

BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSON

THE BRIDAL MARCH; ONE DAY

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

[The Bridal March (*Brude-Slaatten*) was written in Christiania in 1872. It was originally published in the second volume of the first popular edition of Bjørnson's collected tales, issued in Copenhagen in that year. In November 1873, a small edition was published in separate form, and this was followed by an illustrated issue, of which a second edition appeared in 1877. The Bridal March was originally composed as the text to four designs by the Norwegian painter, Tidemand. It was dedicated to Hans Christian Andersen.

One Day (*En Dag*) was originally issued in the Norwegian Magazine "Nyt Tidsskrift," late in 1893; and was republished in a volume of short stories during the following year.

E. G.]

THE BRIDAL MARCH

There lived last century, in one of the high-lying inland valleys of Norway, a fiddler, who has become in some degree a legendary personage. Of the tunes and marches ascribed to him, some are said to have been inspired by the Trolls, one he heard from the devil himself, another he made to save his life, &c., &c. But the most famous of all is a Bridal March; and *its* story does not end with the story of his life.

Fiddler Ole Haugen was a poor cottar high among the mountains. He had a daughter, Aslaug, who had inherited his cleverness. Though she could not play his fiddle, there was music in everything she did—in her talk, her singing, her walk, her dancing.

At the great farm of Tingvold, down in the valley, a young man had come home from his travels. He was the third son of the rich peasant owner, but his two elder brothers had been drowned in a flood, so the farm was to come to him. He met Aslaug at a wedding and fell in love with her. In those days it was an unheard-of thing that a well-to-do peasant of old family should court a girl of Aslaug's class. But this young fellow had been long away, and he let his parents know that he had made enough out in the world to live upon, and that if he could not have what he wanted at home, he would let the farm go. It was prophesied that this indifference to the claims of family and property would bring its own punishment. Some said that Ole Haugen had brought it about, by means only darkly hinted at.

So much is certain, that while the conflict between the young man and his parents was going on, Haugen was in the best of spirits. When the battle was over, he said that he had already made them a Bridal March, one that would never go out of the family of Tingvold—but woe to the girl, he added, whom it did not play to church as happy a bride as the cottar's daughter, Aslaug Haugen! And here again people talked of the influence of some mysterious evil power.

So runs the story. It is a fact that to this day the people of that mountain district have a peculiar gift of music and song, which then must have been greater still. Such a thing is not kept up without some one caring for and adding to the original treasure, and Ole Haugen was the man who did it in his time.

Tradition goes on to tell that just as Ole Haugen's Bridal March was the merriest ever heard, so the bridal pair that it played to church, that were met by it again as they came from the altar, and that drove home with its strain in their ears, were the happiest couple that had ever been seen. And though the race of Tingvold had always been a handsome race, and after this were handsomer than ever, it is maintained that none, before or after, could equal this particular couple.

With Ole Haugen legend ends, and now history begins. Ole's bridal march kept its place in the house of Tingvold. It was sung, and hummed, and whistled, and fiddled, in the house and in the stable, in the field and on the mountain-side. The only child born of the marriage, little Astrid, was rocked and sung to sleep with it by mother, by father, and by servants, and it was one of the first things she herself learned. There was music in the race, and this bright little one had her full share of it, and soon could hum her parent's triumphal march, the talisman of her family, in quite a masterly way.

It was hardly to be wondered at that when she grew up, she too wished to choose her lover. Many came to woo, but at the age of twenty-three the rich and gifted girl was still single. The reason came out at last. In the house lived a quick-witted youth, whom Aslaug had taken in out of pity. He went by the name of the tramp or gipsy, though he was neither. But Aslaug was ready enough to call him so when she heard that Astrid and he were betrothed. They had pledged faith to each other in all secrecy out on the hill pastures, and had sung the bridal march together, she on the height, he answering from below.

The lad was sent away at once. No one could now show more pride of race than Aslaug, the poor cottar's daughter. Astrid's father called to mind what was prophesied when he broke the tradition

of his family. Had it now come to a husband being taken in from the wayside? Where would it end? And the neighbours said much the same.

"The tramp," Knut by name, soon became well known to every one, as he took to dealing in cattle on his own account. He was the first in that part of the country to do it to any extent, and his enterprise had begun to benefit the whole district, raising prices, and bringing in capital. But he was apt to bring drinking bouts, and often fighting, in his train; and this was all that people talked of as yet; they had not begun to understand his capabilities as a business man.

Astrid was determined, and she was twenty-three, and her parents came to see that either the farm must go out of the family or Knut must come into it; through their own marriage they had lost the moral authority that might have stood them in good stead now. So Astrid had her way. One fine day the handsome, merry Knut drove with her to church. The strains of the family bridal march, her grandfather's masterpiece, were wafted back over the great procession, and the two seemed to be sitting humming it quietly, and very happy they looked. And every one wondered how the parents looked so happy too, for they had opposed the marriage long and obstinately.

After the wedding Knut took over the farm, and the old people retired on their allowance. It was such a liberal one that people could not understand how Knut and Astrid were able to afford it; for though the farm was the largest in the district, it was not well-cultivated. But this was not all. Three times the number of workpeople were taken on, and everything was started in a new way, with an outlay unheard of in these parts. Certain ruin was foretold. But "the tramp"—for his nickname had stuck to him—was as merry as ever, and seemed to have infected Astrid with his humour. The quiet, gentle girl became the lively, buxom wife. Her parents were satisfied. At last people began to understand that Knut had brought to Tingvold what no one had had there before, working capital! And along with it he had brought the experience gained in trading, and a gift of handling commodities and money, and of keeping servants willing and happy.

In twelve years one would hardly have known Tingvold again. House and outbuildings were different; there were three times as many workpeople, they were three times as well off, and Knut himself, in his broadcloth coat, sat in the evenings and smoked his meerschaum pipe and drank his glass of toddy with the Captain and the Pastor and the Bailiff. To Astrid he was the cleverest and best man in the world, and she was fond of telling how in his young days he had fought and drunk just to get himself talked about, and to frighten her; "for he was so cunning!"

She followed him in everything except in leaving off peasant dress and customs; to these she always kept. Knut did not interfere with other people's ways, so this caused no trouble between them. He lived with his "set," and his wife saw to their entertainment, which was, however, modest enough, for he was too prudent a man to make unnecessary show or outlay of any kind. Some said that he gained more by the card-playing, and by the popularity this mode of life won for him, than all he laid out upon it, but this was probably pure malevolence.

They had several children, but the only one whose history concerns us is the eldest son, Endrid, who was to inherit the farm and carry on the honour of the house. He had all the good looks of his race, but not much in the way of brains, as is often the case with children of specially active-minded parents. His father soon observed this, and tried to make up for it by giving him a very good education. A tutor was brought into the house for the children, and when Endrid grew up he was sent to one of the agricultural training schools that were now beginning to flourish in Norway, and after that to finish off in town. He came home again a quiet young fellow, with a rather over-burdened brain and fewer town ways than his father had hoped for. But Endrid was a slow-witted youth.

The Pastor and the Captain, both with large families of daughters, had their eye on him. But if this was the reason of the increased attention they paid to Knut, they made a great mistake; the idea of a marriage between his son and a poor pastor's or captain's daughter, with no training to fit her for a rich farmer's wife, was so ridiculous to him that he did not even think it necessary to warn Endrid. And indeed no warning was needed, for the lad saw as well as his father that, though there was no

need for his bringing more wealth into the family through his marriage, it would be of advantage if he could again connect it with one of equal birth and position. But, as ill-luck would have it, he was but an awkward wooer. The worst of it was that he began to get the name of being a fortune-hunter; and when once a young man gets this reputation, the peasants fight shy of him. Endrid soon noticed this himself; for though he was not particularly quick, to make up for it he was very sensitive. He saw that it did not improve his position that he was dressed like a townsman, and "had learning," as the country people said. The boy was sound at heart, and the result of the slights he met with was that by degrees he left off his town dress and town speech, and began to work on his father's great farm as a simple labourer. His father understood—he had begun to understand before the lad did—and he told his wife to take no notice. So they said nothing about marriage, nor about the change in Endrid's ways; only his father was more and more friendly to him, and consulted him in everything connected with the farm and with his other trade, and at last gave the management of the farm altogether into his hands. And of this they never needed to repent.

So the time passed till Endrid was thirty-one. He had been steadily adding to his father's wealth and to his own experience and independence; but had never made the smallest attempt at courtship; had not looked at a girl, either in their own district or elsewhere. And now his parents were beginning to fear that he had given up thoughts of it altogether. But this was not the case.

On a neighbouring farm lived in good circumstances another well-descended peasant family, that had at different times intermarried with the race of Tingvold. A girl was growing up there whom Endrid had been fond of since she was a little child; no doubt he had quietly set his heart on her, for only six months after her confirmation he spoke. She was seventeen then and he thirty-one. Randi, that was the girl's name, did not know at first what to answer; she consulted her parents, but they said she must decide for herself. He was a good man, and from a worldly point of view she could not make a better match, but the difference in their ages was great, and she must know herself if she had the courage to undertake the new duties and cares that would come upon her as mistress of the large farm. The girl felt that her parents would rather have her say Yes than No, but she was really afraid. She went to his mother, whom she had always liked, and found to her surprise that she knew nothing. But the mother was so delighted with the idea that with all her might she urged Randi to accept him. "I'll help you," she said. "Father will want no allowance from the farm. He has all he needs, and he doesn't wish his children to be longing for his death. Things will be divided at once, and the little that we keep to live on will be divided too when we are gone. So you see there will be no trouble with us." Yes, Randi knew all along that Knut and Astrid were kind and nice. "And the boy," said Astrid, "is good and thoughtful about everything." Yes, Randi had felt that too; she was not afraid but that she would get on with him—if she were only capable enough herself!

A few days later everything was settled. Endrid was happy, and so were his parents; for this was a much respected family that he was marrying into, and the girl was both nice-looking and clever; there was not a better match for him in the district. The parents on both sides consulted together, and settled that the wedding should be just before harvest, as there was nothing to wait for.

The neighbourhood generally did not look on the engagement in the same light as the parties concerned. It was said that the pretty young girl had "sold herself." She was so young that she hardly knew what marriage was, and the sly Knut had pushed forward his son before any other lovers had the chance. Something of this came to Randi's ears, but Endrid was so loving to her, and in such a quiet, almost humble way, that she would not break off with him; only it made her a little cool. Both his and her parents heard what was said, but took no notice.

Perhaps just because of this talk they determined to hold the wedding in great style, and this, for the same reason, was not unacceptable to Randi. Knut's friends, the Pastor, the Captain, and the Bailiff, with their large families, were to be among the guests, and some of them were to accompany the pair to church. On their account Knut wanted to dispense with the fiddlers—it was too old-fashioned and peasant-like. But Astrid insisted that they must be played to church and home again

with the Bridal March of her race. It had made her and her husband so happy; they could not but wish to hear it again on their dear children's great festival day. There was not much sentiment about Knut; but he let his wife have her way. The bride's parents got a hint that they might engage the fiddlers, who were asked to play the old March, the family Bridal March, that had lain quiet now for a time, because this generation had worked without song.

But alas! on the wedding day the rain poured hard. The players had to wrap up their fiddles as soon as they had played the bridal party away from the farm, and they did not take them out again till they came within sound of the church-bells. Then a boy had to stand up at the back of the cart and hold an umbrella over them, and below it they sat huddled together and sawed away. The March did not sound like itself in such weather, naturally enough, nor was it a very merry-looking bridal procession that followed. The bridegroom sat with the high bridegroom's hat between his legs and a sou'-wester on his head; he had on a great fur coat, and he held an umbrella over the bride, who, with one shawl on the top of another, to protect the bridal crown and the rest of her finery, looked more like a wet hayrick than a human being. On they came, carriage after carriage, the men dripping, the women hidden away under their wrappings. It looked like a sort of bewitched procession, in which one could not recognise a single face; for there was not a face to be seen, nothing but huddled-up heaps of wool or fur. A laugh broke out among the specially large crowd gathered at the church on account of the great wedding. At first it was stifled, but it grew louder with each carriage that drove up. At the large house where the procession was to alight and the dresses were to be arranged a little for going into church, a hay-cart had been drawn out of the way, into the corner formed by the porch. Mounted on it stood a pedlar, a joking fellow, Aslak by name. Just as the bride was lifted down he called: "Devil take me if Ole Haugen's Bridal March is any good to-day!"

He said no more, but that was plenty. The crowd laughed, and though many of them tried not to let it be seen that they were laughing, it was clearly felt what all were thinking and trying to hide.

When they took off the bride's shawls they saw that she was as white as a sheet. She began to cry, tried to laugh, cried again—and then all at once the feeling came over her that she could not go into the church. Amidst great excitement she was laid on a bed in a quiet room, for such a violent fit of crying had seized her that they were much alarmed. Her good parents stood beside the bed, and when she begged them to let her go back, they said that she might do just as she liked. Then her eyes fell on Endrid. Any one so utterly miserable and helpless she had never seen before; and beside him stood his mother, silent and motionless, with the tears running down her face and her eyes fixed on Randi's. Then Randi raised herself on her elbow and looked straight in front of her for a little, still sobbing after the fit of crying. "No, no,!" she said, "I'm going to church." Once more she lay back and cried for a little, and then she got up. She said that she would have no more music, so the fiddlers were dismissed—and the story did not lose in their telling when they got among the crowd.

It was a mournful bridal procession that now moved on towards the church. The rain allowed of the bride and bridegroom hiding their faces from the curiosity of the onlookers till they got inside; but they felt that they were running the gauntlet, and they felt too that their own friends were annoyed at being laughed at as part of such a foolish procession.

The grave of the famous fiddler, Ole Haugen, lay close by the church-door. Without saying much about it, the family had always tended it, and a new head-board had been put up when the old one had rotted away below. The upper part of it was in the shape of a wheel, as Ole himself had desired. The grave was in a sunny spot, and was thickly overgrown with wild flowers. Every churchgoer that had ever stood by it had heard from some one or other how a botanist in government pay, making a collection of the plants and flowers of the valley and the mountains round about, had found flowers on that grave that did not grow anywhere else in the neighbourhood. And the peasants, who as a rule cared little about what they called "weeds," took pride in these particular ones—a pride mixed with curiosity and even awe. Some of the flowers were remarkably beautiful. But as the bridal pair passed the grave, Endrid, who was holding Randi's hand, felt that she shivered; immediately she

began to cry again, walked crying into the church, and was led crying to her place. No bride within the memory of man had made such an entrance into that church.

She felt as she sat there that all this was helping to confirm the report that she had been sold. The thought of the shame she was bringing on her parents made her turn cold, and for a little she was able to stop crying. But at the altar she was moved again by some word of the priest's, and immediately the thought of all she had gone through that day came over her; and for the moment she had the feeling that never, no, never again, could she look people in the face, and least of all her own father and mother.

Things got no better as the day went on. She was not able to sit with the guests at the dinner-table; in the evening she was half coaxed, half forced to appear at supper, but she spoiled every one's pleasure, and had to be taken away to bed. The wedding festivities, that were to have gone on for several days, ended that evening. It was given out that the bride was ill.

Though neither those who said this nor those who heard it believed it, it was only too true. She was really ill, and she did not soon recover. One consequence of this was that their first child was sickly. The parents were not the less devoted to it from understanding that they themselves were to a certain extent the cause of its suffering. They never left that child. They never went to church, for they had got shy of people. For two years God gave them the joy of the child, and then He took it from them.

The first thought that struck them after this blow was that they had been too fond of their child. That was why they had lost it. So, when another came, it seemed as if neither of them dared to show their love for it. But this little one, though it too was sickly at first, grew stronger, and was so sweet and bright that they could not restrain their feelings. A new, pure happiness had come to them; they could almost forget all that had happened. When this child was two years old, God took it too.

Some people seem to be chosen out by sorrow. They are the very people that seem to us to need it least, but at the same time they are those that are best fitted to bear trials and yet to keep their faith. These two had early sought God together; after this they lived as it were in His presence. The life at Tingvold had long been a quiet one; now the house was like a church before the priest comes in. The work went on perfectly steadily, but at intervals during the day Endrid and Randi worshipped together, communing with those "on the other side." It made no change in their habits that Randi, soon after their last loss, had a little daughter. The children that were dead were boys, and this made them not care so much for a girl. Besides they did not know if they were to be allowed to keep her. But the health and happiness that the mother had enjoyed up to the time of the death of the last little boy, had benefited this child, who soon showed herself to be a bright little girl, with her mother's pretty face. The two lonely people again felt the temptation to be hopeful and happy in their child; but the fateful two years were not over, and they dared not. As the time drew near, they felt as if they had only been allowed a respite.

Knut and Astrid kept a good deal to themselves. The way in which the young people had taken things did not allow of much sympathy or consolation being offered them. Besides, Knut was too lively and worldly-minded to sit long in a house of mourning or to be always coming in upon a prayer meeting. He moved to a small farm that he had bought and let, but now took back into his own hands. There he arranged everything so comfortably and nicely for his dear Astrid, that people whose intention it was to go to Tingvold, rather stayed and laughed with him than went on to cry with his children.

One day when Astrid was in her daughter-in-law's house, she noticed how little Mildrid went about quite alone; it seemed as if her mother hardly dared to touch her. When the father came in, she saw the same mournful sort of reserve towards his own, only child. She concealed her thoughts, but when she got home to her own dear Knut, she told him how things stood at Tingvold, and added: "Our place is there now. Little Mildrid needs some one that dares to love her; pretty, sweet little child that she is!" Knut was infected by her eagerness, and the two old people packed up and went home.

Mildrid was now much with her grandparents, and they taught her parents to love her. When she was five years old her mother had another daughter, who was called Beret; and after this Mildrid lived almost altogether with the old people. The anxious parents began once more to feel as if there might yet be pleasure for them in life, and a change in the popular feeling towards them helped them.

After the loss of the second child, though there were often the traces of tears on their faces, no one had ever seen them weep—their grief was silent. There was no changing of servants at Tingvold, that was one result of the peaceful, God-fearing life there; nothing but praise of master and mistress was ever heard. They themselves knew this, and it gave them a feeling of comfort and security. Relations and friends began to visit them again; and went on doing so, even though the Tingvold people made no return.

But they had not been at church since their wedding-day! They partook of the Communion at home, and held worship there. But when the second girl was born, they were so desirous to be her godparents themselves that they made up their minds to venture. They stood together at their children's graves; they passed Ole Haugen's without word or movement; the whole congregation showed them respect. But they continued to keep themselves very much to themselves, and a pious peace rested over their house.

One day in her grandmother's house little Mildrid was heard singing the Bridal March. Old Astrid stopped her work in a fright, and asked her where in the world she had learned that. The child answered: "From you, grandmother." Knut, who was sitting in the house, laughed heartily, for he knew that Astrid had a habit of humming it when she sat at work. But they both said to little Mildrid that she must never sing it when her parents were within hearing. Like a child, she asked "Why?" But to this question she got no answer. One evening she heard the new herd-boy singing it as he was cutting wood. She told her grandmother, who had heard it too. All grandmother said was: "He'll not grow old here!"—and sure enough he had to go next day. No reason was given; he got his wages and was sent about his business. Mildrid was so excited about this, that grandmother had to try to tell her the story of the Bridal March. The little eight year old girl understood it well enough, and what she did not understand then became clear to her later. It had an influence on her child-life, and especially on her conduct towards her parents, that nothing else had or could have had.

She had always noticed that they liked quietness. It was no hardship to her to please them in this; they were so gentle, and talked so much and so sweetly to her of the children's great Friend in heaven, that it cast a sort of charm over the whole house. The story of the Bridal March affected her deeply, and gave her an understanding of all that they had gone through. She carefully avoided recalling to them any painful memories, and showed them the tenderest affection, sharing with them their love of God, their truthfulness, their quietness, their industry. And she taught Beret to do the same.

In their grandfather's house the life that had to be suppressed at home got leave to expand. Here there was singing and dancing and play and story-telling. So the sisters' young days passed between devotion to their melancholy parents in the quiet house, and the glad life they were allowed to take part in at their grandfather's. The families lived in perfect understanding. It was the parents who told them to go to the old people and enjoy themselves, and the old people who told them to go back again, "and be sure to be good girls."

When a girl between the age of twelve and sixteen takes a sister between seven and eleven into her full confidence, the confidence is rewarded by great devotion. But the little one is apt to become too old for her years. This happened with Beret, while Mildrid only gained by being forbearing and kind and sympathetic—and she made her parents and grandparents happy.

There is no more to tell till Mildrid was in her fifteenth year; then old Knut died, suddenly and easily. There seemed almost no time between the day when he sat joking in the chimney-corner and the day when he lay in his coffin.

After this, grandmother's greatest pleasure was to have Mildrid sitting on a stool at her feet, as she had done ever since she was a little child, and to tell her stories about Knut, or else to get her to

hum the Bridal March. As Astrid sat listening to it, she saw Knut's handsome dark head as she used to see it in her young days; she followed him out to the mountain-side, where he blew the March on his herd-boy's horn, she drove to church by his side—all his brightness and cleverness lived again for her!

But in Mildrid's soul a new feeling began to stir. Whilst she sat and sang for grandmother, she asked herself: "Will it ever be played for me?" The thought grew upon her, the March spoke to her of such radiant happiness. She saw a bride's crown glittering in its sunshine, and a long, bright future beyond that. Sixteen—and she asked herself: "Shall I, shall I ever have some one sitting beside me, with the Bridal March shining in his eyes? Only think, if father and mother were one day to drive with me in such a procession, with the people greeting us on every side, on to the house where mother was jeered at that day, past Ole Haugen's flower-covered grave, up to the altar, in a glory of happiness! Think what it would be if I could give father and mother that consolation!" And the child's heart swelled, imagining all this to herself, swelled with pride and with devotion to those dear parents who had suffered so much.

These were the first thoughts that she did not confide to Beret. Soon there were more. Beret, who was now eleven, noticed that she was left more to herself, but did not understand that she was being gradually shut out from Mildrid's confidence, till she saw another taken into her place. This was Inga, from the neighbouring farm, a girl of eighteen, their own cousin, newly betrothed. When Mildrid and Inga walked about in the fields, whispering and laughing, with their arms round each other, as girls love to go, poor Beret would throw herself down and cry with jealousy.

The time came on for Mildrid to be confirmed; she made acquaintance with other young people of her own age, and some of them began to come up to Tingvold on Sundays. Mildrid saw them either out of doors or in her grandmother's room. Tingvold had always been a forbidden, and consequently mysteriously attractive place to the young people. But even now, only those with a certain quietness and seriousness of disposition went there, for it could not be denied that there was something subdued about Mildrid, that did not attract every one.

At this particular time there was a great deal of music and singing among the youth of the district. For some reason or other there are such periods, and these periods have their leaders. One of the leaders now was, curiously enough, again of the race of Haugen.

Amongst a people where once on a time, even though it were hundreds of years ago, almost every man and woman sought and found expression for their intensest feelings and experiences in song, and were able themselves to make the verses that gave them relief—amongst such a people the art can never quite die out. Here and there, even though it does not make itself heard, it must exist, ready on occasion to be awakened to new life. But in this district songs had been made and sung from time immemorial. It was by no mere chance that Ole Haugen was born here, and here became what he was. Now it was his grandson in whom the gift had reappeared.

Ole's son had been so much younger than the daughter who had married into the Tingvold family, that the latter, already a married woman, had stood godmother to her little brother. After a life full of changes, this son, as an old man, had come into possession of his father's home and little bit of land far up on the mountain-side; and, strangely enough, not till then did he marry. He had several children, among them a boy called Hans, who seemed to have inherited his grandfather's gifts—not exactly in the way of fiddle-playing, though he did play—but he sang the old songs beautifully and made new ones himself. People's appreciation of his songs was not a little added to by the fact that so few knew himself; there were not many that had even seen him. His old father had been a hunter, and while the boys were quite small, the old man took them out to the hillside and taught them to load and aim a gun. They always remembered how pleased he was when they were able to earn enough with their shooting to pay for their own powder and shot. He did not live long after this, and soon after his death their mother died too, and the children were left to take care of themselves, which they managed to do. The boys hunted and the girls looked after the little hill farm. People turned to look at them when they once in a way showed themselves in the valley; they were so seldom there. It

was a long, bad road down. In winter they occasionally came to sell or send off the produce of their hunting; in summer they were busy with the strangers. Their little holding was the highest lying in the district, and it became famed for having that pure mountain air which cures people suffering from their lungs or nerves, better than any yet discovered medicine; every year they had as many summer visitors, from town, and even from abroad, as they could accommodate. They added several rooms to their house, and still it was always full. So these brothers and sisters, from being poor, very poor, came to be quite well-to-do. Intercourse with so many strangers had made them a little different from the other country people—they even knew something of foreign languages. Hans was now twenty-seven. Some years before he had bought up his brothers' and sisters' shares, so that the whole place belonged to him.

Not one of the family had ever set foot in the house of their relations at Tingvold. Endrid and Randi Tingvold, though they had doubtless never put the feeling into words, could just as little bear to hear the name of Haugen as to hear the Bridal March. These children's poor father had been made to feel this, and in consequence, Hans had forbidden his brothers and sisters ever to go to the house. But the girls at Tingvold, who loved music, longed to make acquaintance with Hans, and when they and their girl friends were together, they talked more about the family at Haugen than about anything else. Hans's songs and tunes were sung and danced to, and they were for ever planning how they could manage to meet the young farmer of Haugen.

After this happy time of young companionship came Mildrid's confirmation. Just before it there was a quiet pause, and after it came another. Mildrid, now about seventeen, spent the autumn almost alone with her parents. In spring, or rather summer, she was, like all the other girls after their confirmation, to go to the *søter* in charge of cattle. She was delighted at the thought of this, especially as her friend Inga was to be at the next *søter*.

At last her longing for the time to come grew so strong that she had no peace at home, and Beret, who was to accompany her, grew restless too. When they got settled in the *søter* Beret was quite absorbed in the new, strange life, but Mildrid was still restless. She had her busy times with the cattle and the milk, but there were long idle hours that she did not know how to dispose of. Some days she spent them with Inga, listening to her stories of her lover, but often she had no inclination to go there. She was glad when Inga came to her, and affectionate, as if she wanted to make up for her faithlessness. She seldom talked to Beret, and often when Beret talked to her, answered nothing but Yes or No. When Inga came, Beret took herself off, and when Mildrid went to see Inga, Beret went crying away after the cows, and had the herd-boys for company. Mildrid felt that there was something wrong in all this, but with the best will she could not set it right.

She was sitting one day near the *søter*, herding the goats and sheep, because one of the herd-boys had played truant and she had to do his work. It was a warm midday; she was sitting in the shade of a hillock overgrown with birch and underwood; she had thrown off her jacket and taken her knitting in her hand, and was expecting Inga. Something rustled behind her. "There she comes," thought Mildrid, and looked up.

But there was more noise than Inga was likely to make, and such a breaking and cracking among the bushes. Mildrid turned pale, got up, and saw something hairy and a pair of eyes below it—it must be a bear's head! She wanted to scream, but no voice would come; she wanted to run, but could not stir. The thing raised itself up—it was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a fur cap, a gun in his hand. He stopped short among the bushes and looked at her sharply for a second or two, then took a step forward, a jump, and stood in the field beside her. Something moved at her feet, and she gave a little cry; it was his dog, that she had not seen before.

"Oh, dear!" she said; "I thought it was a bear breaking through the bushes, and I got such a fright!" And she tried to laugh.

"Well, it might almost have been that," said he, speaking in a very quiet voice; "Kvas and I were on the track of a bear; but now we have lost it; and if I have a 'Vardöger,'¹ it is certainly a bear."

He smiled. She looked at him. Who can he be? Tall, broad-shouldered, wiry; his eyes restless, so that she could not see them rightly; besides, she was standing quite close to him, just where he had suddenly appeared before her with his dog and his gun.

She felt the inclination to say, "Go away!" but instead she drew back a few steps, and asked: "Who are you?" She was really frightened.

"Hans Haugen," answered the man rather absently; for he was paying attention to the dog, which seemed to have found the track of the bear again. He was just going to add, "Good-bye!" but when he looked at her she was blushing; cheeks, neck, and bosom crimson.

"What's the matter?" said he, astonished.

She did not know what to do or where to go, whether to run away or to sit down.

"Who are you?" asked Hans in his turn.

Once again she turned crimson, for to tell him her name was to tell him everything.

"Who are you?" he repeated, as if it were the most natural question in the world, and deserved an answer.

And she could not refuse the answer, though she felt ashamed of herself, and ashamed of her parents, who had neglected their own kindred. The name had to be said. "Mildrid Tingvold," she whispered, and burst into tears.

It was true enough; the Tingvold people had given him little reason to care for them. Of his own free will he would scarcely have spoken to one of them. But he had never foreseen anything like this, and he looked at the girl in amazement. He seemed to remember some story of her mother having cried like that in church on her wedding-day. "Perhaps it's in the family," he thought, and turned to go. "Forgive me for having frightened you," he said, and took his way up the hillside after his dog.

By the time she ventured to look up he had just reached the top of the ridge, and there he turned to look at her. It was only for an instant, for at that moment the dog barked on the other side. Hans gave a start, held his gun in readiness, and hurried on. Mildrid was still gazing at the place where he had stood, when a shot startled her. Could that be the bear? Could it have been so near her?

Off she went, climbing where he had just climbed, till she stood where he had stood, shading her eyes with her hand, and—sure enough, there he was, half hidden by a bush, on his knees beside a huge bear! Before she knew what she was doing, she was down beside him. He gave her a smile of welcome, and explained to her, in his low voice, how it had happened that they had lost the track and the dog had not scented the animal till they were almost upon it. By this time she had forgotten her tears and her bashfulness, and he had drawn his knife to skin the bear on the spot. The flesh was of no value at this time; he meant to bury the carcass and take only the skin. So she held, and he skinned; then she ran down to the sæter for an axe and a spade; and although she still felt afraid of the bear, and it had a bad smell, she kept on helping him till all was finished. By this time it was long past twelve o'clock, and he invited himself to dinner at the sæter. He washed himself and the skin, no small piece of work, and then came in and sat beside her while she finished preparing the food.

He chatted about one thing and another, easily and pleasantly, in the low voice that seems to become natural to people who are much alone. Mildrid gave the shortest answers possible, and when it came to sitting opposite him at the table, she could neither speak nor eat, and there was often silence between them. When she had finished he turned round his chair and filled and lit his pipe. He too was quieter now, and presently he got up. "I must be going," he said, holding out his hand, "it's a long way home from here." Then added, in a still lower voice: "Do you sit every day where you were to-day?" He held her hand for a moment, expecting an answer; but she dared not look up, much less speak.

¹ The old superstition that every man is followed by a "Vardöger" (an invisible animal, resembling him in character) is still common among the peasants.

Then she felt him press her hand quickly. "Good-bye, then, and thank you!" he said in a louder tone, and before she could collect herself, she saw him, with the bearskin over his shoulder, the gun in his hand, and the dog at his side, striding away over the heather. There was a dip in the hills just there, and she saw him clear against the sky; his light, firm step taking him quickly away. She watched till he was out of sight, then came outside and sat down, still looking in the same direction.

Not till now was she aware that her heart was beating so violently that she had to press her hands over it. In a minute or two she lay down on the grass, leaning her head on her arm, and began to go carefully over every event of the day. She saw him start up among the bushes and stand before her, strong and active, looking restlessly round. She felt over again the bewilderment and the fright, and her tears of shame. She saw him against the sun, on the height; she heard the shot, and was again on her knees before him, helping him with the skinning of the bear. She heard once more every word that he said, in that low voice that sounded so friendly, and that touched her heart as she thought of it; she listened to it as he sat beside the hearth while she was cooking, and then at table with her. She felt that she had no longer dared to look into his face, so that at last she had made him feel awkward too; for he had grown silent. Then she heard him speak once again, as he took her hand; and she felt his clasp—felt it still, through her whole body. She saw him go away over the heather—away, away!

Would he ever come back? Impossible, after the way she had behaved. How strong, and brave, and self-reliant was everything she had seen of him, and how stupid and miserable all that he had seen of her, from her first scream of fright when the dog touched her, to her blush of shame and her tears; from the clumsy help she gave him, to her slowness in preparing the food. And to think that when he looked at her she was not able to speak; not even to say No, when he asked her if she sat under the hill every day—for she didn't sit there every day! Might not her silence then have seemed like an invitation to him to come and see? Might not her whole miserable helplessness have been misunderstood in the same way? What shame she felt now! She was hot all over with it, and she buried her burning face deeper and deeper in the grass. Then she called up the whole picture once more; all his excellences and her shortcomings; and again the shame of it all overwhelmed her.

She was still lying there when the sound of the bells told her that the cattle were coming home; then she jumped up and began to work. Beret saw as soon as she came that something had happened. Mildrid asked such stupid questions and gave such absurd answers, and altogether behaved in such an extraordinary way, that she several times just stopped and stared at her. When it came to supper-time, and Mildrid, instead of taking her place at the table, went and sat down outside, saying that she had just had dinner, Beret was as intensely on the alert as a dog who scents game at hand. She took her supper and went to bed. The sisters slept in the same bed, and, as Mildrid did not come, Beret got up softly once or twice to look if her sister were still sitting out there, and if she were alone. Yes, she was there, and alone.

Eleven o'clock, and then twelve, and then one, and still Mildrid sat and Beret waked. She pretended to be asleep when Mildrid came at last, and Mildrid moved softly, so softly; but her sister heard her sobbing, and when she had got into bed she heard her say her usual evening prayer so sadly, heard her whisper: "O God, help me, help me!" It made Beret so unhappy that she could not get to sleep even now. She felt her sister restlessly changing from one position to another; she saw her at last giving it up, throwing aside the covering, and lying open-eyed, with her hands below her head, staring into vacancy. She saw and heard no more, for at last she fell asleep.

When she awoke next morning Mildrid's place was empty. Beret jumped up; the sun was high in the sky; the cattle were away long ago. She found her breakfast set ready, took it hurriedly, and went out and saw Mildrid at work, but looking ill. Beret said that she was going to hurry after the cattle. Mildrid said nothing in answer, but gave her a glance as though of thanks. The younger girl stood a minute thinking, and then went off.

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