

## The woman behind the book behind the movie about Barbara

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### I regret nothing. Else Lidegaard's classic TV interview with Estrid Good, alias Barbara.

“When she sat between two men, she could hear the beat of both hearts. She could play them in two parts as on two instruments (...) It was especially those eyes that shone so strongly that she had to take them back every time they had seen something. It was as if they had been too confidential and afterwards were ashamed of it.” (Barbara p. 41).

That was an example of a characteristic of Barbara. Do you recognize yourself in that image?

“Yes, I think so. It reminds me a lot of the time, when Jørgen-Frantz and “Gabriel” also lived in Ordrup. “Gabriel” was married to my sister at the time, and the four of us came together a lot. We lived near Dyrehaven and of course, occasionally, we went to Dyrehavsbakken (an amusement park, red.), and I remember one time where we had been around and popped plates, etc., and Jørgen-Frantz had won a spoon. Afterwards we went in the roller coaster and I knew very well how Jørgen-Frantz and Gabriel felt for me. Although I was not interested in either of them, it was so easy for me to tease them. So in the roller coaster, I sat in front with “Gabriel”...”

Shall we keep calling him “Gabriel”?

“Yes I think so. I sat down in front with Gabriel, and my sister sat behind me with Jørgen-Frantz. And of course I knew that it would annoy Jørgen-Frantz beyond all borders, so I had real fun with Gabriel, and we fooled around and stacked our heads together, and behind us Jørgen-Frantz sat and raged. And when we got out of the roller coaster, the fine spoon he had won had turned into a tiny lump. In his rage, he had turned it around and around into a small lump. And that reminds me a lot of that scene, because that was how those two were, and therefore it is of course something that Jørgen-Frantz remembers.”

How many similarities are there between the things that happen in the book and the things that happened in reality?

“There are many. Many. I just read Barbara again and time and time again I say to myself: this is *that* person, and that is *that* person and this is what happened *then*, and so it was. There are many situations.”

Do you remember any of those episodes?

“I remember the ball. When I was 17 years old, I was visiting the Faroe Islands with my sister, and Jørgen-Frantz and William Heinesen were our Faroese cavalry. They came every morning and played the gramophone beneath our windows to wake us up and take us on trips. And it was a wonderful way to be awakened. We were not exactly used to that from Copenhagen. And we went on many wonderful trips together. But then it happened, which also happens in Barbara, that the marines arrived. It was a royal visit with various small naval vessels. And of course there was a ball, and then all the Faroese people were forgotten, including William and Jørgen-Frantz. And we were at the ball, my sister and I – and all the Faroese women too - and we didn't look at the Faroese, they were somewhere out in the dark. And of course it happened at the end of the ball that you had to go out and get some air. Then you went out on Skansen (a famous building in the harbour, red.), and I was

accompanied by a very goodlooking lieutenant, who had a big mantle specially designed to wrap around me when it got colder. And then I walked there, protected by his mantle and arms out on Skansen. And that is in the scene of the ball, completely.”

When did you first meet Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen?

“I first encountered him in Torshavn in 1921. He had been asked to write about the Faroe Islands and arrived there as a very posh Copenhagener, or so he thought. I was visiting the Faroe Islands. My mother is Faroese of the old Restorp family, and I was on my way to England. I was already engaged at that time and had to go over and meet my English fiancé’s family and get to know them. And Mother thought it would be an excellent idea to make a stop in the Faroe Islands. Mother loved the Faroe Islands; we always heard a lot about the Faroe Islands. We didn’t really want to go, we thought it was weird, cold and wet up there. But we arrived there, and I must admit that we completely fell for the Faroe Islands. And it has continued. Every time I come back there, I’m thrilled, and that’s probably why I fell for Ireland when I came here, because it reminds of the Faroe Islands. Well, but we arrived there, and back then William and Jørgen-Frantz were still very good friends. My sister and I were a little younger than them, but we allowed them to be around us. They called us “the kids”. But we did trips with them, and they took us out and showed us the Faroese nature. For example, I recall a trip where we left late in the evening. During summer, the sun is up almost all night. We took a boat to Kongshavn, I think it was, and from there we climbed up to the highest mountain in the Faroe Islands. It wasn’t dark, but the sun had just gone down for a moment, when we got up to the top of the mountain. It was cold, and we were quite a group, so we danced a Faroese chain dance. And there were some wise people who knew we were going to freeze, and they had brought along some bottles of snaps, so we had snaps and danced Faroese dances, and then suddenly the sun was there. It was an unforgettable sight. Wonderful.”

Did you fall for Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen at the same time that you fell for the Faroe Islands?

“No, not at all. Not at all. I thought he was such a little student-like guy, and I actually did not see anything further to him after I came back to Denmark. Then I got married and came to live in the East, and although he did come to some of our dinner parties at my mother’s place, it was only when I came back to Denmark in approx. 1930 that we saw each other a little more.

I wondered what it was that made me go and visit him in his little loft so often, but I think it was because I longed for a job. In the East, it was all fun, no work: dancing, riding, etc. But I wanted to do something myself, and my husband did not understand that all, seen that I was married and could have everything money could buy. But Jørgen-Frantz understood, and I think it was actually the beginning of our friendship.”

“At one point I travelled to America and lived with Rockwell Kent, and we got a first chance to write a lot to each other. And he was a really great correspondent. I don’t think I was that good. At least I was terribly scolded in all the letters because I didn’t write enough.”

Now, you are sitting with one of Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen's letters. What did he write?

“Yes, in this one he refers to my writing and my spelling. At that time, I had begun to get articles accepted in newspapers and small magazines, and I had learned to write on a machine, so now I suddenly found that I had become a real journalist. But he is not very enthusiastic about that, so he writes to me: ‘How nice that was. A real letter from you. Freshly written on Wednesday and received on Sunday. On top of that, handwritten. Your well-known shabby, slightly touching writing awakens quite different feelings in my heart than a typed letter. Because it’s just not directly from you. Your little spelling mistakes are so cute written with pen, but only annoying when I see them in print’.”

He began to write the novel at one point. And he created a female figure named Barbara, who is you.

“Is me. . . I inspired him, but the figure is taken from an old saga from the Faroe Islands. But he has made her a little less witchy, but somewhat witchy, but less vicious than she was in the sagas. He describes her as a wonderfully beautiful, adorable and lovely girl, he does.”

But also a little unfaithful...

“Very much so! He doesn't believe in Barbara for a minute.”

Is that founded in reality?

“Yes, you almost have to say that. But I have always been faithful in my way – *“faithful in my fashion”*. I've always been, I think I have. At times when he was far down and where he has been very, very sick or something like that, I have visited him and helped him, and I think I do not have too bad a conscience. Some bad conscience, however, I have, when I sit and read his letters through, it makes me really embarrassed, but I can't change that. Now I have been reading and reading his letters, and I can see that he is very erotically drawn to me. But I don't think I was ever really erotically drawn to Jørgen-Frantz. I think I can say that like that.”

He had such an unrequited love for you, didn't he?

“It was probably more of an unfortunate infatuation, which he slowly came to tolerate. We were together a lot and had a good friendship. He writes in one of his letters that I was almost competing with William, who was his best friend, right. And he and I had become almost as good friends as he and William. I was very flattered by that. But you can't force your emotions. And when I wasn't attracted by Jørgen-Frantz, then there was nothing to do about it.”

But it did develop at some point into an erotic relationship?

“Roughly. Roughly.”

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“I became ill, and then he became ill. There was never really a moment when both of us were quite healthy.”

Didn't you realize how much he loved you?

“I don't really think so. Because Jørgen-Frantz was afraid of giving away too much. I think he kept his feelings for himself and, if I may say so, put them in his novel Barbara. He wasn't one of those who wrote ardent letters. Of course, he wrote very sensual letters, but he did not declare on each page how much he loved me or something like that. On the contrary, he called me witch and Satan and everything possible. It was his kind of caress. And so I think he kept the most ardent for Barbara, when he was to write the novel. If you understand what I mean.”

Were you married during this whole process?

“Yes, I was married, but I left my husband.”

Because of Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen?

“No. No not at all. Because of another man I loved very much and who I was supposed to marry. Actually, we should have travelled to Greenland to settle there, but he died. And it was only after his death that Jørgen-Frantz became my consolation. And he could sit with me and talk to me and hold my hand, I was very devastated at that time. And he was a great friend. It was a friendship and a situation that grew slowly and became something very profound at last.”

Did you not live with Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen at one time?

“No, we were supposed to have an apartment together. He was supposed to get an apartment in Klampenborg. I was not meant to get it at all. But when he was supposed to move in, he fell ill and went to Vejlefjord Sanatorium. And while he was there, a man came to me, a man who had known Hans, who was dead, and had been with him in Greenland, and he came and talked to me about him. And that made me develop a much more important friendship with this man than reasonably justified, and I thought I was in love with him. And then I told Jørgen-Frantz that I was in love with this man and that he lived with me in the apartment that should have been Jørgen-Frantz's. And it was a terrible blow for Jørgen-Frantz, who was at Vejlefjord. It was terrible for me to do so. But you can't do anything about it, that's how it happened, and it took a long time before we regained our confidential friendship again. But during all that time he kept in contact with me and called me and wrote to me all the time. But he was very mad and very devastated about it.”

The man with whom you moved together, is it the Andreas Heyde of the book?

“Yes, it is. An easy-living kind of guy who played and sang. The image you get of Andreas in the book is true. He was volatile, and in fact, I didn't mean anything to him, and it turned out very quickly that he didn't matter to me. And of course I convinced Jørgen-Frantz about this. But by this time, the terrible great sorrow had already happened. And even if I don't think it was the beginning of him writing Barbara - for he had already started on it earlier - I do think it gave him the inspiration for the tragedy in Barbara. The tragic thing about Mr. Poul, all he goes through in the book, is probably what Jørgen-Frantz himself felt at that time.”

Now, Barbara does not end, it is incomplete. What do you think was supposed to happen to Barbara after the last chapter?

“I do not think it could have ended in any other way, because she could not have travelled with Andreas, it would have been quite some nonsense, and Mr. Poul did not mean enough to her. I'm not sure that she won't keep on going after that chapter, and that there's maybe nothing new, a new priest. I have complete confidence in Barbara's wingspan and ability to survive. Something new will happen again. She was knocked out at the end of the book, I am sure, which Jørgen-Frantz has of course also seen in me, when Hans died, I was completely knocked out, and he knows how Barbara would react at such a time. So that's exactly the way he describes it.”

What happened to the real, the living Barbara after Jørgen Frantz Jacobsen's death?

“If you mean me. . . Then I moved to England. I was in love with another man, and he was called Bill. And I lived with him in England for 25 years and had a wonderful collaboration with him, which in many ways was built up in the same way as when Jørgen-Frantz and I worked together, and we wrote to each other, and eventually I became more and more proficient. And then I moved to Ireland and fell completely for Ireland and had had enough with London, now I had to try something new. And so I sat over here and wrote and translated, and then another man came my way, and that was my second husband. His name was Good, and he was a fisherman. An Irish fisherman. And I had five very happy years with him, but he drowned after five years. But I stayed here, and for some years I also continued fishing with my gardener Connie. And now I have this little inn, where it is almost like friends staying, paying friends.”

Has Barbara gone to the monastery?

“I don't think Barbara would ever do that. I don't think so. There's so much left to do, but I'm not twenty years any longer.”

How has it been to meet your past again in the way you have now met it here?

“It was very breath-taking for me to read Jørgen-Frantz's letters, it was very breath-taking.”

Do you regret it?

“No, I absolutely do not regret it, but it would be very nice if Jørgen-Frantz still lived, and you could have a little chat with him, right, it would have been nice. He also writes to me in one of his letters, which I have here, about precisely that: ‘Of course you have sometimes been horrible, but I still owe you a lot, especially the inspiration for Barbara. And that is so important that I doubt you will ever be able to do something similar to anyone else.’ And then he ends the letter saying, ‘Thank you for all the good inspirations.’ And that is a comfort to me.”

The interview was first broadcasted in the TV program: Barbara - poem and reality, which is being shown again on DR2 on Friday 10.10. The film ‘Barbara’ is reviewed in the cultural section. Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen's ‘Barbara’ has just come out as a paperback.