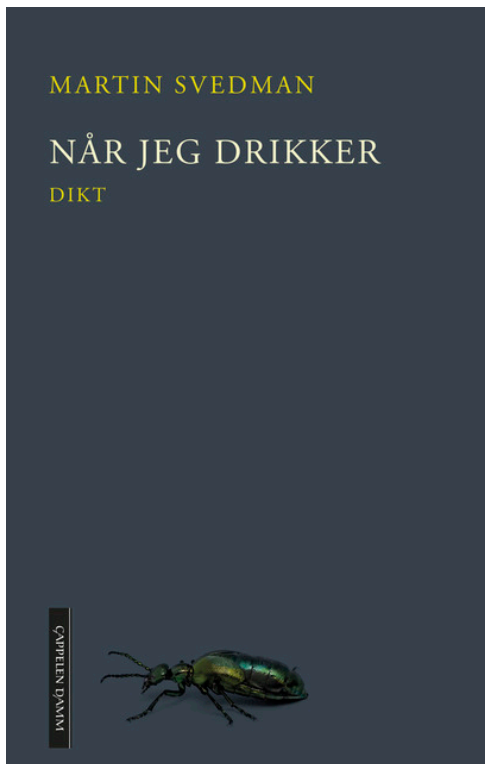


# Cappelen Damm Agency *Spring 2019*



## 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