

**A Step  
in the Right  
Direction  
Translated  
by Barbara  
Haveland  
Morten  
Søndergaard**

FIRST ENGLISH EDITION

Copyright © Morten Søndergaard, 2005

English Translation © Barbara J. Haveland, 2012

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Danish Arts Council Committee for Literature for the translation of this work and the production of this publication.



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Also issued as: ISBN 978-1-927040-34-8 (PDF)

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Søndergaard, Morten, 1964–      A step in the right direction/  
Morten Søndergaard; Barbara J. Haveland, translator.

Translation of: Et skridt i den rigtige retning. Poems.

ISBN 978-1-927040-09-6

I. Haveland, Barbara II. Title.

PT8176.29.O225S5713 2012    839.81'174    C2012-902967-X

PRINTED IN CANADA

# **Vademecum**

*begin again.* First we lie for a while recovering, which is quite alright really  
after all we've been through. But then we try to rise  
anyway, we say:  
Come on now, we have to get up, right now, we say, up we get: *Get up  
now!*  
And we try,  
but we fall back, pull ourselves up onto our elbows anyway, and  
eventually onto our knees,  
and after some time we're up. Then we stand there swaying  
and trying to get used to the situation,  
take the first tentative steps, but then we fall down and we rise  
and we fall and so it goes on for ages.  
After some time we actually do get going and we stagger and we  
stumble and we fall, but it doesn't  
matter, because we rise again and regain our balance. But then  
we fall and stay down for a while  
then drag ourselves over to the bed and lie there a while. After some  
time we rise and go over  
to the fridge and open it, and take out milk and go over to  
the table and sit down at it.  
Then we pour milk over cornflakes and shortly afterwards we rise  
and go to the toilet and sit down.  
And then we rise and then we go out onto the street and into the bus  
and then

we sit down. Then we go to work  
and sit down at the computer, but it goes down, so after  
some time we go home  
and go to bed. Then we go to sleep and then we wake up. And then  
we get out of bed  
on the wrong side and the day  
runs away from us, and the sun comes up and the sun goes down and  
not the other way round.  
We feel as though we  
can't quite keep our feet, that the world just goes on  
turning without us,  
and we wander in the wilderness and we don't really know where to  
begin and where to end.  
And we don't begin and we don't end, but we try anyway to  
dig in our heels. We try to pull ourselves together,  
we need to be more on our toes, on our high heels, *we know that*,  
we tell ourselves, but it's beyond us.  
We work and we work, on the go before the crack of dawn, and we  
try to move on, keep moving on,  
try not to fall short, to find our footing,  
*to stand on our own two feet.*  
But then we fall, fall and fall, and there we  
lie, and there's no getting round it,  
and we try to get back on our feet. We take heart and we rise  
up, because we have to keep going,  
we mustn't go out of our way for anything, but we go out of our way, we fall  
by the wayside and after some time  
we go dead, we let things lie, we grow bitter  
and mean and wayward.  
We've gone downhill, we're done for, done in and feeling  
bypassed. We fall down and stay down.

We grow old and die. We meet our death. Or rather: Death steps in.  
No: We pass away. Yes: We simply pass on. And we're  
laid in the ground and we lie there,  
and lie and lie and lie and lie and lie and lie  
and after some time  
we fall into decay and in the end we fall to dust. And the sun comes  
down and goes up  
(not the other way round, *d'you hear?*), and in the ocean single-celled  
plankton  
run together in ever more complex organisms, they run into one  
And after ages and ages  
they become fish that grow legs and crawl up onto the land, and a  
couple of apes become  
upstanding, and ever more complex  
minds arise and they start to walk and say "we". And we  
drift and dawdle and dart and flit and flounce and  
gallop and glide and jink and jog and lope and leap and march and  
meander and  
plod and prance and promenade and prowl and sashay and saunter  
and step and  
shamble and shuffle and stalk and stomp and stride and stroll and  
strut and swagger and  
tiptoe and tramp and trip and trot and trudge and wade and waddle  
and wander.  
And we gather into groups and in communities and in circles and we  
go to school and to university,  
where new groundbreaking discoveries are made, new ideas spring up,  
and art  
goes its own way, gaining more and more ground and soon we're  
an army of trailblazers  
who join some crossover avant-garde group that won't be left

standing by *anyone*.

And we storm over the thresholds of new millennia, in leaps and bounds,

and we're heading for great times.

We expand and cross borders, on foot, by land and by air, we climb into gleaming machines and we, mankind, we, the great, the just, we invade, we attack,

we let fly at and kill and we are victorious! After a while we come home from successful campaigns and we hold parades and march proudly through triumphal arches. And we place ourselves on well-deserved

victors' rostrums, we place ourselves on thrones

and at negotiating tables and there we

sit, we sit and sit,

kicking our forerunners down, clinging to our posts,

and what should have

been a transient government turns into a running battle and even though

we make compromise upon compromise

one by one we lose our supporters. After some time we're down at heel, on our last legs,

we go off track, we lose our way, we trip ourselves

up and someone pulls the rug from under us

and we miss a step and we feel that we're on

the slide, but we go on sitting and sitting,

while the people rise up. They march, the people, in mile-long protest marches, they fill the squares with shouting and banners and sit-ins. And we respond with tax cuts

And tear-gas and curfews, until we too are cleared out of the way.

We have to stand down

and we go under, right under, we hit rock bottom. We made our bed