening to my own words transforming into a meaning previously foreign.

I sat a while, contented to be within that thinking space without the confusion of outside. I sat opposite the Madonna and wondered what she thought about all this "ding dong" down here. Then I laughed at myself and left.

I sat on the tram and, as it flung itself screaming around a corner, it came to me that I had lost my gloves.

**Helen Eriksen
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This text was part of a site specific installation entitled "Lost" at Oslo Cathedral in October 2005