

**GROWTH OF THE  
SOIL, VOL. II**

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Growth of the soil, Vol. II by Knut Hamsun

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**KNUT HAMSUN**

**GROWTH OF THE  
SOIL, VOL. II**



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*Alfred Knopf*

# Growth of the Soil

Translated from the Norwegian of  
**Knut Hamsun**  
by W. W. Worster

Volume Two



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## Chapter I

**S**ELLANRAA is no longer a desolate spot in the waste; human beings live here — seven of them, counting great and small. But in the little time the haymaking lasted there came a stranger or so, folk wanting to see the mowing-machine. Brede Olsen was first, of course, but Axel Ström came, too, and other neighbours from lower down — ay, from right down in the village. And from across the hills came Oline, the imperishable Oline.

This time, too, she brought news with her from her own village; 'twas not Oline's way to come empty of gossip. Old Sivert's affairs had been gone into, his accounts reckoned up, and the fortune remaining after him come to nothing. Nothing!

Here Oline pressed her lips together and looked from one to another. Well, was there not a sigh — would not the roof fall down? Eleseus was the first to smile.

“Let's see — you're called after your Uncle Sivert, aren't you?” he asked softly.

And little Sivert answered as softly again:

“That's so. But I made you a present of all that might come to me after him.”

“And how much was it?”

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"Between five and ten thousand."

"*Daler?*" cried Eleseus suddenly, mimicking his brother.

Oline, no doubt, thought this ill-timed jesting. Oh, she had herself been cheated of her due; for all that she had managed to squeeze out something like real tears over old Sivert's grave. Eleseus should know best what he himself had written — so-and-so much to Oline, to be a comfort and support in her declining years. And where was that support? Oh, a broken reed!

Poor Oline, they might have left her something — single golden gleam in her life! Oline was not over-blessed with this world's goods. Practised in evil — ay, well used to edging her way by tricks and little meannesses from day to day; strong only as a scandalmonger, as one whose tongue was to be feared; ay, so. But nothing could have made her worse than before; least of all a pittance left her by the dead. She had toiled all her life, had borne children, and taught them her own few arts; begged for them, maybe stolen for them, but always managing for them somehow — a mother in her poor way. Her powers were not less than those of other politicians; she acted for herself and those belonging to her, set her speech according to the moment, and gained her end, earning a cheese or a handful of wool each time; she also could live and die in commonplace insincerity and readiness of wit. Oline — maybe old Sivert had for a moment thought of her as young, pretty, and rosy-cheeked, but now she

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is old, deformed, a picture of decay; she ought to have been dead. Where is she to be buried? She has no family vault of her own; nay, she will be lowered down in a graveyard to lie among the bones of strangers and unknown; ay, to that she comes at last — Oline, born and died. She had been young once. A pittance left to her now, at the eleventh hour? Ay, a single golden gleam, and this slave-woman's hands would have been folded for a moment. Justice would have overtaken her with its late reward; for that she had begged for her children, maybe stolen for them, but always managed for them some way. A moment — and the darkness would reign in her as before; her eyes glower, her fingers feel out graspingly — how much? she would say. What, no more? she would say. She would be right again. A mother many times, realizing life — it was worthy of a great reward.

But all went otherwise. Old Sivert's accounts had appeared more or less in order after Eleseus had been through them; but the farm and the cow, the fishery and nets were barely enough to cover the deficit. And it was due in some measure to Oline that things had turned out no worse; so earnest was she in trying to secure a small remainder for herself that she dragged to light forgotten items that she, as gossip and newsmonger for years, remembered still, or matters outstanding which others would have passed over on purpose, to avoid causing unpleasantness to respectable fellow-citizens. Oh, that Oline! And she did not even say a word