

LAGERLÖF SELMA

THE EMPEROR
OF
PORTUGALLIA

Selma Lagerlöf

The Emperor of Portugallia

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BOOK ONE

THE BEATING HEART

Jan of Ruffluck Croft never tired of telling about the day when his little girl came into the world. In the early morning he had been to fetch the midwife, and other helpers; all the forenoon and a good part of the afternoon he had sat on the chopping-block, in the woodshed, with nothing to do but to wait.

Outside it rained in torrents and he came in for his share of the downpour, although he was said to be under cover. The rain reached him in the guise of dampness through cracks in the walls and as drops from a leaky roof, then all at once, through the doorless opening of the shed, the wind swept a regular deluge in upon him.

"I just wonder if anybody thinks I'm glad to have that young one coming?" he muttered, impatiently kicking at a small stick of wood and sending it flying across the yard. "This is about the worst luck that could come to me! When we got married, Katrina and I, it was because we were tired of drudging as hired girl and farmhand for Eric of Falla, and wanted to plant our feet under our own table; but certainly not to raise children!"

He buried his face in his hands and sighed heavily. It was plain that the chilly dampness and the long dreary wait had somewhat to do with putting him in a bad humour, but they were by no means the only cause. The real reason for his lament was something far more serious.

"I've got to work every day," he reminded himself, "work from early morning till late in the evening; but so far I've at least had some peace nights. Now I suppose that young one will be squalling the whole night long, and I'll get no rest then, either."

Whereupon an even worse fear seized him. Taking his hands from before his face he wrung them so hard that the knuckles fairly cracked. "Up to this we've managed to scratch along pretty well, because Katrina, has been free to go out and work, the same as myself, but now she'll have to sit at home and take care of that young one."

He sat staring in front of him as hopelessly as if he had beheld Famine itself stalking across the yard and making straight for his hut.

"Well!" said he, bringing his two fists down on the chopping-block by way of emphasis. "I just want to say that if I'd only known at the time when Eric of Falla came to me and offered to let me build on his ground, and gave me some old timber for a little shack, if I had only known then that this would happen, I'd have said no to the whole business, and gone on living in the stable-loft at Falla for the rest of my days."

He knew these were strong words, but felt no inclination to take them back.

"Supposing something were to happen – ?" he began – for by that time matters had reached such a pass with him he would not have minded it if the child had met with some mishap before coming into the world – but he never finished what he wished to say as he was interrupted by a faint cry from the other side of the wall.

The woodshed was attached to the house itself. As he listened, he heard one peep after the other from within, and knew, of course, what that meant. Then, for a long while he sat very still, feeling neither glad nor sorry. Finally he said, with a little shrug:

"So it's here at last! And now, for the love of God, they might let me slip in to warm myself!"

But that comfort was not to be his so soon! There were more hours of waiting ahead of him.

The rain still came down in sheets and the wind increased. Though only the latter part of August, it was as disagreeable as a November day. To cap the climax, he fell to brooding over something that made him even more wretched. He felt that he was being slighted and set aside.

"There are three womenfolk, beside the midwife, in there with Katrina," he murmured. "One of them, at least, might have taken the trouble to come and tell me whether it's a boy or a girl."

He could hear them bustling about, as they made up a fire, and saw them run out to the well to fetch water, but of his existence no one seemed to be aware.

Of a sudden he clapped his hands to his eyes and began to rock himself backward and forward. "My dear Jan Anderson," he said in his mind, "what's wrong with you? Why does everything go against you? Why must you always have such a dull time of it? And why couldn't you have married some good-looking young girl, instead of that ugly old Katrina from Falla?"

He was so unspeakably wretched! Even a few tears trickled down between his fingers. "Why are you made so little of in the parish, my good Jan Anderson? Why should you always be pushed back for others? You know there are those who are just as poor as yourself and whose work is no better than yours; but no one gets put down the way you do. What can be the matter with you, my dear Jan Anderson?"

These were queries he had often put to himself, though in vain, and he had no hope of finding the answer to them now, either. After all, perhaps there was nothing wrong with him? Perhaps the only explanation was that both God and his fellowmen were unfair to him?

When that thought came to him, he took his hands from before his eyes and tried to put on a bold face.

"If you're ever again allowed inside your own house, my good Jan Anderson, you mustn't so much as glance toward the young one, but march yourself straight over to the fireplace and sit down, without saying a word. Or, suppose you get right up and walk away! You don't have to sit here any longer now that you know it's over with. Suppose you show Katrina and the rest of the womenfolk that you're not a man to be trifled with..."

He was just on the point of rising, when the mistress of Falla appeared in the doorway of the woodshed, and, with a charming curtsy, bade him come inside to have a peep at the infant.

Had it been any one else than the mistress of Falla herself that had invited him in, it is doubtful whether he would have gone at all, angry as he was. Her he had to follow, of course, but he took his own time about it. He tried to assume the air and bearing of Eric of Falla, when the latter strode across the floor of the town hall to deposit his vote in the ballot-box, and succeeded remarkably well in looking quite as solemn and important.

"Please walk in," said the mistress of Falla, opening the door for him, then stepping aside to let him go first.

One glance at the room told him that everything had been cleaned and tidied up in there. The coffeepot, newly polished and full and steaming, stood at the edge of the hearth, to cool; the table, over by the window, was spread with a snow-white cover, on which were arranged dainty flowered cups and saucers belonging to the mistress of Falla. Katrina lay on the bed and two of the women, who had come to lend a hand, stood pressed against the wall so that he should have a free and unobstructed view of all the preparations. Directly in front of the table stood the midwife, with a bundle on her arm.

Jan could not help thinking that for once in his life he appeared to be the centre of attraction. Katrina glanced up at him appealingly, as if wanting to ask whether he was pleased with her. The other women, too, all turned their eyes toward him, expectantly waiting for some word of praise from him for all the trouble they had been to on his account.

However, it is not so easy to appear jubilant when one has been half frozen and out of sorts all day! Jan could not clear his face of that Eric-of-Falla expression, and stood there without saying a word.

Then the midwife took a step forward. The hut was so tiny that that one stride put her square in front of him, so that she could place the child in his arms.

"Now Jan shall have a peek at the li'l lassie She's what I'd call a *real baby*!" said the midwife.

And there stood Jan, holding in his two hands something soft and warm done up in a big shawl, a corner of which had been turned back that he might see the little wrinkled face and the tiny wizened hands. He was wondering what the womenfolk expected him to do with that which had been thrust upon him, when he felt a sudden shock that shook both him and the child. It had not come from any of the women and whether it had passed through the child to him or through him to the child, he could not tell.

Immediately after, the heart of him began to beat in his breast as it had never done before. Now he was no longer cold, or sad, or worried. Nor did he feel angry. All was well with him. But he could not comprehend why there was a thumping and a beating in his breast, when he had not been dancing, or running, or climbing hills.

"My good woman," he said to the midwife, "do lay your hand here and feel of my heart! It seems to beat so queerly."

"Why, it's a regular attack of the heart!" the midwife declared.

"But perhaps you're subject to these spells?"

"No," he assured her. "I've never had one before – not just in this way."

"Do you feel bad? Are you in pain?"

"Oh, no!"

Then the midwife could not make out what ailed him. "Anyhow," said she, "I'll relieve you of the child."

But now Jan felt he did not want to give up the child. "Ah, let me hold the little girl!" he pleaded.

The womenfolk must have read something in his eyes, or caught something in his tone that pleased them: for the midwife's mouth had a peculiar quirk and the other women all burst out laughing.

"Say Jan, have you never cared so much for somebody that your heart has been set athrobbing because of her?" asked the midwife.

"No indeed!" said Jan.

But at that moment he knew what it was that had quickened the heart in him. Moreover he was beginning to perceive what had been amiss with him all his life, and that he whose heart does not respond to either joy or sorrow can hardly be called human.

GLORY GOLDIE SUNNYCASTLE

The following day Jan of Ruffluck Croft stood waiting for hours on the doorstep of his hut, with the little girl in his arms.

This, too, was a long wait. But now it was all so different from the day before. He was standing there in such good company that he could become neither weary nor disheartened. Nor could he begin to tell how good it felt to be holding the warm little body pressed close to his heart. It occurred to him that hitherto he had been mighty sour and unpleasant, even to himself; but now all was bliss and sweetness within him. He had never dreamed that one could be so gladdened by just loving some one.

He had not stationed himself on the doorstep without a purpose, as may be assumed. It was an important matter that he must try to settle while standing there. He and Katrina had spent the whole morning trying to choose a name for the child. They had been at it for hours, without arriving at a decision. Finally Katrina had said: "I don't see but that you'll have to take the child and go stand on the stoop with her. Then you can ask the first female that happens along what her name is, and the name she names we must give to the girl, be it ugly or pretty."

Now the hut lay rather out of the way and it was seldom that any one passed by their place; so Jan had to stand out there ever so long, without seeing a soul. This was also a gray day, though no rain fell. It was not windy and cold, however, but rather a bit sultry. If Jan had not held the little girl in his arms he would have lost heart.

"My dear Jan Anderson," he would have said to himself. "You must remember that you live away down in the Ashdales, by Dove Lake, where there isn't but one decent farmhouse and here and there a poor fisherman's hut. Who'll you find hereabout with a name that's pretty enough to give to your little girl?"

But since this was something which concerned his daughter he never doubted that all would come right. He stood looking down toward the lake, as if not caring to her how shut in from the whole countryside it lay, in its rock-basin. He thought it might just happen that some high-toned lady, with a grand name, would come rowing across from Doveness, on the south shore of the lake. Because of the little girl he felt almost sure this would come to pass.

The child slept the whole time; so for all of her he could have stood there and waited as long as he liked. But the worrisome person was Katrina! Every other minute she would ask him whether any one had come along yet and if he thought it prudent to keep the infant out in the damp air any longer.

Jan turned his eyes up toward Great Peak, rising high above the little groves and garden-patches of the Ashdales, like a watch tower atop some huge fortress, keeping all strangers at a distance. Still it might be possible that some great lady, who had been up to the Peak, to view the beautiful landscape had taken the wrong path back and strayed in the direction of Ruffluck.

He quieted Katrina as well as he could. The child was safe enough, he assured her. Now that he had stood out there so long he wanted to wait another minute or so.

Not a soul hove in sight, but he was confident that if he just stuck to it, the help would come. It could not be otherwise. It would not have surprised him if a queen in a golden chariot had come driving over mountains and through thickets, to bestow her name upon his little girl.

More moments passed, and he knew that dusk would soon be falling. Then he would not be let stand there longer. Katrina looked at the clock, and again begged him to come inside.

"Just you be patient a second!" he said. "I think I see something peeping out over west."

The sky had been overcast the whole day, but at that moment the sun [Note: In Swedish the sun is feminine.] came bursting out from behind the clouds, and darted a few rays down toward the child.

"I don't wonder at your wanting to have a peek at the li'l lassie before you go down," said Jan to the sun. "She's something worth seeing!"

The sun came forth, clearer and clearer, and shed a rose-coloured glow over both the child and the hut.

"Maybe you'd like to be godmother to 'er?" said Jan of Ruffluck.

To which the sun made no direct reply. She just beamed for a moment, then drew her mist-cloak about her and disappeared.

Once again Katrina was heard from. "Was any one there?" asked she. "I thought I heard you talking to somebody. You'd better come inside now."

"Yes, now I'm coming," he answered, and stepped in. "Such a grand old aristocrat just went by! But she was in so great a hurry I had barely time to say 'go'day' to her, before she was gone."

"Goodness me! How provoking!" exclaimed Katrina. "And after we'd waited so long, too! I suppose you didn't have a chance to ask what her name was?"

"Oh, yes. Her name is Glory Goldie Sunnycastle – that much I got out of her."

"*Glory Goldie Sunnycastle!* But won't that name be a bit too dazzling?" was Katrina's only comment.

Jan of Ruffluck was positively astonished at himself for having hit upon something so splendid as making the sun godmother to his child. He had indeed become a changed man from the moment the little girl was first laid in his arms!

THE CHRISTENING

When the little girl of Ruffluck Croft was to be taken to the parsonage, to be christened, that father of hers behaved so foolishly that Katrina and the godparents were quite put out with him.

It was the wife of Eric of Falla who was to bear the child to the christening. She sat in the cart with the infant while Eric of Falla, himself, walked alongside the vehicle, and held the reins. The first part of the road, all the way to Doveness, was so wretched it could hardly be called a road, and of course Eric had to drive very carefully, since he had the unchristened child to convey.

Jan had himself brought the child from the house and turned it over to the godmother, and had seen them set out. No one knew better than he into what good hands it was being intrusted. And he also knew that Eric of Falla was just as confident at handling the reins as at everything else. As for Eric's wife – why she had borne and reared seven children; therefore he should not have felt the least bit uneasy.

Once they were well on their way and Jan had again gone back to his digging, a terrible sense of fear came over him. What if Eric's horse should shy? What if the parson should drop the child? What if the mistress of Falla should wrap too many shawls around the little girl, so she'd be smothered when they arrived with her at the parsonage?

He argued with himself that it was wrong in him to borrow trouble, when his child had such godfolk as the master and mistress of Falla. Yet his anxiety would not be stilled. Of a sudden he dropped his spade and started for the parsonage just as he was taking the short cut across the heights, and running at top speed all the way. When Eric of Falla drove into the stable-yard of the parsonage the first person that met his eyes was Jan of Ruffluck.

Now, it is not considered the proper thing for the father or mother to be present at the christening, and Jan saw at once that the Falla folk were displeased at his coming to the parsonage. Eric did not beckon to him to come and help with the horse, but unharnessed the beast himself, and the mistress of Falla, drawing the child closer to her, crossed the yard and went into the parson's kitchen, without saying a word to Jan.

Since the godparents would not so much as notice him, he dared not approach them; but when the godmother swept past him he heard a little piping sound from the bundle on her arm. Then he at least knew the child had not been smothered.

He felt it was stupid in him not to have gone home at once. But now he was so sure the parson would drop the child, that he had to stay.

He lingered a moment in the stable-yard, then went straight over to the house and up the steps into the hallway.

It is the worst possible form for the father to appear before the clergyman, particularly when his child has such sponsors as Eric of Falla, and his wife. When the door to the pastor's study swung open and Jan of Ruffluck in his soiled workaday clothes calmly shuffled into the room, just after the pastor had begun the service and there was no way of driving him out, the godparents swore to themselves that once they were home they would take him severely to task for his unseemly behaviour.

The christening passed off as it should without the slightest occasion for a mishap, and Jan of Ruffluck had nothing for his intrusion. Just before the close of the service he opened the door and quietly slipped out again, into the hallway. He saw of course that everything seemed to go quite smoothly and nicely without his help.

In a little while Eric of Falla and his wife also came out into the hall. They were going across to the kitchen, where the mistress of Falla had left the child's outer wraps and shawls. Eric went ahead and opened the door for his wife, whereupon two kittens came darting into the hallway and tumbled over each other right in front of the woman's feet, tripping her. She felt herself going headlong and barely had time to think: "I'm falling with the child; it will be killed and I'll be heartbroken for life,"

when a strong hand seized and steadied her. Looking round she saw that her rescuer was Jan Anderson of Ruffluck, who had lingered in the hallway as if knowing he would be needed there. Before she could recover herself sufficiently to thank him, he was gone.

And when she and her husband came driving home, there stood Jan digging away. After the accident had been averted, he had felt that he might safely go back to his work.

Neither Eric nor his wife said a word to him about his unseemly behaviour. Instead, the mistress of Falla invited him in for afternoon coffee, muddy and begrimed as he was from working in the wet soil.

THE VACCINATION BEE

When the little girl of Ruffluck was to be vaccinated no one questioned the right of her father to accompany her, since that was his wish. The vaccinating took place one evening late in August. When Katrina left home, with the child, it was so dark that she was glad to have some one along who could help her over stiles and ditches, and other difficulties of the wretched road.

The vaccination bee was held that year at Falla. The housewife had made a big fire on the hearth in the living-room and thought it unnecessary to furnish any other illumination, except a thin tallow candle that burned on a small table, at which the sexton was to perform his surgical work.

The Ruffluck folk, as well as every one else, found the room uncommonly light, although it was as dim at the back as if a dark-gray wall had been raised there – making the room appear smaller than it was. And in this semi-darkness could be dimly seen a group of women with babes in arms that had to be trundled, and fed, and tended in every way.

The mothers were busy unwinding shawls and mufflers late from their little ones, drawing off their slips, and unloosing the bands of their undershirts, so that the upper portion of their little bodies could be easily exposed when the sexton called them up to the operating table.

It was remarkably quiet in the room, considering there were so many little cry-babies all gathered in one place. The youngsters seemed to be having such a good time gazing at one another they forgot to make a noise. The mothers were quiet because they wanted to hear what the sexton had to say; for he kept up a steady flow of small talk.

"There's no fun like going about vaccinating and looking at all the pretty babies," said he. "Now we shall see whether it's a fine lot you've brought me this year."

The man was not only the sexton of the parish, where he had lived all his life, but he was also the schoolmaster. He had vaccinated the mothers, had taught them, and seen them confirmed and married. Now he was going to vaccinate their babies. This was the children's first contact with the man who was to play such an important part in their lives.

It seemed to be a good beginning. One mother after the other came forward and sat down on a chair at the table, each holding her child so that the light would fall upon its bared left arm; and the sexton, chattering all the while, then made the three tiny scratches in the smooth baby skin, without so much as a peep coming from the youngster. Afterward the mother took her baby over to the fireplace to let the vaccine dry in. Meantime she thought of what the sexton had said of her child – that it was large and beautiful and would some day be a credit to the family; that it would grow up to be as good as its father and grandfather – or even better.

Everything passed off thus peacefully and quietly until it came to Katrina's turn at the table with her Glory Goldie.

The little girl simply would not be vaccinated. She screamed and fought and kicked. Katrina tried to hush her and the sexton spoke softly and gently to her; but it did no good. The poor little thing was uncontrollably frightened.

Katrina had to take her away and try to get her quieted. Then a big, sturdy boy baby let himself be vaccinated with never a whimper. But the instant Katrina was back at the table with her girl the trouble started afresh. She could not hold the child still long enough for the sexton to make even a single incision.

Now there was no one left to vaccinate but Glory Goldie of Ruffluck. Katrina was in despair because of her child's bad behaviour. She did not know what to do about it, when Jan suddenly emerged from the shadow of the door and took the child in his arms. Then Katrina got up to let him take her place at the table.

"You just try it once!" she said scornfully, "and let's see whether you'll do any better." For Katrina did not regard the little toil-worn servant from Falla whom she had married as in any sense her superior.

Before sitting down, Jan slipped off his jacket. He must have rolled up his shirt sleeve while standing in the dark, at the back of the room, for his left arm was bared.

He wanted so much to be vaccinated, he said. He had never been vaccinated but once, and there was nothing in the world he feared so much as the smallpox.

The instant the little girl saw his bare arm she became quiet, and looked at her father with wide, comprehending eyes. She followed closely every movement of the sexton, as he put in the three short red strokes on the arm. Glancing from one to the other, she noticed that her father was not faring so very badly.

When the sexton had finished with Jan, the latter turned to him, and said:

"The li'l' lassie is so still now that maybe you can try it."

The sexton tried, and this time everything went well. The little girl was as quiet as a mouse the whole time – the same knowing look in her eyes. The sexton also kept silence until he had finished; then he said to the father:

"If you did that only to calm the child, we could just as well have made believe – "

"No, Sexton," said Jan, "then you would not have succeeded. You never saw the like of that child! So don't imagine you can get her to believe in something that isn't what it passes for."

THE BIRTHDAY

On the little girl's first birthday her father was out digging in the field at Falla; he tried to recall to mind how it had been in the old days, when he had no one to think about while at work in the field; when he did not have the beating heart in him, and when he had no longings and was never anxious.

"To think that a man can be like that!" he mused in contempt of his old self. "If I were as rich as Eric of Falla or as strong as Börje, who digs here beside me, it would be as nothing to having a throbbing heart in your breast. That's the only thing that counts."

Glancing over at his comrade, a powerfully built fellow who could do again as much work as himself, he noticed that to-day the man had not gone ahead as rapidly as usual with the digging.

They worked by the job. Börje always took upon himself more work than did Jan, yet they always finished at about the same time. That day, however, it went slowly for Börje; he did not even keep up with Jan, but was left far behind.

But then Jan had been working for all he was worth, that he might the sooner get back to his little girl. That day he had longed for her more than usual. She was always drowsy evenings; so unless he hurried home early, he was likely to find her asleep for the night when he got home.

When Jan had completed his work he saw that Börje was not even half through. Such a thing had never happened before in all the years they had worked together, and Jan was so astonished he went over to him.

Börje was standing deep down in the ditch, trying to loosen a clump of sod. He had stepped on a piece of glass, and received an ugly gash on the bottom of his foot, so that he could hardly step on it. Imagine the torture of having to stand and push the spade into the soil with an injured foot!

"Aren't you going to quit soon?" asked Jan.

"I'm obliged to finish this job to-day," replied the comrade. "I can't get any grain from Eric of Falia till the work is done, and we're all out of rye-meal."

"Then go'-night for to-day," said Jan.

Börje did not respond. He was too tired and done up to give even the customary good-night salutation.

Jan of Ruffluck walked to the edge of the field; but there he halted.

"What does it matter to the little girl whether or not you come home for her birthday?" he thought. "She's just as well off without you. But Börje has seven kiddies at home, and no food for them. Shall you let them starve so that you can go home and play with Glory Goldie?"

Then he wheeled round, walked back to Börje, and got down into the ditch to help him. Jan was rather tired after his day's toil and could not work very fast. It was almost dark when they got through.

"Glory Goldie must be asleep this long while," thought Jan, when he finally put in the spade for the last bit of earth.

"Go'-night for to-day," he called back to Börje for the second time.

"Go'-night," returned Börje, "and thanks to you for the help. Now I must hurry along and get my rye. Another time I'll give you a lift, be sure of that!"

"I don't want any pay ... Go'-night!"

"Don't you want anything for helping me?" asked Börje. "What's come over you, that you're so stuck-up all at once?"

"Well, you see, it's – it's the lassie's birthday to-day."

"And for that I got help with my digging?"

"Yes, for that and for something else, too! Well – good bye to you!"

Jan hurried away so as not to be tempted to explain what that *something else* was. It had been on the tip of his tongue to say: "To-day is not only Glory Goldie's birthday, but it's also the birthday of my heart."

It was as well, perhaps, that he did not say it, for Börje would surely have thought Jan had gone out of his mind.

CHRISTMAS MORN

Christmas morning Jan took the little girl along with him to church; she was then just one year and four months old.

Katrina thought the girl rather young to attend church and feared she would set up a howl, as she had done at the vaccination bee; but inasmuch as it was the custom to take the little ones along to Christmas Matins, Jan had his own way.

So at five o'clock on Christmas Morn they all set out. It was pitch dark and cloudy, but not cold; in fact the air was almost balmy, and quite still, as it usually is toward the end of December.

Before coming to an open highway, they had to walk along a narrow winding path, through fields and groves in the Ashdales, then take the steep winter-road across Snipa Ridge.

The big farmhouse at Falla, with lighted candles at every window, stood out as a beacon to the Ruffluck folk, so that they were able to find their way to Börje's hut; there they met some of their neighbours, bearing torches they had prepared on Christmas Eve. Each torch-bearer led a small group of people most of whom followed in silence; but all were happy; they felt that they, too, like the Wise Men of old, were following a star, in quest of the new-born King.

When they came to the forest heights they had to pass by a huge stone which had been hurled at Svartsjö Church, by a giant down in Frykerud, but which, luckily, had gone over the steeple and dropped here on Snipa Ridge. When the church-goers came along, the stone lay, as usual, on the ground. But they knew, they did, that in the night it had been raised upon twelve golden pillars and that the *trolls* had danced and feasted under it.

It was not so very pleasant to have to walk past a stone like that! Jan looked over at Katrina to see whether she was holding the little girl securely. Katrina, calm and unconcerned, walked along, chatting with one of their neighbours. She was quite oblivious, apparently, to the terrors of the place.

The spruce trees up there were old and gnarled, and their branches were dotted with clumps of snow. As seen in the glow of the torch light, one could not but think that some of the trees were really trolls, with gleaming eyes beneath snow hats, and long sharp claws protruding from thick snow mittens.

It was all very well so long as they held themselves still. But what if one of them should suddenly stretch forth a hand and seize somebody? There was no special danger for grown-ups and old people; but Jan had always heard that the trolls had a great fondness for small children – the smaller the better. It seemed to him that Katrina was holding the little girl very carelessly. It would be no trick at all for the huge clawlike troll hands to snatch the child from her. Of course he could not take the baby out of her arms in a dangerous spot like this, for that might cause the trolls to act.

Murmurs and whispers now passed from tree-troll to tree-troll; the branches creaked as if they were about to bestir themselves.

Jan did not dare ask the others if they saw or heard what he did. A question of that sort might be the very thing to rouse the trolls. In this agony of suspense he knew of but one thing to do: he struck up a psalm-tune. He had a poor singing-voice and had never before sung so any one could hear him. He was so weak at carrying a tune that he was afraid to sing out even in church; but now he had to sing, no matter how it went. He observed that the neighbours were a little surprised. Those who walked ahead of him nudged each other and looked round; but that did not stop him; he had to continue.

Immediately one of the womenfolk whispered to him: "Wait a bit, Jan, and I'll help you."

She took up the Christmas carol in the correct melody and the correct key. It sounded beautiful, this singing in the night among the trees, and soon everybody joined in.

"Hail Blessed Morn, by prophets' holy words foretold," rang out on the air. A murmur of anguish came from the tree-trolls; they bowed their heads so that their wicked eyes were no longer

visible, and drew in their claws under spruce needles and snow. When the last measure of the first stanza died away, no one could have told that there was anything besides ordinary old spruce trees on the forest heights.

The torches that had lighted the Ashdales folk through the woods were burned out when they came to the highroad; but here they went on, guided by the lights from peasant huts. When one house was out of sight, they glimpsed another in the distance, and every house along the road had candles burning at all the windows, to guide the poor wanderers on their way to church.

At last they came to a hillock, from which the church could be seen. There stood the House of God, like acme gigantic lantern, light streaming out through all its windows. When the foot-farers saw this, they held their breath. After all the little, low-windowed huts they had passed along the way, the church looked marvellously big and marvellously bright.

At sight of the sacred edifice Jan fell to thinking about some poor folk in Palestine, who had wandered in the night from Bethlehem to Jerusalem with a child, their only comfort and joy, who was to be circumcised in the Temple of the Holy City. These parents had to grope their way in the darkness of night, for there were many who sought the life of their child.

The people from the Ashdales had left home at an surly hour, so as to reach the church ahead of those who drove thither. But when they were quite near the church grounds, sleighs, with foaming horses and jingling bells, went flying past, forcing the poor foot-farers to fake to the snow banks, at the edge of the road.

Jan now carried the child. He was continually dodging vehicles, for the tramp along the road had become very difficult. But before them lay the shining temple; if they could only get to it they would be sheltered, and safe from harm.

Suddenly, from behind, there came a deafening noise of clanging bells and clamping hoofs. A huge sledge, drawn by two horses, was coming. On the front seat sat a young gentleman, in a fur coat and a high fur cap, and his young wife. The gentleman was driving; behind him stood his coachman, holding a burning torch so high that the draft blew the flame backward, leaving in its wake a long trail of smoke and flying sparks.

Jan, with the child in his arms, stood at the edge of the snowbank. All at once his foot sank deep in the snow, and he came near falling. Quickly the gentleman in the sledge drew rein and shouted to the peasant, whom he had forced from the road:

"Hand over the child and it shall ride to the church with us. It's risky carrying a little baby when there are so many teams out."

"Much obliged to you," said Jan Anderson, "but I can get along all right."

"We'll put the little girl between us, Jan," said the young wife.

"Thanks," he returned, "but you needn't trouble yourselves!"

"So you're afraid to trust us with the child?" laughed the man in the sledge, and drove on.

The foot-farers trudged along under ever-increasing difficulties. Sledge followed sledge. Every horse in the parish was in harness that Christmas morning.

"You might have let him take the girl," said Katrina. "I'm afraid you'll fall with her!"

"What, I let *him* have my child? What are you thinking of, woman!"

"What harm would there have been in letting her ride with the superintendent of the ironworks?"

Jan Anderson of Ruffluck stood stockstill. "Was that the superintendent at Doveness?" he said, looking as though he had just come out of a dream.

"Why of course! Who did you suppose it was?"

Yes, where had Jan's thoughts been? What child had he been carrying? Where had he intended going? In what land had he wandered? He stood stroking his forehead, and looked rather bewildered when he answered Katrina.

"I thought it was Herod, King of Judea, and his wife, Herodias," he said.

GLORY GOLDIE'S ILLNESS

When the little girl of Ruffluck was three years old she had an illness which must have been the scarlet fever, for her little body was red all over and burning hot to the touch. She would not eat, nor could she sleep; she just lay tossing in delirium. Jan could not think of going away from home so long as she was sick. He stayed in the hut day after day, and it looked as though Eric of Falla's rye would go unthreshed that year.

It was Katrina who nursed the little girl, who spread the quilt over her every time she cast it off, and who fed her a little diluted blueberry cordial, which the housewife at Falla had sent them. When the little maid was well Jan always looked after her; but as soon as she became ill he was afraid to touch her, lest he might not handle her carefully enough and would only hurt her. He never stirred from the house, but sat in a corner by the hearth all day, his eyes fixed on the sick child.

The little one lay in her own crib with only a couple of straw pillows under her, and no sheets. It must have been hard on the delicate little body, made sensitive by rash and inflammation, to lie upon the coarse tow-cloth pillow-casings.

Strange to say, every time the child began to toss on the bed Jan would think of the finest thing he had to his name – his Sunday shirt.

He possessed only one good shirt, which was of smooth white linen, with a starched front. It was so well made that it would have been quite good enough for the superintendent at Doveness. And Jan was very proud of that shirt. The rest of his wearing apparel, which was in constant use, was as coarse as were the pillow-casings the little girl lay on.

But maybe it was only stupid in him to be thinking of that shirt? Katrina would never in the world let him ruin it, for she had given it to him as a wedding present.

Anyhow, Katrina was doing all she could. She borrowed a horse from Eric of Falla, wrapped the little one in shawls and quilts and rode to the doctor's with her. That was courageous of Katrina – though Jan could not see that it did any good. Certainly no help came out of the big medicine bottle she brought back with her from the apothecary's, nor from any of the doctor's other prescriptions.

Perhaps he would not be allowed to keep so rare a jewel as the little girl, unless he was ready to sacrifice for her the best that he had, mused he. But it would not be easy to make a person of Katrina's sort understand this.

Old Finne-Karin came into the hut one day while the girl lay sick. She knew how to cure sickness in animals, as do all persons of her race, and she was not so bad, either, at conjuring away styes and boils and ringworms; but for other ailments one would scarcely think of consulting her. It was hardly the thing to expect help from a witch doctor for anything but trifling complaints.

The moment the old woman stepped into the room she noticed that the child was ill. Katrina informed her that it had the scarlet fever, but nobody sought her advice. That the parents were anxious and troubled she must have seen, of course, for as soon as Katrina had treated her to coffee and Jan had given her a piece of plug-tobacco, she said, entirely of her own accord:

"This sickness is beyond my healing powers; but as much I'm able to tell you; you can find out whether it's life or death. Keep awake till midnight, then, on the stroke of twelve, place the tip of the forefinger of your left hand against the tip of the little finger, eyelet-like, and look through at the young one. Notice carefully who lies beside her in the bed, and you'll know what to expect."

Katrina thanked her kindly, knowing it was best to keep on the good side of such folk; but she had no notion of doing as she had been told.

Jan attached no importance to the advice, either. He thought of nothing but the shirt. But how would he ever be able to muster courage enough to ask Katrina if he might tear up his wedding shirt? That the little girl would not get any better on that account he understood, to be sure, and if she must die anyhow, he would just be throwing it away.

Katrina went to bed that evening at her usual hour, but Jan felt too troubled to sleep. Seated in his corner, he could see how Glory Goldie was suffering. That which she had under her was too rough and coarse. He sat thinking how nice it would be if he could only make up a bed for the little girl that would feel cool and soft and smooth.

His shirt, freshly laundered and unused, lay in the bureau drawer. It hurt him to think of its being there; at the same time he felt it would hardly be fair to Katrina to use her gift as a sheet for the child.

However, as it drew on toward midnight and Katrina was sleeping soundly, he went over to the bureau and took out the shirt. First he tore away the stiff front, then he slit the shirt into two parts, whereupon he slipped one piece under the little girl's body, and spread the other one between the child and the heavy quilt that covered her.

That done, he stole back to his corner and again took up his vigil. He had not sat there long when the clock struck twelve. Almost without thinking of what he was doing he put the two fingers of his left hand up to his eye, ring fashion, and peeped through at the bed.

And lo, at the edge of the bed sat a little angel of God! It was all scratched, and bleeding, from contact with the coarse bedding, and was about to go away, when it turned and felt of the fine shirt, running its tiny hands over the smooth white linen. Then, in a twinkling, it swung its legs inside the edge of the bed and lay down again, to watch over the child. At the same time up one of the bedposts crawled something black and hideous, which on seeing that the angel of God seemed about to depart, stuck its head over the bedside and grinned with glee, thinking it could creep inside and lie down in the angel's place.

But when it saw that the angel of God still guarded the child, it began to writhe as if suffering the torments of hell, and shrank back toward the floor.

The next day the little girl was on the road to recovery. Katrina was so glad the fever was broken that she had not the heart to say anything about the spoiled wedding shirt, though she probably thought to herself that she had a fool of a husband.

CALLING ON RELATIVES

One Sunday afternoon Jan and Glory Goldie set out together in the direction of the big forest; the little girl was then in her fifth year.

Silent and serious, father and little daughter walked hand in hand, as if bent upon a very solemn mission. They went past the shaded birch grove, their favourite haunt, past the wild strawberry hill and the winding brook, without stopping; then, disappearing in an easterly direction, they went into the densest part of the forest; nor did they stop there. Wherever could they be going? By and by they came out on a wooded hill above Loby. From there they went down to the scale-pan, where country-road and town-road cross. They did not go to Nästa or to Nysta, and never even glanced toward Där Fram and På Valln, but went farther and farther into the village. No one could have told just where they were bound for. Surely they could not be thinking of calling upon the Hindricksons, here in Loby?

To be sure Björn Hindrickson's wife was a half-sister of Jan's mother, so that Jan was actually related to the richest people in the parish, and he had a right to call Hindrickson and his wife uncle and aunt. But heretofore he had never claimed kinship with these people. Even to Katrina he had barely mentioned the fact that he had such high connections. Jan would always step out of the way when he saw Björn Hindrickson coming, and not even at church did he go up and shake hands with him.

But now that Jan had such a remarkable little daughter he was something more than just a poor labourer. He had a jewel to show and a flower with which to adorn himself. Therefore he was as rich as the richest, as great as the greatest, and now he was going straight to the big house of Björn Hindrickson to pay his respects to his fine relatives, for the first time in his life.

The visit at the big house was not a long one. In less than an hour after their arrival, Jan and the little girl were crossing the house-yard toward the gate. But at the gate Jan stopped and glanced back, as if half-minded to go in again.

He certainly had no reason to regret his call. Both he and the child had been well received. Björn Hindrickson's wife had taken the little girl over to the blue cupboard, and given her a cookie and a lump of sugar, and Björn Hindrickson himself had asked her name and her age; whereupon he had opened his big leather purse and presented her with a bright new sixpence.

Jan had been served with coffee, and his aunt had asked after

Katrina and had wondered whether they kept a cow or a pig, and if their hut was cold in winter and if the wages Jan received from

Eric of Falla were sufficient for their needs.

No, there was nothing about the visit itself that troubled Jan. When he had chatted a while with the Hindricksons they had excused themselves – which was quite proper – saying they were invited to a tea that afternoon and would be leaving in half an hour. Jan had risen at once and said good-bye, knowing they must allow themselves time to dress. Then his aunt had gone into the pantry and had brought out butter and bacon, had filled a little bag with barley, and another with flour, and had tied them all into a single parcel, which she had put into Jan's hand at parting. It was just a little something for Katrina, she had said. She should have some recompense for staying at home to look after the house.

It was this parcel Jan stood there pondering over. He knew that in the bundle were all sorts of good things to eat, the very things they longed for at every meal at Ruffluck, still he felt it would be unfair to the little girl to keep it.

He had not come to the Hindricksons as a beggar, but simply to see his kinsfolk. He did not wish them to entertain any false notions as to that. This thought had come to him instantly the parcel was handed to him, but his regard for the Hindricksons was so great that he would not have dared refuse it.

Now, turning back from the gate, he walked over to the barn and put the parcel down near the door, where the housefolk constantly passed and would be sure to see it.

He was sorry to have to leave it. But his little girl was no beggar! Nobody must think that she and her father went about asking alms.

THE SCHOOL EXAMINATION

When the little girl was six years old Jan went along with her to the Östanby school one day, to listen to the examinations.

This being the first and only schoolhouse the parish boasted, naturally every one was glad that at last a long-felt want had been met. In the old days Sexton Blackie had no choice but to go about from farmhouse to farmhouse with his pupils.

Up until the year 1860, when the Östanby school was built, the sexton had been compelled to change classrooms every other week, and many a time he and his little pupils had sat in a room where the housewife prepared meals and the man of the house worked at a carpenter's bench; where the old folk lay abed all day and the chickens were cooped under the sofa.

But just the same it had gone rather well with the teaching; for Sexton Blackie was a man who could command respect in all weathers. Still it must have been a relief to him to be allowed to work in a room that was to be used only for school purposes; where the walls were not lined with cubby-beds and shelves filled with pots and pans and tools; where there was no obstructing loom in front of the window to shut out the daylight, and where women neighbours could not drop in for a friendly chat over the coffee cups during school hours.

Here the walls were hung with illustrations of Bible stories, with animal pictures and portraits of Swedish kings. Here the children had little desks with low benches, and did not have to sit perched up round a high table, where their noses were hardly on a level with the edge. And here Sexton Blackie had a desk all to himself, with spacious drawers and compartments for his record-books and papers. Now he looked rather more impressive during school hours than in former days, when he had often heard lessons while seated upon the edge of a hearth, with a roaring fire at his back and the children huddled on the floor in front of him. Here he had a fixed place for the blackboard and hooks for maps and charts, so that he did not have to stand them up against doors and sofa backs. He knew, too, where he had his goose quills and could teach the children how to make strokes and curves, so that each one of them would some day be as fine a penman as himself. It was even possible to train the children to rise in a body and march out in line, like soldiers. Indeed, no end of improvements could be introduced now that the schoolhouse was finished.

Glad as was every one of the new school, the parents did not feel altogether at ease in the presence of their children, after they had begun to go there. It was as if the youngsters had come into something new and fine from which their elders were excluded. Of course it was wrong of the parents to think this, when they should have been pleased that the children were granted so many advantages which they themselves had been denied.

The day Jan of Ruffluck visited the school, he and his little Glory Goldie walked hand in hand, as usual, all the way, like good friends and comrades; but as soon as they came in sight of the schoolhouse and Glory Goldie saw the children assembled outside, she dropped her father's hand and crossed to the other side of the road. Then, in a moment, she ran off and joined a group of children.

During the examination Jan sat near the teacher's lectern, up among the School Commissioners and other fine folk. He had to sit there; otherwise he could not have seen anything of Glory Goldie but the back of her neck, as she sat in the front row, to the right of the lectern, where the smaller children were placed. In the old days Jan would never have gone so far forward; but one who was father to a little girl like Glory Goldie did not have to regard himself as the inferior of anybody. Glory Goldie could not have helped seeing her father from where she sat, yet she never gave him a glance. It was as if he did not exist for her. On the other hand, Glory Goldie's gaze was fixed upon her teacher, who was then examining the older pupils, on the left side of the room. They read from books, pointed out different countries and cities on the map, and did sums on the blackboard, and the teacher had no

time to look at the little tots on the right. So it would not have mattered very much if Glory Goldie had sent her father an occasional side-glance; but she never so much as turned her head toward him.

However, it was some little comfort to him that all the other children did likewise. They, too, sat the whole time with their clear blue eyes fastened on their teacher. The little imps made believe they understood him when he said something witty or clever; for then they would nudge each other and giggle.

No doubt it was a surprise to the parents to see how well the children conducted themselves throughout the examination. But Sexton Blackie was a remarkable man. He could make them do almost anything.

As for Jan of Ruffluck, he was beginning to feel embarrassed and troubled. He no longer knew whether it was his own little girl who sat there or somebody else's. Of a sudden he left his place among the School Commissioners and moved nearer the door.

At last the teacher was done examining the older pupils. Now came the turn of the little ones, those who had barely learnt their letters. They had not acquired any vast store of learning, to be sure, but a few questions had to be put to them, also. Besides, they were to give some account of the Story of the Creation.

First they were asked to tell who it was that created the world. That they knew of course. And then, unhappily, the teacher asked them if they knew of any other name for God.

Now all the little A-B-C-ers were stumped! Their cheeks grew hot and the skin on their foreheads was drawn into puckers, but they could not for the life of them think out the answer to such a profound question.

Among the larger children, over on the right, there was a general waving of hands, and whispering and tittering; but the eight small beginners held their mouths shut tight and not a sound came from them. Glory Goldie was as mum as the rest.

"There is a prayer which we repeat every day," said the teacher.

"What do we call God there?"

Now Glory Goldie had it! She knew the teacher wanted them to say they called God *Father*— and raised her hand.

"What do we call God, Glory Goldie?" he asked.

Glory Goldie jumped to her feet, her cheeks aflame, her little yellow pigtail of a braid pointing straight out from her neck.

"We call him Jan," she answered in a high, penetrating voice.

Immediately a laugh went up from all parts of the room. The gentry, the School Board, parents and children all chuckled. Even the schoolmaster appeared to be amused.

Glory Goldie went red as a beet and her eyes filled up. The teacher rapped on the floor with the end of his pointer and shouted "Silence!" Whereupon he said a few words to explain the matter.

"It was *Father* Glory Goldie wanted to say, of course, but said Jan instead because her own father's name is Jan. We can't wonder at the little girl, for I hardly know of another child in the school who has so kind a father as she has. I have seen him stand outside the schoolhouse in rain and bluster, waiting for her, and I've seen him come carrying her to school through blizzards, when the snow was knee-deep in the road. So who can wonder at her saying Jan when she must name the best she knows!"

The teacher patted the little girl on the head. The people all smiled, but at the same time they were touched.

Glory Goldie sat looking down, not knowing what she should do with herself; but Jan of Ruffluck felt as happy as a king, for it had suddenly become clear to him that the little girl had been his the whole time.

THE CONTEST

It was strange about the little girl of Ruffluck and her father! They seemed to be so entirely of one mind that they could read each other's thoughts.

In Svartsjö lived another schoolmaster, who was an old soldier. He taught in an out-of-the-way corner of the parish and had no regular schoolhouse, as had the sexton; but he was greatly beloved by all children. The youngsters themselves hardly knew they went to school to him, but thought they came together just to play.

The two schoolmasters were the best of friends. But sometimes the younger teacher would try to persuade the older one to keep abreast of the times, and wanted him to go in for phonetics and other innovations. The old soldier generally regarded such things with mild tolerance. Once, however, he lost his temper.

"Just because you've got a schoolhouse you think you know it all, Blackie!" he let fly. "But I'll have you understand that my children know quite as much as yours, even if they do have only farmhouses to sit in."

"Yes, I know," returned the sexton, "and have never said anything to the contrary. I simply mean that if the children could learn a thing with less effort –"

"Well, what then?" bristled the old soldier.

The sexton knew from the old man's tone that he had offended him, and tried to smooth over the breach.

"Anyhow you make it so easy for your pupils that they never complain about their lessons."

"Maybe I make it too easy for them?" snapped the old man. "Maybe I don't teach them anything?" he shouted, striking the table with his hand.

"What on earth has come over you, Tyberg?" said the sexton. "You seem to resent everything I say."

"Well, you always come at me with so many allusions!"

Just then other people happened in, and soon all was smooth between the schoolmasters; when they parted company they were as good friends as ever. But when old man Tyberg was on his way home, the sexton's remarks kept cropping up in his mind, and now he was even angrier than before.

"Why should that stripling say I could teach the children more if I kept abreast of the times?" he muttered to himself. "He probably thinks I'm too old, though he doesn't say it in plain words." Tyberg could not get over his exasperation, and as soon as he reached home he told it all to his wife.

"Why should you mind the sexton's chatter?" said the wife. "'Youth is elastic, but age is solid,' as the saying goes. You're excellent teachers both of you."

"Little good your saying it!" he grunted. "Others will think what they like just the same."

The old man went about for days looking so glum that he quite distressed his wife.

"Can't you show them they are in the wrong?" she finally suggested.

"How show them? What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you know your pupils to be just as clever as the sexton's –"

"Of course they are!" he struck in.

"– then you must see that your pupils and his get together for a test examination."

The old man pretended not to be interested in her proposition, but all the same it caught his fancy. And some days later the sexton received a letter from him wherein he proposed that the children of both schools be allowed to test their respective merits.

The sexton was not averse to this, of course, only he wanted to have the contest held some time during the Christmas holidays, so that it could be made a festive occasion for the children.

"That was a happy conceit," thought he. "Now I shan't have to review any lessons this term."

Nor was it necessary. It was positively amazing the amount of reading and studying that went on just then in the two schools!

The contest was held the evening of the day after Christmas. The schoolroom had been decorated for the occasion with spruce trees, on which shone all the church candles left over from the Christmas Matins, and there were apples enough to give every child two apiece. It was whispered about that the parents and guardians who had come to listen to the children would be served with coffee and cakes. The chief attraction, however, was the big contest.

On one side of the room sat the soldier's pupils, on the other the sexton's. And now it was for the children to defend their teachers' reputations. Schoolmaster Tyberg had to examine the sexton's pupils, and the sexton the Tyberg pupils. Any questions that could not be answered by the one school were to be taken up by the other. Each question had to be duly recorded so that the judges would be able to decide which school was the better.

The sexton opened the contest. He proceeded rather cautiously at first, but when he found that he had a lot of clever children to deal with he went at them harder and harder. The Tyberg pupils were so well grounded they did not let a single quizz get by them.

Then came old man Tyberg's turn at questioning the sexton's pupils.

The soldier was no longer angry with the sexton. Now that his children had shown that they knew their bits, the demon of mischief flew into him. At the start he put a few straight questions to the sexton's pupils, but being unable to remain serious for long at a time he soon became as waggish as he usually was at his own school.

"Of course I know that you have read a deal more than have we who come from the backwoods," said he. "You have studied natural science and much else, still I wonder if any of you can tell me what the stones in Motala Stream are?"

Not one of the sexton's pupils raised a hand, but on the other side hand after hand shot up.

Yet, in the sexton's division sat Olof Oleson – he who knew he had the best head in the parish, and Där Nol, of good old peasant stock. But they could not answer. There was Karin Svens, the sprightly lass of a soldier's daughter, who had not missed a day at school. She, with the others, wondered why the sexton had not told them what there was remarkable about the stones in Motala Stream.

Schoolmaster Tyberg stood looking very grave while Schoolmaster

Blackie sat gazing at the floor, much perturbed.

"I don't see but that we'll have to let this question go to the opposition," said the soldier-teacher. "Fancy, so many bright boys and girls not being able to answer an easy question like that!"

At the last moment Glory Goldie turned and looked back at her father, as was her habit when not knowing what else to do.

Jan was too far away to whisper the answer to her; but the instant the child caught her father's eye she knew what she must say. Then, in her eagerness, she not only raised her hand, but stood up.

Her schoolmates all turned to her, expectantly, and the sexton looked pleased because the question would not be taken away from his children.

"They are wet!" shouted Glory Goldie without waiting for the question to be put to her, for the time was up.

The next second the little girl feared she had said something very stupid and spoiled the thing for them all. She sank down on the bench and hid her face under the desk, so that no one should see her.

"Well answered, my girl!" said the soldier-teacher. "It's lucky for you sexton pupils there was one among you could reply; for, with all your cock-sureness, you were about to lose the game."

And such peals of laughter as went up from the children of both schools and from the grown folk as well, the two schoolmasters had never heard. Some of the youngsters had to stand up to have their laugh out, while others doubled in their seats, and shrieked. That put an end to all order.

"Now I think we'd better remove the benches and take a swing round the Christmas trees," said old man Tyberg.

And never before had they had such fun in the schoolhouse, and never since, either.

FISHING

It would hardly have been possible for any one to be as fond of the little girl as her father was; but it may be truly said that she had a very good friend in old seine-maker Ola.

This is the way they came to be friends: Glory Goldie had taken to setting out fishing-poles in the brook for the small salmon-trout that abounded there. She had better luck with her fishing than any one would have expected, and the very first day she brought home a couple of spindly fishes.

She was elated over her success, as can be imagined, and received praise from her mother for being able to provide food for the family, when she was only a little girl of eight. To encourage the child, Katrina let her cleanse and fry the fish. Jan ate of it and declared he had never tasted the like of that fish, which was the plain truth. For the fish was so bony and dry and burnt that the little girl herself could scarcely swallow a morsel of it.

But for all that the little girl was just as enthusiastic over her fishing. She got up every morning at the ionic time that Jan did and hurried off to the brook, a basket on her arm, and carrying in a little tin box the worms to bait her hooks. Thus equipped, she went off to the brook, which came gushing down the rocky steep in numerous falls and rapids, between which were short stretches of dark still water and places where the stream ran, clear and transparent, over a bed of sand and smooth stones.

Think of it! After the first week she had no luck with the fishing. The worms were gone from all the hooks, but no fish had fastened there. She shifted her tackle from rapid to still water, from still water to rippling falls, and she changed her hooks – but with no better results.

She asked the boys at Börje's and at Eric's if they were not the ones who got up with the lark and carried off her fish. But a question like that the boys would not deign to answer. For no boy would stoop to take fish from the brook, when he had the whole of Dove Lake to fish in. It was all right for little girls, who were not allowed to go down to the lake, to run about hunting fish in the woods, they said.

Despite the superior airs of the boys, the little girl only half-believed them. "Surely someone must take the fish off my hooks!" she said to herself. Hers were real hooks, too, and not just bent pins. And in order to satisfy herself she arose one morning before Jan or Katrina were awake, and ran over to the brook. When near to the stream she slackened her pace, taking very short cautious steps so as not to slip on the stones or to rustle the bushes. Then, all at once her, whole body became numb. For at the edge of the brook, on the very spot where she had set out her poles the morning before, stood a fish thief tampering with her lines. It was not one of the boys, as she had supposed, but a grown man, who was just then bending over the water, drawing up a fish.

Little Glory Goldie was never afraid. She rushed right up to the thief and caught him in the act.

"So you're the one who comes here and takes my fish!" she said. "It's a good thing I've run across you at last so we can put a stop to this stealing."

The man then raised his head, and now Glory Goldie saw his face. It was the old seine-maker, who was one of their neighbours.

"Yes, I know this is your tackle," the man admitted, without getting angry or excited, as most folks do when taken to task for wrongdoing.

"But how can you take what isn't yours?" asked the puzzled youngster.

The man looked straight at her; she never forgot that look; she seemed to be peering into two open and empty caverns at the back of which were a pair of half-dead eyes, beyond reflecting either joy or grief.

"Well, you see, I'm aware that you get what you require from your parents and that you fish only for the fun of it, while at my home we are starving."

The little girl flushed. Now she felt ashamed.

The seine-maker said nothing further, but picked up his cap (it had dropped from his head while he was bending over the fishing-poles) and went his way. Nor did Glory Goldie speak. A couple of fish lay floundering on the ground, but she did not take them up; when she had stood a while looking at them, she kicked them back into the water.

All that day the little girl felt displeased with herself, without knowing why. For indeed it was not she who had done wrong. She could not get the seine-maker out of her thoughts. The old man was said to have been rich at one time; he had once owned seven big farmsteads, each in itself worth as much as Eric of Falla's farm. But in some unaccountable way he had disposed of his property and was now quite penniless.

However, the next morning Glory Goldie went over to the brook the same as usual. This time no one had touched her hooks, for now there was a fish at the end of every line. She released the fishes from the hooks and laid them in her basket; but instead of going home with her catch she went straight to the seine-maker's cabin.

When the little girl came along with her basket the old man was out in the yard, cutting wood. She stood at the stile a moment, watching him, before stepping over. He looked pitifully poor and ragged. Even her father had never appeared so shabby.

The little girl had heard that some well-do-to people had offered the seine-maker a home for life, but in preference he had gone to live with his daughter-in-law, who made her home here in the Ashdales, so as to help her in any way that he could; she had many children, and her husband, who had deserted her, was now supposed to be dead.

"To-day there was fish on the hooks!" shouted the little girl from the stile.

"You don't tell me!" said the seine-maker. "But that was well."

"I'll gladly give you all the fish I catch," she told him, "if I'm only allowed to do the fishing myself." So saying, she went up to the seine-maker and emptied the contents of her basket on the ground, expecting of course that he would be pleased and would praise her, just as her father – who was always pleased with everything she said or did – had always done. But the seine maker took this attention with his usual calm indifference.

"You keep what's yours," he said. "We're so used to going hungry here that we can get on without your few little fishes."

There was something out of the common about this poor old man and Glory Goldie was anxious to win his approval.

"You may take the fish of and stick the worms on the hooks, if you like," said she, "and you can have all the tackle and everything."

"Thanks," returned the old man. "But I'll not deprive you of your pleasure."

Glory Goldie was determined not to go until she had thought out a way of satisfying him.

"Would you like me to come and call for you every morning," she asked him, "so that we could draw up the lines together and divide the catch – you to get half, and I half?"

Then the old man stopped chopping and rested on his axe. He turned his strange, half-dead eyes toward the child, and the shadow of a smile crossed his face.

"Ah, now you put out the right bait!" he said. "That proposition I'll not say no to."

AGRIPPA

The little girl was certainly a marvel! When she was only ten years old she could manage even Agrippa Prästberg, the sight of whom was enough to scare almost any one out of his wits.

Agrippa had yellow red-lidded eyes, topped with bushy eyebrows, a frightful nose, and a wiry beard that stood out from his face like raised bristles. His forehead was covered with deep wrinkles and his figure was tall and ungainly. He always wore a ragged military cap.

One day when the little girl sat all by herself on the flat stone in front of the hut, eating her evening meal of buttered bread, she espied a tall man coming down the lane whom she soon recognized as Agrippa Prästberg. However, she kept her wits about her, and at once broke and doubled her slice of bread buttered side in – then slipped it under her apron.

She did not attempt to run away or to lock up the house, knowing that that would be useless with a man of his sort; but kept her seat. All she did was to pick up an unfinished stocking Katrina had left lying on the stone when starting out with Jan's supper a while ago, and go to knitting for dear life.

She sat there as if quite calm and content, but with one eye on the gate. No, indeed, there was not a doubt about it – Agrippa intended to pay them a visit, for just then he lifted the gate latch.

The little girl moved farther back on the stone and spread out her skirt. She saw now that she would have to guard the house.

Glory Goldie knew, to be sure, that Agrippa Prästberg was not the kind of man who would steal, and he never struck any one unless they called him Grippie, or offered him buttered bread, nor did he stop long at a place where folk had the good luck not to have a Dalecarlian clock in the house.

Agrippa went about in the parish "doctoring" clocks, and once he set foot in a house where there was a tall, old-fashioned chimney clock he could not rest until he had removed the works, to see if there was anything wrong with them. And he never failed to find flaws which necessitated his taking the whole clock apart. That meant he would be days putting it together again. Meantime, one had to house and feed him.

The worst of it was that if Agrippa once got his hands on a clock it would never run as well as before, and afterward one had to let him tinker it at least once a year, or it would stop going altogether. The old man tried to do honest and conscientious work, but just the name he ruined all the clocks he touched.

Therefore it was best never to let him fool with one's clock. That

Glory Goldie knew, of course, but she saw no way of saving the Dalecarlian timepiece, which was ticking away inside the hut.

Agrippa knew of the clock being there and had long watched for an opportunity to get at it, but at other times when he was seen thereabout, Katrina had been at home to keep him at a safe distance.

When the old man came up he stopped right in front of the little girl, struck the ground with his stick, and rattled off:

"Here comes Johan Utter Agrippa Prästberg, drummer-boy to His Royal Highness and the Crown! I have faced shot and shell and fear neither angels nor devils. Anybody home?"

Glory Goldie did not have to reply, for he strode past her into the house and went straight over to the big Dalecarlian clock.

The girl ran in after him and tried to tell him what a good clock it was, that it ran neither too fast nor too slow and needed no mending.

"How can a clock run well that has not been regulated by Johan Utter Agrippa Prästberg!" the old man roared.

He was so tall he could open the clock-case without having to stand on a chair. In a twinkling he removed the face and the works and placed them on the table. Glory Goldie clenched the hand under her apron, and tears came to her eyes; but what could she do to stop him?

Agrippa was in a fever of a hurry to find out what ailed the clock, before Jan or Katrina could get back and tell him it needed no repairing. He had brought with him a small bundle, containing work-tools and grease jars, which he tore open with such haste that half its contents fell to the floor.

Glory Goldie was told to pick up everything that had dropped. And any one who has seen Agrippa Prästberg must know she would not have dared do anything but obey him. She got down on all fours and handed him a tiny saw and a mallet.

"Anything more!" he bellowed. "Be glad you're allowed to serve His Majesty's and the Kingdom's drummer-boy, you confounded crofter-brat!"

"No, not that I see," replied the little girl meekly. Never had she felt so crushed and unhappy. She was to look after the house for her mother and father, and now this had to happen!

"But the spectacles?" snapped Agrippa. "They must have dropped, too?"

"No," said the girl, "there are no spectacles here." Suddenly a faint hope sprang up in her. What if he couldn't do anything to the clock without his glasses? What if they should be lost? And just then her eye lit on the spectacle-case, behind a leg of the table.

The old man rummaged and searched among the cog-wheels and springs in his bundle. "I don't see but I'll have to get down on the floor myself, and hunt," he said presently. "Get up, crofter-brat!"

Quick as a flash the little girl's hand shot out and closed over the spectacle-case, which she hid under her apron.

"Up with you!" thundered Agrippa. "I believe you're lying to me.

What are you hiding under your apron? Come! Out with it!"

She promptly drew out one hand. The other hand she had kept under her apron the whole time. Now she had to show that one, too. Then he saw the buttered bread.

"Ugh! It's buttered bread!" Agrippa shrank back as if the girl were holding out a rattlesnake.

"I sat eating it when you came, and then I put it out of sight for,

I know you don't like butter."

The old man got down on his hands and knees and began to search, but to no purpose, of course.

"You must have left them where you were last," said Glory Goldie.

He had wondered about that himself, though he thought it unlikely.

At all events he could do nothing to the clock without his glasses.

He had no choice but to gather up his tools and replace the works in the clock-case.

While his back was turned the little girl slipped the spectacles into his bundle, where he found them when he got to Lövdala Manor – the last place he had been to before coming to Ruffluck Croft. On opening the bundle to show they were not there, the first object that caught his eye was the spectacle-case.

Next time he saw Jan and Katrina in the pine grove outside the church, he went up to them.

"That girl of yours, that handy little girl of yours is going to be a comfort to you," he told them.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

There were many who said to Jan of Ruffluck that his little girl would be a comfort to him when she was grown. Folks did not seem to understand that she already made him happy every day and every hour that God granted them. Only once in the whole time of her growing period did Jan have to suffer any annoyance or humiliation on her account.

The summer the little girl was eleven her father took her to Lövdala Manor on the seventeenth of August, which was the birthday of the lord of the manor, Lieutenant Liljecrona.

The seventeenth of August was always a day of rejoicing that was looked forward to all the year by every one in Svartsjö and in Bro, not only by the gentry, who participated in all the festivities, but also by the young folk of the peasantry, who came in crowds to Lövdala to look at the smartly dressed people and to listen to the singing and the dance music.

There was something else, too, that attracted the young people to Lövdala on the seventeenth of August, and that was all the fruit that was to be found in the orchard at that time. To be sure, the children had been taught strict honesty in most matters, but when it came to a question of such things as hang on bushes and trees, out in the open, they felt at liberty to take as much as they wanted, just so they were careful not to be caught at it.

When Jan came into the orchard with his Glory Goldie he noticed how the little girl opened her eyes when she saw all the fine apple trees, laden with big round greenings. And Jan would not have denied her the pleasure of tasting of the fruit had he not seen Superintendent Söderlind and two other men walking about in the orchard, on the lookout for trespassers.

He hurried Glory Goldie over to the lawn in front of the manor-house, out of temptation's way. It was plain that her thoughts were still on the apple trees and the gooseberry bushes, for she never even glanced at the prettily dressed children of the upper class or at the beautiful flowers. Jan could not get her to listen to the fine speeches delivered by the Dean of Bro and Engineer Boraëus of Borg, in honour of the day. Why she would not even listen to Sexton Blackie's congratulatory poem!

Anders Öster's clarinet could be heard from the house. It was playing such lively dance music just then that folks were hardly able to hold themselves still, but the little girl only tried to find a pretext for getting back to the orchard.

Jan kept a firm grip on her hand all the while and no matter what excuse she would hit upon to break away, he never relaxed his hold. Everything went smoothly for him until evening, when dusk fell.

Then coloured lanterns were brought out and set in the flower beds and hung in the trees and in among the clinging ivy that covered the house wall. It was such a pretty sight that Jan, who had never before seen anything of that kind, quite lost his head and hardly knew whether he was still on earth; but just the same he did not let go of the little hand.

When the lanterns had been lighted, Anders Öster and his nephew and the village shopkeeper and his brother-in-law struck up a song. While they sang the air seemed to vibrate with a strange sort of rapture that took away all sadness and depression. It came so softly and caressingly on the balmy night air that Jan just gave up to it, as did every one else. All were glad to be alive; glad they had so beautiful a world to live in.

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