Kristin Lavransdatter

Author: Sigrid Undset (1882-1949)
First Published: 1920-1922
Genre: Novel
Locale: Norway
Time: Fourteenth century
Plot: Historical realism

Lavrans Björgulfsson, the knightly landholder of a medieval manor named Jörundgaard, in Norway. A good and gentle man who strives to live his life by strict Christian standards, he particularly loves Kristin, his oldest daughter, and allows her great freedom of speech and action.

Ragnfrid Ivarsdatter, Lavrans’ wife, who had inherited Jörundgaard from her father. She is a good woman who does her best to be a loving wife and mother, although she suffers pangs of conscience all of her life for loving another man before her marriage to Lavrans.

Kristin Lavransdatter, their beautiful but headstrong daughter, who is used to having her own way. When she falls in love with Erlend Nikulaussön, she breaks her troth to Simon Andressön, a neighbor, much to her father’s embarrassment. She has an affair with Erlend and later, during their betrothal, becomes pregnant. Though she begins married life under untoward circumstances, she becomes a good wife, looking after her husband’s lands and other property as well as giving him many sons. She and her husband have a stormy married life, however, for the husband is as vehement and proud as his wife. Always in the background, too, is the fact that Kristin dishonored her father by her premarital behavior. Kristin works hard to provide an inheritance for her sons, especially after her husband loses his lands through treason to the crown and his family takes refuge on the manor at Jörundgaard, inherited by Kristin. After her husband’s death, when her sons are old enough to fend for themselves, Kristin enters a convent. She dies there a few years later, during an epidemic of the Black Plague in 1349.
Erlend Nikulaussön, a young nobleman who falls in love with Kristin and woos her away from her betrothed. He is a handsome, violent, and contumacious man, always in some sort of scrape because he acts without thinking of the consequences. His greatest mistake is seeking to separate Norway from Sweden in the days of King Magnus VII. Charged with treason, he is found guilty and loses his lands and almost his life. Retirement to his wife’s manor is galling, and so he separates from his wife to lead a lonely life on a small farm once owned by a relative, Lady Aashild. He returns to vindicate Kristin’s honor when she is accused of adultery but is killed in a brawl upon his arrival.

Nikulaus Erlendssön (Naakve), the eldest son of Kristin and Erlend, a handsome, quiet person. Affected by the bickering and antagonism between his parents, he becomes a monk when he reaches manhood.

Bjorgulf Erlendssön, Kristin and Erlend’s second son. He is an unfortunate child who early begins to become blind. He enters a monastery with Nikulaus, his older brother, who cares for him tenderly. Bjorgulf and Nikulaus also die of the Black Plague.

Gaute Erlendssön, the third son of Kristin and Erlend, a lover of the land and farming. He is the son who takes over Kristin’s manor of Jorundgaard when he grows up.

Skule Erlendssön and Ivar Erlendssön, the twin sons of Kristin and Erlend, adventurous boys who grow up to take service under distant kinsmen and seek their careers far from their native land. Ivar finally settles down and marries Signe Gamalsdatter, a rich young widow.

Lavrans Erlendssön, the sixth son of Kristin and Erlend. He migrates to Iceland in the service of a bishop when he grows up.

Munan Erlendssön, the seventh son of Kristin and Erlend, who dies during an epidemic while still a boy.

Erlend Erlendssön, the eighth son of Kristin and Erlend, conceived during a secret visit made by Kristin to see her husband after he had left Jörundgaard. The birth of this child, who lives but three months, causes Kristin to be wrongly accused of adultery.

Simon Andressön of Dyfrin, the young nobleman jilted by Kristin Lavransdatter when she falls in love with Erlend Nikulaussön. Simon continues to love Kristin and works on her behalf many times, even saving the life of Erlend when the latter is sentenced to die for treason. He marries Kristin’s younger sister, Ramborg.

Sigrid, Simon Andressön’s sister.

Arngjerd, the illegitimate daughter of Simon Andressön.

Simon Simonsson, the son of Ramborg and Simon Andressön, born after his father dies of a wound suffered while separating some brawlers.

Ramborg, the sister of Kristin. She falls in love with Simon Andressön after he has been jilted by Kristin and marries him. She is always hostile to Kristin and jealous of
her.

**Ulvhild**, another sister of Kristin. She is crippled by a falling timber at the age of three and dies while still a young girl.

**Lady Aashild**, Erlend Nikulaussön’s aunt and the mistress of Hangen, supposedly a witch-wife. She befriends Erlend and Kristin at the time of their marriage.

**Sir Björn**, Lady Aashild’s husband, a strange, secretive man.

**Arne Gyrdssön**, a childhood playmate of Kristin who falls in love with her as he grows up. He and Kristin are falsely accused of loose sexual conduct when they are in their teens.

**Bentein**, a licentious young man who tries to rape Kristin and, not succeeding, spreads the false tale that she and Arne Gyrdssön have been lovers.

**Sira Eirik**, Bentein’s grandfather, a priest.

**Eline Ormsdatter**, a married woman who takes Erlend Nikulaussön as her lover before he meets Kristin. Eline and Erlend have two illegitimate children. The woman, jealous of Kristin, tries to poison her. She fails and then stabs herself to death.

**Ulf Haldorssön**, Erlend Nikulaussön’s loyal henchman for thirty-five years and a distant kinsman. Wrongly accused of fathering Kristin’s eighth son, he kills a man in defense of her good name.