THE BIRCH AND THE STAR

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The Birch and the Star
and
Other Stories

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By

Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen

Editor of
East O' the Sun and West O' the Moon

Illustrations by

Frederick V. Poole

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Foreword

The realistic stories in this book, given for the first time to American children, were written in the Norwegian by Jörgen Moe and in the Swedish by Zacharias Topelius. Both authors have won fame in their native lands as writers of juvenile literature. Their works show sincere sympathy with child life and great power to interpret it artistically.

Children need the realistic story side by side with the purely imaginative fairy tale, for the story true to human experience serves to bring about a proper balance between the ideas created by a world of fancy and those of the world of reality.

The standard of literary merit is the same for both kinds of stories. Both must influence the child’s life subtly and indirectly, not by moralizing or preaching.

GUDRUN THORNE-THOMSEN.

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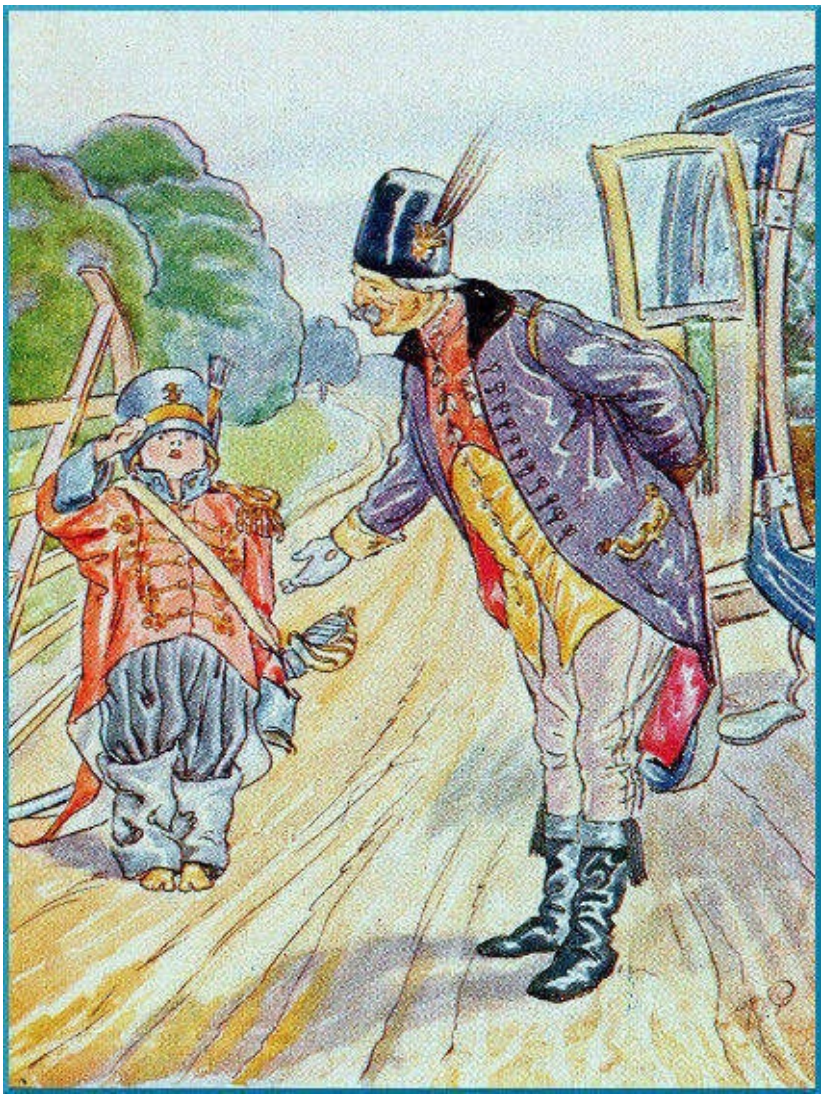


… the gentleman stopped out of his carriage
(took Bikku by the hand)

The Birch and the Star

ABOUT two hundred years ago Finland had suffered greatly. There had been war; cities were burned, the harvest destroyed and thousands of people had died; some had perished by the sword, others from hunger, many from dreadful diseases. There was nothing left but tears and want, ashes and ruins.

Then it happened that many families became separated; some were captured and carried away by the enemy, others fled to the forests and desert places or far away to Sweden. A wife knew nothing about her husband, a brother nothing about his sister, and a father and mother did not know whether their children were living or dead. Some fugitives came back and when they found their dear ones, there was such joy that it seemed as if there had been no war, no sorrow. Then the huts were raised from the ashes, the fields again turned yellow with golden harvest. A new life began for the country.

During the time of the war a brother and sister were carried far away to a foreign land. Here they found friendly people who took care of them. Year after year passed and the children grew and suffered no want. But even in their comfort and ease they could not forget their father, mother and native country.

When the news came that there was peace in Finland, and that those who wished might return, the children felt more and more grieved to stay in a foreign land, and they begged permission to return home. The strangers who had taken care of them laughed and said, “Foolish children, you don’t realize that your country lies hundreds of miles away from here.”

But the children replied, “That does not matter, we can walk home.”

The people then said, “Here you have a home, clothes and food and friends who love you; what more do you desire?”

“More than anything else we want to go home,” answered the children.

“But there is nothing but poverty and want in your home. There you would have to sleep on miserable moss beds and suffer from cold and hunger. Probably your parents, sisters, brothers and friends are dead long ago, and if you look for them you will find only tracks of wolves in the snow-drifts on the lonely field where your cottage used to stand.”

“Yes,” said the children, “but we must go home.”

“But you have been away from your home for many years, you were only six and seven years old when you were carried away. You have forgotten the road you came on. You can’t even remember how your parents look.”

“Yes,” said the children, “but we must go home.”

“Who is going to show you the way?”

“God will help us,” answered the boy, “and besides, I remember that a large birch tree stands in front of my father’s cottage, and many lovely birds sing there every morning.”

“And I remember that a beautiful star shines through the branches of the birch at night,”

said the little girl.

“Foolish children,” said the people in the foreign land, “you must never think about this again; it will only bring you sorrow.”

But still the children always thought about going home, not because they were disobedient, but because it was impossible for them to forget their country, impossible to cease longing for father and mother.

One moonlight night the boy could not sleep for the thoughts of home and parents. He asked his sister if she were asleep.

“No, I can’t sleep. I am thinking of our home.”

“And so am I,” said the boy, “come let us pack our clothes and flee. There seems to be a voice in my heart that says, ‘Go home, go home,’ it is the voice of God I know, so we are doing nothing wrong.”

“Yes, let us go,” said the sister. And quietly they went away.

It was a lovely night, the moon shone brightly and lit up the paths. “But dear brother, I am afraid we never shall find our home,” said the little girl after they had walked a while.

The brother answered, “Let us always go toward the northwest, and we shall surely reach Finland, and when we are there, the birch and the star shall be our sign. If we see the star shining through the leaves of the birch, we shall know that we are at home.”

“But don’t you think wild beasts may devour us or robbers carry us away?” cried she.

“Remember, sister dear, the hymn which our mother taught us long ago—‘Though you suffer in a foreign land, God will lead you by the hand.’”

“Yes,” said the little girl, “God will send his angels to protect us in the foreign land.”

And they went bravely on. The boy cut a stout stick from a young oak tree in order to protect his sister and himself, but no evil befell them.

One day they came to a cross road where they did not know which way to go. Then they saw two little birds that were singing in a tree by the road on the left-hand side. “Come,” said the brother, “this road is the right one. I know it from the song of the birds. Perhaps these little birds are sent by God to help us along.”

The children went on, and the birds flew from branch to branch, but not faster than the little ones could follow them. The children ate nuts and berries in the woods, drank water from the clear brooks, and slept at night on soft beds of moss. They seemed to be cared for in a most wonderful way. They always had enough to eat, and they always found a place where they could spend the night. They could not tell why, but whenever they saw the little birds, they said, “See, there are God’s angels, who are helping us.” And so they walked on.

But at last the little girl grew very tired from wandering about so long, and said to her brother, “When shall we begin to look for our birch?”

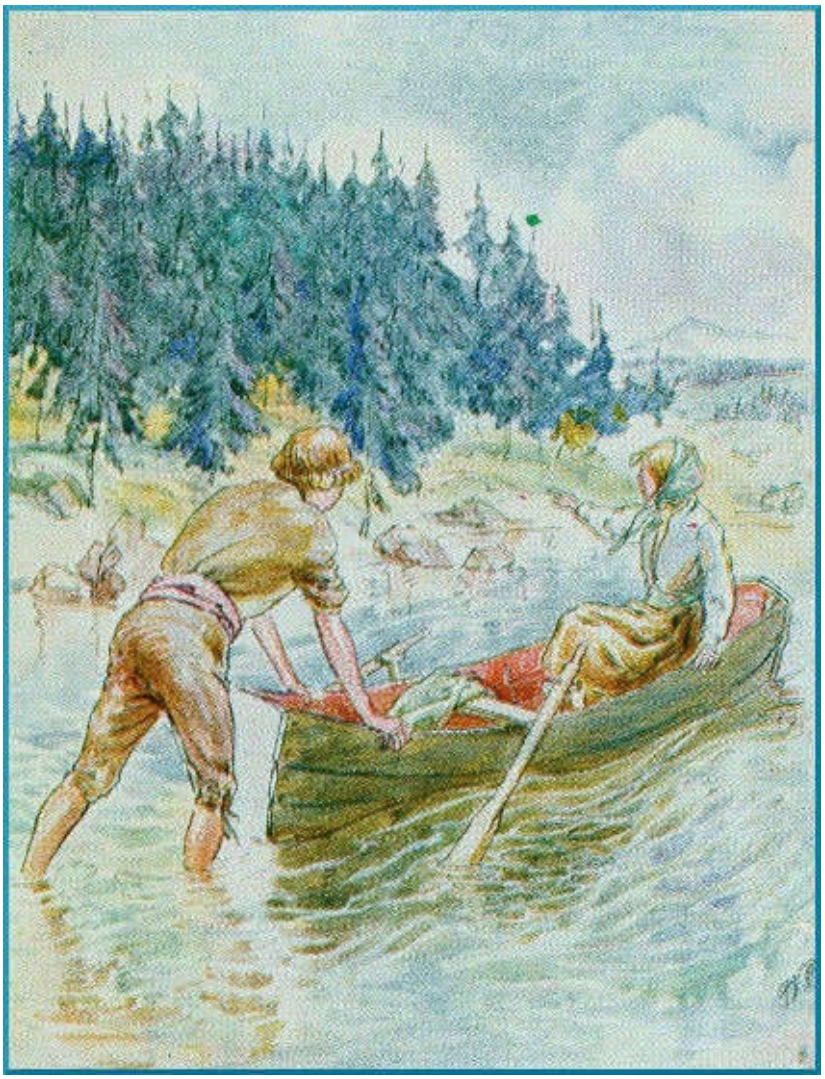
And he answered, “Not until we hear people speak the language which our father and mother spoke.”

Again they walked towards the north and west. Summer was gone, the days in the forests began to grow cold and again the little sister asked about the birch, but her brother begged her to be patient.

The country through which they now wandered gradually began to change. The land which they had left and through which they had walked for weeks and months was a level land, now they had come into a country with mountains, rivers and lakes. The little sister asked, “Tell me brother how shall we get over the steep mountains?”

Her brother answered, “I shall carry you,” and he carried her.

Again the little girl asked, “How shall we cross the rapid rivers and the great lakes?”



… and he rowed across the rivers and lakes

The boy answered, “We shall row across,” and he rowed across the rivers and lakes; for wherever they came, they found boats, which seemed to be there just for their sakes.

Sometimes the brother swam with his little sister across the rivers and they floated easily on the waves. At their side flew the two little birds. One evening when they were very tired, the children came upon the ruins of burned down buildings. Close by stood a large new farm house. Outside the kitchen door stood a girl peeling vegetables. “Will you give us something to eat?” asked the boy.

“Yes, come,” answered the child, “mother is in the kitchen, she will give you supper, if you are hungry.”

Then the brother threw his arms about his sister’s neck. “Do you hear, sister? This girl speaks the language that our father and mother spoke. Now we may begin to look for the birch and the star.” The children then went into the kitchen where they were received with much friendliness, and were asked where they came from. They answered, “We come from a foreign land and are looking for our home. We have no other mark than this—a large birch tree grows in the yard in front of the house. In the morning birds sing in its branches, and in the evening a large star shines through its leaves.”

“Poor children,” said the people, full of pity, “thousands of birches grow in this country, thousands of birds sing in the tree tops, and thousands of stars shine in the sky. How will you find your birch and your star?”

The boy and girl answered, “God will help us. His angels have led us to our own country. Now we are almost at home.”

“Finland is great,” said the people, shaking their heads.

“But God is greater!” answered the boy. And they thanked the good people for their kindness and went on their way.

It was fortunate for the children that they did not need to sleep in the woods any longer, but could go from farm to farm. Though there were wide plains between the human dwellings and great poverty everywhere, the children were given food and shelter; all felt sorry for them.

But their birch and star they did not find. From farm to farm they looked; there were so many birches and so many stars, but not the right ones.

“Finland is so large, and we are so small,” sighed the little girl, “I don’t think we will ever find our home.”

The boy said, “Do you believe in God?”

“Yes, you know I do,” she answered.

“Remember then,” continued the brother, “that greater miracles have been performed. When the three wise men journeyed to Bethlehem, a star went before them to show them the way. God will show us the way too.”

“Yes, he will,” answered the little girl. She always agreed with her brother. And bravely they trudged on.

One evening at the end of the month of May, they came to a lonely farm. This was in the second year of their wanderings. As they approached the house, they saw a large birch tree which stood in front of it. The light green leaves looked lovely in the bright summer

evening and through the leaves shone the bright evening star. “That’s our birch!” cried the boy.

“That is our star,” whispered the little girl.

Each clasped the neck of the other and praised the good Lord with joyful hearts. “Here is the barn where father’s horses stood,” began the boy.

“I am sure this is the well where mother raised water for the cattle,” answered the girl.

“Here are two small crosses under the birch. I wonder what that means,” said the boy.

“I am afraid to go in,” said the girl. “What if Father and Mother are not living, or think if they don’t know us. You go in first, brother.”

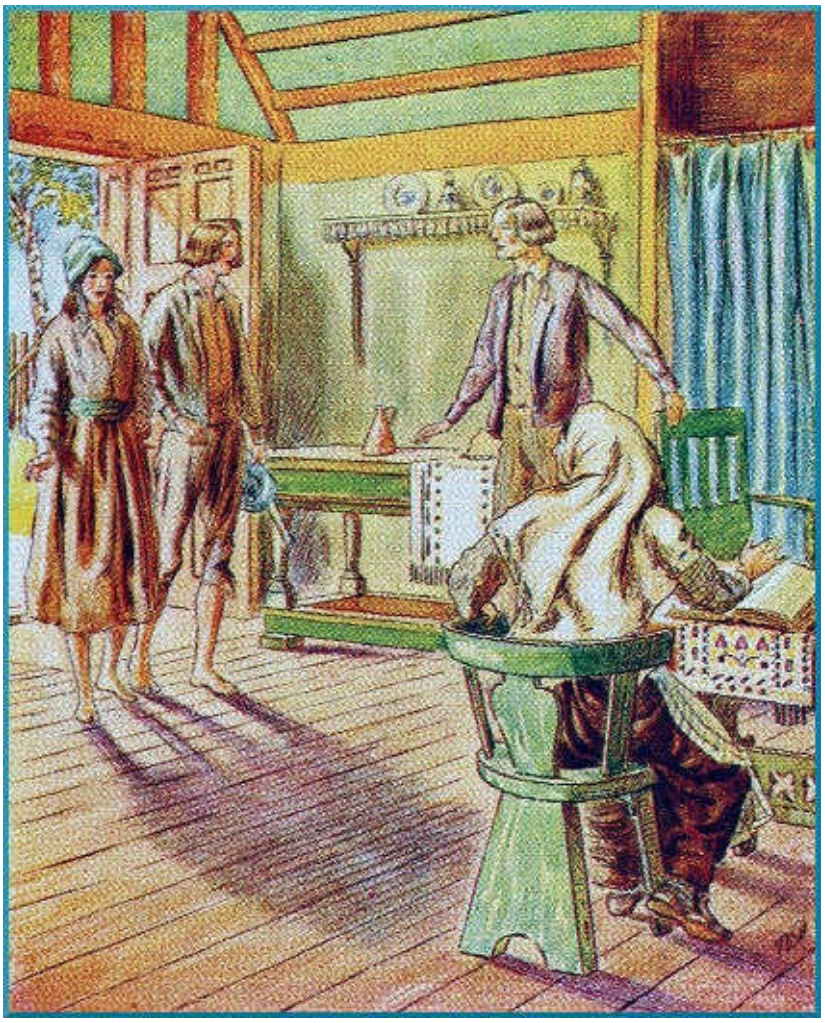
In the sitting-room sat an old man and his wife—well, they were really not old, but suffering and sorrow had aged them before their time. The man said to his wife, “Now spring has come again, birds are singing, flowers are peeping up everywhere, but there is no new hope of joy in our hearts. We have lost all our children, two are resting under the birch, and far sadder—two are in the land of the enemy, and we shall never see them on earth. It is hard to be alone when one grows old.”

The wife answered, “I have not given up hope. God is mighty, he led the people of Israel out of their imprisonment. If he so wills he has the power to give us back our children.”

“Oh, what a blessing that would be,” answered the man.

While he was still talking, the door opened. In stepped a boy and a girl who asked for something to eat. “Come nearer children,” said the man, “stay with us tonight.” And to each other the old people said, “Our children would have been just their ages if we had been allowed to keep them, and they would have been just as beautiful,” thought the parents, and they wept.

Then the children could keep still no longer, but embraced their father and mother, crying, “We are your children whom God in a wonderful way has led back from the foreign land.”



In stepped a boy and a girl

The parents pressed the children to their hearts and all praised God, who on this lovely spring evening had brought the warmth of joy to them.

And now the children had to tell everything that had happened to them, and though there was much sorrow and many dark days to tell of, now the sorrow was changed to joy. The father felt of the arms of his son and rejoiced to find him so manly and strong. The mother kissed the rosy cheeks of her daughter and said, “I knew something beautiful would happen to-day, because two little strange birds sang so sweetly in the top of the birch this morning.”

“We know those birds,” said the little girl. “They are angels disguised which have flown before us all the way to lead us home. They sang because they were glad that we had found our home.”

“Come, let us go and see the birch,” said the boy. “Look, sister, here lie our little brother and sister.”

“Yes,” said the mother, “but they are now angels with God.”

“I know, I know,” cried the little girl, “the angels in bird form who have flown before us all the way and who sang of our coming, are our brother and sister. It was they who

always seemed to say to us ‘Go home to Father and Mother.’ It was they who cared for us, so that we did not starve or freeze to death. It was they who sent us boats so that we were not drowned in the rapid rivers. It was also they who said to us, ‘That is the right birch, this is the right star.’ God sent them to keep us safe.”

“See,” said the boy, “the star is shining more brightly than ever through the leaves. It is bidding us welcome. Now we have found our home—now our wanderings are ended.”

—From the Swedish by Zacharias Topelius.

Viggo and Beate

Part One

The Doll under the Briar Rosebush

THERE was once a little girl, and her name was Beate. She was only five years old, but a bright and good little girl she was.

On her birthday her father had given her a beautiful straw hat. There were red ribbons around it, I can't tell you how pretty it was. Her mother had given her a pair of yellow shoes and the daintiest white dress. But her old aunt had given her the very best present of all; it was a doll, with a sweet pretty face and dark brown curls. She was a perfect beauty in every respect. There was nothing the matter with her except that the left eyebrow was painted a tiny bit too high up.

"It looks as if she were frowning a little. I wonder if she is not quite pleased?" asked Beate, when she held her in her arms.

"Oh, yes," answered her aunt, "but she doesn't know you yet. It is a habit she has of always lifting her eyebrow a little when she looks closely at anyone. She only wants to find out if you are a good little girl."

"Yes, yes, and now she knows, for now that eyebrow is just like the other one," said Beate.

Oh, how Beate grew to love that doll, almost more than she loved Marie and Louise, and they were her best friends.

One day Beate was walking in the yard with her doll in her arms. The doll had a name now, and they had become fast friends. She had called her Beate, her own name, and the name of her old aunt who had given her the doll.

It was in the early spring. There was a beautiful green spot, with fine, soft grass in one corner of the yard around the old well. There stood a big willow tree with a low trunk, and it was covered with the little yellow blossoms that children call goslings.

They look like goslings too, for each little tassel has soft, soft yellow down, and they can swim in the water, but walk?—no, that they cannot do.

Now Big Beate—she wasn't more than five years old, but she was ever so much bigger than the other one—and Little Beate, soon agreed that they would pick goslings from the tree and throw them into the well, so that they might have just as good a time as the big geese and goslings that were swimming about in the pond. It was really Big Beate who thought of this first, but Little Beate agreed immediately; you can't imagine how good she always was.

Now Big Beate climbed up into the willow and picked many pretty yellow goslings into her white apron, and when she counted them and had counted to twenty, twice, she said that now they had enough, and Little Beate thought so too.

So she began to climb down, but that was not easy for she had to hold her apron together with one hand and climb with the other. She thought Little Beate called up to her to throw the goslings down first, but she didn’t dare to do that; she was afraid they might fall and hurt themselves.

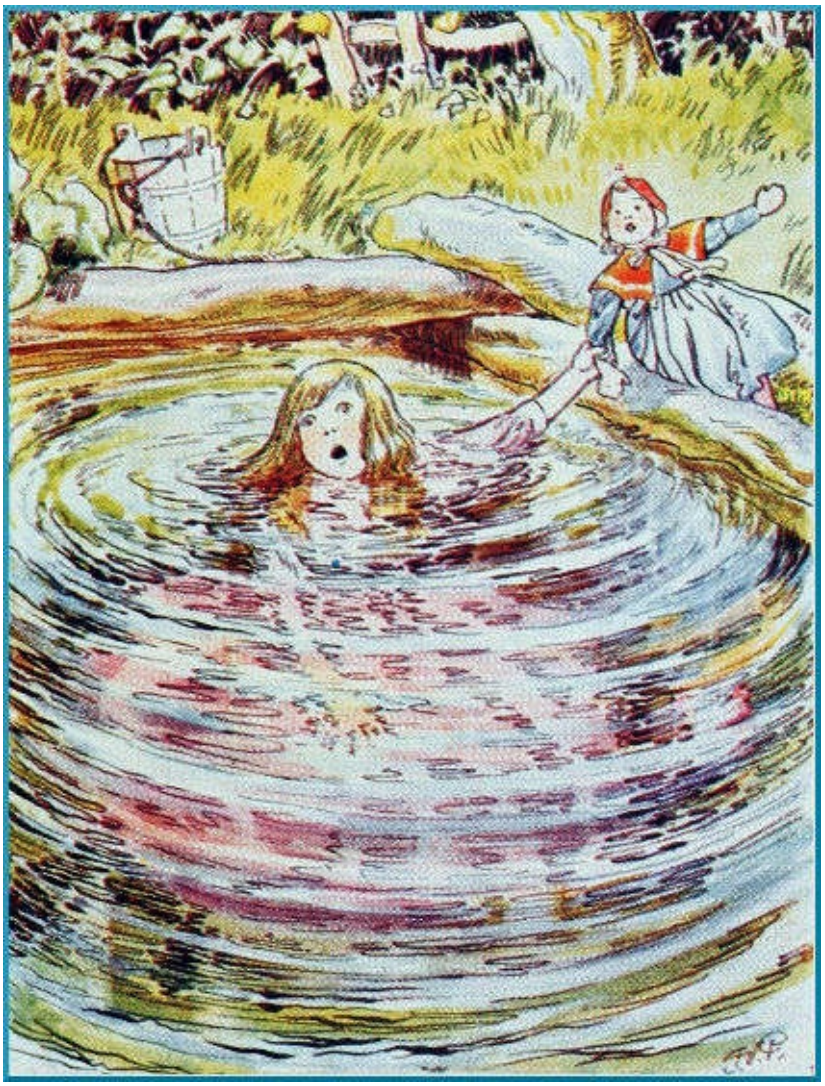
Now both of them ran over to the well, and Big Beate helped her little friend to get her legs firmly fixed between the logs that were around the well, so that she might sit in comfort and watch the little goslings swim about on the water. Then gosling after gosling was dropped down, and as soon as each one reached the water it seemed to become alive and it moved about. Oh, what fun! Big Beate clapped her hands to the pretty little downy birds, and when she helped Little Beate a bit, she too could clap her hands.

But after awhile the little goslings would not swim any longer but lay quite still. That was no fun at all, so Big Beate asked her namesake if she didn’t think she might lean a little over the edge of the well and blow on them, for then she thought they might come to life again. Little Beate didn’t answer, but she raised her left eyebrow a good deal and moved her right arm in the air as if she were saying, “Please don’t do that, dear Big Beate! Don’t you remember Mother has told us how dark it is down there in the well? Think, if you should fall in!”

“Oh, nonsense; just see how easy it is,” said Big Beate, for she thought the goslings were stupid when they didn’t want to swim about. She leaned out over the well and blew on the nearest ones—Yes, it helped—the goslings began to swim again. But those that were farthest away didn’t move at all.

“What stupid little things!” said Beate, and she leaned far, far out over the edge of the well. Then her little hands slipped on the smooth log and—splash! in she fell deep down into the water. It was so cold, so icy cold, and it closed over her head and took the straw hat, which she had got on her birthday, off her hair. She hadn’t time to hear if Little Beate screamed, but I’m sure she did.

When Beate’s head came over the water again she grasped the round log with both her hands but the hands were too small and the log too wide and slippery, she couldn’t hold on. Then she saw her dear friend, Little Beate, standing stiff and dumb with fright, staring at her and with her right arm stretched out to her. Big Beate hurriedly caught hold of her and Little Beate made herself as stiff as she could, and stiffer still, and stood there between the logs holding her dear friend out of the water.



… and stood there between the logs
holding her dear friend out of the water

Now Beate screamed so loudly that her father and mother heard her and came running as fast as they could, pale and frightened, and pulled her out. She was dripping wet and so scared and cold that her teeth chattered.

The father ran to the house with her, but she begged him for heaven’s sake not to leave Little Beate, for she might fall into the well, “And it’s she who has saved me.”

Now they put Beate to bed and Little Beate had to sleep with her. When she had said her prayers she hugged her little friend and said, “Never, never can I thank you enough, because you saved me from that horrible deep well, dear Little Beate. Of course, I know that our Lord helped you to stand firm between the logs, and to make yourself so strong and stiff, but it was you, and no one else who stretched your hand out to me, so that I was not drowned. And therefore you shall be my very best friend, always, and when I grow up you shall be the godmother to my first daughter, and I shall call her Little Beate for you.” Then she kissed the little one and slept.

Part Two

Viggo

Now Big Beate had a brother who was bigger still than she. He was eight years old, and he was a wild, mischievous boy. His name was really only Viggo, but he had read an old story about a terrible, bearded viking by the same name, who sailed from land to land killing and robbing and bringing with him on his ship all the gold and silver which he found and all the pretty girls. So Viggo got a hatchet, just such a one as he had read that the old Viking had, and he told his sister that after this she must call him Viggo the Viking, for a Viking he would be when he grew up. In the yard he ran after the chickens and the ducks; he wanted to try his strength and the ax on their heads. They cackled and screamed and flew away from him and this only made the little viking the braver. But when he came to the geese, with uplifted ax, shouting his wild war cry, the old gander got angry, bent his long neck and pinched Viggo the Viking's leg so that he threw his ax down and ran screaming and howling away. The old gander knew well enough the code of the vikings, that vikings are not allowed to rob and kill in their own country, no not even on the other side of the goose pond.

One day Viggo the Viking came up to his sister. He looked wild, wore a big paper helmet on his head and frowned angrily.

"Now I am going to carry away the pretty girls in this land, that is what I have come for," said he. "You are too big, but Little Beate is surely going to be mine. I'll carry her far, far away, at least to the pine woods and perhaps even to the pasture, and you shall never see her any more, in all your life."

"You are a naughty boy, and give us nothing but trouble, that is what Mother said too, the other day," said Beate. "Little Beate has done you no harm, she hasn't even said a word to you."

"Has not done anything to me?" said the viking. "Didn't she stand on the flower pot yesterday under the big geranium, when I came and put my horse there? Don't you think I saw that she pushed my horse so that he fell down and broke his left hind leg? If I did what she deserves, I should cut her head off," said the viking, and he tried the edge of his little ax with his fingers.

"Oh! you are a terrible boy," said Beate, "but I know well how to hide Little Beate, so that you shall never touch her."

Then she went straight to her little friend and told her sorrowfully what a naughty boy Viggo was, that he intended to kill her, and that she, Big Beate, didn't dare to have her inside the house. "But I know a place where I shall hide you well so that he shall never find you," said she.

Then she took her little friend and went with her behind the barn to a high stone fence. Close up against it stood a briar rose bush laden with blossoms, the pale pink roses hanging down on all sides. It made a little fragrant bower and there Little Beate should stay in its shade and shelter and sit on a grass bench. When night came, and it grew damp and cold, she should not be uncomfortable for she had her warm cape there, and raisin

cookies she had on a platter by her side, and all about her the roses bloomed so prettily.

Then Big Beate kissed her good-bye and good-night, and begged her to be patient, and by no means to go out so that Viggo the Viking should see her. Big Beate promised surely to see her the next morning and find out how she had slept, and then she went quietly away.

Beate had hardly time to wash her face the next morning before she ran to her little friend. She was afraid that Little Beate might have been scared in the dark, because she was all alone in the little bower during the night. Beate ran as fast as she could and came out of breath to the briar rose bush. But you can't imagine her sorrow. Little Beate was not there, her cape and hat lay on the ground, but her little friend was gone. Nowhere was she to be found. Beate searched and called her name, but no answer came. It was Viggo the Viking who had carried her away, she knew. As sorrowful as she now was, Big Beate had never been before in all her life. She burst into tears and turned home slowly with a broken heart.

Who should after this be her best friend, who always was willing to do what she wanted? And who should be godmother to her first daughter when she grew up?

Part Three

The Floating Island

Beate was now a year older. During that year she had never forgotten Little Beate. She had looked for her in the orchard and far away in the pasture.

When Mother had asked Viggo about Little Beate he answered that the country was full of vikings and wild beasts, and that he did not know anything about the doll.

Big Beate had many dolls given to her, but not one was like Little Beate. No one was so sweet and good natured, no one so pretty and graceful.

Either the dolls had cheeks that were too red or they could not be dressed right—stiff and clumsy they all were when they tried to move their arms and legs, and it was no use at all to talk to them.

Beate had a beautiful play house with a table and chairs and a bureau in one corner.

It was a Saturday, and the next day, Sunday, she expected her friends, Marie and Louise, on a visit, for it was her birthday; therefore she wanted to decorate her doll house as prettily as she could. All the furniture was placed just right, and she had strewn fresh leaves on the floor, but she needed some pretty little ornaments for her bureau.

Beate knew what to do. On the hillside by the Black Pond she remembered that she had seen the prettiest little snail shells anyone might wish for, round and fluted with yellow and brown markings. They would be just the thing for the bureau, if she could only find empty ones. She ran off to search for them, slipping in and out through the hazel bushes, and creeping in under the mountain ashes and junipers on the steep hillside, and picking

empty snail shells by the dozen.

But all of a sudden she heard a bird cry such a weird cry from the lake. She peeped out between the green branches and saw a big, big bird swimming about down there; it had a long blue neck and a white breast, but its back was shining black. It swam over the lake so fast that you could see a streak in the water behind it, and then suddenly it dived and was gone.

Beate stood there and stared at the water, waiting to see it come up again, but she waited and she waited and no bird came. She began to be frightened, thinking the poor bird was drowned, when she saw it shoot up again far away almost in the middle of the lake.

It flapped its wings, making round rings about itself, which spread farther and farther over the dark surface of the water. Then it began to swim again very slowly towards a tiny green island which lay there. When it came to the island it stretched its neck and looked carefully around to all sides. Then it crept up into the high weeds and grasses which hung out over the water.

Beate could not get tired of looking at the pretty little island. It was so pretty and so little, not bigger than one-quarter of the parlor floor, and oblong, with here and there tiny bays and points. Willow bushes grew out of the grass in some places and in one end grew a little white-barked birch tree. Beate thought she had never seen anything half so lovely as the little green island on the black water. It seemed just like a strange little land, all by itself. She kept watching it through the bushes hoping all the time the bird would come again, but it stayed on the island.

At last the evening breeze began to ruffle the surface of the water a little and Beate remembered that she must hurry home. She bent down to pick a few more snail shells which she might give to Marie and Louise. Again she looked up and peeped through the leaves and branches to say good-night to the island, when—think of it! The little green island was gone.

Beate wouldn’t believe her own eyes, she thought she must have moved without knowing it, so that the bushes hid the island from her, but no, she was sitting exactly in the same spot.

She thought of goblins and fairies and ran up the path to the top of the hill as fast as she could. But when she got there she had to look again. And she became more astonished than ever for now she saw the little green island again but far from the place where she first saw it. It was sailing slowly towards the southern end of the lake and the silver birch was its sail.

As soon as Beate reached home she found Anne, the nurse, and told her what she had seen.

Anne knew all about the floating island, it had been on the lake for many years, she said. But there were many strange things about it. Every time there was to be a fine year for the farmers the island was green all summer, but if there was to be a bad year the grass on it grew yellow and brown and there were but few leaves on the little birch. Yes, old Anne would not be surprised if there appeared blood red spots on the island in years of warfare and trouble.

Every year there was a loon's nest there, and Anne had her own opinions both of the loon and the island; but when Beate wanted to know more, old Anne only shook her head, for she was not the kind that told everything she knew.

But one thing she would tell and that was, that if anyone stood on the floating island and took a loon's egg out of the nest and wished for something, that wish would come true, if the egg was put safely back into the nest again. If you wished to become the Princess of England your wish would indeed be fulfilled, said old Anne. But there was one more thing to notice; you must not talk about it to a living soul.

"Not even to Father and Mother?" asked Beate.

"No," said Anne, "not to a living soul."

Beate could think of nothing but the island all that evening, and when she had closed her eyes she could dream of nothing else all night. Now it was covered with blood-red spots—now it was green; then she thought that the loon cried "I am the Princess of England, but I have been bewitched and must stay a loon."

Just as soon as Beate got up in the morning she begged her father to row her and Marie and Louise out to the floating island, when they came to visit her in the afternoon, and that he promised.

But he also asked how she had happened to think of that and what she wanted there. Beate thought first that she would tell him everything, but then she remembered Anne's words and only said that she wished to go out there because the little green island was so pretty, and she wished to look at it more closely.

"Yes, indeed, it is pretty and you shall see a loon's nest too," said the father stroking Beate's brown hair.

Then Beate's face grew red and the tears came to her eyes, for she knew well enough about the loon's nest and about the eggs.

In the afternoon the father took the three little girls down to the lake. Viggo was along too, but there was no boat, only a raft, not large enough to carry all of them, so he had to stay behind. And he was perfectly willing for he was now older and had grown more thoughtful than when we last heard of him. Now he helped the little girls on the raft.

The water was like a mirror, black and shining. The big pine forest on one shore and the green hillside on the other stood on their heads and looked at themselves in the smooth surface. Round about, close to the water's edge, stood the tall grasses high and straight, like regiments of soldiers guarding the quiet little lake. And here and there lay broad green leaves and large snowy water-lilies swimming on the dark water. Beate's friends thought this was the loveliest thing they had ever seen, and they begged the father to stop and get some of the pretty water-lilies for them. But Beate alone was longing for the floating island.

It lay in the middle of the lake, and when they drew near, it looked as if there were two little islands, one on top of the water and one below its surface, and the latter was almost prettier than the former. The father rowed close up to the island and around it, and when he came to the other side the loon plunged out of the reeds into the water and was gone.

“There is the loon’s nest,” said the father and landed the raft.

The little girls leaned over the edge while the father held them, first one, then the other. What joy! The loon’s nest lay on the very edge of the little tiny island hidden among the grasses, and in the nest lay two big grayish-brown eggs, with black spots, larger than any goose eggs.

Marie and Louise shouted and laughed, but Beate felt strangely frightened and was very quiet. She begged her father to let her stand on the island, only a minute, and would he let her take one of the eggs in her hand?

The father would not deny her that, but lifted her up onto the floating island. But he told her she must be very careful, just lift the egg gently between her two fingers for if the bird noticed that the egg had been touched she would not hatch it.

And now Beate stood on the green floating island. She grew quite pale, she was so excited when she bent down to pick up the grayish-brown egg. She lifted it carefully between her two fingers. Now she might wish for anything in the wide, wide world. And what do you think she wished for? To become the Princess of England? Oh, no, she knew something far better than that. Then her lips moved softly and she whispered to herself, “And now I wish that Little Beate was with me once more and would never, never leave me.”

Carefully and with trembling hand, she put the egg back into the nest. What was the pink something her eye caught sight of among the tall reeds close to the nest? It was her doll. Beate gave one shriek of joy—“Little Beate, my own Little Beate,” she sobbed when she had her own dearest friend in her arms again. She covered her with tears and kisses, she held her tight in her arms as if she would never in the world let her go.

Her father, Marie, and Louise stood by without saying a word. At last the father stroked Beate’s hair, kissed his little girl, and lifted her on to the raft again.

Such a birthday party as Beate had now she never had before nor since. What did it matter that a year’s rains and snows had faded the pink of Little Beate’s cheeks and bleached her brown curls? She was the guest of honor and sat on the prettiest chair. She had all the cookies and chocolate that she wanted. She was petted and loved, and at night, tired and happy Big Beate slept with her little friend in her arms.

“Little Beate, my own little Beate”

Part Four

Hans, the Old Soldier

Viggo was ten years old now. He no longer cared to become a viking when he grew up. To be an officer in the army was his one thought now; he would prefer to become a general of course, but if he couldn’t be that at once, he would be satisfied to be a captain; he might become a general later. From whom do you suppose he had learned such things? From Hans, the old Grenadier.

Hans was Viggo’s dearest friend, though he was cross and curt to other people. The servants on the farm often called the old Grenadier “Hans the Watchdog,” for they said when he talked to anyone it sounded like a dog barking, and he looked as though he were ready to bite. But Viggo had once said that the Grenadier’s voice sounded like the rattle of a drum, and the old soldier thought that was well said. It was really from that time on that Viggo and Hans were such good friends.

Hans the Grenadier was six feet-two, and a little more. He was broad shouldered and straight as a stick. His hair was long and snowy white, and it hung in a braid down his red soldier's coat.

When he came walking up to the farm from his little cottage he always carried the ax on the left shoulder, like a gun, and marched stiff and straight turning the toes well out, and kept step as if the sergeant was marching right at his heels, commanding "Left, right! Left, right!"

Hans wore yellow leather trousers, but suspenders he never used, so there was always a gap of three or four inches between the coat and the trousers where his shirt showed through, winter as well as summer. His hat was worn to a reddish-brown. It was wide at the crown and narrow at the brim, and there was a deep hollow in the top which filled with water when it rained. He always wore his hat a little on one ear. When Hans turned his toes out more than usual and put his hat too much on one side, the servants would say, "Both Hans the Watchdog and his goose pond are pretty well filled up to-day." And however much he disliked to, Viggo had to admit that this was a bad sign, for Hans had the sad fault of sometimes drinking a drop too much. But Viggo always knew that at such times Old Hans was most willing to tell about the time he served in the army, both in '88 and '89. Then he told of the battles at Kvistrum and at Lier, and first and last about the "Prince of Gustenberg"—it was Prince Christian of Augustenburg he meant.

"That was a man!" said Hans. "Such a face you never saw on any man. When he looked at you it was as if he would eat you in one bite. And such a nose between the eyes! You are looking at me, well, for a common soldier I have been specially well favored. But the Prince of Gustenberg he had a nose that shouted 'Get out of my way.' And therefore they did get out of his way too, wherever he showed himself. Such another man we've never had in Norway, neither before nor since his time. God bless him where he lies, and God punish those who laid him there!"

"Aren't you ashamed? The Prince of Augustenburg never swore, I'm sure," said Viggo.

"You think so, you little cub? But it is true, he never did," said Hans. "But that is because a general does not need to, it does not become him, but for the common man it is just as necessary as to drink whiskey."

This did not prove anything to Viggo, on the contrary he said it was a shame to do either.

"A shame?" said the Grenadier. "Do you know what the Prince of Gustenberg said when he spoke in front of the troops? 'One thing is a shame,' said he, 'and that is to turn your back before retreat is called.' And now you know what is a shame, my boy!"

Viggo understood well enough that it was no use to discuss such a matter with the old Grenadier, so he sat silent a little while.

"Have you never known a little boy to become a general?" he asked at last. "No, I haven't but I have known a drummer boy who became a sergeant. He was not much bigger than you; but that was a lively youngster! He could do everything you can think of. He could beat the drum equally well standing on his head or on his legs. There was one thing though that was very hard for him to do and that was to beat 'Retreat.' On the drill ground he knew it as well as his A-B-C's, but when he smelled the enemy's powder he seemed to

forget all about it. The captain had to give him a rap or two before he could remember it again. But ‘Forward March’ he knew how to drum, he never forgot that, and sometimes he beat that instead of ‘Retreat,’ and when the captain got angry he made the excuse that he did not hear, the guns made so much noise about him, he said. Usually he wasn’t punished either, because he had once saved the captain’s life with a snowball.”

“With a snowball?” said Viggo.

“Yes, I said snowball, you little cub, he did not use greater means. We were rushing up a hill with the enemy in front of us. It was in winter, with deep snow and thawing too. The captain and the drummer boy led the march, eight or ten steps in front of us. But as soon as they came to the top of the hill there stood the enemy in line. ‘Aim!’ commanded the enemy’s officer and all the guns pointed right at the captain. Quick as lightning the drummer boy grabbed a handful of snow and made a snowball and, just as the blue-jacketed donkey opened his mouth to say ‘Fire!’ the drummer boy threw the snowball straight into the open mouth. He was speechless for a moment and stood there mouth wide open. Well then the rest of us arrived and we had a hot fight.”

“Then was he made a sergeant?” asked Viggo.

“Yes, a while afterwards, when the Prince had heard of it. He was given the rank of a sergeant, and something better even than that. The Prince called him ‘my son.’ The Prince rode to the front. ‘My son,’ he said to the drummer boy, ‘I understand you know how to stop the mouth of the enemy when he is about to talk too loudly. We will try what more you can do,’ said he, and then the drummer became sergeant.”

“It was too bad that they didn’t make him a general,” said Viggo. He stood there polishing his coat button, then he added half aloud, “Do you think I might become a general, Hans?”

“Well, well, listen to the spring chicken!” said Hans. “So it is general you want to be, cub that you are? Never mind, don’t blush for that, it wasn’t a bad question. But it is very difficult, for then you must learn much, oh very much.”

“Mathematics, you mean?” said Viggo. “I have learned some of that already, and languages too.”

“Yes, that is well enough, but you must learn much more, you must learn the commands and what is more, boy! you must learn to drill so that you don’t make a mistake in a single movement; the gun must dance in your hands, and when you strike it it must sing like the dean in church when he sings ‘Amen.’ And you must march so stiff and straight that the balls fly past you, as soon as they see you.”

Viggo did not know when he should learn all this, but Old Hans said that those things one learned in war.

“But if only war broke out again,” said Viggo.

“Yes, you are right, my boy, if only war broke out! that was well said,” agreed the Grenadier.

“Then do you think I might become a general?” continued Viggo.

“Who knows? But it is difficult. The eyes are not bad, you have the right expression. But

the nose, no it has not the correct shape. But of course it may grow and curve in time," said Old Hans.

And that Viggo hoped too, and in that hope he learned to drill and march from his old friend, but he often looked in the mirror and wished with all his heart that the nose would curve a little more.

Part Five

Allarm

One afternoon Viggo was walking home from school with a bag of books on his back. He marched straight as a stick with a soldierly step, for he was thinking of the time when he should change this bag for one full of cartridges. Old Hans was standing outside the cottage waiting for him, and when Viggo halted and saluted, the old man asked if he could guess what present there was for him at the house.

"How does it look?" asked Viggo.

"It is brown," said Hans. "Now guess."

"Oh, I suppose it is nothing but a lump of brown sugar from Aunt Beate. She never remembers that I have outgrown such sweet stuff," said Viggo.

"Try again!" said Hans, and grinned. "It is dark brown, man, it walks on four feet and laps milk."

"Are you mad? Is it the puppy the Captain has promised me? Is it?" cried Viggo, and forgot all about standing straight and stiff before the Grenadier.

"Right about, you cheater! Of course that's what it is," said Hans the Grenadier.

But Viggo turned a somersault instead of "Right about" and ran to the house. On a piece of carpet close by the fireplace lay the little puppy, and he was beautiful. Viggo could not get tired of looking at him. The body was dark brown, but the nose and paws were light brown, and he had a light brown spot over each eye. He was almost as broad as he was long, and when Viggo sat down on the floor beside him and stroked and patted the soft fur he bent his short, stubby neck and smelled, and then licked Viggo's hand. Soon they had become acquainted and from that time on Viggo watched carefully to see if the puppy grew, almost as carefully as he watched his own nose, to see if it had the proper curve so that he might become a general.

But it went much faster with the puppy. And as he grew Viggo loved him more and more; they were inseparable. In the night Allarm lay by his bed, and in the daytime he sat beside Viggo when he was studying his lessons. The puppy looked at him with his big brown eyes, just as if he would help him when he came to difficult passages, and then he followed him wherever Viggo went or stood. He was not allowed to go along to school, but he met him every afternoon more than half way and barked with joy and wagged his

tail when he saw Viggo.

One winter morning Hans the Grenadier and some of the farm hands were going to the woods to haul lumber. Viggo had a holiday that day so he was allowed to go along. He put his rubber boots on and whistled for Allarm. The puppy jumped and barked when he noticed that they were off for the woods, for Allarm's father was a hound, so Allarm wanted to hunt too. But Viggo's father said it would be best to leave Allarm at home, for there were packs of wolves in the woods and their tracks had been seen even in the field close to the farm. Viggo did not like to leave Allarm behind, but when his father said so of course he must do it. He took the strap and tied Allarm to the leg of the sofa. Then he put his old coat on the floor beside the dog, so that he might rest more softly and be comfortable. But you can't imagine how Allarm whined and howled when he understood that he was to be left tied up instead of being allowed to go along to the woods.

He lay flat on the floor and dragged his body to Viggo's feet as far as the strap reached—just as if he begged for freedom and permission to go with him, and he looked at Viggo with sad eyes which seemed to say, "Have you really the heart to go to the woods to have a good time, and to leave me behind, tied up and alone?" No, Viggo had not the heart to do that. He told his father that he could not stand to have Allarm so sad, happen what would, and he begged that he might take him along.

The father smiled and said he was afraid it might be the death of his dog, but if Viggo wanted to risk it and take him along he must take good care of him and not let him out of his sight. Then they untied him, and you may imagine Allarm's joy; he jumped and barked so that the mother had to put her fingers in her ears.

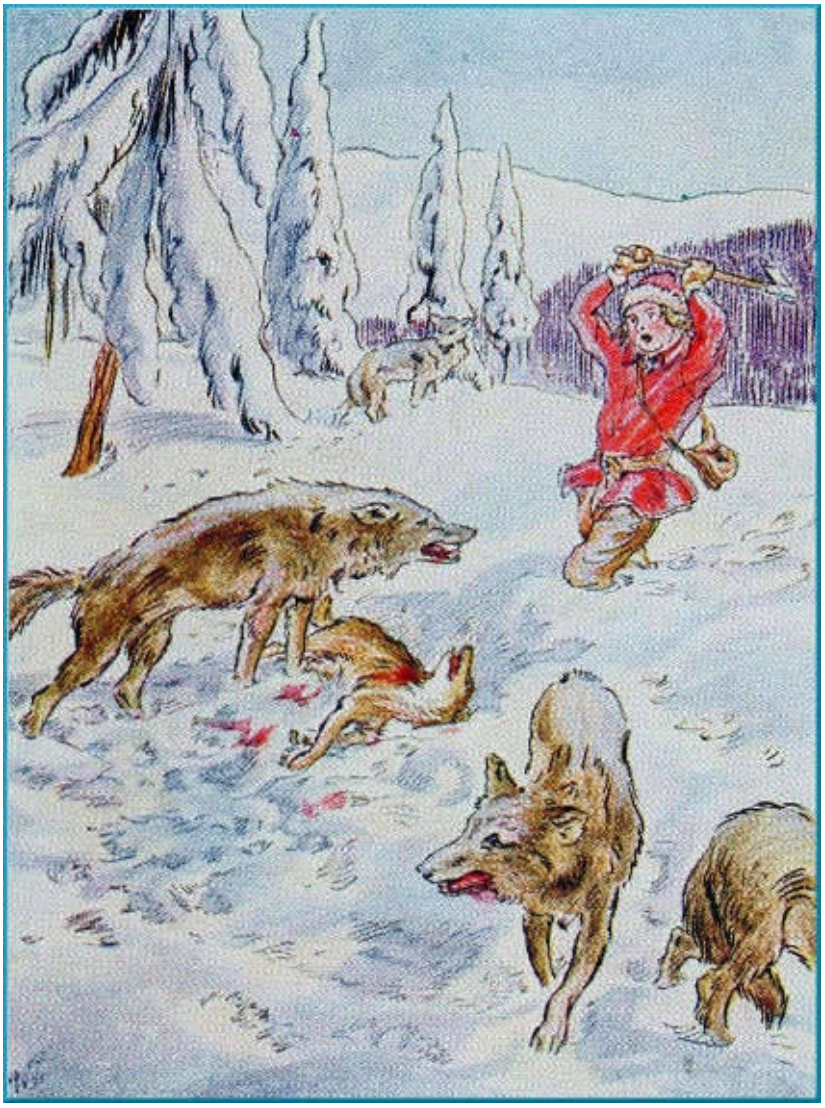
How beautiful the forest was! First they drove for awhile along the main road where there was good driving. The seven horses went in a line, one after the other and Hans the Grenadier and Viggo and Allarm walked behind the first one. On both sides of the road stood tall pines with their yellow trunks reaching out of the snow. Here and there between them stood an old fir with its branches hanging down to the ground. The needles couldn't be seen at all as it was white with snow from top to bottom—there you could see its dark brown leg. And all the young trees on both sides stood bent to the ground under the weight of the snow. It looked as if they had dressed in heavy white robes against the cold and stood there bowing to all who went past. But they made no loud greetings. No, the forest was so still, so still you could not hear the least sound except the horses' hoofs crunching in the snow. Here and there Viggo saw the foot-prints of a wolf beside the road. Then he always told Allarm to keep close by him, and that he did.

But after awhile they left the road and turned into the thick forest. Hans the Grenadier waded in front and the snow came to his knees, then came the horses and the boys, one after the other, and at last Viggo. It was a fine tramp. The snow came sifting down from twigs and boughs, so the men were white like snowmen, and the steam rose in clouds from the horses because the snow melted on them.

After a while they came to the logs and began to hitch them to the horses. Then suddenly Viggo remembered Allarm; he had forgotten all about the dog since they turned away from the road. He looked around him, and just then he heard Allarm whine and howl somewhere in the depths of the forest.

As quick as lightning he grabbed an ax which Old Hans had hewed into the stump of a tree and rushed in through the trees in the direction from which the howling came. It was not easy, he ran over the wild fields, and the snow reached far above his knees, but he noticed nothing, he only feared he would be too late. Once he had to stop a little to draw breath, then again he heard the pitiful wail of the dog, but now it sounded fainter. Off Viggo rushed again, and at last he spied something between the trees. He did not see his dog, but three wolves stood in a circle, heads turned toward the center, the fourth one lay inside the ring and bit something in the snow.

Viggo shouted so that it thundered in the forest, and rushed against the wolves with lifted ax. When he came within seven or eight feet distance from them, the greylegs got frightened and sneaked, tail between the legs, far into the dark forest, but the fourth one, who lay on top of Allarm, hated to give up his prey. It was a large yellow wolf. He looked up at Viggo and showed his bloody teeth. But Viggo only thought of the dog’s danger. “Let go of Allarm. Let go of my dog or I’ll teach you!” he cried and swung the axe high above his head. Then greylegs thought he had better not try the game and sneaked slowly away after the others. He turned once and howled and showed his teeth, and then he disappeared between the white bushes.



“Let go of my dog or I’ll teach you!”

Far down in a hole in the snow lay Allarm. He was so bitten that he could not jump to his feet and, when Viggo lifted him, the blood dripped down on the white snow. His whole body shivered and shook like an aspen leaf, but he licked Viggo’s hand.

Just then Old Hans the Grenadier stood by Viggo’s side. When he had gained his breath after his hurried run, the old man cried very angrily, “If I did what you deserve I should have to whip you, you little cub. Shame on you! Do you think it fit for a youngster like you to rush against a pack of wolves? If they had eaten you up alive before you had a chance to make a sound, what would you have said then?”

“Then I would have said, ‘One thing is a shame, and that is to turn your back before “retreat” is called,’” said Viggo, and looked sharply at the Grenadier.

“Well said, my boy! The nose has not quite the right curve yet, but the eyes are there, and I do believe the heart too,” said Old Hans. He took the dog from Viggo and went home with both of them.

Part Six

The Black Pond

“Hurrah, the Black Pond is frozen. The ice is more than an inch thick, and there’s a crowd of boys down there!” shouted one of Viggo’s classmates one Sunday morning, as he thrust his frost covered head through the door and swung his skates. I dare say it didn’t take Viggo long before he got his skates down from the nail, and as soon as he had got permission from his father, he ran off with his friend. And what do you think, he was so anxious to get down to the lake, that he forgot to whistle for Allarm.

But Allarm had a fine nose. Just as soon as he had swallowed his breakfast he understood that Viggo was gone. Then he ran out switching his tail and hunting through the yard for Viggo’s trail, and when he noticed that it didn’t lead to the school he knew he might follow. Then he rushed madly after him over the fields, and had caught up with him long before Viggo had reached the cottage of Hans the Grenadier, which lay close by the lake.

One thing Viggo had promised his father before he got permission to go, and that was that he should be very careful and not skate far out from the shore. His father knew that the ice was safe along the shore, but that near the middle of the lake there was an air hole through which warm air rose to the surface, and there the ice was never thick.

And Viggo meant honestly to do what his father had told him, but now you shall hear what happened.

When he came to the lake there was a crowd of boys there, big ones and little ones, from all the farms and cottages round about. There must have been twenty or more. Most of them had skates on but some only slid on the ice. And Viggo could see that they had been in just as great hurry as he to get down on the ice, for some had run off without caps and some without mittens, but they did not notice the cold. They shouted and laughed so that you could not hear yourself think.

As soon as Viggo had put on his skates he began to look around in the crowd. Most of the boys he knew, for he had raced with them before and knew he could beat every one of them. But there was one boy who skated about by himself and seemed not to care about the others. He was much bigger than Viggo, almost half grown, and Viggo saw immediately that it would not be easy to beat him in a race. The boys called him Peter Lightfoot and the name fitted him. Peter crossed his arms and swung around on one leg. He could do the corkscrew, skate backwards as easily as forwards, and lie so low and near the ice that he might have kissed it. And this he did as easily and neatly as one turns around on the parlor floor. But all this Viggo could do too.

“Can you write your initials?” asked Viggo. Yes, Peter Lightfoot stood on one leg and wrote ***PL*** in the ice, but the letters hung together. Then Viggo started. He ran, turned himself around backwards and wrote ***P L*** and between the P and the L he made a short jump so that the letters stood apart.

“Hurrah for Viggo! He wrote Peter Lightfoot backwards,” shouted the boys and threw up their caps. Then the big boy blushed crimson, but he said nothing and tried to laugh.

Now they began to play “Fox and Geese,” and everybody wanted Viggo to be the fox. Peter wanted to play too, for he was sure that Viggo could not catch him; he was indeed much bigger and stronger. The race course was scratched in the ice and Viggo called, “Out, out, my geese,” and off they ran. But Viggo didn’t care to run after the little goslings, it was the big gander, Peter Lightfoot, he wished to catch. And that was a game! Off they went, Peter in front and Viggo after him, so that the wind whistled around them, back and forth in corners and circles, and all the other boys stopped and looked on. Every time Viggo was right at his heels, Peter jumped and was far ahead of the fox again. But at last Viggo had him cornered, but just as he would have caught the goose, Peter stretched out his left leg and meant to trip Viggo, but his skate caught in a frozen twig and—thump! there lay Peter Lightfoot, the ice cracking all around him.

“A good thing he wasn’t made of glass,” laughed the boys and crowded around Peter. He got up and looked angrily around the circle of boys.

“Now stand in a row, we’ll jump,” said he, and the boys did. They piled hats and caps on top of each other, first only three high. The whole row jumped that, then four, then five, then six, but each time fewer got over and those who pushed the top cap off with their skates had to stop playing and must stand aside and look on. At last there were eight hats and caps on top of each other, and now only Peter and Viggo were left to jump.

“Put your cap on top!” said Peter, and Viggo did. But all the boys called and shouted, one louder than the other, that no one could ever make that jump.

Now Peter came so fast that the air whistled about him, jumped—and whiff! he was over! He touched Viggo’s cap the least little bit, but it did not fall off the pile.

“Hurrah for Peter! That was a masterly jump!” shouted the boys. “Viggo can never do that, he is too small,” said one. Allarm seemed to be of the same opinion; he whined and cried and ran in front of Viggo’s legs as if he wanted to hinder him. Viggo knew this was the test, and his heart beat fast. He chased the dog away roughly and ran with all his might. Just as he came running fast as the wind ready for the jump Peter called suddenly “Stop, Stop,” but Viggo was not the one to be confused at that; he flew over like a bird and there was at least four inches between his skates and the topmost cap. Then the boys crowded around him and shouted that Viggo was the champion; there wasn’t a boy who could come up to him. But Peter Lightfoot looked at him with a sly and evil eye, and you could see he was planning to play a trick on him. And indeed, that’s what he did.

After a little while Peter took an apple out of his pocket and rolled it over the ice toward the airhole. “The one who dares go for the apple may keep it!” he called. And many dared to try that, for the apple had not rolled far and the ice was strong enough. Now Peter threw an apple farther out, someone got that too. But at last he rolled one that stopped right on the edge of the open water. One boy after the other ran out toward it, but when the ice began to crack they slowly turned around again.

“Don’t do it, it is dangerous!” shouted Viggo.

“Oh, yes, Viggo is great when things are easy, but if there is danger he turns pale as a ghost,” said Peter and laughed aloud.

This was more than Viggo could bear. He thought of what the Prince of Augustenburg had said before the front, and he thought he must fetch the apple, come what might. But he forgot that “retreat” had been called, for his father had forbidden him to go near the hole. Allarm looked at him with grave eyes and wagged his tail slowly, he did not dare to whine, for he had just been scolded. But that did not help. Viggo ran so that the wind whistled about his ears, and when he had gotten out over the ice some distance he made himself light and let the skates glide of themselves so that he should not fall through. The ice bent under his feet and cracked, but he glided on and on, and the ice did not break. Now he was close by the apple, he bent down to pick it up—crash! the ice broke, and Viggo, head first, fell in.

In a minute Viggo’s cap floated up by the edge of the ice. Viggo seemed to have lost consciousness in the icy water, but it was not long before his head appeared above the hole. He swam for the ice and seized the edge, but a piece broke off every time he tried to climb up.

At first the boys stood there dumb with fright. Then they all called to him that he must try to hold on, but no one dared to help him and no one thought of running for help. Peter Lightfoot had sneaked away when Viggo fell in.

The best one of them all was Allarm. First he ran yelping around the hole, but when he saw Viggo appear again he snatched his wet cap between his teeth and as fast as an arrow he ran towards home. When he reached the cottage of Hans the Grenadier the old soldier was just standing in the open doorway. The dog put Viggo’s stiff frozen cap at his feet, whined and cried, jumped up on the old man, held on to his coat and dragged him towards the ice. Hans understood right away what was the matter, snatched a rope and ran towards the lake, and in no time he stood by the hole. He threw the rope to Viggo, who had begun

to grow stiff from the icy bath, and pulled him out.

Viggo ran as fast as he could to the cottage of Hans, and when he reached the door he had an armor of shining ice over his whole body. When the Grenadier pulled off his trousers they could stand by themselves on the floor; they were frozen stiff.

Viggo, of course, had to change from top to toe, and what should he put on? Hans went to his old chest and came back with his uniform. Viggo looked rather queer, the yellow knee trousers reached to his ankles, and the red coat with yellow cuffs and lapels hung on him like a bag. But he was wearing a real uniform! Hans looked at him. “Well,” he said, “I won’t say much about the fit of the clothes, but who knows you may wear a better looking uniform some day. The heart is of the right kind, and the nose—well it is doing better.”

—From the Norwegian by Jörgen Moe.

Bikku Matti

On a wooded hillside stood a little cabin. It had but one window and this was so small that, when the round, fair, curly head of a little boy appeared in it, the whole window was filled. Some years ago there had been a brick chimney and the walls had been painted red. At that time the cabin and a little potato field were fenced in neatly. But now it all looked poor, very poor. The smoke escaped through a hole in the turf roof and the fence had fallen to pieces long ago. In this place lived an old blind soldier and his wife. They could not work in the field to make their living; but the old man earned a little money by tying nets; the old woman made a few brooms; the church gave them each year three barrels of rye for bread, and thus they managed to live.

Four or five years ago a young and hard-working couple lived with the old people. Then they all had enough and to spare. But one Sunday morning, the large church boat that carried the people of the parish to church was overturned by a sudden squall, and both the young man and his wife, with many others, were lost in the waves. The old people had stayed at home that day, the old man because he was blind and his wife in order to take care of a little baby.

So the old couple remained there with their sorrow, their poverty and a little grandchild. For the young couple had left a little boy whose name was Matti; because he was so little they called him Bikku Matti. Those who don’t understand Finnish will have to guess what the name means.

Bikku had cheeks as red and round as an apple, clear, blue eyes and hair as yellow as gold, the only gold to be found in the cabin. It was Bikku’s round face which often filled the cottage window when anything passed on the road.

If you happen to come that way in Summer, you will see a gate across the road close to the cottage. You will have to stop your carriage, unless some one comes to open the gate.

But just wait a little, Bikku Matti will soon be there. There he is in the cabin door. How he runs to reach the gate in time, with his golden hair streaming in the wind. Now he is at the

gate. If you have a penny, throw it to him, he rather expects it; but let it be a shiny one—he does not know the value of money and a penny, if bright and new, gives him as much pleasure as a silver coin. But take care not to throw your coin on the road before the horse and carriage have passed the gate; Bikku Matti has but little sense yet, and if he sees the bright penny in the road, he is likely to throw himself over it, allowing the gate to shut right in front of your horse.

On week-days Bikku Matti had only coarse bread and herring to eat, but on Sundays he had potatoes and sour milk. Still, on such food he throve and grew rounder and rounder as the years went by. He could not read much—some prayers and the ten commandments was about all.

But then Matti could do other things. He could stand on his head and turn somersaults where the grass was soft. He could skip stones over the smooth lake, while the grandmother was washing his shirt. He could drive a horse on the main road and ride the neighbor's horse to the watering trough, if someone walked beside him. He could tell the tracks of the blue-jay from those of the crow on the new-fallen snow, and wolf tracks he knew well. He could carve a boat or a sled out of chips of wood and could make horses and cows of pine cones with small twigs for legs. But, although Bikku possessed all these powers (and they were many for a small boy like Bikku), there were some necessary things he did not possess—he had no trousers. This may seem very strange to you, but it was after all not so strange. His grandparents were very poor, and then it was customary in that neighborhood for little boys to go about in plain cotton slips as Bikku did. But this was only on week-days; on Sundays the other boys were dressed in blouses and trousers. It was only Bikku who neither Sunday nor Monday wore anything but the little slip. But for a long time he did not know that trousers were a necessary piece of garment for a little boy. But see what happened.

One Sunday morning when the whole parish were to meet at the beach to go to church, Bikku declared that he was going too. "That will never do, dear child," said Grandmother.

"Why not?" asked Bikku Matti.

"You have no trousers." Bikku became very serious.

"I might have an old skirt to lend you," said Grandmother, "but then everybody would take you for a girl."

"But I am not a girl, I am a man," said Bikku Matti.

"Of course you are," said Grandmother. "A man is a man, be he no larger than a thumb. Stay nicely at home, Bikku dear." And Bikku remained at home that time.

But soon after that there was to be a Fair in the valley, a Horse Fair, and Bikku loved horses better than anything else in the world. He knew they would be there—black, white and brown ones. And there would be a Punch and Judy show, a merry-go-round, and many more wonderful things. Bikku Matti had heard the boys tell great tales about all these things, and now Bikku said that he must go to the Fair.

"It won't do, dear child," said Grandmother again.

"Why not?" asked Bikku Matti.

“There will be many people there, my dear, and you cannot go without trousers.”

Bikku Matti struggled with himself a while, and Punch and Judy danced before his eyes. At last he said, “If Grandmother would lend me her skirt?”

“Here it is,” said Grandmother, and laughed to herself when the little boy stumbled on the kitchen floor in the skirt. “But you look like a girl,” she said.

“If I look like a girl, I won’t go,” said Bikku Matti. “I am no girl, I am a man.”

“Well, you do look like a girl,” said Grandmother, “but you might tell everybody whom you meet that you are a man.”

“That’s what I will do,” thought Bikku Matti, and so he started off.

On the road he met a strange gentleman who stopped and said, “Little girl, can you tell me the way to the Fair?”

“I am no girl, I am a man,” said Bikku Matti.

“You don’t look like a man,” said the stranger.

Bikku Matti made no answer, but when he reached the Fair he called out so that all could hear him, “I only look like a girl, but I am a man.”

Men and women laughed out loud. Boys and girls gathered about Bikku Matti, clapped their hands and cried, “Oh, look at little Mary, where did you get your pretty clothes?”

“It’s Grandmother’s skirt, and not mine,” said Bikku Matti. “I am no Mary, I am Matti, don’t you see?”

Then the largest and naughtiest of the boys took Bikku Matti on his back, carried him to the Punch and Judy show and cried out, “Come and see a penny-lad! Come and see my man in a petticoat!”

Bikku Matti grew angry and pulled the boy’s hair with all his might. “It is not my skirt, it is Grandmother’s skirt!” he cried and he began to weep.

But the naughty boy kept on. “Come and see this man in a skirt.”

And in this way he ran around the whole Fair grounds, the boy calling, Bikku pulling his hair and crying. Never had Bikku had such a ride. He cried, he screamed, he scratched, he bit, and when at last he got loose, he ran as fast as he could, but he stumbled in the skirt, crawled up again, stumbled, got up again and ran on until he reached Grandfather’s cabin all out of breath and sobbing.

“Take off the skirt!” he cried. “I won’t have any skirt, I am a man!”

“Don’t cry, Bikku dear,” said his grandmother, trying to comfort him. “When you grow old, you will show them that you are a man as good as any.”

“Yes,” said Grandfather, “and next time I will lend you my trousers.”

They loved Bikku more than anything else in the world, these old grandparents, they would have given him gold embroidered velvet trousers, if it had been in their power. Now Grandmother gave him a large piece of bread and butter, and Bikku Matti sat in the corner eating it while the tears dried on his cheek.

Some time after this there was great excitement in the valley. The road was one cloud of dust, from all the driving and running. A gentleman of much importance was expected to come through the valley. It was even said that the gentleman was next to the King himself. All the people came to see him and strange things were told about him. “He drives in a golden carriage,” said some. “With twelve horses before it. He is dressed from top to toe in silver and velvet,” said others. But the children had their own thoughts about him. They imagined that the high gentleman carried a big sack on his back filled with silver coins and candy sticks, which he threw out among them.

Bikku Matti also heard about it and this time he had to be by the roadside with the other children, there was no help for that.

“But what about your clothes?” said Grandfather, smiling. “Perhaps you are to borrow Grandmother’s skirt?”

“I won’t have any skirt!” cried Bikku Matti, and turned red to the roots of his hair when he remembered all that he had suffered because of that skirt. “No, never in the world will I wear a skirt again. I want Grandfather’s trousers.”

“Well, little one, come with me to the garret and we will see how well the trousers fit you,” said Grandfather. And now Bikku Matti was happy. He climbed up the garret ladder like a cat, so fast that Grandfather could not keep up with him. Then they came to the big painted chest farthest off in the corner.

Of this chest Bikku stood in great awe, but he had only had glimpses into it once or twice. Now it was opened, and the first thing that lay there glittering before him was a large sword in its gleaming sheath. “O, Grandfather, I want that,” he cried.

“Oh you do?” said Grandfather. “Hold the sword till I get the uniform out of the chest.”

Bikku Matti took the sword; it was so heavy that he could hardly lift it. Old Grandfather stroked his cheek. “When you become a man,” he said, “perhaps you may carry a sword too, and be allowed to fight for your country. Do you want to do that Bikku?”

“Yes,” answered Bikku, straightening himself. “I shall cut the heads off all of them!”

“Oh now, that depends upon whom it is you will fight.”

“Yes,” thought Bikku, “I shall cut the heads off all the wolves and hawks, and thistles and of all those who will harm Grandfather and Grandmother, and of all those who call me a girl.”

“Well, well Bikku, take care, don’t be too cruel. Here are the trousers. You need the coat too, I suppose.”

“Yes, Grandfather, and the sword, and the cap too.”

“Here you have it all, Bikku, but you must promise not to go farther than the gate.” And Bikku promised.

Just as they came down from the garret they heard the sheriff driving on the road calling and shouting to the people to get out of the road, that the high gentleman was coming soon. There was a great deal of hurry and flurry on the road as well as in the little kitchen.

Grandfather’s trousers were put on Bikku Matti. They were gray with light blue stripes

along the sides and so wide and long that Bikku could easily have hidden himself in one of the trouser legs. It looked very discouraging, but on they must go. From below about half the length of the trousers was rolled up and fastened with pins, and from above they were hitched up and tied with a kerchief under Bikku's arms.

There was just as much difficulty with the coat. When it was on the little fellow, the sleeves and coat tails swept the floor.

"No, this will not do," said Grandmother, and she rolled up the sleeves and coat tails and fastened them with pins. Bikku was waiting impatiently.

The tall soldier cap was then placed on his head, but it would have fallen down over his little head and neck clear to the shoulders, if it had not been filled with hay. At last they tied the heavy sword on Bikku's back and the little knight was ready.

There never was a hero returning from a victory half so proud as was Bikku in his first pair of trousers. The little body was lost in the big uniform, only the blue, honest eyes, the red cheeks and the important little pug-nose could be seen between the collar and the cap. The brave knight started off with the sword scraping the ground. But soon the pins began to fall out, the cap nearly upset, and it looked as if our soldier would surely fall at each step he took. The old people had not laughed so heartily for a long time.

Grandfather, who could hear but not see the outfit, swung the little boy about, kissed the little nose that stuck out and said, "God bless you little Bikku, may no lad worse than you wear our country's uniform. Now take care to salute when the great gentleman comes—so." And then he taught Bikku to stand straight as a stick with serious face, left arm stretched straight down, right hand at the forehead.

"Yes, Grandfather," said Bikku, who was always willing to learn. Bikku had just arrived at the gate when a dust cloud was seen on the road and the great gentleman came driving. Now he was quite near, oh, how fast he came! Suddenly the driver called, "Whoa!" and again, "Open that gate."

Now this is what happened. The sheriff himself was standing at the gate to see that everything should go off right. He was to give the command and his assistant was to open it. But when the carriage approached with lightning speed, the sheriff wanted to make a deep bow. In doing so he fell, and there he lay sprawling in the ditch by the road. His assistant waited for the word of command, and when he saw his superior officer fall, he became so confused that he could not think of opening the gate. Therefore the gate remained shut right before the nose of the high gentleman. The carriage had stopped and now the gentleman looked out surprised to see what was the matter, while the driver kept on calling, "Open the gate!"

Then Bikku Matti stepped up, though with much difficulty, opened the gate and saluted exactly as Grandfather had taught him. The driver whipped up the horses, the carriage started, but the gentleman called, "Stop!" and the carriage stopped a second time.

"Who are you, little one in my regiment's uniform?" called out the high gentleman, and laughed so heartily that the carriage shook.

Bikku Matti did not understand anything of this and did only what Grandfather had told him to, saluted again as straight and serious as could be. This amused the high gentleman

still more, and he asked the people who stood near about the parents of the little boy.

The sheriff, who by this time had crept out of the ditch, came hurriedly forward to tell that the little boy was an orphan and lived with his grandfather, an old blind soldier named Hugh.

What was the surprise of all, when the gentleman stepped out of his carriage, took Bikku by the hand and walked with him straight to the little cabin. And what excitement in the little hut! Grandmother could say nothing when the stranger entered, but stood there open-mouthed. Grandfather, because he saw nothing, had more courage and pointed politely in the direction where he knew the bench was.

“God’s blessings on you my friends,” said the stranger and shook hands with the old people. “It seems to me I recognize you, old comrade,” he continued, while he looked searchingly at Grandfather. “Are you not Hugh No. 39 of my old regiment?”

“Yes, Captain,” answered Grandfather in great surprise, for he recognized the voice.

“God be praised, that at last I have found you. Do you think I could forget you, who saved my life? You, who carried me on your back across the stream while the bullets sang about your ears, and the enemies were all about? If you have forgotten it, do you think I ever should forget it? After the war was over, I looked for you and inquired for you everywhere, but without success, and at last I thought you were dead. But now I have found you, and now I may repay you a little by looking after you and yours in your old age. And what a fine boy you have!”

The gentleman caught Bikku Matti in his arms, lifted him high up and kissed him so heartily that the hat fell off, the sword rattled and the rest of Grandmother’s pins fell out of the coat and the trousers.

“No, no, let me alone,” said Bikku. “Now you have made me drop the cap, and Grandfather will be angry.”

“Dear sir,” said Grandmother, quite ashamed of Bikku, “be so kind as not to mind how the boy talks; he is not used to being with people.”

“Don’t worry about the boy’s talk, he is right in guarding the soldier’s cap. Listen, Bikku, do you want to become a soldier like your Grandfather?” said the gentleman.

“Grandfather says it depends upon whom I am to fight,” said Bikku.

“That is right,” said the gentleman, “and you certainly are not lacking in courage.”

“That, Captain, is because he wears trousers for the first time to-day, and that gives courage.”

“Rather say it is the old uniform which gives courage,” said the General (for now he was a general). “Much gunpowder and much honor are hidden in that old uniform and the memories of it pass from generation to generation. But this is a new age and the boy may live to serve his country in many ways. Are you strong little man?”

Bikku did not answer but held out his arm and showed his muscles.

“Yes,” said the General, “I see you will be as strong as a bear when you are a little older. Will you go with me and eat soft bread and drink milk every day, and cakes and candy you

may have too, if you are good?”

“And shall I have a horse to ride on?” asked Bikku.

“Yes, of course,” said the General.

Bikku thought it over a while, his little blue eyes flew from the stranger to Grandfather, from Grandfather to Grandmother, and back to the stranger again. At last he crept upon the old woman’s knee and said, “I will stay with Grandfather and Grandmother.”

“But dear Bikku,” said the old soldier, with tears in his eyes, “Grandfather gives you only hard bread, water and herring. Don’t you hear that gentleman offers you soft bread, milk and other good things, and a horse to ride?”

“I want to stay with Grandfather, I won’t leave Grandfather,” cried Bikku, hardly able to keep the tears away.

“You are right,” said the General and stroked Bikku’s round cheek, “stay with your Grandfather, and none of you shall suffer want, and when you grow to be a man, come to me, if I am still living. You shall have fields to plow and forests to hew. But whatever work you do, it is all the same, you will be an honest and loyal son of your country. Will you not, Bikku?”

“Yes,” said the boy standing straight and tall.

“God bless you child,” said Grandfather and Grandmother, moved to tears. “And God bless our beloved country, and may he give it many loyal sons like you, little Bikku. Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

“That’s written in my primer,” said Bikku Matti softly.

“Yes, but it must be written in our hearts also,” said the general, and once more he kissed the boy.

—From the Swedish by Zacharias Topelius.

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