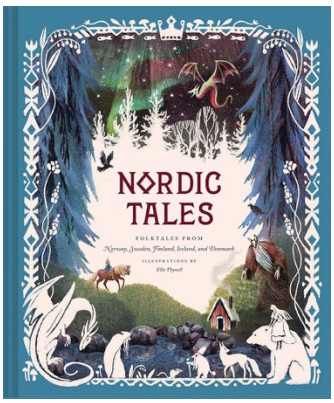
Stitch & Story Club presents

A Nordic Tale

Jack of Sjöholm and the Gan-Finn



Tonight's Nordic tale is a little different from the "Vikings and gods" vibe people expect. It's more like a coastal ghost story mixed with folk magic and a cautionary fable.

The language is old because the translation is old, and it also assumes you already know the setting: winter fishing communities in northern Norway, where storms are deadly and boats are everything. A key idea in this story is that **wind and weather are treated like something you can bargain for, steal, or weaponize**. Another key idea is that Jack isn't just trying to survive—he's trying to **change technology** in a way that threatens someone's power.

If you feel a little lost listening, you are not alone. So, here's a quick glossary, after which I've written a modern retelling so you can relax into the story.

Original Text in the public domain: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13508/13508-h/13508-h.htm

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Glossary (plain English, "what you need to know")

Nordland / Helgeland / Lofoten / Finmark
Regions along the northern Norwegian coast. Think: remote fishing communities, rough seas, long winter darkness.

Finn / "Finns" in this story
This is an old term the translator uses for the Sámi (Indigenous people of northern Scandinavia). The story frames a Sámi sorcerer in a stereotyped way (common in older folklore). It's okay to name that out loud as context.

Gamme
A hut (often turf-covered). In the story, it's the old man's dwelling.

Gan-Finn / "Gan"
A sorcerer figure using harmful magic (the footnote says it's tied to "malefic" magic). In this tale, he sells winds and sends magical "flies."

Fair winds "by the sackful"
Folklore idea: wind is treated like a commodity—stored in a sack, sold, released.

Jöjk / jöjking
A type of traditional Sámi chanting. In the story, it's portrayed as spell-singing.

Gan-flies
Magical agents (like cursed insects) the sorcerer sends out to cause harm or track people.

Draug / Draugboat
A "draugr" is an undead/sea-ghost figure in Norse tradition. Here it becomes a supernatural "dead man's boat" bargain.

Ottring / Femböring / Sekstring
Types of boats. You don't have to memorize them—just know the story is tracking Jack's innovations and reputation.

"Every seventh boat"
A folkloric "price" or curse: the supernatural helper demands a portion of the work, with consequences.

Dead water (daudvatn)
Water that doesn't move normally—still, dragging, eerie. Like sailing into a trap.

A Nordic Tale: Jack of Sjöholm and the Gan-Finn

A Modern American Retelling
by Marni Reecer, M.A.

Long ago on the north coast, fishing was brutal and winter storms killed people fast. Boats were rough, and families didn't count on anyone growing old. People even believed you could buy a good wind from a magician—wind in a sack, sold like flour.

A crew from Thjöttö sailed north looking for fish. Week after week: nothing. Supplies ran low. The sensible plan was to go home.

But there was a young guy with them—Jack from Sjöholm—who'd never been on a trip like this. And Jack kept saying, "If the fish aren't here, they're farther north. We didn't come all this way to eat our food and give up."

Against better judgment, they listened.

They pushed farther and farther north until they reached the far edge of the world as they knew it. Then a storm hit. They tried to find shelter. They failed. The sea swallowed their boat.

Jack ended up clinging to the overturned hull in the dark while the others slipped away one by one. As they died, they blamed him. Jack heard every word. He survived anyway—half stubbornness, half luck.

When dawn came, he washed up on a snowy shore. No town. No boats. Just ice, sea, and silence—until he saw smoke under a cliff.

He stumbled to a hut and found an old sorcerer inside, wrapped in furs, sitting in warm ashes, muttering into a sack as if he was talking to it. A young woman named Seimke cared for the old man, and she cared for Jack too—fed him, warmed him, let him sleep on fox skins.

Jack recovered. And the first thing he did was go look at what was left of his boat.

That's when his real obsession began.

He walked around that wreck and thought, *This is not a boat. This is a mistake shaped like a boat.* Too low in the front. Built like it wanted to dive under waves instead of rise over them. Jack started designing something better in his head: higher prow, sharper lines, more flexibility, something that could cut through waves and still steer.

Seimke followed him everywhere. She liked him. Maybe she loved him. But she also warned him: the old man was angry.

Because the old man's power depended on danger. If Jack built safer boats, people wouldn't need to buy "good winds" and storm protection from a sorcerer. Jack wasn't just building a boat. He was threatening a whole system.

The sorcerer tried to stop him—by warping the landscape so Jack couldn't find the shore, by sending fog and northern lights like chasing flames, by releasing magical flies to track him. Seimke secretly helped Jack anyway. She even sent her snowshoes to guide him back when he got trapped inland.

Still, the curse-work continued. Jack tried to build, and everything went wrong. He felt confused, jittery, like his brain was full of needles. He couldn't get the boat right.

Then, one summer evening, someone appeared by the shore: a stranger in a low cap, face hidden. And beside him floated a long, sleek boat—beautifully built. Too perfect.

Jack wanted it immediately.

Seimke panicked. She begged him not to go. She promised him treasures and magic tools and secrets. When that didn't work, she tried to physically hold him back.

Jack said, basically: "If I stay here playing around, more men will die at sea. I have to go."

He stepped into the strange boat. Someone unseen raised the sail. They took off.

That's when the sorcerer opened his wind sack and sent a storm after them.

The sea rose like a wall. Birds fled. The wind screamed.

But this boat moved like it wasn't made of wood at all—like it was part fish, part bird. Jack couldn't even tell if it was whole. It felt like it was skimming reality.

They blasted past other overturned boats, past people dying in the surf, through glowing "sea-fire" at night.

Then Jack woke up.

He was home at Thjöttö, near his own boathouse, as if the whole thing had been a dream—except the shape of that impossible boat was burned into his mind.

He started building.

To keep people from interfering, Jack acted a little crazy—shouting that he was sailing from the roof, making wild faces, laughing too loudly. People stayed away. He worked alone at night, obsessed.

Just before Christmas, he was almost finished with a new boat design when a huge black fly crawled across the planks—feeling, testing, like it was inspecting the work.

Jack's confidence collapsed. He re-checked everything. Doubt poured in. Then his lamp went out.

In the dark, something appeared in the boathouse: a Draug—an undead sea-thing—who offered Jack a deal.

"You want the perfect boat? Fine. But you pay. In every seventh boat you build, I put in the keel board."

Jack knew what that meant: sabotage hidden inside success. A curse built into progress.

He fought with himself. Then he knocked three times, accepting the bargain.

Jack's boats changed the coast. They were faster, safer, better. People crowded around his workshop begging for orders. Even the bailiff—the kind who takes too much and gives nothing—came to seize a boat as payment.

And that boat? It sank. The bailiff died.

Jack kept building anyway. He got rich. He stopped caring which boat was the seventh.

Until the cost came home.

One stormy night, Jack refused to rescue his family because he believed his boats couldn't fail.

They did.

His mother, his siblings, and little Malfri died at sea.

After that, Jack couldn't sleep. At night he heard them. He started counting boats in his head, trying to guess how many "seventh boats" he'd sent out. He tried pounding keel boards, desperate to find the cursed ones.

Then the dead came—boat crews, men and children, an endless line of the drowned—walking up from the shore toward him, hollow-eyed, mouths open like they were still swallowing seawater.

Jack fled in a boat, but the sea turned strange—dead water, rotting planks, grabbing hands. A cloud of black flies rose.

And there, on the same shore where this all began, sat the Gan-Finn again, watching.

Seimke was there too—older now, still alive, still sharp.

Jack came ashore.

And the story ends with Jack and Seimke leaving together, escaping the sorcerer by tricking him in one last bargain—sailing out again into open water, away from land, away from the life he made and the death it caused.

What is this story is *really* about?

1) Innovation has a cost.
Jack wants to make boats safer. That's good. But the story refuses to let "progress" be simple. It asks: *What do you trade away to get what you want?* Speed? Safety? Integrity? People?

2) Systems fight back.
The Gan-Finn isn't just a villain. He represents a power structure that profits from danger and scarcity. If people don't fear storms, he loses control.

3) The bargain is the turning point.
Jack's deal—"every seventh boat"—is a perfect folklore image for cutting corners, hidden risk, or the lie we tell ourselves:

"Most of these will be fine."
The story says: eventually, "most" isn't good enough.

4) Seimke is complicated.
She's helper, lover, and also tied to the Gan-Finn's world. She's the human side of the story's moral tension: staying safe vs. going free, love vs. purpose, comfort vs. change.

Questions to ponder

- If Jack's goal is safety, why does the story punish him so harshly?
- What does "every seventh boat" represent in modern life?
- Where do you see the story arguing for humility, not just skill?

Stitch Focus: Fisherman's Rib
(Halbpatent / Half Brioche) — the basics

Tonight's story lives in winter weather—cold sea, hard work, survival, and the cost of shortcuts. Fisherman's Rib is a fitting companion because it's the kind of stitch that feels made for real life: warm, durable, and built by repeating one simple action until it becomes something strong.

What it is:
A textured rib created by working into the stitch below, which builds a thick, stretchy fabric. It looks similar to brioche, but it's worked differently and often feels simpler once you find the flow.

Fisherman's Rib (Knit Flat)
(True Fisherman's Rib using knit below)

Cast on any **even** number of stitches
Row 1 (WS): *K1, p1* across.
Row 2 (RS): *Knit 1 below (k1b), p1* across.
Repeat Rows 1–2 for pattern.

Notes:
- *Knit 1 below (k1b)* is worked into the stitch one row below.
- Creates a deep, lofty fabric with strong vertical ribs.
- Uses more yarn than standard ribbing.

Fisherman's Rib in the round:
Alternates *k1/p1* with *k1b/p1*

Half Brioche / Halbpatent (Knit Flat)
(Yarn over + slipped stitch method)

Cast on any **odd** number of stitches
Row 1 (WS): Slip1 purlwise, *yo, slip1 purlwise, k1* repeat *--* to end of row. Turn.
Row 2 (RS): Sl1 purlwise, *k2tog, p1*, repeat *--* to end of row. Turn.
Repeat Rows 1–2 for pattern.

Notes:
- Each slipped stitch carries a yarn over from the previous row.
- This creates the brioche "double stitch" effect without knitting below.
- Fabric looks similar to Fisherman's Rib but is structurally different.

Half Brioche in the round:
Alternates *slip + YO* rounds with *working the paired stitches together*

Refer to **Fisherman's Rib Blog Post with Video Tutorials** here:
https://theyarnyway.com/fishermans-rib-vs-half-brioche-halbpatent/

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