

LAGERLÖF
SELMA

FROM A
SWEDISH
HOMESTEAD

Selma Lagerlöf
From a Swedish Homestead

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25228996

From a Swedish Homestead:

Содержание

From a Swedish	4
I	4
II	21
III	28
IV	34
V	59
VI	65
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	83

Selma Lagerlöf

From a Swedish Homestead

From a Swedish **Homestead**

I

The Story of a Country House

I

It was a beautiful autumn day towards the end of the thirties. There was in Upsala at that time a high, yellow, two-storied house, which stood quite alone in a little meadow on the outskirts of the town. It was a rather desolate and dismal-looking house, but was rendered less so by the Virginia-creepers which grew there in profusion, and which had crept so high up the yellow wall on the sunny side of the house that they completely surrounded the three windows on the upper story.

At one of these windows a student was sitting, drinking his morning coffee. He was a tall, handsome fellow, of distinguished appearance. His hair was brushed back from his forehead; it

curled prettily, and a lock was continually falling into his eyes. He wore a loose, comfortable suit, but looked rather smart all the same.

His room was well furnished. There was a good sofa and comfortable chairs, a large writing-table, a capital bookcase, but hardly any books.

Before he had finished his coffee another student entered the room. The new-comer was a totally different-looking man. He was a short, broad-shouldered fellow, squarely built and strong, ugly, with a large head, thin hair, and coarse complexion.

'Hede,' he said, 'I have come to have a serious talk with you.'

'Has anything unpleasant happened to you?'

'Oh no, not to me,' the other answered; 'it is really you it concerns.' He sat silent for a while, and looked down. 'It is so awfully unpleasant having to tell you.'

'Leave it alone, then,' suggested Hede.

He felt inclined to laugh at his friend's solemnity.

'I can't leave it alone any longer,' said his visitor. 'I ought to have spoken to you long ago, but it is hardly my place. You understand? I can't help thinking you will say to yourself: "There's Gustaf Alin, son of one of our cottagers, thinks himself such a great man now that he can order me about."'

'My dear fellow,' Hede said, 'don't imagine I think anything of the kind. My father's father was a peasant's son.'

'Yes, but no one thinks of that now,' Alin answered. He sat there, looking awkward and stupid, resuming every moment

more and more of his peasant manners, as if that could help him out of his difficulty. 'When I think of the difference there is between your family and mine, I feel as if I ought to keep quiet; but when I remember that it was your father who, by his help in days gone by, enabled me to study, then I feel that I must speak.'

Hede looked at him with a pleasant smile.

'You had better speak out and have done with it,' he said.

'The thing is,' Alin said, 'I have heard people say that you don't do any work. They say you have hardly opened a book during the four terms you have been at the University. They say you don't do anything but play on the violin the whole day; and that I can quite believe, for you never wanted to do anything else when you were at school in Falu, although there you were obliged to work.'

Hede straightened himself a little in his chair. Alin grew more and more uncomfortable, but he continued with stubborn resolution:

'I suppose you think that anyone owning an estate like Munkhyttan ought to be able to do as he likes – work if he likes, or leave it alone. If he takes his exam., good; if he does not take his exam., what does it matter? for in any case you will never be anything but a landed proprietor and iron-master. You will live at Munkhyttan all your life. I understand quite well that is what you must think.'

Hede was silent, and Alin seemed to see him surrounded by the same wall of distinction which in Alin's eyes had always surrounded his father, the Squire, and his mother.

'But, you see, Munkhyttan is no longer what it used to be when there was iron in the mine,' he continued cautiously. 'The Squire knew that very well, and that was why it was arranged before his death that you should study. Your poor mother knows it, too, and the whole parish knows it. The only one who does not know anything is you, Hede.'

'Don't you think I know,' Hede said a little irritably, 'that the iron-mine cannot be worked any longer?'

'Oh yes,' Alin said, 'I dare say you know that much, but you don't know that it is all up with the property. Think the matter over, and you will understand that one cannot live from farming alone at Vesterdalarne. I cannot understand why your mother has kept it a secret from you. But, of course, she has the sole control of the estate, so she need not ask your advice about anything. Everybody at home knows that she is hard up. They say she drives about borrowing money. I suppose she did not want to disturb you with her troubles, but thought that she could keep matters going until you had taken your degree. She will not sell the estate before you have finished, and made yourself a new home.'

Hede rose, and walked once or twice up and down the floor. Then he stopped opposite Alin.

'But what on earth are you driving at, Alin? Do you want to make me believe that we are not rich?'

'I know quite well that, until lately, you have been considered rich people at home,' Alin said. 'But you can understand that things must come to an end when it is a case of always spending

and never earning anything. It was a different thing when you had the mine.'

Hede sat down again.

'My mother would surely have told me if there were anything the matter,' he said. 'I am grateful to you, Alin; but you have allowed yourself to be frightened by some silly stories.'

'I thought that you did not know anything,' Alin continued obstinately. 'At Munkhyttan your mother saves and works in order to get the money to keep you at Upsala, and to make it cheerful and pleasant for you when you are at home in the vacations. And in the meantime you are here doing nothing, because you don't know there is trouble coming. I could not stand any longer seeing you deceiving each other. Her ladyship thought you were studying, and you thought she was rich. I could not let you destroy your prospects without saying anything.'

Hede sat quietly for a moment, and meditated. Then he rose and gave Alin his hand with rather a sad smile.

'You understand that I feel you are speaking the truth, even if I *will* not believe you? Thanks.'

Alin joyfully shook his hand.

'You must know, Hede, that if you will only work no harm is done. With your brains, you can take your degree in three or four years.'

Hede straightened himself.

'Do not be uneasy, Alin,' he said; 'I am going to work hard now.'

Alin rose and went towards the door, but hesitated. Before he reached it he turned round.

'There was something else I wanted,' he said. He again became embarrassed. 'I want you to lend me your violin until you have commenced reading in earnest.'

'Lend you my violin?'

'Yes; pack it up in a silk handkerchief, and put it in the case, and let me take it with me, or otherwise you will read to no purpose. You will begin to play as soon as I am out of the room. You are so accustomed to it now you cannot resist if you have it here. One cannot get over that kind of thing unless someone helps one; it gets the mastery over one.'

Hede appeared unwilling.

'This is madness, you know,' he said.

'No, Hede, it is not. You know you have inherited it from the Squire. It runs in your blood. Ever since you have been your own master here in Upsala you have done nothing else but play. You live here in the outskirts of the town simply not to disturb anyone by your playing. You cannot help yourself in this matter. Let me have the violin.'

'Well,' said Hede, 'before I could not help playing, but now Munkhyttan is at stake; I am more fond of my home than of my violin.'

But Alin was determined, and continued to ask for the violin.

'What is the good of it?' Hede said. 'If I want to play, I need not go many steps to borrow another violin.'

'I know that,' Alin replied, 'but I don't think it would be so bad with another violin. It is your old Italian violin which is the greatest danger for you. And besides, I would suggest your locking yourself in for the first few days – only until you have got fairly started.'

He begged and begged, but Hede resisted; he would not stand anything so unreasonable as being a prisoner in his own room.

Alin grew crimson.

'I must have the violin with me,' he said, 'or it is no use at all.' He spoke eagerly and excitedly. 'I had not intended to say anything about it, but I know that it concerns more than Munkhyttan. I saw a young girl at the Promotion Ball in the spring who, people said, was engaged to you. I don't dance, you know, but I liked to watch her when she was dancing, looking radiant like one of the lilies of the field. And when I heard that she was engaged to you, I felt sorry for her.'

'Why?'

'Because I knew that you would never succeed if you continued as you had begun. And then I swore that she should not have to spend her whole life waiting for one who never came. She should not sit and wither whilst waiting for you. I did not want to meet her in a few years with sharpened features and deep wrinkles round her mouth –'

He stopped suddenly; Hede's glance had rested so searchingly upon him.

But Gunnar Hede had already understood that Alin was in

love with his *fiancée*. It moved him deeply that Alin under these circumstances tried to save him, and, influenced by this feeling, he yielded and gave him the violin.

When Alin had gone, Hede read desperately for a whole hour, but then he threw away his book.

It was not of much good his reading. It would be three or four years before he could be finished, and who could guarantee that the estate would not be sold in the meantime?

He felt almost with terror how deeply he loved the old home. It was like witchery. Every room, every tree, stood clearly before him. He felt he could not part with any of it if he were to be happy. And he was to sit quietly with his books whilst all this was about to pass away from him.

He became more and more restless; he felt the blood beating in his temples as if in a fever. And then he grew quite beside himself because he could not take his violin and play himself calm again.

'My God!' he said, 'Alin will drive me mad. First to tell me all this, and then to take away my violin! A man like I must feel the bow between his fingers in sorrow and in joy. I must do something; I must get money, but I have not an idea in my head. I cannot think without my violin.'

He could not endure the feeling of being locked in. He was so angry with Alin, who had thought of this absurd plan, that he was afraid he might strike him the next time he came.

Of course he would have played, if he had had the violin, for

that was just what he needed. His blood rushed so wildly, that he was nearly going out of his mind.

Just as Hede was longing most for his violin a wandering musician began to play outside. It was an old blind man. He played out of tune and without expression, but Hede was so overcome by hearing a violin just at this moment that he listened with tears in his eyes and with his hands folded.

The next moment he flung open the window and climbed to the ground by the help of the creepers. He had no compunction at leaving his work. He thought the violin had simply come to comfort him in his misfortune.

Hede had probably never before begged so humbly for anything as he did now, when he asked the old blind man to lend him his violin. He stood the whole time with his cap in his hand, although the old man was blind.

The musician did not seem to understand what he wanted. He turned to the young girl who was leading him. Hede bowed to the poor girl and repeated his request. She looked at him, as if she must have eyes for them both. The glance from her big eyes was so steady that Hede thought he could feel where it struck him. It began with his collar, and it noticed that the frills of his shirt were well starched, then it saw that his coat was brushed, next that his boots were polished.

Hede had never before been subjected to such close scrutiny. He saw clearly that he would not pass muster before those eyes.

But it was not so, all the same. The young girl had a strange

way of smiling. Her face was so serious, that one had the impression when she smiled that it was the first and only time she had ever looked happy; and now one of these rare smiles passed over her lips. She took the violin from the old man and handed it to Hede.

'Play the waltz from "Freischütz," then,' she said.

Hede thought it was strange that he should have to play a waltz just at that moment, but, as a matter of fact, it was all the same to him what he played, if he could only have a bow in his hand. That was all he wanted. The violin at once began to comfort him; it spoke to him in faint, cracked tones.

'I am only a poor man's violin,' it said; 'but such as I am, I am a comfort and help to a poor blind man. I am the light and the colour and the brightness in his life. It is I who must comfort him in his poverty and old age and blindness.'

Hede felt that the terrible depression that had cowed his hopes began to give way.

'You are young and strong,' the violin said to him. 'You can fight and strive; you can hold fast that which tries to escape you. Why are you downcast and without courage?'

Hede had played with lowered eyes; now he threw back his head and looked at those who stood around him. There was quite a crowd of children and people from the street, who had come into the yard to listen to the music. It appeared, however, that they had not come solely for the sake of the music. The blind man and his companion were not the only ones in the troupe.

Opposite Hede stood a figure in tights and spangles, and with bare arms crossed over his chest. He looked old and worn, but Hede could not help thinking that he looked a devil of a fellow with his high chest and long moustaches. And beside him stood his wife, little and fat, and not so very young either, but beaming with joy over her spangles and flowing gauze skirts.

During the first bars of the music they stood still and counted, then a gracious smile passed over their faces, and they took each other's hands and began to dance on a small carpet. And Hede saw that during all the equilibristic tricks they now performed the woman stood almost still, whilst her husband did all the work. He sprang over her, and twirled round her, and vaulted over her. The woman scarcely did anything else but kiss her hand to the spectators.

But Hede did not really take much notice of them. His bow began to fly over the strings. It told him that there was happiness in fighting and overcoming. It almost deemed him happy because everything was at stake for him. Hede stood there, playing courage and hope into himself, and did not think of the old tight-rope dancers.

But suddenly he saw that they grew restless. They no longer smiled; they left off kissing their hands to the spectators; the acrobat made mistakes, and his wife began to sway to and fro in waltz time.

Hede played more and more eagerly. He left off 'Freischütz' and rushed into an old 'Nixie Polka,' one which generally sent all

the people mad when played at the peasant festivals.

The old tight-rope dancers quite lost their heads. They stood in breathless astonishment, and at last they could resist no longer. They sprang into each other's arms, and then they began to dance a waltz in the middle of the carpet.

How they danced! dear me, how they danced! They took small, tripping steps, and whirled round in a small circle; they hardly went outside the carpet, and their faces beamed with joy and delight. There was the happiness of youth and the rapture of love over these two old people.

The whole crowd was jubilant at seeing them dance. The serious little companion of the blind man smiled all over her face, and Hede grew much excited.

Just fancy what an effect his violin could have! It made people quite forget themselves. It was a great power to have at his disposal. Any moment he liked he could take possession of his kingdom. Only a couple of years' study abroad with a great master, and he could go all over the world, and by his playing earn riches and honour and fame.

It seemed to Hede that these acrobats must have come to tell him this. That was the road he should follow; it lay before him clear and smooth. He said to himself: 'I will – I *will* become a musician! I *must* be one! This is better than studying. I can charm my fellow-men with my violin; I can become rich.'

Hede stopped playing. The acrobats at once came up and complimented him. The man said his name was Blomgren. That

was his real name; he had other names when he performed. He and his wife were old circus people. Mrs. Blomgren in former days had been called Miss Viola, and had performed on horseback; and although they had now left the circus, they were still true artists – artists body and soul. That he had probably already noticed; that was why they could not resist his violin.

Hede walked about with the acrobats for a couple of hours. He could not part with the violin, and the old artists' enthusiasm for their profession appealed to him. He was simply testing himself. 'I want to find out whether there is the proper stuff for an artist in me. I want to see if I can call forth enthusiasm. I want to see whether I can make children and idlers follow me from house to house.'

On their way from house to house Mr. Blomgren threw an old threadbare mantle around him, and Mrs. Blomgren enveloped herself in a brown cloak. Thus arrayed, they walked at Hede's side and talked.

Mr. Blomgren would not speak of all the honour he and Mrs. Blomgren had received during the time they had performed in a real circus; but the *directeur* had given Mrs. Blomgren her dismissal under the pretence that she was getting too stout. Mr. Blomgren had not been dismissed: he had himself resigned his position. Surely no one could think that Mr. Blomgren would remain with a *directeur* who had dismissed his wife!

Mrs. Blomgren loved her art, and for her sake Mr. Blomgren had made up his mind to live as a free artist, so that she could still

continue to perform. During the winter, when it was too cold to give performances in the street, they performed in a tent. They had a very comprehensive repertoire. They gave pantomimes, and were jugglers and conjurers.

The circus had cast them off, but Art had not, said Mr. Blomgren. They served Art always. It was well worth being faithful to Art, even unto death. Always artists – always. That was Mr. Blomgren's opinion, and it was also Mrs. Blomgren's.

Hede walked quietly and listened. His thoughts flew restlessly from plan to plan. Sometimes events happen which become like symbols, like signs, which one must obey. There must be some meaning in what had now happened to him. If he could only understand it rightly, it might help him towards arriving at a wise resolution.

Mr. Blomgren asked the student to notice the young girl who was leading the blind man. Had he ever before seen such eyes? Did he not think that such eyes must mean something? Could one have those eyes without being intended for something great?

Hede turned round and looked at the little pale girl. Yes, she had eyes like stars, set in a sad and rather thin face.

'Our Lord knows always what He is about,' said Mrs. Blomgren; 'and I also believe that He has some reason for letting such an artist as Mr. Blomgren perform in the street. But what was He thinking about when He gave that girl those eyes and that smile?'

'I will tell you something,' said Mr. Blomgren; 'she has not the

slightest talent for Art. And with those eyes!"

Hede had a suspicion that they were not talking to him, but simply for the benefit of the young girl. She was walking just behind them, and could hear every word.

'She is not more than thirteen years old, and not by any means too old to learn something; but, impossible – impossible, without the slightest talent! If one does not want to waste one's time, sir, teach her to sew, but not to stand on her head. Her smile makes people quite mad about her,' Mr. Blomgren continued. 'Simply on account of her smile she has had many offers from families wishful to adopt her. She could grow up in a well-to-do home if she would only leave her grandfather. But what does she want with a smile that makes people mad about her, when she will never appear either on horseback or on a trapeze?'

'We know other artists,' said Mrs. Blomgren, 'who pick up children in the street and train them for the profession when they cannot perform any longer themselves. There is more than one who has been lucky enough to create a star and obtain immense salaries for her. But Mr. Blomgren and I have never thought of the money; we have only thought of some day seeing Ingrid flying through a hoop whilst the whole circus resounded with applause. For us it would have been as if we were beginning life over again.'

'Why do we keep her grandfather?' said Mr. Blomgren. 'Is he an artist fit for us? We could, no doubt, have got a previous member of a Hofkapell if we had wished. But we love that child; we cannot do without her; we keep the old man for her sake.'

'Is it not naughty of her that she will not allow us to make an artist of her?' they said.

Hede turned round. The little girl's face wore an expression of suffering and patience. He could see that she knew that anyone who could not dance on the tight-rope was a stupid and contemptible person.

At the same moment they came to another house, but before they began their performance Hede sat down on an overturned wheelbarrow and began to preach. He defended the poor little girl. He reproached Mr. and Mrs. Blomgren for wishing to hand her over to the great, cruel public, who would love and applaud her for a time, but when she grew old and worn out, they would let her trudge along the streets in rain and cold. No; he or she was artist enough, who made a fellow-being happy. Ingrid should only have eyes and smiles for one, should keep them for one only; and this one should never leave her, but give her a safe home as long as he lived.

Tears came into Hede's eyes whilst he spoke. He spoke more to himself than to the others. He felt it suddenly as something terrible to be thrust out into the world, to be severed from the quiet home-life. He saw that the great, star-like eyes of the girl began to sparkle. It seemed as if she had understood every single word. It seemed as if she again felt the right to live.

But Mr. Blomgren and his wife had become very serious. They pressed Hede's hand and promised him that they would never again try and persuade the little girl to become an artist.

She should be allowed to lead the life she wished. He had touched them. They were artists – artists body and soul; they understood what he meant when he spoke of love and faithfulness.

Then Hede parted from them and went home. He no longer tried to find any secret meaning in his adventure. After all, it had meant nothing more than that he should save this poor sorrowful child from always grieving over her incapacity.

II

Munkhyttan, the home of Gunnar Hede, was situated in a poor parish in the forests of Vesterdalarne. It was a large, thinly-populated parish, with which Nature had dealt very stingily. There were stony, forest-covered hills, and many small lakes. The people could not possibly have earned a livelihood there had they not had the right to travel about the country as pedlars. But to make up for it, the whole of this poor district was full of old tales of how poor peasant lads and lassies had gone into the world with a pack of goods on their backs, to return in gilded coaches, with the boxes under the seats filled with money.

One of the very best stories was about Hede's grandfather. He was the son of a poor musician, and had grown up with his violin in his hand, and when he was seventeen years old he had gone out into the world with his pack on his back. But wherever he went his violin had helped him in his business. He had by turns gathered people together by his music and sold them silk handkerchiefs, combs, and pins. All his trading had been brought about with music and merriment, and things had gone so well with him that he had at last been able to buy Munkhyttan, with its mine and ironworks, from the poverty-stricken Baron who then owned the property. Then he became the Squire, and the pretty daughter of the Baron became his wife.

From that time the old family, as they were always called, had

thought of nothing else but beautifying the place. They removed the main building on to the beautiful island which lay on the edge of a small lake, round which lay their fields and their mines. The upper story had been added in their time, for they wanted to have plenty of room for their numerous guests; and they had also added the two large flights of steps outside. They had planted ornamental trees all over the fir-covered island. They had made small winding pathways in the stony soil, and on the most beautiful spots they had built small pavilions, hanging like large birds'-nests over the lake. The beautiful French roses that grew on the terrace, the Dutch furniture, the Italian violin, had all been brought to the house by them. And it was they who had built the wall protecting the orchard from the north wind, and the conservatory.

The old family were merry, kind-hearted, old-fashioned people. The Squire's wife certainly liked to be a little aristocratic; but that was not at all in the old Squire's line. In the midst of all the luxury which surrounded him he never forgot what he had been, and in the room where he transacted his business, and where people came and went, the pack and the red-painted, home-made violin were hung right above the old man's desk.

Even after his death the pack and the violin remained in the same place. And every time the old man's son and grandson saw them their hearts swelled with gratitude. It was these two poor implements that had created Munkhyttan, and Munkhyttan was the best thing in the world.

Whatever the reason might be – and it was probably because it seemed natural to the place that one lived a good, genial life there, free from trouble – Hede's family clung to the place with greater love than was good for it. And more especially Gunnar Hede was so strongly attached to it that people said that it was incorrect to say of him that he owned an estate. On the contrary, it was an old estate in Vesterdalarne that owned Gunnar Hede.

If he had not made himself a slave of an old rambling manor-house and some acres of land and forest, and some stunted apple-trees, he would probably have continued his studies, or, better still, gone abroad to study music, which, after all, was no doubt his proper vocation in this world. But when he returned from Upsala, and it became clear to him that they really would have to sell the estate if he could not soon earn a lot of money, he decided upon giving up all his other plans, and made up his mind to go out into the world as a pedlar, as his grandfather before him had done.

His mother and his *fiancée* besought him rather to sell the place than to sacrifice himself for it in this manner, but he was not to be moved. He put on peasant's attire, bought goods, and began to travel about the country as a pedlar. He thought that if he only traded a couple of years he could earn enough to pay the debt and save the estate.

And as far as the latter was concerned he was successful enough. But he brought upon himself a terrible misfortune.

When he had walked about with his pack for a year or so he

thought that he would try and earn a large sum of money at one stroke. He went far north and bought a large flock of goats, about a couple of hundred. And he and a comrade intended to drive them down to a large fair in Vermland, where goats cost twice as much as in the north. If he succeeded in selling all his goats, he would do a very good business.

It was in the beginning of November, and there had not yet been any snow, when Hede and his comrade set out with their goats. The first day everything went well with them, but the second day, when they came to the great Fifty-Mile Forest, it began to snow. Much snow fell, and it stormed and blew severely. It was not long before it became difficult for the animals to make their way through the snow. Goats are certainly both plucky and hardy animals, and the herd struggled on for a considerable time; but the snow-storm lasted two days and two nights, and it was terribly cold.

Hede did all he could to save the animals, but after the snow began to fall he could get them neither food nor water. And when they had worked their way through deep snow for a whole day they became very footsore. Their feet hurt them, and they would not go any longer. The first goat that threw itself down by the roadside and would not get up again and follow the herd Hede lifted on to his shoulder so as not to leave it behind. But when another and again another lay down he could not carry them. There was nothing to do but to look the other way and go on.

Do you know what the Fifty-Mile Forest is like? Not a

farmhouse, not a cottage, mile after mile, only forest; tall-stemmed fir-trees, with bark as hard as wood, and high branches; no young trees with soft bark and soft twigs that the animals could eat. If there had been no snow, they could have got through the forest in a couple of days; now they could not get through it at all. All the goats were left there, and the men too nearly perished. They did not meet a single human being the whole time. No one helped them.

Hede tried to throw the snow to one side so that the goats could eat the moss; but the snow fell so thickly, and the moss was frozen fast to the ground. And how could he get food for two hundred animals in this way?

He bore it bravely until the goats began to moan. The first day they were a lively, rather noisy herd. He had had hard work to make them all keep together, and prevent them from butting each other to death. But when they seemed to understand that they could not be saved their nature changed, and they completely lost their courage. They all began to bleat and moan, not faintly and peevishly, as goats usually do, but loudly, louder and louder as the danger increased. And when Hede heard their cries he felt quite desperate.

They were in the midst of the wild, desolate forest; there was no help whatever obtainable. Goat after goat dropped down by the roadside. The snow gathered round them and covered them. When Hede looked back at this row of drifts by the wayside, each hiding the body of an animal, of which one could still see the

projecting horns and the hoofs, then his brain began to give way.

He rushed at the animals, which allowed themselves to be covered by the snow, swung his whip over them, and hit them. It was the only way to save them, but they did not stir. He took them by the horns and dragged them along. They allowed themselves to be dragged, but they did not move a foot themselves. When he let go his hold of their horns, they licked his hands, as if beseeching him to help them. As soon as he went up to them they licked his hands.

All this had such a strong effect upon Hede that he felt he was on the point of going out of his mind.

It is not certain, however, that things would have gone so badly with him had he not, after it was all over in the forest, gone to see one whom he loved dearly. It was not his mother, but his sweetheart. He thought himself that he had gone there because he ought to tell her at once that he had lost so much money that he would not be able to marry for many years. But no doubt he went to see her solely to hear her say that she loved him quite as much in spite of his misfortunes. He thought that she could drive away the memory of the Fifty-Mile Forest.

She could, perhaps, have done this, but she would not. She was already displeased because Hede went about with a pack and looked like a peasant; she thought that for that reason alone it was difficult to love him as much as before. Now, when he told her that he must still go on doing this for many years, she said that she could no longer wait for him. This last blow was too much

for Hede; his mind gave way.

He did not grow quite mad, however; he retained so much of his senses that he could attend to his business. He even did better than others, for it amused people to make fun of him; he was always welcome at the peasants' houses. People plagued and teased him, but that was in a way good for him, as he was so anxious to become rich. And in the course of a few years he had earned enough to pay all his debts, and he could have lived free from worry on his estate. But this he did not understand; he went about half-witted and silly from farm to farm, and he had no longer any idea to what class of people he really belonged.

III

Raglanda was the name of a parish in the north of East Vermland, near the borders of Dalarne, where the Dean had a large house, but the pastor only a small and poor one. But poor as they were at the small parsonage, they had been charitable enough to adopt a poor girl. She was a little girl, Ingrid by name, and she had come to the parsonage when she was thirteen years old.

The pastor had accidentally seen her at a fair, where she sat crying outside the tent of some acrobats. He had stopped and asked her why she was crying, and she had told him that her blind grandfather was dead, and that she had no relatives left. She now travelled with a couple of acrobats, and they were good to her, but she cried because she was so stupid that she could never learn to dance on the tight-rope and help to earn any money.

There was a sorrowful grace over the child which touched the pastor's heart. He said at once to himself that he could not allow such a little creature to go to the bad amongst these wandering tramps. He went into the tent, where he saw Mr. and Mrs. Blomgren, and offered to take the child home with him. The old acrobats began to weep, and said that although the girl was entirely unfitted for the profession, they would so very much like to keep her; but at the same time they thought she would be happier in a real home with people who lived in the same place

all the year round, and therefore they were willing to give her up to the pastor if he would only promise them that she should be like one of his own children.

This he had promised, and from that time the young girl had lived at the parsonage. She was a quiet, gentle child, full of love and tender care for those around her. At first her adopted parents loved her very dearly, but as she grew older she developed a strong inclination to lose herself in dreams and fancies. She lived in a world of visions, and in the middle of the day she could let her work fall and be lost in dreams. But the pastor's wife, who was a clever and hard-working woman, did not approve of this. She found fault with the young girl for being lazy and slow, and tormented her by her severity so that she became timid and unhappy.

When she had completed her nineteenth year, she fell dangerously ill. They did not quite know what was the matter with her, for this happened long ago, when there was no doctor at Raglanda, but the girl was very ill. They soon saw she was so ill that she could not live.

She herself did nothing but pray to God that He would take her away from this world. She would so like to die, she said.

Then it seemed as if our Lord would try whether she was in earnest. One night she felt that she grew stiff and cold all over her body, and a heavy lethargy fell upon her. 'I think this must be death,' she said to herself.

But the strange thing was that she did not quite lose

consciousness. She knew that she lay as if she were dead, knew that they wrapped her in her shroud and laid her in her coffin, but she felt no fear of being buried, although she was still alive. She had but the one thought that she was happy because she was about to die and leave this troublesome life.

The only thing she was uneasy about was lest they should discover that she was not really dead and would not bury her. Life must have been very bitter to her, inasmuch as she felt no fear of death whatever.

But no one discovered that she was living. She was conveyed to the church, carried to the churchyard, and lowered into the grave.

The grave, however, was not filled in; she had been buried before the service on Sunday morning, as was the custom at Raglanda. The mourners had gone into church after the funeral, and the coffin was left in the open grave; but as soon as the service was over they would come back, and help the gravedigger to fill in the grave.

The young girl knew everything that happened, but felt no fear. She had not been able to make the slightest movement to show that she was alive, even if she had wanted to; but even if she had been able to move, she would not have done so; the whole time she was happy because she was as good as dead.

But, on the other hand, one could hardly say that she was alive. She had neither the use of her mind nor of her senses. It was only that part of the soul which dreams dreams during the night that

was still living within her.

She could not even think enough to realize how terrible it would be for her to awake when the grave was filled in. She had no more power over her mind than has one who dreams.

'I should like to know,' she thought, 'if there is anything in the whole wide world that could make me wish to live.'

As soon as that thought rushed through her it seemed to her as if the lid of the coffin, and the handkerchief which had been placed over her face, became transparent, and she saw before her riches and beautiful raiment, and lovely gardens with delicious fruits.

'No, I do not care for any of these things,' she said, and she closed her eyes for their glories.

When she again looked up they had disappeared, but instead she saw quite distinctly a little angel of God sitting on the edge of the grave.

'Good-morning, thou little angel of God,' she said to him.

'Good-morning, Ingrid,' the angel said. 'Whilst thou art lying here doing nothing, I would like to speak a little with thee about days gone by.'

Ingrid heard distinctly every word the angel said; but his voice was not like anything she had ever heard before. It was more like a stringed instrument; it was not like singing, but like the tones of a violin or the clang of a harp.

'Ingrid,' the angel said, 'dost thou remember, whilst thy grandfather was still living, that thou once met a young student,

who went with thee from house to house playing the whole day on thy grandfather's violin?'

The girl's face was lighted by a smile.

'Dost thou think I have forgotten this?' she said. 'Ever since that time no day has passed when I have not thought of him.'

'And no night when thou hast not dreamt of him?'

'No, not a night when I have not dreamt of him.'

'And thou wilt die, although thou rememberest him so well,' said the angel. 'Then thou wilt never be able to see him again.'

When he said this it was as if the dead girl felt all the happiness of love, but even that could not tempt her.

'No, no,' she said; 'I am afraid to live; I would rather die.'

Then the angel waved his hand, and Ingrid saw before her a wide waste of desert. There were no trees, and the desert was barren and dry and hot, and extended in all directions without any limits. In the sand there lay, here and there, objects which at the first glance looked like pieces of rock, but when she examined them more closely, she saw they were the immense living animals of fairy tales, with huge claws and great jaws, with sharp teeth; they lay in the sand, watching for prey. And between these terrible animals the student came walking along. He went quite fearlessly, without suspecting that the figures around him were living.

'But warn him! do warn him!' Ingrid said to the angel in unspeakable fear. 'Tell him that they are living, and that he must take care.'

'I am not allowed to speak to him,' said the angel with his clear voice; 'thou must thyself warn him.'

The apparently dead girl felt with horror that she lay powerless, and could not rush to save the student. She made one futile effort after the other to raise herself, but the impotence of death bound her. But then at last, at last, she felt her heart begin to beat, the blood rushed through her veins, the stiffness of death was loosened in her body. She arose and hastened towards him.

IV

It is quite certain the sun loves the open places outside the small village churches. Has no one ever noticed that one never sees so much sunshine as during the morning service outside a small, whitewashed church? Nowhere else does one see such radiant streams of light, nowhere else is the air so devoutly quiet. The sun simply keeps watch that no one remains on the church hill gossiping. It wants them all to sit quietly in church and listen to the sermon – that is why it sends such a wealth of sunny rays on to the ground outside the church wall.

Perhaps one must not take it for granted that the sun keeps watch outside the small churches every Sunday; but so much is certain, that the morning Ingrid had been placed in the grave in the churchyard at Raglanda, it spread a burning heat over the open space outside the church. Even the flint stones looked as if they might take fire as they lay and sparkled in the wheel-ruts. The short, down-trodden grass curled, so that it looked like dry moss, whilst the yellow dandelions which grew amongst the grass spread themselves out on their long stems, so that they became as large as asters.

A man from Dalarne came wandering along the road – one of those men who go about selling knives and scissors. He was clad in a long, white sheep-skin coat, and on his back he had a large black leather pack. He had been walking with this burden

for several hours without finding it too hot, but when he had left the highroad, and came to the open place outside the church, he stopped and took off his hat in order to dry the perspiration from his forehead.

As the man stood there bare-headed, he looked both handsome and clever. His forehead was high and white, with a deep wrinkle between the eyebrows; the mouth was well formed, with thin lips. His hair was parted in the middle; it was cut short at the back, but hung over his ears, and was inclined to curl. He was tall, and strongly, but not coarsely, built; in every respect well proportioned. But what was wrong about him was his glance, which was unsteady, and the pupils of his eyes rolled restlessly, and were drawn far into the sockets, as if to hide themselves. There was something drawn about the mouth, something dull and heavy, which did not seem to belong to the face.

He could not be quite right, either, or he would not have dragged that heavy pack about on a Sunday. If he had been quite in his senses, he would have known that it was of no use, as he could not sell anything in any case. None of the other men from Dalarne who walked about from village to village bent their backs under this burden on a Sunday, but they went to the house of God free and erect as other men.

But this poor fellow probably did not know it was a holy day until he stood in the sunshine outside the church and heard the singing. He was sensible enough at once to understand that he could not do any business, and then his brain began to work as

to how he should spend the day.

He stood for a long time and stared in front of him. When everything went its usual course, he had no difficulty in managing. He was not so bad but that he could go from farm to farm all through the week and attend to his business, but he never could get accustomed to the Sunday – that always came upon him as a great, unexpected trouble.

His eyes became quite fixed, and the muscles of his forehead swelled.

The first thought that took shape in his brain was that he should go into the church and listen to the singing, but he would not accept this suggestion. He was very fond of singing, but he dared not go into the church. He was not afraid of human beings, but in some churches there were such quaint, uncanny pictures, which represented creatures of which he would rather not think.

At last his brain worked round to the thought that, as this was a church, there would probably also be a churchyard, and when he could take refuge in a churchyard all was well. One could not offer him anything better. If on his wanderings he saw a churchyard, he always went in and sat there awhile, even if it were in the middle of a workaday week.

Now that he wanted to go to the churchyard a new difficulty suddenly arose. The burial-place at Raglanda does not lie quite near the church, which is built on a hill, but on the other side of the road; and he could not get to the entrance of the churchyard without passing along the road where the horses of the church-

goers were standing tied up.

All the horses stood with their heads deep in bundles of hay and nosebags, chewing. There was no question of their being able to do the man any harm, but he had his own ideas as to the danger of going past such a long row of animals.

Two or three times he made an attempt, but his courage failed him, so that he was obliged to turn back. He was not afraid that the horses would bite or kick. It was quite enough for him that they were so near that they could see him. It was quite enough that they could shake their bridles and scrape the earth with their hoofs.

At last a moment came when all the horses were looking down, and seemed to be eating for a wager. Then he began to make his way between them. He held his sheepskin cloak tightly around him so that it should not flap and betray him, and he went on tiptoe as lightly as he could. When a horse raised its eyelid and looked at him, he at once stopped and curtsied. He wanted to be polite in this great danger, but surely animals were amenable to reason, and could understand that he could not bow when he had a pack full of hardware upon his back; he could only curtsy.

He sighed deeply, for in this world it was a sad and troublesome thing to be so afraid of all four-footed animals as he was. He was really not afraid of any other animals than goats, and he would not have been at all afraid of horses and dogs and cats had he only been quite sure that they were not a kind of transformed goats. But he never was quite sure of that, so as a

matter of fact it was just as bad for him as if he had been afraid of all kinds of four-footed animals.

It was no use his thinking of how strong he was, and that these small peasant horses never did any harm to anyone: he who has become possessed of such fears cannot reason with himself. Fear is a heavy burden, and it is hard for him who must always carry it.

It was strange that he managed to get past all the horses. The last few steps he took in two long jumps, and when he got into the churchyard he closed the gate after him, and began to threaten the horses with his clenched fist.

'You wretched, miserable, accursed goats!'

He did that to all animals. He could not help calling them goats, and that was very stupid of him, for it had procured him a name which he did not like. Everyone who met him called him the 'Goat.' But he would not own to this name. He wanted to be called by his proper name, but apparently no one knew his real name in that district.

He stood a little while at the gate, rejoicing at having escaped from the horses, but he soon went further into the churchyard. At every cross and every stone he stopped and curtsied, but this was not from fear: this was simply from joy at seeing these dear old friends. All at once he began to look quite gentle and mild. They were exactly the same crosses and stones he had so often seen before. They looked just as usual. How well he knew them again! He must say 'Good-morning' to them.

How nice it was in the churchyard! There were no animals

about there, and there were no people to make fun of him. It was best there, when it was quite quiet as now; but even if there were people, they did not disturb him. He certainly knew many pretty meadows and woods which he liked still better, but there he was never left in peace. They could not by any means compare with the churchyard. And the churchyard was better than the forest, for in the forest the loneliness was so great that he was frightened by it. Here it was quiet, as in the depths of the forest; but he was not without company. Here people were sleeping under every stone and every mound; just the company he wanted in order not to feel lonely and strange.

He went straight to the open grave. He went there partly because there were some shady trees, and partly because he wanted company. He thought, perhaps, that the dead who had so recently been laid in the grave might be a better protection against his loneliness than those who had passed away long ago.

He bent his knees, with his back to the great mound of earth at the edge of the grave, and succeeded in pushing the pack upwards, so that it stood firmly on the mound, and he then loosened the heavy straps that fastened it. It was a great day – a holiday. He also took off his coat. He sat down on the grass with a feeling of great pleasure, so close to the grave that his long legs, with the stockings tied under the knee, and the heavy laced shoes dangled over the edge of the grave.

For a while he sat still, with his eyes steadily fixed upon the coffin. When one was possessed by such fear as he was, one could

not be too careful. But the coffin did not move in the least; it was impossible to suspect it of containing any snare.

He was no sooner certain of this than he put his hand into a side-pocket of the pack and took out a violin and bow, and at the same time he nodded to the dead in the grave. As he was so quiet he should hear something pretty.

This was something very unusual for him. There were not many who were allowed to hear him play. No one was ever allowed to hear him play at the farms, where they set the dogs at him and called him the 'Goat'; but sometimes he would play in a house where they spoke softly, and went about quietly, and did not ask him if he wanted to buy any goat-skins. At such places he took out his violin and treated them to some music; and this was a great favour – the greatest he could bestow upon anybody.

As he sat there and played at the edge of the grave it did not sound amiss; he did not play a wrong note, and he played so softly and gently that it could hardly be heard at the next grave. The strange thing about it was that it was not the man who could play, but it was his violin that could remember some small melodies. They came forth from the violin as soon as he let the bow glide over it. It might not, perhaps, have meant so much to others, but for him, who could not remember a single tune, it was the most precious gift of all to possess such a violin that could play by itself.

Whilst he played he sat with a beaming smile on his face. It was the violin that spoke and spoke; he only listened. Was it not

strange that one heard all these beautiful things as soon as one let the bow glide over the strings? The violin did that. It knew how it ought to be, and the Dalar man only sat and listened. Melodies grew out of that violin as grass grows out of the earth. No one could understand how it happened. Our Lord had ordered it so.

The Dalar man intended to remain sitting there the whole day, and let the dear tunes grow out of the violin like small white and many-coloured flowers. He would play a whole meadowful of flowers, play a whole long valleyful, a whole wide plain.

But she who lay in the coffin distinctly heard the violin, and upon her it had a strange effect. The tones had made her dream, and what she had seen in her dreams caused her such emotion that her heart began to beat, her blood to flow, and she awoke.

But all she had lived through while she lay there, apparently dead, the thoughts she had had, and also her last dream – everything vanished in the same moment she awoke to consciousness. She did not even know that she was lying in her coffin, but thought she was still lying ill at home in her bed. She only thought it strange that she was still alive. A little while ago, before she fell asleep, she had been in the pangs of death. Surely, all must have been over with her long ago. She had taken leave of her adopted parents, and of her brothers and sisters, and of the servants. The Dean had been there himself to administer the last Communion, for her adopted father did not think he could bear to give it to her himself. For several days she had put away all earthly thoughts from her mind. It was incomprehensible that

she was not dead.

She wondered why it was so dark in the room where she lay. There had been a light all the other nights during her illness. And then they had let the blankets fall off the bed. She was lying there getting as cold as ice. She raised herself a little to pull the blankets over her. In doing so she knocked her head against the lid of the coffin, and fell back with a little scream of pain. She had knocked herself rather severely, and immediately became unconscious again. She lay as motionless as before, and it seemed as if life had again left her.

The Dalar man, who had heard both the knock and the cry, immediately laid down his violin and sat listening; but there was nothing more to be heard – nothing whatever. He began again to look at the coffin as attentively as before. He sat nodding his head, as if he would say 'Yes' to what he was himself thinking about, namely, that nothing in this world was to be depended upon. Here he had had the best and most silent of comrades, but had he not also been disappointed in him?

He sat and looked at the coffin, as if trying to see right through it. At last, when it continued quite still, he took his violin again and began to play. But the violin would not play any longer. However gently and tenderly he drew his bow, there came forth no melody. This was so sad that he was nearly crying. He had intended to sit still and listen to his violin the whole day, and now it would not play any more.

He could quite understand the reason. The violin was uneasy

and afraid of what had moved in the coffin. It had forgotten all its melodies, and thought only of what it could be that had knocked at the coffin-lid. That is how it is one forgets everything when one is afraid. He saw that he would have to quiet the violin if he wanted to hear more.

He had felt so happy, more so than for many years. If there was really anything bad in the coffin, would it not be better to let it out? Then the violin would be glad, and beautiful flowers would again grow out of it.

He quickly opened his big pack, and began to rummage amongst his knives and saws and hammers until he found a screw-driver. In another moment he was down in the grave on his knees and unscrewing the coffin-lid. He took out one screw after the other, until at last he could raise the lid against the side of the grave; at the same moment the handkerchief fell from off the face of the apparently dead girl. As soon as the fresh air reached Ingrid, she opened her eyes. Now she saw that it was light. They must have removed her. Now she was lying in a yellow chamber with a green ceiling, and a large chandelier was hanging from the ceiling. The chamber was small, but the bed was still smaller. Why had she the sensation of her arms and legs being tied? Was it because she should lie still in the little narrow bed? It was strange that they had placed a hymn-book under her chin; they only did that with corpses. Between her fingers she had a little bouquet. Her adopted mother had cut a few sprigs from her flowering myrtle, and laid them in her hands. Ingrid was very

much surprised. What had come to her adopted mother? She saw that they had given her a pillow with broad lace, and a fine hem-stitched sheet. She was very glad of that; she liked to have things nice. Still, she would rather have had a warm blanket over her. It could surely not be good for a sick person to lie without a blanket. Ingrid was nearly putting her hands to her eyes and beginning to cry, she was so bitterly cold. At the same moment she felt something hard and cold against her cheek. She could not help smiling. It was the old, red wooden horse, the old three-legged Camilla, that lay beside her on the pillow. Her little brother, who could never sleep at night without having it with him in his bed, had put it in her bed. It was very sweet of her little brother. Ingrid felt still more inclined to cry when she understood that her little brother had wanted to comfort her with his wooden horse.

But she did not get so far as crying. The truth all at once flashed upon her. Her little brother had given her the wooden horse, and her mother had given her her white myrtle flowers, and the hymn-book had been placed under her chin, because they had thought she was dead.

Ingrid took hold of the sides of the coffin with both hands and raised herself. The little narrow bed was a coffin, and the little narrow chamber was a grave. It was all very difficult to understand. She could not understand that this concerned her, that it was she who had been swathed like a corpse and placed in the grave. She must be lying all the same in her bed, and be seeing or dreaming all this. She would soon find out that this was

no reality, but that everything was as usual.

All at once she found the explanation of the whole thing – 'I often have such strange dreams. This is only a vision' – and she sighed, relieved and happy. She laid herself down in her coffin again; she was so sure that it was her own bed, for that was not very wide either.

All this time the Dalar man stood in the grave, quite close to the foot of the coffin. He only stood a few feet from her, but she had not seen him; that was probably because he had tried to hide himself in the corner of the grave as soon as the dead in the coffin had opened her eyes and begun to move. She could, perhaps, have seen him, although he held the coffin-lid before him as a screen, had there not been something like a white mist before her eyes so that she could only see things quite near her distinctly. Ingrid could not even see that there were earthen walls around her. She had taken the sun to be a large chandelier, and the shady lime-trees for a roof. The poor Dalar man stood and waited for the thing that moved in the coffin to go away. It did not strike him that it would not go unrequested. Had it not knocked because it wanted to get out? He stood for a long time with his head behind the coffin-lid and waited, that it should go. He peeped over the lid when he thought that now it must have gone. But it had not moved; it remained lying on its bed of shavings.

He could not put up with it any longer; he must really make an end of it. It was a long time since his violin had spoken so prettily as to-day, he longed to sit again quietly with it. Ingrid, who had

nearly fallen asleep again, suddenly heard herself addressed in the sing-song Dalar dialect:

'Now, I think it is time you got up.'

As soon as he had said this he hid his head. He shook so much over his boldness that he nearly let the lid fall.

But the white mist which had been before Ingrid's eyes disappeared completely when she heard a human being speaking. She saw a man standing in the corner, at the foot of the coffin, holding a coffin-lid before him. She saw at once that she could not lie down again and think it was a vision. Surely he was a reality, which she must try and make out. It certainly looked as if the coffin were a coffin, and the grave a grave, and that she herself a few minutes ago was nothing but a swathed and buried corpse. For the first time she was terror-stricken at what had happened to her. To think that she could really have been dead that moment! She could have been a hideous corpse, food for worms. She had been placed in the coffin for them to throw earth upon her; she was worth no more than a piece of turf; she had been thrown aside altogether. The worms were welcome to eat her; no one would mind about that.

Ingrid needed so badly to have a fellow-creature near her in her great terror. She had recognized the Goat directly he put up his head. He was an old acquaintance from the parsonage; she was not in the least afraid of him. She wanted him to come close to her. She did not mind in the least that he was an idiot. He was, at any rate, a living being. She wanted him to come so near to her

that she could feel she belonged to the living and not to the dead.

'Oh, for God's sake, come close to me!' she said, with tears in her voice.

She raised herself in the coffin and stretched out her arms to him.

But the Dalar man only thought of himself. If she were so anxious to have him near her, he resolved to make his own terms.

'Yes,' he said, 'if you will go away.'

Ingrid at once tried to comply with his request, but she was so tightly swathed in the sheet that she found it difficult to get up.

'You must come and help me,' she said.

She said this, partly because she was obliged to do it, and partly because she was afraid that she had not quite escaped death. She must be near someone living.

He actually went near her, squeezing himself between the coffin and the side of the grave. He bent over her, lifted her out of the coffin, and put her down on the grass at the side of the open grave.

Ingrid could not help it. She threw her arms round his neck, laid her head on his shoulder and sobbed. Afterwards she could not understand how she had been able to do this, and that she was not afraid of him. It was partly from joy that he was a human being – a living human being – and partly from gratitude, because he had saved her.

What would have become of her if it had not been for him? It was he who had raised the coffin-lid, who had brought her

back to life. She certainly did not know how it had all happened, but it was surely he who had opened the coffin. What would have happened to her if he had not done this? She would have awakened to find herself imprisoned in the black coffin. She would have knocked and shouted; but who would have heard her six feet below the ground? Ingrid dared not think of it; she was entirely absorbed with gratitude because she had been saved. She must have someone she could thank. She must lay her head on someone's breast and cry from gratitude.

The most extraordinary thing, almost, that happened that day was, that the Dalar man did not repulse her. But it was not quite clear to him that she was alive. He thought she was dead, and he knew it was not advisable to offend anyone dead. But as soon as he could manage, he freed himself from her and went down into the grave again. He placed the lid carefully on the coffin, put in the screws and fastened it as before. Then he thought the coffin would be quite still, and the violin would regain its peace and its melodies.

In the meantime Ingrid sat on the grass and tried to collect her thoughts. She looked towards the church and discovered the horses and the carriages on the hillside. Then she began to realize everything. It was Sunday; they had placed her in the grave in the morning, and now they were in church.

A great fear now seized Ingrid. The service would, perhaps, soon be over, and then all the people would come out and see her. And she had nothing on but a sheet! She was almost naked.

Fancy, if all these people came and saw her in this state! They would never forget the sight. And she would be ashamed of it all her life.

Where should she get some clothes? For a moment she thought of throwing the Dalar man's fur coat round her, but she did not think that that would make her any more like other people.

She turned quickly to the crazy man, who was still working at the coffin-lid.

'Oh,' she said, 'will you let me creep into your pack?'

In a moment she stood by the great leather pack, which contained goods enough to fill a whole market-stall, and began to open it.

'You must come and help me.'

She did not ask in vain. When the Dalar man saw her touching his wares he came up at once.

'Are you touching my pack?' he asked threateningly.

Ingrid did not notice that he spoke angrily; she considered him to be her best friend all the time.

'Oh, dear good man,' she said, 'help me to hide, so that people will not see me. Put your wares somewhere or other, and let me creep into the pack, and carry me home. Oh, do do it! I live at the Parsonage, and it is only a little way from here. You know where it is.'

The man stood and looked at her with stupid eyes. She did not know whether he had understood a word of what she said. She repeated it, but he made no sign of obeying her. She began

again to take the things out of the pack. Then he stamped on the ground and tore the pack from her.

However should Ingrid be able to make him do what she wanted?

On the grass beside her lay a violin and a bow. She took them up mechanically – she did not know herself why. She had probably been so much in the company of people playing the violin that she could not bear to see an instrument lying on the ground.

As soon as she touched the violin he let go the pack, and tore the violin from her. He was evidently quite beside himself when anyone touched his violin. He looked quite malicious.

What in the world could she do to get away before people came out of church?

She began to promise him all sorts of things, just as one promises children when one wants them to be good.

'I will ask father to buy a whole dozen of scythes from you. I will lock up all the dogs when you come to the Parsonage. I will ask mother to give you a good meal.'

But there was no sign of his giving way. She bethought herself of the violin, and said in her despair:

'If you will carry me to the Parsonage, I will play for you.'

At last a smile flashed across his face. That was evidently what he wanted.

'I will play for you the whole afternoon; I will play for you as long as you like.'

'Will you teach the violin new melodies?' he asked.

'Of course I will.'

But Ingrid now became both surprised and unhappy, for he took hold of the pack and pulled it towards him. He dragged it over the graves, and the sweet-williams and southernwood that grew on them were crushed under it as if it were a roller. He dragged it to a heap of branches and wizened leaves and old wreaths lying near the wall round the churchyard. There he took all the things out of the pack, and hid them well under the heap. When it was empty he returned to Ingrid.

'Now you can get in,' he said.

Ingrid stepped into the pack, and crouched down on the wooden bottom. The man fastened all the straps as carefully as when he went about with his usual wares, bent down so that he nearly went on his knees, put his arms through the braces, buckled a couple of straps across his chest, and stood up. When he had gone a few steps he began to laugh. His pack was so light that he could have danced with it.

It was only about a mile from the church to the Parsonage. The Dalar man could walk it in twenty minutes. Ingrid's only wish was that he would walk so quickly that she could get home before the people came back from church. She could not bear the idea of so many people seeing her. She would like to get home when only her mother and the maid-servants were there.

Ingrid had taken with her the little bouquet of flowers from her adopted mother's myrtle. She was so pleased with it that she

kissed it over and over again. It made her think more kindly of her adopted mother than she had ever done before. But in any case she would, of course, think kindly of her now. One who has come straight from the grave must think kindly and gently of everything living and moving on the face of the earth.

She could now understand so well that the Pastor's wife was bound to love her own children more than her adopted daughter. And when they were so poor at the Parsonage that they could not afford to keep a nursemaid, she could see now that it was quite natural that she should look after her little brothers and sisters. And when her brothers and sisters were not good to her, it was because they had become accustomed to think of her as their nurse. It was not so easy for them to remember that she had come to the Parsonage to be their sister.

And, after all, it all came from their being poor. When father some day got another living, and became Dean, or even Rector, everything would surely come right. Then they would love her again, as they did when she first came to them. The good old times would be sure to come back again. Ingrid kissed her flowers. It had not been mother's intention, perhaps, to be hard; it was only worry that had made her so strange and unkind.

But now it would not matter how unkind they were to her. In the future nothing could hurt her, for now she would always be glad, simply because she was alive. And if things should ever be really bad again, she would only think of mother's myrtle and her little brother's horse.

It was happiness enough to know that she was being carried along the road alive. This morning no one had thought that she would ever again go over these roads and hills. And the fragrant clover and the little birds singing and the beautiful shady trees, which had all been a source of joy for the living, had not even existed for her. But she had not much time for reflection, for in twenty minutes the Dalar man had reached the Parsonage.

No one was at home but the Pastor's wife and the maid-servants, just as Ingrid had wished. The Pastor's wife had been busy the whole morning cooking for the funeral feast. She soon expected the guests, and everything was nearly ready. She had just been into the bedroom to put on her black dress. She glanced down the road to the church, but there were still no carriages to be seen. So she went once again into the kitchen to taste the food.

She was quite satisfied, for everything was as it ought to be, and one cannot help being glad for that, even if one is in mourning. There was only one maid in the kitchen, and that was the one the Pastor's wife had brought with her from her old home, so she felt she could speak to her in confidence.

'I must confess, Lisa,' she said, 'I think anyone would be pleased with having such a funeral.'

'If she could only look down and see all the fuss you make of her,' Lisa said, 'she would be pleased.'

'Ah!' said the Pastor's wife, 'I don't think she would ever be pleased with me.'

'She is dead now,' said the girl, 'and I am not the one to say

anything against one who is hardly yet under the ground.'

'I have had to bear many a hard word from my husband for her sake,' said the mistress.

The Pastor's wife felt she wanted to speak with someone about the dead girl. Her conscience had pricked her a little on her account, and this was why she had arranged such a grand funeral feast. She thought her conscience might leave her alone now she had had so much trouble over the funeral, but it did not do so by any means. Her husband also reproached himself, and said that the young girl had not been treated like one of their own children, and that they had promised she should be when they adopted her; and he said it would have been better if they had never taken her, when they could not help letting her see that they loved their own children more. And now the Pastor's wife felt she must talk to someone about the young girl, to hear whether people thought she had treated her badly.

She saw that Lisa began to stir the pan violently, as if she had difficulty in controlling her anger. She was a clever girl, who thoroughly understood how to get into her mistress's good books.

'I must say,' Lisa began, 'that when one has a mother who always looks after one, and takes care that one is neat and clean, one might at least try to obey and please her. And when one is allowed to live in a good Parsonage, and to be educated respectably, one ought at least to give some return for it, and not always go idling about and dreaming. I should like to know what would have happened if you had not taken the poor thing in. I

suppose she would have been running about with those acrobats, and have died in the streets, like any other poor wretch.'

A man from Dalarné came across the yard; he had his pack on his back, although it was Sunday. He came very quietly through the open kitchen-door, and curtsied when he entered, but no one took any notice of him. Both the mistress and the maid saw him, but as they knew him, they did not think it necessary to interrupt their conversation.

The Pastor's wife was anxious to continue it; she felt she was about to hear what she needed to ease her conscience.

'It is perhaps as well she is gone,' she said.

'Yes, ma'am,' the servant said eagerly; 'and I am sure the Pastor thinks just the same. In any case he soon will. And the mistress will see that now there will be more peace in the house, and I am sure the master needs it.'

'Oh!' said the Pastor's wife, 'I was obliged to be careful. There were always so many clothes to be got for her, that it was quite dreadful. He was so afraid that she should not get as much as the others that she sometimes even had more. And it cost so much, now that she was grown up.'

'I suppose, ma'am, Greta will get her muslin dress?'

'Yes; either Greta will have it, or I shall use it myself.'

'She does not leave much behind her, poor thing!'

'No one expects her to leave anything,' said her adopted mother. 'I should be quite content if I could remember ever having had a kind word from her.'

This is only the kind of thing one says when one has a bad conscience, and wants to excuse one's self. Her adopted mother did not really mean what she said.

The Dalar man behaved exactly as he always did when he came to sell his wares. He stood for a little while looking round the kitchen; then he slowly pushed the pack on to a table, and unfastened the braces and the straps; then he looked round to see if there were any cats or dogs about. He then straightened his back, and began to unfasten the two leather flaps, which were fastened with numerous buckles and knots.

'He need not trouble about opening his pack to-day,' Lisa said; 'it is Sunday, and he knows quite well we don't buy anything on Sundays.'

She, however, took no notice of the crazy fellow, who continued to unfasten his straps. She turned round to her mistress. This was a good opportunity for insinuating herself.

'I don't even know whether she was good to the children. I have often heard them cry in the nursery.'

'I suppose it was the same with them as it was with their mother,' said the Pastor's wife; 'but now, of course, they cry because she is dead.'

'They don't understand what is best for them,' said the servant; 'but the mistress can be certain that before a month is gone there will be no one to cry over her.'

At the same moment they both turned round from the kitchen range, and looked towards the table, where the Dalar man stood

opening his big pack. They had heard a strange noise, something like a sigh or a sob. The man was just opening the inside lid, and out of the pack rose the newly-buried girl, exactly the same as when they laid her in the coffin.

And yet she did not look quite the same. She looked almost more dead now than when she was laid in her coffin. Then she had nearly the same colour as when she was alive; now her face was ashy-gray, there was a bluish-black shadow round her mouth, and her eyes lay deep in her head. She said nothing, but her face expressed the greatest despair, and she held out beseechingly, and as if to avert their anger, the bouquet of myrtle which she had received from her adopted mother.

This sight was more than flesh and blood could stand. Her mother fell fainting to the ground; the maid stood still for a moment, gazing at the mother and daughter, covered her eyes with her hands, and rushed into her own room and locked the door.

'It is not me she has come for; this does not concern me.'

But Ingrid turned round to the Dalar man.

'Put me in your pack again, and take me away. Do you hear? Take me away. Take me back to where you found me.'

The Dalar man happened to look through the window. A long row of carts and carriages was coming up the avenue and into the yard. Ah, indeed! then he was not going to stay. He did not like that at all.

Ingrid crouched down at the bottom of the pack. She said

not another word, but only sobbed. The flaps and the lids were fastened, and she was again lifted on to his back and carried away. Those who were coming to the funeral feast laughed at the Goat, who hastened away, curtsyng and curtsyng to every horse he met.

V

Anna Stina was an old woman who lived in the depths of the forest. She gave a helping hand at the Parsonage now and then, and always managed opportunely to come down the hillside when they were baking or washing. She was a nice, clever old woman, and she and Ingrid were good friends. As soon as the young girl was able to collect her thoughts, she made up her mind to take refuge with her.

'Listen,' she said to the Dalar man. 'When you get onto the highroad, turn into the forest; then go straight on until you come to a gate; there you must turn to the left; then you must go straight on until you come to the large gravel-pit. From there you can see a house: take me there, and I will play to you.'

The short and harsh manner in which she gave her orders jarred upon her ears, but she was obliged to speak in this way in order to be obeyed; it was the only chance she had. What right had she to order another person about – she who had not even the right to be alive?

After all this she would never again be able to feel as if she had any right to live. This was the most dreadful part of all that had happened to her: that she could have lived in the Parsonage for six years, and not even been able to make herself so much loved that they wished to keep her alive. And those whom no one loves have no right to live. She could not exactly say how she

knew it was so, but it was as clear as daylight. She knew it from the feeling that the same moment she heard that they did not care about her an iron hand seemed to have crushed her heart as if to make it stop. Yes, it was life itself that had been closed for her. And the same moment she had come back from death, and felt the delight of being alive burn brightly and strongly within her, just at that moment the one thing that gave her the right of existing had been torn from her.

This was worse than sentence of death. It was much more cruel than an ordinary sentence of death. She knew what it was like. It was like felling a tree – not in the usual manner, when the trunk is cut through, but by cutting its roots and leaving it standing in the ground to die by itself. There the tree stands, and cannot understand why it no longer gets nourishment and support. It struggles and strives to live, but the leaves get smaller and smaller, it sends forth no fresh shoots, the bark falls off, and it must die, because it is severed from the spring of life. Thus it is it must die.

At last the Dalar man put down his pack on the stone step outside a little house in the midst of the wild forest. The door was locked, but as soon as Ingrid had got out of the pack she took the key from under the doorstep, opened the door, and walked in.

Ingrid knew the house thoroughly and all it contained. It was not the first time she had come there for comfort; it was not the first time she had come and told old Anna Stina that she could not bear living at home any longer – that her adopted mother

was so hard to her that she would not go back to the Parsonage. But every time she came the old woman had talked her over and quieted her. She had made her some terrible coffee from roasted peas and chicory, without a single coffee-bean in it, but which had all the same given her new courage, and in the end she had made her laugh at everything, and encouraged her so much, that she had simply danced down the hillside on her way home.

Even if Anna Stina had been at home, and had made some of her terrible coffee, it would probably not have helped Ingrid this time. But the old woman was down at the Parsonage to the funeral feast, for the Pastor's wife had not forgotten to invite any of those of whom Ingrid had been fond. That, too, was probably the result of an uneasy conscience.

But in Anna's room everything was as usual. And when Ingrid saw the sofa with the wooden seat, and the clean, scoured table, and the cat, and the coffee-kettle, although she did not feel comforted or cheered, she felt that here was a place where she could give vent to her sorrow. It was a relief that here she need not think of anything but crying and moaning.

She went straight to the settle, threw herself on the wooden seat, and lay there crying, she did not know for how long.

The Dalar man sat outside on the stone step; he did not want to go into the house on account of the cat. He expected that Ingrid would come out and play to him. He had taken the violin out long ago. As it was such a long time before she came, he began to play himself. He played softly and gently, as was his wont. It

was barely possible for the young girl to hear him playing.

Ingrid had one fit of shivering after the other. This was how she had been before she fell ill. She would no doubt be ill again. It was also best that the fever should come and put an end to her in earnest.

When she heard the violin, she rose and looked round with bewildered glance. Who was that playing? Was that her student? Had he come at last? It soon struck her, however, that it was the Dalar man, and she lay down again with a sigh. She could not follow what he was playing. But as soon as she closed her eyes the violin assumed the student's voice. She also heard what he said; he spoke with her adopted mother and defended her. He spoke just as nicely as he had done to Mr. and Mrs. Blomgren. Ingrid needed love so much, he said. That was what she had missed. That was why she had not always attended to her work, but allowed dreams to fill her mind. But no one knew how she could work and slave for those who loved her. For their sake she could bear sorrow and sickness, and contempt and poverty; for them she would be as strong as a giant, and as patient as a slave.

Ingrid heard him distinctly and she became quiet. Yes, it was true. If only her adopted mother had loved her, she would have seen what Ingrid was worth. But as she did not love her, Ingrid was paralyzed in her efforts. Yes, so it had been.

Now the fever had left her, she only lay and listened to what the student said. She slept a little now and then; time after time she thought she was lying in her grave, and then it was always

the student who came and took her out of the coffin. She lay and disputed with him.

'When I am dreaming it is you who come,' she said.

'It is always I who come to you, Ingrid,' he said. 'I thought you knew that. I take you out of the grave; I carry you on my shoulders; I play you to sleep. It is always I.'

What disturbed and awoke her was the thought that she had to get up and play for the Dalar man. Several times she rose up to do it, but could not. As soon as she fell back upon the settle she began to dream. She sat crouching in the pack and the student carried her through the forest. It was always he.

'But it was not you,' she said to him.

'Of course it was I,' he said, smiling at her contradicting him. 'You have been thinking about me every day for all these years; so you can understand I could not help saving you when you were in such great danger.'

Of course she saw the force of his argument; and then she began to realize that he was right, and that it was he. But this was such infinite bliss that she again awoke. Love seemed to fill her whole being. It could not have been more real had she seen and spoken with her beloved.

'Why does he never come in real life?' she said, half aloud. 'Why does he only come in my dreams?'

She did not dare to move, for then love would fly away. It was as if a timid bird had settled on her shoulder, and she was afraid of frightening it away. If she moved, the bird would fly away, and

sorrow would overcome her.

When at last she really awoke, it was twilight. She must have slept the whole afternoon and evening. At that time of the year it was not dark until after ten o'clock. The violin had ceased playing, and the Dalar man had probably gone away.

Anna Stina had not yet come back. She would probably be away the whole night. It did not matter to Ingrid; all she wanted was to lie down again and sleep. She was afraid of all the sorrow and despair that would overwhelm her as soon as she awoke. But then she got something new to think about. Who could have closed the door? who had spread Anna Stina's great shawl over her? and who had placed a piece of dry bread beside her on the seat? Had he, the Goat, done all this for her? For a moment she thought she saw dream and reality standing side by side, trying which could best console her. And the dream stood joyous and smiling, showering over her all the bliss of love to comfort her. But life, poor, hard, and bitter though it was, also brought its kindly little mite to show that it did not mean to be so hard upon her as perhaps she thought.

VI

Ingrid and Anna Stina were walking through the dark forest. They had been walking for four days, and had slept three nights in the Säter huts. Ingrid was weak and weary; her face was transparently pale; her eyes were sunken, and shone feverishly. Old Anna Stina now and then secretly cast an anxious look at her, and prayed to God that He would sustain her so that she might not die by the wayside. Now and then the old woman could not help looking behind her with uneasiness. She had an uncomfortable feeling that the old man with his scythe came stealthily after them through the forest to reclaim the young girl who, both by the word of God and the casting of earth upon her, had been consecrated to him.

Old Anna Stina was little and broad, with a large, square face, which was so intelligent that it was almost good-looking. She was not superstitious – she lived quite alone in the midst of the forest without being afraid either of witches or evil spirits – but as she walked there by the side of Ingrid she felt as distinctly as if someone had told her that she was walking beside a being who did not belong to this world. She had had that sensation ever since she had found Ingrid lying in her house that Monday morning.

Anna Stina had not returned home on the Sunday evening, for down at the Parsonage the Pastor's wife had been taken very ill, and Anna Stina, who was accustomed to nurse sick people,

had stayed to sit up with her. The whole night she had heard the Pastor's wife raving about Ingrid's having appeared to her; but that the old woman had not believed. And when she returned home the next day and found Ingrid, the old woman would at once have gone down to the Parsonage again to tell them that it was not a ghost they had seen; but when she had suggested this to Ingrid, it had affected her so much that she dared not do it. It was as if the little life which burnt in her would be extinguished, just as the flame of a candle is put out by too strong a draught. She could have died as easily as a little bird in its cage. Death was prowling around her. There was nothing to be done but to nurse her very tenderly and deal very gently with her if her life was to be preserved.

The old woman hardly knew what to think of Ingrid. Perhaps she was a ghost; there seemed to be so little life in her. She quite gave up trying to talk her to reason. There was nothing else for it but giving in to her wishes that no one should hear anything about her being alive. And then the old woman tried to arrange everything as wisely as possible. She had a sister who was housekeeper on a large estate in Dalarne, and she made up her mind to take Ingrid to her, and persuade her sister, Stafva, to give the girl a situation at the Manor House. Ingrid would have to be content with being simply a servant. There was nothing else for it.

They were now on their way to the Manor House. Anna Stina knew the country so well that they were not obliged to go by the

highroad, but could follow the lonely forest paths. But they had also undergone much hardship. Their shoes were worn and in pieces, their skirts soiled and frayed at the bottom, and a branch had torn a long rent in Ingrid's sleeve.

On the evening of the fourth day they came to a hill from which they could look down into a deep valley. In the valley was a lake, and near the edge of the lake was a high, rocky island, upon which stood a large white building. When Anna Stina saw the house, she said it was called Munkhyttan, and that it was there her sister lived.

They made themselves as tidy as they could on the hillside. They arranged the handkerchiefs which they wore on their heads, dried their shoes with moss, and washed themselves in a forest stream, and Anna Stina tried to make a fold in Ingrid's sleeve so that the rent could not be seen.

The old woman sighed when she looked at Ingrid, and quite lost courage. It was not only that she looked so strange in the clothes she had borrowed from Anna Stina, and which did not at all fit her, but her sister Stafva would never take her into her service, she looked so wretched and pitiful. It was like engaging a breath of wind. The girl could be of no more use than a sick butterfly.

As soon as they were ready, they went down the hill to the lake. It was only a short distance. Then they came to the land belonging to the Manor House.

Was that a country house?

There were large neglected fields, upon which the forest encroached more and more. There was a bridge leading on to the island, so shaky that they hardly thought it would keep together until they were safely over. There was an avenue leading from the bridge to the main building, covered with grass, like a meadow, and a tree which had been blown down had been left lying across the road.

The island was pretty enough, so pretty that a castle might very well have been built there. But nothing but weeds grew in the garden, and in the large park the trees were choking each other, and black snakes glided over the green, wet walks.

Anna Stina felt uneasy when she saw how neglected everything was, and went along mumbling to herself: 'What does all this mean? Is Stafva dead? How can she stand everything looking like this? Things were very different thirty years ago, when I was last here. What in the world can be the matter with Stafva?' She could not imagine that there could be such neglect in any place where Stafva lived.

Ingrid walked behind her, slowly and reluctantly. The moment she put her foot on the bridge she felt that there were not two walking there, but three. Someone had come to meet her there, and had turned back to accompany her. Ingrid heard no footsteps, but he who accompanied them appeared indistinctly by her side. She could see there was someone.

She became terribly afraid. She was just going to beg Anna Stina to turn back and tell her that everything seemed so strange

here that she dare not go any further. But before she had time to say anything, the stranger came quite close to her, and she recognised him. Before, she only saw him indistinctly; now she saw him so clearly that she could see it was the student.

It no longer seemed weird and ghost-like that he walked there. It was only strangely delightful that he came to receive her. It was as if it were he who had brought her there, and would, by coming to welcome her, show that it was.

He walked with her over the bridge, through the avenue, quite up to the main building.

She could not help turning her head every moment to the left. It was there she saw his face, quite close to her cheek. It was really not a face that she saw, only an unspeakably beautiful smile that drew tenderly near her. But if she turned her head quite round to see it properly, it was no longer there. No, there was nothing one could see distinctly. But as soon as she looked straight before her, it was there again, quite close to her.

Her invisible companion did not speak to her, he only smiled. But that was enough for her. It was more than enough to show her that there was one in the world who kept near her with tender love.

She felt his presence as something so real, that she firmly believed he protected her and watched over her. And before this happy consciousness vanished all the despair which her adopted mother's hard words had called forth.

Ingrid felt herself again given back to life. She had the right

to live, as there was one who loved her.

And this was why she entered the kitchen at Munkhyttan with a faint blush on her cheeks, and with radiant eyes, fragile, weak, and transparent, but sweet as a newly-opened rose.

She still went about as if in a dream, and did not know much about where she was; but what surprised her so much that it nearly awakened her was to see a new Anna Stina standing by the fireplace. She stood there, little and broad, with a large, square face, exactly like the other. But why was she so fine, with a white cap with strings tied in a large bow under her chin, and with a black bombazine dress? Ingrid's head was so confused, that it was some time before it occurred to her that this must be Miss Stafva.

She felt that Anna Stina looked uneasily at her, and she tried to pull herself together and say 'Good-day.' But the only thing her mind could grasp was the thought that he had come to her.

Inside the kitchen there was a small room, with blue-checked covering on the furniture. They were taken into that room, and Miss Stafva gave them coffee and something to eat.

Anna Stina at once began to talk about their errand. She spoke for a long time; said that she knew her sister stood so high in her ladyship's favour that she left it to her to engage the servants. Miss Stafva said nothing, but she gave a look at Ingrid as much as to say that it would hardly have been left with her if she had chosen servants like her.

Anna Stina praised Ingrid, and said she was a good girl. She

had hitherto served in a parsonage, but now that she was grown up she wanted really to learn something, and that was why Anna Stina had brought her to one who could teach her more than any other person she knew.

Miss Stafva did not reply to this remark either. But her glance plainly showed that she was surprised that anyone who had had a situation in a parsonage had no clothes of her own, but was obliged to borrow old Anna Stina's.

Then old Anna Stina began to tell how she lived quite alone in the forest, deserted by all her relatives. And this young girl had come running up the hill many an evening and many an early morning to see her. She had therefore thought and hoped that she could now help her to get a good situation.

Miss Stafva said it was a pity that they had gone such a long way to find a place. If she were a clever girl, she could surely get a situation in some good family in their own neighbourhood.

Anna Stina could now clearly see that Ingrid's prospects were not good, and therefore she began in a more solemn vein:

'Here you have lived, Stafva, and had a good, comfortable home all your life, and I have had to fight my way in great poverty. But I have never asked you for anything before to-day. And now you will send me away like a beggar, to whom one gives a meal and nothing more.'

Miss Stafva smiled a little; then she said:

'Sister Anna Stina, you are not telling me the truth. I, too, come from Raglanda, and I should like to know at what peasant's

house in that parish grow such eyes and such a face.'

And she pointed at Ingrid, and continued:

'I can quite understand, Anna Stina, that you would like to help one who looks like that. But I do not understand how you can think that your sister Stafva has not more sense than to believe the stories you choose to tell her.'

Anna Stina was so frightened that she could not say a word, but Ingrid made up her mind to confide in Miss Stafva, and began at once to tell her whole story in her soft, beautiful voice.

And Ingrid had hardly told of how she had been lying in the grave, and that a Dalar man had come and saved her, before old Miss Stafva grew red and quickly bent down to hide it. It was only a second, but there must have been some cause for it, for from that moment she looked so kind.

She soon began to ask full particulars about it; more especially she wanted to know about the crazy man, whether Ingrid had not been afraid of him. Oh no, he did no harm. He was not mad, Ingrid said; he could both buy and sell. He was only frightened of some things.

Ingrid thought the hardest of all was to tell what she had heard her adopted mother say. But she told everything, although there were tears in her voice.

Then Miss Stafva went up to her, drew back the handkerchief from her head, and looked into her eyes. Then she patted her lightly on the cheek.

'Never mind that, little miss,' she said. 'There is no need for

me to know about that. Now sister and Miss Ingrid must excuse me,' she said soon after, 'but I must take up her ladyship's coffee. I shall soon be down again, and you can tell me more.'

When she returned, she said she had told her ladyship about the young girl who had lain in the grave, and now her mistress wanted to see her.

They were taken upstairs, and shown into her ladyship's boudoir.

Anna Stina remained standing at the door of the fine room. But Ingrid was not shy; she went straight up to the old lady and put out her hand. She had often been shy with others who looked much less aristocratic; but here, in this house, she did not feel embarrassed. She only felt so wonderfully happy that she had come there.

'So it is you, my child, who have been buried,' said her ladyship, nodding friendlily to her. 'Do you mind telling me your story, my child? I sit here quite alone, and never hear anything, you know.'

Then Ingrid began again to tell her story. But she had not got very far before she was interrupted. Her ladyship did exactly the same as Miss Stafva had done. She rose, pushed the handkerchief back from Ingrid's forehead and looked into her eyes.

'Yes,' her ladyship said to herself, 'that I can understand. I can understand that he must obey those eyes.'

For the first time in her life Ingrid was praised for her courage. Her ladyship thought she had been very brave to place herself in

the hands of a crazy fellow.

She *was* afraid, she said, but she was still more afraid of people seeing her in that state. And he did no harm; he was almost quite right, and then he was so good.

Her ladyship wanted to know his name, but Ingrid did not know it. She had never heard of any other name but the Goat. Her ladyship asked several times how he managed when he came to do business. Had she not laughed at him, and did she not think that he looked terrible – the Goat? It sounded so strange when her ladyship said 'the Goat.' There was so much bitterness in her voice when she said it, and yet she said it over and over again.

No; Ingrid did not think so, and she never laughed at unfortunate people. The old lady looked more gentle than her words sounded.

'It appears you know how to manage mad people, my child,' she said. 'That is a great gift. Most people are afraid of such poor creatures.' She listened to all Ingrid had to say, and sat meditating. 'As you have not any home, my child,' she said, 'will you not stay here with me? You see, I am an old woman living here by myself, and you can keep me company, and I shall take care that you have everything you want. What do you say to it, my child? There will come a time, I suppose,' continued her ladyship, 'when we shall have to inform your parents that you are still living; but for the present everything shall remain as it is, so that you can have time to rest both body and mind. And you shall call me "Aunt"; but what shall I call you?'

'Ingrid – Ingrid Berg.'

'Ingrid,' said her ladyship thoughtfully. 'I would rather have called you something else. As soon as you entered the room with those star-like eyes, I thought you ought to be called Mignon.'

When it dawned upon the young girl that here she would really find a home, she felt more sure than ever that she had been brought here in some supernatural manner, and she whispered her thanks to her invisible protector before she thanked her ladyship, Miss Stafva, and Anna Stina.

Ingrid slept in a four-poster, on luxurious featherbeds three feet high, and had hem-stitched sheets, and silken quilts embroidered with Swedish crowns and French lilies. The bed was so broad that she could lie as she liked either way, and so high that she must mount two steps to get into it. At the top sat a Cupid holding the brightly-coloured hangings, and on the posts sat other Cupids, which held them up in festoons.

In the same room where the bed stood was an old curved chest of drawers inlaid with olive-wood, and from it Ingrid might take as much sweetly-scented linen as she liked. There was also a wardrobe containing many gay and pretty silk and muslin gowns that only hung there and waited until it pleased her to put them on.

When she awoke in the morning there stood by her bedside a tray with a silver coffee-set and old Indian china. And every morning she set her small white teeth in fine white bread and delicious almond-cakes; every day she was dressed in a fine

muslin gown with a lace fichu. Her hair was dressed high at the back, but round her forehead there was a row of little light curls.

On the wall between the windows hung a mirror, with a narrow glass in a broad frame, where she could see herself, and nod to her picture, and ask:

'Is it you? Is it really you? How have you come here?'

In the daytime, when Ingrid had left the chamber with the four-poster, she sat in the drawing-room and embroidered or painted on silk, and when she was tired of that, she played a little on the guitar and sang, or talked with the old lady, who taught her French, and amused herself by training her to be a fine lady.

But she had come to an enchanted castle – she could not get away from that idea. She had had that feeling the first moment, and it was always coming back again. No one arrived at the house, no one left it. In this big house only two or three rooms were kept in order; in the others no one ever went. No one walked in the garden, no one looked after it. There was only one man-servant, and an old man who cut the firewood. And Miss Stafva had only two servants, who helped her in the kitchen and in the dairy.

But there was always dainty food on the table, and her ladyship and Ingrid were always waited upon and dressed like fine ladies of rank.

If nothing thrived on the old estate, there was, at any rate, fertile soil for dreams, and even if they did not nurse and cultivate flowers there, Ingrid was not the one to neglect her dream-roses. They grew up around her whenever she was alone. It seemed to

her then as if red dream-roses formed a canopy over her.

Round the island where the trees bent low over the water, and sent long branches in between the reeds, and where shrubs and lofty trees grew luxuriantly, was a pathway where Ingrid often walked. It looked so strange to see so many letters carved on the trees, to see the old seats and summer-houses; to see the old tumble-down pavilions, which were so worm-eaten that she dared not go into them; to think that real people had walked here, that here they had lived, and longed, and loved, and that this had not always been an enchanted castle.

Down here she felt even more the witchery of the place. Here the face with the smile came to her. Here she could thank him, the student, because he had brought her to a home where she was so happy, where they loved her, and made her forget how hardly others had treated her. If it had not been he who had arranged all this for her, she could not possibly have been allowed to remain here; it was quite impossible.

She knew that it must be he. She had never before had such wild fancies. She had always been thinking of him, but she had never felt that he was so near her that he took care of her. The only thing she longed for was that he himself should come, for of course he would come some day. It was impossible that he should not come. In these avenues he had left behind part of his soul.

Summer went, and autumn; Christmas was drawing near.

'Miss Ingrid,' said the old housekeeper one day, in a rather mysterious manner, 'I think I ought to tell you that the young

master who owns Munkhyttan is coming home for Christmas. In any case, he generally comes,' she added, with a sigh.

'And her ladyship, who has never even mentioned that she has a son,' said Ingrid.

But she was not really surprised. She might just as well have answered that she had known it all along.

'No one has spoken to you about him, Miss Ingrid,' said the housekeeper, 'for her ladyship has forbidden us to speak about him.'

And then Miss Stafva would not say any more.

Neither did Ingrid want to ask any more. Now she was afraid of hearing something definite. She had raised her expectations so high that she was herself afraid they would fail. The truth might be well worth hearing, but it might also be bitter, and destroy all her beautiful dreams. But from that day he was with her night and day. She had hardly time to speak to others. She must always be with him.

One day she saw that they had cleared the snow away from the avenue. She grew almost frightened. Was he coming now?

The next day her ladyship sat from early morning in the window looking down the avenue. Ingrid had gone further into the room. She was so restless that she could not remain at the window.

'Do you know whom I am expecting to-day, Ingrid?'

The young girl nodded; she dared not depend upon her voice to answer.

'Has Miss Stafva told you that my son is peculiar?'

Ingrid shook her head.

'He is very peculiar – he – I cannot speak about it. I cannot – you must see for yourself.'

It sounded heartrending. Ingrid grew very uneasy. What was there with this house that made everything so strange? Was it something terrible that she did not know about? Was her ladyship not on good terms with her son? What was it, what was it?

The one moment in an ecstasy of joy, the next in a fever of uncertainty, she was obliged to call forth the long row of visions in order again to feel that it must be he who came. She could not at all say why she so firmly believed that he must be the son just of this house. He might, for the matter of that, be quite another person. Oh, how hard it was that she had never heard his name!

It was a long day. They sat waiting in silence until evening came.

The man came driving a cartload of Christmas logs, and the horse remained in the yard whilst the wood was unloaded.

'Ingrid,' said her ladyship in a commanding and hasty tone, 'run down to Anders and tell him that he must be quick and get the horse into the stable. Quick – quick!'

Ingrid ran down the stairs and on to the veranda; but when she came out she forgot to call to the man. Just behind the cart she saw a tall man in a sheepskin coat, and with a large pack on his back. It was not necessary for her to see him standing curtsying and curtsying to recognise him. But, but – She put her hand to

her head and drew a deep breath. How would all these things ever become clear to her? Was it for that fellow's sake her ladyship had sent her down? And the man, why did he pull the horse away in such great haste? And why did he take off his cap and salute? What had that crazy man to do with the people of this house?

All at once the truth flashed upon Ingrid so crushingly and overwhelmingly that she could have screamed. It was not her beloved who had watched over her; it was this crazy man. She had been allowed to remain here because she had spoken kindly of him, because his mother wanted to carry on the good work which he had commenced.

The Goat – that was the young master.

But to her no one came. No one had brought her here; no one had expected her. It was all dreams, fancies, illusions! Oh, how hard it was! If she had only never expected him!

But at night, when Ingrid lay in the big bed with the brightly-coloured hangings, she dreamt over and over again that she saw the student come home. 'It was not you who came,' she said. 'Yes, of course it was I,' he replied. And in her dreams she believed him.

One day, the week after Christmas, Ingrid sat at the window in the boudoir embroidering. Her ladyship sat on the sofa knitting, as she always did now. There was silence in the room.

Young Hede had been at home for a week. During all that time Ingrid had never seen him. In his home, too, he lived like a peasant, slept in the men-servants' quarters, and had his meals

in the kitchen. He never went to see his mother.

Ingrid knew that both her ladyship and Miss Stafva expected that she should do something for Hede, that at the least she would try and persuade him to remain at home. And it grieved her that it was impossible for her to do what they wished. She was in despair about herself and about the utter weakness that had come over her since her expectations had been so shattered.

To-day Miss Stafva had just come in to say that Hede was getting his pack ready to start. He was not even staying as long as he generally did at Christmas, she said with a reproachful look at Ingrid.

Ingrid understood all they had expected from her, but she could do nothing. She sewed and sewed without saying anything.

Miss Stafva went away, and there was again silence in the room. Ingrid quite forgot that she was not alone; a feeling of drowsiness suddenly came over her, whilst all her sad thoughts wove themselves into a strange fancy.

She thought she was walking up and down the whole of the large house. She went through a number of rooms and salons; she saw them before her with gray covers over the furniture. The paintings and the chandeliers were covered with gauze, and on the floors was a layer of thick dust, which whirled about when she went through the rooms. But at last she came to a room where she had never been before; it was quite a small chamber, where both walls and ceiling were black. But when she came to look more closely at them, she saw that the chamber was neither

painted black, nor covered with black material, but it was so dark on account of the walls and the ceiling being completely covered with bats. The whole room was nothing but a huge nest for bats. In one of the windows a pane was broken, so one could understand how the bats had got in in such incredible numbers that they covered the whole room. They hung there in their undisturbed winter sleep; not one moved when she entered. But she was seized by such terror at this sight that she began to shiver and shake all over. It was dreadful to see the quantity of bats she so distinctly saw hanging there. They all had black wings wrapped around them like cloaks; they all hung from the walls by a single long claw in undisturbable sleep. She saw it all so distinctly that she wondered if Miss Stafva knew that the bats had taken possession of a whole room. In her thoughts she then went to Miss Stafva and asked her whether she had been into that room and seen all the bats.

'Of course I have seen them,' said Miss Stafva. 'It is their own room. I suppose you know, Miss Ingrid, that there is not a single old country house in all Sweden where they have not to give up a room to the bats?'

'I have never heard that before,' Ingrid said.

'When you have lived as long in the world as I have, Miss Ingrid, you will find out that I am speaking the truth,' said Miss Stafva.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.