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Содержание

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Preface

Long before Columbus discovered America, there were brave men in the north of Europe who dared to sail farther out upon the unknown waters of the Atlantic than any other people in the world. These daring seamen were called Vikings. Their home was the peninsula of Scandinavia, now ruled over by one king, although divided into two distinct countries, Norway and Sweden.

It was along the shores of Norway, with rugged mountains fringing its deep bays, that the Vikings learned command of their curious, high-prowed ships, and overcame all fear of wind and storm. Their strong nature shows itself to-day in the people of Norway, who patiently endure many hardships while trying to get a living on the rough mountain-sides or along the rocky coasts.

Many of our Norwegian cousins have come to America to make a new home for themselves where the sun shines more

warmly and the winds blow less keenly. Their fair-haired children are growing up amongst us, showing us the qualities their parents most admire. Be brave, be honest, be kind to all creatures, be faithful to every little duty, – these are the lessons they have been taught from babyhood, as well as their brothers and sisters who have not as yet ventured far from the land they love so well, – the land of rapid-flowing rivers, deep, dark bays, and narrow valleys.

Come with me to-day to the home of one of these blue-eyed cousins and join her for a while in her work and play.

CHAPTER I
THE FARM

"Come, Mari, my little daughter, and you shall help me make the cakes," called her mother.

Mari stood in the middle of the big farm-yard with a flock of hens around her. She was scattering grain among them from a big bag on her arm; not a sound could be heard except once in a while the scratching of the hens' feet. They were too busy to notice each other or the big dog that sat on the door-step.

The little girl laughed quietly as she watched them. "They are so happy; they love this pleasant summer-time as much as I do," she said to herself.

But the moment she heard her mother's voice, she turned quickly toward the house without stopping a moment longer to see whether her pet hen, Biddy Wee, or cross old Yellow Legs got the most dinner. Mari never in her life thought of answering her parents by saying:

"Why, papa?" or "Why, mamma?" or "I'll come in a moment."

Mari lives in Norway, and Norwegian parents train their children to obey without delay.

The little girl was only too glad to come now, however. Her mother had promised she should learn to make flat-bread to-day. She was pleased that she was old enough to be trusted with this

important work. Why, she could keep house alone when she had mastered this necessary art, and her mother could leave her in charge.

Mari remembers when she was such a tiny tot that her head barely reached above the table. Even then she loved to watch her mother as she sat at the big moulding-board, rolling out the dough until it was nearly as thin as paper.

This dough was made of barley-meal which was raised here at the farm. It was rolled out into sheets almost as wide as the table itself, for each cake must be about a half-yard across. Then came the cooking. The cake was lifted from the board to a hot flat stone on the fireplace, where it was quickly baked. How fast the pile grew! and how skilful mother always was. She never seemed to burn or break a single cake.

Wherever you go in Mari's country you will find flat-bread. You can eat quantities of it, if you like, yet somehow it will not easily check your hunger, and it gives little strength.

"Now, dear, be careful not to get a grain of dust on the floor," said her mother, as Mari stood at the table ready for directions.

The child looked very pretty, with her long, light hair hanging down her back in two braids. The snowy kerchief was tied under her chin just as it was when she came in from the farm-yard. She had no need to put on an apron before beginning her work, for she already wore one. She was never without it, in fact, and hardly thought herself dressed in the morning until her apron had been fastened around her plump little waist.

Her cheeks looked rosy enough to kiss, but such a thing seldom happened, for mothers in Norway believe that is a bad habit. They think that it often leads to the carrying of disease from one person to another.

"Shake hands with the baby and the children," they would say, "but please don't kiss them." They are wise in this, – don't you think so?

Before Mari had rolled out six cakes, her cheeks grew rosier yet. It was hard work, although it had seemed easy enough when mother was doing it.

The first three cakes had to be rolled over and over again because they would stick to the board. Then the lifting was not such a simple thing as Mari had supposed before she came to do it herself. But she kept trying. Her mother was very patient and encouraged her with loving smiles and kind words. At last the little girl made a really *good* cake and landed it all by herself on the stone, without doubling, or even wrinkling, it.

"Good, good," said her mother, "you will soon be a real helper, Mari. But now you have worked long enough for the first time. I will finish the baking while you take the baby and give him an airing."

And where was the baby, bless him? Mari knew, for she went at once to the other side of the room where a pole was fastened into the wall. A big basket was hanging down from the end of this pole, and in the basket was a little blue-eyed baby, cooing softly to himself.

Mari's mother was a very busy woman. There was always something to do, either inside the house or out-of-doors. She had very little time for holding a baby. So when Mari and her brothers were away at school, and mother was left alone, that dear little rosy-cheeked fellow sometimes began to cry in a very lively manner. The cooking and the cheese-making and the spinning must go on just the same, and time could not be spent in holding a baby.

But he must be amused in some way. So the strong pole was fastened into the wall, and the cradle attached to the end. Do you wonder what fun there could be in staying up in that basket, hour after hour? The baby enjoyed it because the pole would spring a little at every movement of his body. As long as he kept awake, he could, and did, bob up and down. That was amusement enough.

He was glad to see Mari now. She was a perfect little mother, and soon had his hood and cloak fastened on. They were hardly needed, for he was already done up in so many garments, it didn't seem possible he could be cold, wherever he went.

The living-room, where Mari had been working, was large and high. The beams were dark with age, but the floor was white from the many scrubbings Mari's mother had given it.

On one side of the room was the big fireplace where all the cooking was done. During the long winter evenings the family and servants sat in front of the blazing logs and told stories of the famous sea-captains of the olden times. Or perhaps they talked of the fairies and giants, in whom Mari firmly believed. Her mother

laughed at the idea of these wonderful creatures. Yet, after all, it was not more than a hundred years ago that they seemed real to many grown-up people.

Wonderful creatures who made themselves seen from time to time dwelt in the mountains, the fields, and the rivers. This is what Mari's great-grandma had believed, and was she not a sensible woman? It is no wonder, therefore, that our little cousin loved to think that these beings were still real. When she went to sleep at night, she often dreamed of the gnomes who live far down in the earth, or the giants who once dwelt among the mountains.

When she was very little she sometimes waked up from such dreams with a shiver. "O, don't let the cruel giant get me," she would cry. Then she would jump out of her own little cot into the big bed of her parents. She felt quite safe as soon as her mother's loving arms held her tightly, and she was sound asleep again in a minute.

That big bed certainly looked strong enough to be a fortress against the giants or any other of the wonderful creatures of fairy-world. It stood in the corner of the living-room, where Mari's mother worked all day, and where the family ate and sat. It was so high that even grown people did not get into it without climbing up the steps at one side. It had a wooden top, which made it seem like a little house. It was not as long as bedsteads in other countries. No grown person could stretch out in it to his full length. He must bend his knees, or curl himself up in some way,

for he certainly could not push his feet through the heavy wooden foot-board.

Mari's people, however, never thought of its being uncomfortable. All Norwegian bedsteads are made in this way, so they became used to it as they grew up. But sometimes English travellers had stayed at the farmhouse all night when they had been overtaken by a storm. They would be sure to get up in the morning complaining. They would say:

"O yes, this country of Norway is very beautiful, but why don't you have beds long enough for people to sleep in with comfort."

The farm where Mari lives lies in a narrow valley half a mile from the sea. The cold winter winds are kept off by the mountain which stands behind the houses. No one but Mari's family and the servants who work on the farm live here. Yet I spoke of houses. This is because the little girl's home is made up of several different houses, instead of one large farmhouse, such as one sees in America.

Mari's father thinks that two, or perhaps three, rooms are quite enough to build under one roof. He settled here when he was a young man. Mari's mother came here to live when they were married. At that time there was but one house. It contained the living-room and the storeroom. After a while another house was built close by, for the farm hands to sleep in. Still another little building was added after a while for the winter's supplies, for there is no store within many miles of the farm.

Mari's mother never says, "Come, my child, run down the road

and buy me five pounds of sugar," or, "Hurry, dear, go and get two pounds of steak for dinner." It would be useless for her to think of doing such a thing. All the provisions the family may need must be obtained in large quantities from the distant city, unless they are raised here on the farm.

The storehouse was built very carefully. It was raised higher than the other buildings so that rats and other wild creatures should have hard work to reach the supplies. There is not a great deal on hand now, for it is summer-time, but in the autumn the bins will be full of vegetables, and large quantities of fish and meats will hang from the rafters. There will be stores of butter and cheese and a large supply of coffee, for Mari's people drink it freely.

CHAPTER II
VISITORS

"Mother, mother, I hear the sound of wheels," cried the little girl, as she came hurrying into the house, panting for breath. The baby was such a big load it is a wonder she could hurry at all.

"Could you see what is coming?" asked her mother.

"Yes, there are two carriages, I know, for I saw a cariole, and I could hear another gig, although it was still out of sight round the bend of the road. They must be in a hurry, for I could hear the driver of the cariole clucking to his horse to make him go faster."

"Run right down to the rye-field, Mari, and tell your father to send Snorri up with the horses. Leave the baby with me."

Mari hurried away, while her mother went out into the yard to greet her visitors who had now drawn near.

The first carriage was a cariole, as Mari had said. It was a sort of gig with very long shafts. It had a seat in front just wide enough to hold one person, with a small place behind, where the post-boy sat. A lady rode in this cariole and drove the sturdy little horse.

Behind her came a second carriage, which could not be very comfortable, as there were no springs and the seat was directly over the axle. Two people were in this, also, a gentleman and the driver.

"We are in great haste to reach the next station by afternoon,"

the gentleman tried to explain to the farmer's wife. He spoke brokenly, for he seemed to know but few Norwegian words.

"He must be an American," Mari's mother said to herself. "Those people always seem to be in a hurry." She dropped a deep curtsy to the lady, who seemed to be the gentleman's wife.

"Won't you come into the house while you wait for the carriage?" she asked. The lady smiled, and followed her into the living-room.

"What a lovely big fireplace you have!" exclaimed the visitor, as she sat down. "And what good times you probably have here in the long winter evenings. Indeed they must seem long when the daylight only lasts two or three hours."

Mari's mother smiled. "Yes, and the summer days seem long now that there are only two or three hours of darkness in the whole twenty-four," she answered. "At least, they must seem long to you who are a stranger," she went on. She spoke in good English, of which she was very proud. She had learned it when she was a girl in school, and was already teaching Mari to use it.

"Is that your spinning-wheel?" asked the visitor, as she looked around the room. "Excuse me for asking, but I do wish I could watch you spinning. In America everything we wear is made in the mills and factories, and a spinning-wheel is not a common sight nowadays."

"I make all the clothing for my family," answered Mari's mother. "It is so strong it lasts nearly a lifetime. Look at my dress; I have worn it every working-day for many years, and it is still

as good as new."

"Dear me! what a smart woman you are. If you don't mind, I should like to examine the goods. I suppose that is what people call homespun. And I suppose the wool of which it was made came from your own sheep, did it not?"

"Yes, indeed, and my husband raised every one of the flock himself," was the answer. "I will gladly spin some of the wool for you now. But see! the carriages are waiting, and your husband looks impatient."

"Then I must not keep him waiting, for we have a long journey before us. So good-bye. Perhaps we may stop here again on our way back from the north. Thank you very much for your kindness."

The lady went out, and Snorri helped her into the cariole and himself jumped up behind, and away they went. The lady's husband followed in another carriage in the same manner they had driven into the yard. The ones that had brought them here had gone away as soon as the travellers stepped out. Their drivers would take them back to the station where they belonged.

"Mother, why is our house a posting-station?" asked Mari, when the travellers had gone. "I think it is a great bother. No matter how busy father and the men are, they must stop their work and harness up the horses to carry strangers along the road. They don't get money for it, either, do they?"

"That is the way your father pays his taxes," her mother answered. "You know what good roads we have in our country,

Mari. You know, too, that many other things are done by the government to make this country a fine one. Of course every one must share in the cost of these things. As we live on a farm and have horses, your father is allowed to pay his share in work. That is, he agrees to carry the travellers who come this way to the next station. After all, it isn't very much bother," she said, thoughtfully. "But come, dear, set the table; it is near dinner-time, and your father will soon be here."

The table did not stand in the middle of the room. It was in the corner nearest the fireplace. A wide bench was built round the two sides of the room nearest it, so that most of those who gathered around the table could sit on these benches.

Mari's mother soon had a steaming junket ready, besides a dish of smoked salmon, plenty of boiled potatoes, a large, dark-coloured cheese which looked like soap, and last, but not least, a plate was piled high with flat-bread.

"May father have the cakes I made?" asked Mari.

"Sure enough, little daughter. He will eat them with pleasure, I know."

In a few minutes the farmer and his helpers appeared. All gathered around the table together.

"What a fine junket this is to-day," said Mari's father, as his wife helped him to another plateful.

The junket was made of milk, barley, and potatoes, and was a dish of which he was very fond.

"Dear me! how good the flat-bread is, too. And only to think

that our little Mari made it all herself," continued the farmer. "She will soon be a woman at this rate."

Mari's rosy cheeks grew redder still at her father's praise.

"I shall be glad to see Gretel back again," said the little girl's mother, after a while. "I miss her very much, though Mari is a good little helper. But Gretel is having a good time with Henrik, I'm sure."

Gretel and Henrik had gone up on the mountain to the summer-house, where the cows were pastured during the two warmest months of the year. Henrik was now fourteen years old, and his father felt that he could be trusted to care for the cows as well as he could do it himself; while Gretel could make good cheese and butter, although she was only thirteen. This boy and girl were now living together all alone up on the mountain-side, but they were not the least bit lonely.

Every Saturday afternoon Henrik brought down the butter and cheese his sister had made during the week. He had so many stories to tell of their good times, that Mari would say:

"Oh, dear! Henrik, I wish I could go back with you."

"I wish you could, little sister, but mother must not be left alone, you know." And Henrik would put his arms around her and kiss her lovingly.

"Where is Ole?" asked the farmer, as the family finished eating their dinner. "He should not be late to meals and give you trouble, good wife."

"He went up to the river on a fishing trip. I told him I should

not scold if he was late this time," said his mother. "I was glad of the thought of having some fresh salmon."

"Very well, then. But come, my men, we must get back to the field now. The noon hour has passed." And the farmer led the way out of the house.

But before he rose from the table little Mari said:

"Thanks for the food, dear father and mother," while she went first to one, then the other, and gave each of them a loving kiss.

Then the workmen rose and went in turn to the farmer and his wife and shook hands, to show they, too, were thankful.

It was very pleasant and cheerful in this farmer's house, you can plainly see; and it was all quite natural for these simple country people to show how kindly they felt for each other.

"There comes Ole, now," said the farmer's wife. "I can hear his call. Run, Mari, and see if he has met with good fortune."

"O, mother, mother, see what I have here," cried Mari, a few moments afterward. "Ole has a fine string of fish, and that will please you, I know. But do look at this young magpie. It was snared in his trap while he was fishing. He says I may have it for my very own. May I keep it, please?"

"It seems as though you had enough pets now, Mari. You have your own pony and your dog Kyle. But I hate to refuse you, my dear. Yes, you may have it, but you and Ole must keep it out of mischief. Magpies are sometimes very troublesome birds, for they notice shining objects and carry them off if they get a chance."

Mari's mother now turned to the string of trout which she hastened to put away in the storeroom. Ole had cleaned them nicely before he brought them home. He now ate his dinner as quickly as possible, after which he and his sister went out into the yard to make a cage for their new pet.

"In a little while he will get tame so he will follow us around," said Ole, as he cut the wooden bars for the cage. "Then we shall need to shut him up only when we wish."

"Isn't he a beauty," exclaimed Mari, as she stroked the magpie. "Look, Ole, at the green and purple feathers in his wings and tail. They are very handsome and glossy."

"Be careful, Mari, or he may bite you. That hooked bill of his is pretty sharp, if he is a young bird. See him look at you with his bright eyes. They say that magpies will grow fond of one in a very short time."

"Did you ever see a magpie's nest, Ole?"

"Yes, I passed one this morning as I went through the woods. It was way back in a thick bush. I crept up and looked in. The mother bird was away, and I saw five pretty green eggs dotted with little purple spots."

"What did you do, Ole? I hope you did not touch them."

"At first, I thought I would, Mari, because, you know, those pretty eggs will sometime hatch out, and the five magpies will fly away to harm smaller and more helpless birds. Besides, they go into the grain-fields and pick the grain. Father isn't very fond of magpies, I can tell you.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.