

# UC Santa Barbara

## Translation Studies Journal

### Title

"Three Square Stories"

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/36x040bw>

### Journal

Translation Studies Journal, 2(1)

### ISSN

1555-8614

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### Publication Date

2007

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## Translator's Preface

*Lise Kildegaard*

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 "*firkantede 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 Firkantede 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".

En tre hundrede og sekstende gang sad der en dreng på bunden af en sø. Så blev det vinter. Isen dækkede søen, men drengen krummede sig sammen og satte ryggen til isen, så den sprang. Han steg op af hullet og så sig omkring, mens det tynde lag vand frøs til is på hans krop. Han var hvid som en stjerne. Armene strakt. Lysende.

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

*Translated by Lise Kildegaard*

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.

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 prinsesserne blev forvandlet til henholdsvis skarnbasser 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 galloperede af sted, mens han råbte vildt omkring sig. Om aftenen red han sagte hjem på et stort Å. Han græd, for det gør alfabet-ryttere, 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.