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LITTLE SWEDISH COUSIN



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CLAIRE M. COBURN



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Our Little Swedish Cousin

The Little Cousin Series



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LIST OF TITLES

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- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Our Little African Cousin | Our Little Japanese Cousin |
| Our Little Armenian Cousin | Our Little Jewish Cousin |
| Our Little Brown Cousin | Our Little Korean Cousin |
| Our Little Canadian Cousin | By H. Lee M. Pike |
| By Elizabeth R. Macdonald | Our Little Mexican Cousin |
| Our Little Chinese Cousin | By Edward C. Butler |
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| Our Little Cuban Cousin | Our Little Panama Cousin |
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| Our Little Eskimo Cousin | Our Little Scotch Cousin |
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New England Building,

Boston, Mass.



SIGRID

Our Little Swedish Cousin

By
Claire M. Coburn

Illustrated by
L. J. Bridgman and R. C. Woodberry



Boston

L. C. Page & Company

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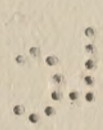
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Preface



FOR more than five thousand years, the ancestors of our little Swedish cousin have dwelt in the Scandinavian peninsula. No wonder she loves the stories of the Vikings, the old legends, customs, and fête-days. They are her priceless heritage from the days of long ago.

The snow and glaciers on the extreme north cut off this long tongue of land, so that it is as separate from the rest of Europe as an island. In the olden days, almost every Swede tilled the soil and lived remote from his neighbour. Villages were few, so that each family created its own little world of work and pleasure. Even the children must be

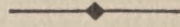
very industrious and ingenious to help supply the needs of the family. Whether she lives in the city or the country, every little Swedish girl to-day is taught this same thrift and industry.

Because the winter months, when the sun shows his face but a few hours each day, are long and dreary, our northern relatives fairly revel in their short summers. The whole nation lives out-of-doors and rejoices in the merry sunshine. All day excursions, picnics, and water trips are crowded into the brief season.

The peasant still owns his little red cottage and the well-to-do farmer and the nobleman live in their old homesteads. The cities continue to be small in number and in size, but slowly, slowly, the great throbbing life of the outside world is creeping in to steal away much of the picturesqueness of this old nation.

You will be surprised to learn in how many ways the life of our little Swedish cousin is similar to that of American children. But she is such a very hospitable and polite little maid, I am sure she will give you a hearty welcome if you visit her and see her for yourself at work and at play.

Contents



| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| I. THE SKATING CARNIVAL | I |
| II. THE KNITTING LESSON | 14 |
| III. YULE-TIDE | 29 |
| IV. AT GRANDMOTHER'S | 45 |
| V. MIDSUMMER'S EVE | 57 |
| VI. A VISIT TO SKANSEN | 68 |
| VII. THROUGH THE GÖTA CANAL | 80 |
| VIII. THE NAME-DAY | 93 |

List of Illustrations

| | PAGE |
|--|-----------------------|
| SIGRID | <i>Frontispiece</i> ✓ |
| BRITA AND HER FOOT-PUSHER | 6 ✓ |
| “A SHEAF OF GRAIN IS FASTENED UP IN THE YARD OF EVERY COUNTRY HOME” | 38 ✓ |
| BAKING RYE BREAD AT GRANDMOTHER'S | 52 ✓ |
| “IN A TWINKLING, THE CHILDREN . . . WERE DAN- CING AROUND THE POLE” | 62 ✓ |
| THE GÖTA CANAL | 86 ✓ |

Our Little Swedish Cousin

CHAPTER I.

THE SKATING CARNIVAL

“SIGRID, Sigrid, hurry and get your skates. The ice is at last safe, and mother says that we may go to the park with Miss Eklund, this afternoon.”

Erik thrust his head through the nursery door to announce the good news to his sister, who was poring over her lessons for the next day.

“Oh!” cried the little girl as she quickly slipped out of her seat at the long table, “I am so glad, for I thought I should never

2 Our Little Swedish Cousin

have a chance to wear the new skates that father gave me on my birthday.”

In a trice, she had gathered up all her books, packed them neatly away, and was off to put on her warm furs. She was a flax-haired little maid, with very blue eyes, and plump rosy cheeks as round as an apple, because she lived out-of-doors a great deal and romped with her brothers.

In just no time at all, she had put on her warm blue coat, lined with gray squirrel, and a little cap to match, with the fur also on the inside. She quickly fastened on her rubber overshoes, which had a border of fur around the top and down the front. When she had found her white woolen mittens with a quaint red and blue pattern knitted right across the back, she was ready to join her brothers Erik and Anders.

They were a jolly little party of merry-makers, for it was the first skate of the

season. Our Swedish cousins who live in the city may not go skating whenever they like. They must wait till some wise person appointed by the government says the ice is quite thick and firm.

“I will beat you running down-stairs to the porter’s door,” called Sigrid, who was bubbling over with good spirits. Away she flew, down the long flight of stone steps, and stood dancing up and down on one foot, waiting for the others.

Sigrid’s father was an officer in the king’s army, and in the winter-time, she and her big brother Erik and her little brother Anders lived with their parents and their governess, Miss Eklund, in a large apartment house in Stockholm. All the city people in Sweden live in these houses, plain and substantial on the outside, but comfortable inside, and not so very unlike American houses. In the centre of every house is a

4 Our Little Swedish Cousin

great stone stairway, and at the entrance sits a doorkeeper behind a tiny port-hole window. Every one who came to call on Sigrid's mother, who was a very hospitable lady, and had many guests, must ring the porter's bell. Then up would bob his head before the little window to see if he should let them in. He peered through the window so quickly after any one rang the bell that he always reminded Sigrid of a Jack-in-the-box.

"Gerda and Per are coming too," said little Anders as he walked by Miss Eklund's side. He had just learned to skate, so that he felt quite grown-up to be allowed to go at all. Everybody can skate in Sweden, so that the children learn when they are very young.

The merry group crossed the street to the left side, instead of to the right as we should go, and started off briskly. Every few steps, Sigrid would make a little bobbing courtesy as she met some older friend. Such a funny

little bow it was, made by quickly bending the knee without stopping her walk.

“Brita has such a beautiful new foot-pusher that her father has bought her,” exclaimed Sigrid. They had reached the open country near the skating-park, and a couple of children rapidly skimmed past them on these strange sleds. “Don’t you think that I am old enough to have a foot-pusher now, Miss Eklund?”

Christmas was very near and the air was already full of secrets, so Miss Eklund smiled to herself and replied, “Perhaps you might ask the good father at home what he thinks about it.”

I don’t believe that you know what a “foot-pusher” or “kicker” is. I am sure I don’t know why you should. Picture to yourself the framework of an ordinary sled with two wooden rods fastened at right angles to each runner. In the front part of

6 Our Little Swedish Cousin

this odd-looking object, Brita had strapped her skates to a low narrow seat. She stood on one runner, grasped these rods, and gave a quick little kick with the other foot, which hastened the sled along at a lively pace.

Soon the gleaming sheet of ice spread out before them. Already it was quite dark with people who were gliding merrily about.

“Oh, Sigrid, the band has begun to blow,” cried Erik gleefully, for a Swedish ice carnival is never complete without a band “to blow,” as they say.

“When I came home from school this noon,” continued Erik, “I saw them thrusting the little evergreen trees into the snow around the seats.”

Fir-trees and clumps of old beeches grew on the snow-clad hills about the pond, but this wreath of evergreen trees on the rim of the ice, was to shelter the older people who sat wrapped in furs to watch the sport.



BRITA AND HER FOOT-PUSHER

“Those boys look like great white birds,” said Sigrid, who was already fastening on her skates. She stopped a minute to watch a group of three boys who were skating with sails attached to their backs, — big white sails shaped like a capital A with the top cut off.

“Now for a race,” cried Anders, and away they glided over the ice to find Gerda and Per, who lived in the same big apartment house.

Though it was only three o'clock in the afternoon, the sun had already set, for you will remember that in Stockholm the winter days are very short, and in the middle of the winter the lazy sun does not get up till after nine o'clock in the morning. But the twilight lingers for a long time, so that it does not get dark for a couple of hours after sundown.

All too soon, it was time to start for home,

8 Our Little Swedish Cousin

but none of the children thought of teasing to stay longer, for Swedish children are taught to obey without asking why.

Already a couple of huge bonfires flamed up along the shore. Just as they were leaving the edge of the pond, a dozen dark figures with blazing torches passed them. So silently and swiftly did the little procession twinkle by, that you might have thought them will-o'-the-wisp lights. But the children knew they were expert ski-runners, who were bound for the smooth hillside.

The long white slope was just the best place for the ski-lobing, and it was quite alive with people, for no winter sport is more wildly exciting. Every one wore narrow strips of wood, sometimes twelve feet long, turned up at the front, to the centre of which the foot was firmly secured. At a given signal, they placed their feet together, and down the hillside they shot, as though they had wings.

“I never see ski-lobing without thinking of the olden times when the fleet-footed peasants on skis were our only postmen,” said Miss Eklund.

“They can go over frozen rivers and hills as straight as a bird flies,” said Erik.

“Yes,” said Miss Eklund, “when we had no post, the only way a message could be sent in winter, was by these ski-runners. The swiftest runner in a hamlet would start for the nearest village. There he would give the message to another runner to carry on to the next hamlet. It is wonderful how soon they could arouse the whole country.

“Instead of a letter, they carried staffs of wood. If this stick was burned at one end, it meant that a forest was afire. But if a red rag was attached, then the enemy had invaded the land and men were called to arms.”

They were almost home now, and as they turned a corner a rough shed appeared in

10 Our Little Swedish Cousin

the corner of a park. Several people were just coming out. "Please, Miss Eklund, may we stop just a minute to see the ice figures?" exclaimed all the children at once.

"You must be quick or we shall be late to supper," replied Miss Eklund, who always enjoyed these beautiful snow pictures as much as the children.

Inside the low shed, was the figure of a young mother, with a sad but lovely face, who held a wee baby close in her arms. A fierce wind seemed to swirl her draperies, and she was trying to shelter the tiny creature at her breast, while a little boy was weeping bitterly against her skirts. The group was made of snow and ice, yet so wonderfully moulded were the figures, they looked like pure white marble.

As they went out the door, Miss Eklund slipped a coin into a little box which was

placed there to receive money for the poor at Christmas.

“Elsa and Karl must have been out in the country to see their grandmother,” said Sigrid, as a sleigh jingled past. The mother and two children were cosily packed in front. The driver stood on a little platform built in the rear. A white net with a wide border of tassels covered the back of the horse and the dasher of the sleigh.

“Father,” burst out Erik, as he came in from the cold, “we did have the best time. Little Anders can skate as well as the rest of us now.”

“Well,” replied Major Lund, “you certainly look as though you had enjoyed yourself. But somebody will lose his porridge if he is not ready for supper soon.”

The family gathered about the table. Before they began, the father turned to his oldest child and said,

12 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“Erik, I believe it is your turn to say grace to-night. Sigrid said it yesterday.”

Every one stood while the boy solemnly bowed his head and said the simple words.

Oh, they were so hungry! Didn't their supper of rice porridge, flat rye bread, pancakes and milk taste good! The three children sat very quietly at the table and ate all the food that was served them. Not a spoonful of porridge or a crumb of rye bread was left.

Perhaps you never saw Swedish flat bread. Even the king's family eat these big brown cakes, which are as much as a foot across, and look like a thin, crisp cookie. They have a large hole in the centre. In the farmers' houses, they run a long pole through this hole, and hang their bread from the ceiling.

When the meal was over, each child rose and shook hands with the father and mother

and said, "Tack för matin," or as we should say, "Thanks for food." Then the parents thanked each other. So many thanks may seem very strange to you, but it is an old and beautiful custom in Sweden.

"I am glad my little girl had such a happy afternoon," said Mrs. Lund as she sat embroidering with her daughter beside her. "But there will be very little time for skating, during the next few days. Christmas will be here before we know it, and you can help me about many small things."

"Mother, may I go with you to the Christmas market this year? You know I was sick and could not go last year," said Sigrid.

"I remember, Sigrid," replied her mother. "You must go to bed now, and we will plan about it in the morning."

CHAPTER II.

THE KNITTING LESSON

“WON’T mother be surprised, Miss Eklund, when she finds out how fast I have learned to knit?” said Sigrid.

“Yes, I am sure she will be much pleased,” replied Miss Eklund.

Sigrid was very soberly knitting a red worsted square, while her governess sat near to help her when the little steel needles behaved badly. It was Sigrid’s first piece of knitting, so she was flushed and eager over her task.

The morning sun poured through the window on a pretty picture. Against the heavy dark wooden chair, Sigrid’s pale gold hair shone and glistened. It was brushed back

very tight and trim, for that is the way Swedish mothers think little girls should wear their hair. The two smooth braids were fastened with a broad blue ribbon. Over her plain dark blue woolen dress, she wore a blue and white checked gingham apron. Except for the aprons which she always wore, Sigrid's dresses were much like those of her little American cousin, only they were very plain and simple. She did not have any rings, or bracelets or necklaces. That was not because she did not love the pretty trinkets. Oh, no. But she must wait till she is older.

The nursery where they were sitting was a large comfortable room with a huge porcelain stove which filled all one corner of the room and reached way to the ceiling. It was made of shiny green tiles, the colour of the walls of the room, and down in the front were two large brass doors, behind which was the fire.

16 Our Little Swedish Cousin

This was the only kind of stove that Sigrid had ever seen, so she never thought that it was queer.

I must not forget to tell you about the odd decoration of the nursery windows. After the fashion of all Swedish windows, they swung out from the middle like doors. When the cold winter months came, on went double windows. Though Sigrid was the healthiest child in the world, she never knew what it was like to open a window in winter and let the fresh, pure air blow in, for all around the inside of the frame were neatly pasted narrow strips of paper. You buy these strips at the store with mucilage on the back like a postage stamp. In the little narrow space between the two windows, Sigrid's mother had planted bright green mosses and gray lichens with tiny red cups. A little wooden house and several painted wooden men and women were placed in this minia-

ture park, that kept green all winter. Sigrid liked her window better than any in the house, for all the others had only the mosses and coloured berries.

“Before many months, I believe you will be able to knit a pair of stockings,” said Miss Eklund, as she watched her industrious pupil.

“Did you have to make all your stockings when you were a little girl?” said Sigrid.

“Yes, indeed. I was smaller than you are when I began to learn to knit, for my father was a poor farmer and there was a large family of us. The first thing I ever made was a cozy for a coffee-urn, just as you are doing,” said Miss Eklund.

“Oh, tell me what you used to do when you were a little girl. Did you learn your lessons at home as Anders and I do?” asked Sigrid.

“It was very different when I was your age, for we lived way out in the country in a big red

18 Our Little Swedish Cousin

farmhouse, and our nearest neighbour was two miles away. We lived in the far north, so that when the winter days were only a few hours long, I could not go to school, but I learned a great deal at home. During the long evenings, father and my big brothers could not see to work on the farm or cut timber, so we would all sit together in the living-room with its huge open fire. Father made mother's chairs or a cradle for the baby, or whittled tools for the farm. Brother Olaf carved wooden platters and spoons with wonderful animals and figures. Then in the spring-time he would sell these things in the city markets.

“Mother used to spin and weave our warm clothes, and she taught me how to do all these things, besides sewing and embroidering. Sometimes, father would tell us the same old sagas that you children love to hear.”

“Did you have to study catechism, too?”

Sigrid's rosy face looked quite solemn at the thought, for every day she had to learn a portion of the catechism, and also Bible history. She loved the stories of David and Saul and Daniel in the lions' den, but the catechism! Oh, that was very, very hard for a little girl!

"All little Swedish girls must learn their catechism, Sigrid, and my father was even more strict than your good parents," replied Miss Eklund.

"Elsa's big sister, who went to England last year, says that English children do not have to learn to knit and sew and embroider just as they learn their geography and spelling. Why do I have to learn to do these things, when my father could buy them for me?" asked Sigrid.

Just then, Sigrid dropped a stitch in her knitting, and had to unravel two rows before Miss Eklund could reply.

20 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“Even though your mother lived in a beautiful house and her father was very rich, she also learned to knit and sew and crochet. You must know how to do these things so you will be able to take care of your own home when you grow up. But it is time for dinner now and I hear your mother’s callers going. Make haste and put your knitting away lest she see her present.”

Every morning, Sigrid had an early breakfast with her brother Erik, who went to a private school. He was studying very hard to go to the university at Upsala. Then she must study her lessons and learn many of the same things which her governess had been taught in the long winter months on the farm. And after that came her gymnastic exercises every day, as much a lesson as her reading and spelling.

“Erik,” called Sigrid, after dinner, as her brother walked past the nursery. Though

he was only three years older than his sister, he was a tall, sturdy boy, and Sigrid felt very proud of him. She beckoned him to a quiet corner where they could whisper unobserved.

“I have a surprise for mother. Miss Eklund has taught me to knit, and mother does not know yet. If I can get it finished, it is going to be a cozy for Christmas.”

“That’s fine,” said Erik, “but you wait till I show you something which I learned to make in my sloyd class at school.” Erik glanced around cautiously. Nobody was in sight, so he drew a carved tray from his school-bag.

“Oh, it’s beautiful!” and Sigrid clapped her hands with glee. “How could you make it? Why, it is just like an old Viking ship with the dragon’s head peering at you from the prow. And you have made the sides like the scales of some strange monster. Mother will be so delighted.

22 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“It must be splendid to be a big boy and go to your school,” continued Sigrid. “You do such interesting things. I wish that I could go on a school journey with my teacher for two or three days and see some of our wonderful old castles, as you do. Mother says perhaps Miss Eklund and I may go with her and father when they go through the Göta Canal to Göteborg, next summer, to visit Aunt Frederika. That will be better than a school journey.”

“But, Sigrid, there are many wonderful things to see right here in our own beautiful Stockholm,” said Erik. “Many school-children come here every spring with their teachers.”

“Sometime you promised you would tell me an old saga about Stockholm before there was any city here,” said Sigrid.

“Oh, you mean about King Agne,” said Erik. “Once father pointed out to me the

place where he was supposed to have landed with his ships, so I always like that story.”

“Yes, yes, that is the one. Do tell me,” said Sigrid.

Erik loved to tell his little sister these stories that he had often heard from his mother and father, so he did not need to be urged.

“Many hundred years ago, when the bold Vikings sailed out from our harbours and conquered far and wide, King Agne ruled in Upsala. Where our city is to-day, was only a group of green wooded islands with a few huts. Late in the summer, King Agne came sailing in from the Baltic, and dropped anchor near the large island, where the king’s palace is to-day.”

“Why, I can see that from mother’s window,” said Sigrid.

“Yes, we are so high up from the water, we can easily see the island. These old Vi-

24 Our Little Swedish Cousin

king kings often went on voyages of conquest along our shores. Way off to the east, King Agne had warred against King Froste of Finland and slain him. Then the victor plundered the country and sailed over here with much booty. He had taken captive the king's beautiful daughter Skialf, his son Loge, and many others.

“King Agne was exultant over his victory and he wanted to make the Princess Skialf his bride. So he said to his henchmen :

“ ‘ Let a spacious tent be erected beneath that fine oak-tree on yonder tongue of land. Then let my swiftest runners carry staffs of invitation to all the chieftains round about and bid them gather at a royal feast to celebrate the wedding of King Agne and the fair Princess Skialf. Command them that they bring a goodly store of meat and drink for the feast.’ ”

“ Miss Eklund told us about the messen-

gers' staffs when we went skating, so I know about them," interrupted Sigrid.

"These sticks were burned at one end, with a noose at the other end. This was a very plain way of telling the chieftains that they would be hanged and their houses burned, if they neglected to send the message on to the next chief.

"So a large number gathered in the huge tent which looked out on the Baltic, where the dragon-prowed ships lay at anchor.

"All this time the poor princess was very unhappy. But she dared not let the king know her fears. She thought and thought how she could escape becoming his bride. Finally a plan grew in her mind and she said to the king:

"O brave and generous king, I beseech you that, before the royal wedding feast, you hold a funeral banquet in honour of my noble sire. My lord, may you give ear to this great

26 Our Little Swedish Cousin

favour which a captive maiden begs for her father.'

"The princess prayed so piteously that the heart of the old Viking was melted, and he again commanded :

" ' Let the two feasts for my slain enemy and for my wedding be celebrated at the same time.'

"The goodly company gathered around the royal board, and fell to eating and drinking with great zest. The grave-ale was handed around in a huge drinking-horn, and the lusty warriors drank so long and so deep that soon they became boisterous and began to fight among themselves.

"Now the king wore about his neck a long and massive chain of gold. It was so long that it hung way down on his chest. Many other Viking kings had worn this royal treasure.

"In the midst of the carousal, the princess whispered to the king :

“ ‘ My lord, have a care for your beautiful gold necklace, lest you lose it during the revels.’

“ ‘ Ah, my lovely bride, you are right. What a prudent and careful wife you will make!’ said the king, as he coiled the chain several times around his neck.

“ Ere long, the fiery-hearted warriors were so drunk with ale that sleep overcame them, and one by one they fell from their places at the table. As soon as they were soundly slumbering, the princess rose from her place by the king’s side. She and the other captives had only pretended to drink. She fastened a ship’s rope to the coil of gold about the king’s neck and then handed the rope to her brother, who was outside.

“ Whist! the men threw the rope over the branch of the huge oak. Up went the tent into the air, and the king was strangled with his own golden chain.”

28 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“What a horrible story!” said Sigrid with a shudder. “What became of the princess?”

“Oh, she and the other captives hastened away to the ships and sailed back to Finland. When the Vikings awoke from their heavy sleep, they were wild with rage. But there was nothing to do but to bury the king beneath a great mound of earth, which the waves long since washed away.”

“Ugh! I am glad I did not live in those cruel days, aren't you, Erik?”

But Erik shook his head and laughed. “Just think what fun it would be to sail away in a brave ship, out on the wild ocean where no man had ever been before. Those old Vikings were as strong as giants and feared nothing in the world. I must finish studying my lessons now, but I'll tell you another tale some other time.”

CHAPTER III.

YULE - TIDE

“I’LL bring you a gingerbread goat,” said Sigrid to little Anders as she started for the Christmas market with her mother.

“Next year you shall go too, my son,” said Mrs. Lund. She kissed the little lad, who was trying to look brave because he must stay at home. From the nursery window, he watched them as far as he could see down the long avenue. Behind Sigrid and her mother, a cheery-faced housemaid followed at a respectful distance. She carried a huge market-basket.

“Just think, mother. There are only three days before Christmas. Won’t it be jolly to see grandma and Aunt Frederika and all the

30 Our Little Swedish Cousin

cousins?" said Sigrid, who was dancing along beside her mother.

"Yes, indeed. They will all be here by to-morrow night," replied the mother.

"What crowds of people are on the street," said the child, as they wound their way through the good-natured throngs.

"Most of them are bound for the same place that we are," laughed Mrs. Lund, who was rosy-cheeked and flaxen-haired like Sigrid.

"When we come to the big open space at the top of this hill, where all the booths are, you must keep very close to my side, for you might easily lose me."

"I never saw so many little booths before," said Sigrid. "I like their white roofs, for they look like snow. Do they always have the Christmas market on this hilltop?"

"Yes, for hundreds of years the peasants have been allowed to build their shelters here and sell their Christmas wares. In some

places, for months, the whole family has been carving, knitting, weaving, and sewing all these things that we shall see as we walk along," replied Mrs. Lund.

"I see a booth with lots of little gingerbread pigs and goats. May I buy one for Anders, over there?" asked Sigrid.

"In a minute. But first I must get some of old Brita's knitted caps for some poor children I know."

They halted in front of one of these booths, which have a few rough boards for a roof and a narrow counter. Here was an old peasant woman, so wrapped up in warm clothes that you could scarcely see her pleasant, wrinkled face. A black shawl was tied over her head, and a second dark woolen shawl was crossed over her breast and tied behind. Her petticoats were so heavily wadded that you wondered how she ever walked at all.

"Doesn't she look funny, mother?" whis-

32 Our Little Swedish Cousin

pered Sigrid, who was clinging to her mother's hand.

“Speak low, child,” said Mrs. Lund. “I would not have you hurt the old creature's feelings. It is bitter cold standing here all day. She needs all her warm clothes. As long ago as when I was a child, she came here to sell these garments that she knits and crochets all summer.

“I think that must be King Oscar's sleigh which has just come up the hill,” said Sigrid as they turned away from Brita's booth.

“Sure enough. He is making his annual visit to the Christmas market. Let us stand here and watch him for a minute.”

Just then the big Christmas crowd burst into a shout: “Long live King Oscar!” The white-haired old gentleman, who is so tall and stately that you would notice him anywhere, bowed graciously to his people.

“Would he ask me what I wanted for

Christmas, if I stood near him?" asked Sigrid.

"No, he asks only the poor little children who don't look as though they would have a tree at home," replied Mrs. Lund. "Ah, he is talking to that ragged little fellow who watched us buy the accordion for Karl. By and by, his servant will buy a lot of things and give them to the children. He is a kind-hearted man as well as a good king."

"Hear all those birds singing!" exclaimed the child.

"Listen again and see if you cannot tell where they are," said Mrs. Lund.

"Why, I believe they are cuckoo whistles, only I never heard so many all at once," cried Sigrid.

"Suppose we go over and buy two or three," said Mrs. Lund. They threaded their way to the booth where these cheap little clay birds were so popular.

34 Our Little Swedish Cousin

The buxom maid was loaded with bundles long before Sigrid wanted to go home.

For the next two days, there was a great stir all over the house. Everything that could be washed and scoured was made clean and radiant. All the family were making presents. Oh, such mystery everywhere!

“There, Miss Eklund,” said Sigrid. “I have finished the cozy. Now I want some more red sealing-wax. I have helped Anders wrap up his presents, and mine are almost ready.”

“Have you fastened on your rhymes?” asked Miss Eklund.

“All except the one for Aunt Frederika’s present. I cannot seem to think of a verse for her,” was the reply.

“You must be sure and have a pretty verse for your dear aunt, who has come way from Göteborg. Perhaps I can help you later.”

Miss Eklund left her little charge labouring

with pencil and paper. Sigrid would never think her Christmas gifts complete without a verse for each one.

“ Here come father and Erik with the tree,” shouted Anders.

“ Isn't this a beauty ? ” inquired Erik, as he and his father rested for a minute.

“ Did you get it in the Christmas market, father ? Mother and I saw a whole forest of little Christmas trees there,” said Sigrid.

“ Yes,” replied Major Lund. “ I wanted to take you children out in the country and cut it down myself. Sometime, when we have Christmas at grandmother's, that's what we will do. Then you all shall help choose the tree before I cut it.

“ No one must go into the parlour now,” he continued, as he carried the tree through the doorway. “ Mind you, not one peep till to-morrow night.” He shook his finger playfully at the children.

36 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“ I always like ‘ Dipping Day,’ ” said Sigrid, the day before Christmas, to her brother Erik. “ It is such fun to eat in the kitchen.”

She was waiting for her turn to dip the piece of black bread on her plate, into the kettle of sizzling hot fat. All the family, the relatives who had come to spend the holidays and the servants, stood about in the clean kitchen, eating the noonday meal. The walls fairly gleamed with copper and brass pans and kettles. Even the brick oven had a fresh coat of whitewash, in honour of the day. Every other little Swedish girl over the land was eating her dinner in the kitchen on that day, just as Sigrid was doing.

In the centre of the room, a long table was loaded with good things to eat. And here was the big kettle in which the Christmas ham and other meats had been cooked.

Later in the afternoon, when the children returned from a brisk walk in the park, they

gathered in the nursery for afternoon coffee. How Sigrid loved this coffee-drinking on Christmas Eve! All the grown-up people in Sweden drink a great deal of coffee. But Sigrid was seldom allowed to have it except on a few holidays.

The children could hear the pleasant chatter of the older people, whose coffee was served in the parlour. But they knew what was waiting for them in the nursery.

On the little table there, a plate was prepared for each child with a pyramid of different kinds of bread. Some of these rolls were in such odd shapes that I am sure you would not call them bread at all. There was black bread, white bread, saffron-coloured bread, some shaped like little men and others like pigs and goats. Of course there were gingerbread men, and even chocolate bread figures.

Each little mound had candy and nuts tucked away in the corners. The kind of

38 Our Little Swedish Cousin

candy which Sigrid liked best was done up in a small package with bright paper. Pictures and mottoes were pasted on the outside.

I am afraid you will be getting as impatient for the Christmas tree as Sigrid. But a Swedish Christmas is the most joyous season of the year. And the merrymaking often lasts three weeks. Even the birds are not forgotten, for a sheaf of grain is fastened up in the yard of every country home for their Christmas dinner.

At last, the folding doors of the parlour were opened by invisible hands. There stood the tree ablaze with candles and ornaments, but no presents. For a moment every one was silent for the wonder of it.

Mrs. Lund began to sing the old carol, "Now the Christmas Has Come," and the others joined in.

After Major Lund had read the story of the Babe in the Manger, the children caught hold of hands and danced about the tree.



“ A SHEAF OF GRAIN IS FASTENED UP IN THE YARD OF EVERY COUNTRY HOME ”

Round and round they spun. In a wink, the circle broke and the long line of young people went dancing in and out through the rooms of the house.

“Come and join us, father,” they shouted. “Come, Aunt Frederika and mother.” Soon every one was drawn into the chain, even the servants in the kitchen.

When they were out of breath with laughing, singing, and dancing, they sat round a large table near the tree.

“What is all that noise about?” exclaimed Major Lund. He pretended to be surprised. “Erik, there seems to be a great to-do outside the door. Open it and see what is wanted.”

Erik opened it a crack. In ran a little old man with a long white beard. He wore a rough gray jacket, knee-breeches, and a tall, pointed red cap.

“The Tomt, the Tomt,” cried Sigrid.

“Is there any naughty child here, who

40 Our Little Swedish Cousin

doesn't deserve a present?" asked the gnome. He hopped about and made a great deal of noise for a small person.

Anders hid behind his mother's skirt. He was always a little afraid of Tomt, who is much like our Santa Claus.

"No, we haven't any naughty children," replied the father.

"Then I shall leave some presents from my packet," cried Tomt. He darted out into the hall and came back slowly tugging some large packages. Then he vanished as quickly as he had come.

"Now, Erik, you may bring the baskets and help me give out the presents," said Major Lund.

Beneath the low boughs of the fir-tree were several large baskets, heaped with presents. Major Lund read aloud the verse on each neat package before Erik passed it. Oh, such a heap of presents for each and all! It was

quite late in the evening before all the bundles were opened. What a hand-shaking and kissing there was !

“ I thought that looked like a foot-pusher when Tomt brought it in,” said Sigrid, who shone with happiness over her new treasure.

“ How proud I am of my children,” said Mrs. Lund, as Sigrid and Erik were thanking her for their gifts. “ I am sure I had no idea you could knit so well. I shall use the cozy for afternoon coffee to-morrow. And the Viking ship tray is really beautiful, Erik.”

Little children should have been abed and asleep when the family finally sat down to their supper. But it was Christmas Eve, and nobody minded. Among all the good things that Sigrid ate that night, I must tell you about two dishes that every Swedish girl eats for her Christmas supper, — lut-fisk and rice porridge. The big bowl of porridge had a crisscrossing of powdered cinnamon over the

top. Inside was one almond. The person who found it would be the next one in the family to be married.

For weeks, the Christmas lut-fisk — a kind of fish — had soaked in lye. Then it was cooked a long time. Whenever Sigrid lifted a portion on her fork, it fell apart in delicate flakes that were quite transparent.

“We must not forget to put out a dish of porridge and milk for Tomt when he comes back in the night,” said Erik, as the children were getting ready for bed.

“I’ll bring Anders’ little chair from the nursery, because it is so low Tomt can reach up to it,” said Sigrid. “If I put it beside the kitchen door, I am sure he will see it when he comes in.”

Early the next morning, — oh, very, very early, — Anders crept down-stairs to see if Tomt had been there.

“He drank all the milk and ate most of the

porridge," cried Anders, in great excitement. Then he ran back to let Miss Eklund finish dressing him.

"It seems more like night than morning," exclaimed Erik. It was not six o'clock, but the children were starting for church. Indeed, it could not have been blacker at midnight. But in almost every window that they passed two candles burned brightly. When they returned for their breakfast, after the joyous Christmas service, the sun had not yet risen.

For days the festivities continued.

"Please, mother, may we keep the tree till Knut's Day?" begged Anders on New Year's afternoon. The candles had been relighted on the tree for a party for some poor children. The last happy child had gone home, loaded with goodies.

Mrs. Lund consented. But even Knut's Day, the thirteenth of January, came all too soon. Then the children helped to "rob the

44 Our Little Swedish Cousin

tree," as the Swedes say when they take off its pretty trinkets. They looked very solemn as one of the maids carried the tree into the back-yard.

"Now Christmas is really over," mourned Erik, "and school begins to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV

AT GRANDMOTHER'S

“PERA, you do remember me, don't you? Oh, you nice old dog!” Anders threw his arms around the neck of a small shaggy yellow dog that was wriggling almost out of his skin with joy. You could not have told which was the happier, the dog or the boy.

“Just think! I haven't seen you for six months, Pera!” The two playmates romped across grandmother's lawn to the porch, where Erik was sitting on the steps with a tennis racket, waiting for his father.

“Sigrid has been hunting everywhere for you, Anders,” said Erik.

“Here you are,” exclaimed Sigrid a minute later, as she spied Anders. “Larsson says

46 Our Little Swedish Cousin

there is a baby calf over in the barn, and he will show it to us if we will go now."

Anders jumped up quickly, and followed by the dog, the children ran toward the group of barns and stables, at some distance from the house.

"Look at all those wild strawberries in this field," said Anders.

"I had forgotten that it was time for them. I must ask grandmother if we can pick all we want," said Sigrid.

"I want to see father's new sailboat. Have you been down to the lake yet?" asked Anders.

"No," said Sigrid. "Let's go around and see everything. Mother says we shall stay all summer, because poor grandmother is so old and feeble she doesn't like to leave her. Larsson, Larsson, where are you?"

The old farmer, who had taken care of the grounds and farm for many years, hobbled out

to the barn door to welcome the children and to show them the new calf, the little pigs, and the chickens.

No place in the world is quite so interesting as grandmother's old house, whether you are a Swedish or an American girl.

Sigrid's grandmother lived in a fine old house on a hilltop which overlooked Lake Mälär. It was only a short journey of two or three hours from Stockholm, yet it was quite out in the country, several miles from any village. As you drove through the avenue of huge beech-trees, you would be curious to know why so many small, low-lying buildings were grouped near the house. They were placed to form three sides of a square, after the fashion of many Swedish country places.

Off in the distance were the barns, which the children visited, and another group of red cottages, where the farm-helpers and their families lived. These people lived in a little

48 Our Little Swedish Cousin

world by themselves, with everything they needed right on the grounds. If Mrs. Lund wished fish for dinner, she could not send a maid to market to buy a live fish from a tank of water, as she did in Stockholm. Instead, one of the servants caught the fish in the lake, or she ordered smoked fish from the storehouse.

On each side of the family residence were houses for the servants. Some of the small separate sheds were used for washing, baking, tools, and provisions. But you would enjoy a peep into some of these buildings with the children.

The new sailboat was anchored at the wharf near the bath-house. "Father has promised to teach Erik how to sail this summer," said Sigrid. They were clinging to the wharf railing, so that they could get a glimpse of the little cabin, with its two bunks and red cushions. "I am glad you learned to swim

last summer, for now we can have such sport when Karin and Elsa get here."

Sigrid had learned to swim when she was very small. Look in your geography and you will see that almost one-tenth of the whole surface of Sweden is covered with lakes and rivers. There is water, water everywhere. Just fancy how miserable a Swedish mother would be if her little daughter could not swim!

The door of the storehouse stood open when the children climbed the hill from the lake, so they slipped in after Svea. On the outside, it was just a mound of grassy earth, with a door cut in the grass, but no windows.

"Isn't it cool in here!" exclaimed Anders. "Svea, aren't you going to skim the milk?"

"Later in the day, Anders," said the maid, who held her lantern up over her head while she hunted for the sausages.

50 Our Little Swedish Cousin

From above, hung long strings of sausages, smoked hams, and fish. In the dim light of the lantern, the children could see the big round cheeses and the bins of potatoes. The pans of milk were set to cool in another room of this queer storehouse.

“I wish you would give us some lingon jam,” said Sigrid. “The kind we had last year, Svea.”

“Wait till I open a new jar. Now, run ahead, for I want to lock the door,” replied Svea. She had not forgotten how the children had teased her the summer before for their favourite jam of red Swedish berries.

“Next week will be the time for washing. Perhaps mother will let us ride down to the lake when the clothes are carried there,” said Sigrid. She tried to lift herself up on the window-sill to look into the wash-house, where the huge copper kettle was ready to boil the clothes, but she was not tall enough.

“Never mind,” she said. “We can get into the bake-house, I am sure. Sometime, Svea says, I may help her bake bread. It must be almost time now, for she hasn't made any for several months.”

In the city, Sigrid's mother bought her rye bread from a baker, but grandmother had her bread baked three or four times a year in this little house. Most of the room was filled by the huge stone fireplace, which was heated to a high temperature. Then the coals were raked off and the rye bread cooked on the hot stones.

“What does she do with this flat round piece of wood with a short handle?” asked Anders, who was exploring.

“Oh,” said Sigrid, “it is a great lark to watch her. She rolls out the batter quite thin, and slips that wooden shovel beneath each cake. Then she takes this other wooden spade with a long handle, shakes the cake

52 Our Little Swedish Cousin

from the little spade to that one, and thrusts it on the hot stones. Svea does it very quickly, but she laughed when I asked if it was hard, so I don't believe it is as easy as it looks."

"Don't you think it is time for dinner? I am so hungry," said Anders.

"Guess what we are going to have to-day," said Sigrid.

"Pancakes and jelly," Anders replied promptly.

"No, sour milk, with powdered ginger on top."

"Let's run, then," said Anders, "because I don't want to be late and have father say I cannot have any."

But they arrived in season and ate their full share of the white curds, which they always enjoyed.

Inside of the old house, you would be amazed at the size of the rooms. Though



BAKING RYE BREAD AT GRANDMOTHER'S

they were simply furnished, there was much choice old carved furniture, lovely plants, and vines, so that the rooms were very cheery. The floors were scrubbed beautifully clean and covered with rugs. Everywhere was exquisite order and neatness.

As in the city home, the children had a large nursery, where they always played during the little time they were indoors. A trapeze hung between the nursery and an adjoining room; a large cushion rested beneath. On rainy days, the children hung from this indoor swing and climbed the ropes like young monkeys.

“One, two, three, four, five,” counted Sigrid, as she sat on the porch a few days after their arrival. “Why, are all those old women going to help with the washing to-morrow, mother?”

“Yes; we shall need them all. Larsson has arranged for them to sleep at some of the

54 Our Little Swedish Cousin

servants' houses, so they will be ready to begin very early in the morning."

The queer procession of old women, with coloured kerchiefs tied over their heads, slowly filed down the road. Long before the children were awake the next morning, a fire had been lighted in the wash-house beneath the monster kettle, and the women were at work.

Wasn't that a lively week, though! Sigrid's mother was an excellent housekeeper, but she never had all the clothes and linen of the family washed but three times a year! Such scores and scores of garments went into that copper kettle — enough to clothe a whole village. Even if her family had been quite poor, Sigrid would still have had many more dresses and aprons than her American cousin.

By the time the oxen were harnessed to a long, low wagon with latticed sides, Sigrid and Anders were ready to climb in and ride to the

lake with the old women and the tubs of clothes which had boiled in the kettle.

As soon as they arrived at a clean, sandy beach near the wharf, the children hopped out of the wagon.

“Let's sit in the rowboat at the end of the wharf,” said Anders. “Then we can play we are pirates and watch the women on the shore.”

The washerwomen took off their shoes and stockings, pinned up their skirts, and waded into the water. Then there was such a splashing and rinsing of clothes, and bobbing of kerchiefed heads, and swinging of long arms!

“They are bad children. We must beat them very hard,” one wrinkled old woman explained to Anders. She had carried her pile of dripping clothes from the water's edge to a big stone, where she pounded them with a flat wooden beater. “But they will be as white as a lily when I am done.”

56 Our Little Swedish Cousin

Later all the garden bushes were spread with garments. You needed only to half-close your eyes to fancy a summer snow-squall had whitened the green grass over a large area.

“Everything in the house will be fresh and sweet for Midsummer’s Day,” sighed Mrs. Lund, when the last washerwoman had returned to the country district where she lived.

CHAPTER V.

MIDSUMMER'S EVE

“IT looks more like the mast of one of the big ships in the harbour than anything else,” said Erik. He and his father were standing beside the huge May-pole which lay flat on the green grass in grandmother's front lawn. Near by several men were hammering away on a large wooden platform, in the centre of which the pole was to be hoisted.

“Yes, my son, I have often thought so. This pole is not more than fifty feet high. I have seen them twice as tall. But if we are going to cover all these cross-bars with birch boughs and wreaths, we must hitch up old Maja and drive into the woods soon.”

“Indeed, you must,” said Mrs. Lund, as

58 Our Little Swedish Cousin

she hurried across the lawn with a huge wreath of daisies over her arm and a basket of nodding bluebells. "You will find us under that clump of beeches, making our wreaths, when you return. Oh! there is plenty for every one to do before the pole is trimmed for to-night."

"Mother, you do make wreaths so fast," said Sigrid. She was sitting in the midst of a group of friends and relatives, who had gathered at grandmother's to celebrate Midsummer's Eve and the day following. As she talked, she sorted daisies, or "priests'-ruffs," as she called them, into bunches for her mother.

"Just hand me a clump of those white daisies, so I can tie their long stems to this rope, and you will soon see how I do it," said Mrs. Lund.

"To-night will be the longest of the whole year," said Miss Eklund, while her fingers plaited birch leaves. "How I love these long

days of sunshine! Why, last night I read in my room without a lamp till almost eleven o'clock!"

"Please tell Karin and me about how you made pancakes on Midsummer's Eve when you were a little girl, Miss Eklund," begged Sigrid, who, with her cousin, was sitting near the governess.

"Oh! the young girls out in the country where I used to live will have a merry time of it to-night. I wonder if they still make pancakes. I was about sixteen years old the night I tried it with two other girls, for the charm would not work unless there were three. Together we took the bowl from the cupboard, beat the eggs, and added the flour. All three of us stirred it at once and threw in the salt at the same time. Of course, we got in too much salt. Not one of us must speak or laugh the whole time. That was the hardest of all. Dear me, I hadn't thought

60 Our Little Swedish Cousin

of that night for years." Miss Eklund delayed her tale to laugh as heartily as if she was making up for lost time.

"After we had poured out the batter and cooked it, each of us ate a third of the very salt cake. But we couldn't drink before we went to bed. During our dreams, the older girls told us that a young man would appear to each of us and offer us a glass of water."

Karin interrupted the story by exclaiming, "What is that coming down the road? I believe it is the boys with our green boughs. Old Maja doesn't look as though he liked those branches thrust behind his ears. Why, the wagon is all one bower of birch-trees!"

As the wagon drove into the yard, Erik spied his newly-arrived cousin and sung out:

"There once was little Karin,
Who at the royal hall
Among the handmaids serving
The fairest was of all.

“Then spoke the King, ‘Fair Karin,
Wilt thou my sweetheart be?
My horse and golden saddle
I’ll straightway give to thee.’”

The children all laughed merrily at the new turn to the familiar old song.

“How pretty we shall make the May-pole!” exclaimed Sigrid.

She called it a “May-pole,” though it was the middle of June. The Swedish word for “May” means green leaf. And a “green-leaf pole” it certainly was when they had draped the cross-bars with leaves and garlands and added scores of the yellow and blue flags of Sweden.

Toward the close of the afternoon, the pole in its gala-dress was swung into place by means of huge ropes. Then a great shout went up from the little crowd of relatives and working people who lived on the grounds.

“Strike up a dance, Per,” cried Major Lund

62 Our Little Swedish Cousin

to the fiddler. In a twinkling, the children had caught hold of hands and were dancing around the pole. Old and young, servants and all, shared in the merrymaking.

As Sigrid ran about in a gay costume, you would scarcely have recognized her. Instead of her plain city clothes, she wore a pretty peasant dress. Many fashionable Swedish mammas let their children wear this dress on holidays in the country. Over her dark blue woolen skirt, Sigrid wore a bright apron, striped in red, blue, yellow, black, and white. The waist was white, with a red silk bodice and shoulder-straps. An embroidered kerchief was folded quaintly about her throat. On her yellow braids rested a tall pointed blue cap, with red pipings and tassels in back. Several other little girls at the dance wore similar dresses.

“Erik,” said Sigrid, quite late in the evening, as the fiddler stopped to tune up for



“IN A TWINKLING, THE CHILDREN . . . WERE DAN-
CING AROUND THE POLE”

the next dance, "several times to-night I have seen some one over by the well-sweep. I thought perhaps he was one of the farmers' children. But he hides there as though he was afraid to come out."

"Suppose we go over and speak to him," said Erik.

When they reached the well-sweep, no one was there.

"I know that I saw him only a minute ago. There, I think he is behind that elm-tree. You run this side and I will go the other," said Sigrid.

All escape was cut off this time, and Erik dragged the cowering child from his hiding-place.

"If he isn't a chimney-sweep!" exclaimed Erik when he saw the boy away from the shadow of the tree.

"You needn't be afraid of us, little boy," said Sigrid, kindly. "You can't help it because

64 Our Little Swedish Cousin

you have to go down into the chimneys and your face is always black with soot. Don't you want something to eat?"

The sooty youngster grinned and shifted his coil of rope from one shoulder to the other. He managed to murmur, "Thank you." Sigrid ran ahead to the kitchen to get some salt herring, rye bread, and coffee. The little sweep left his long broom and rope on the grass, and began to eat greedily.

"Aren't you ever afraid to go down inside of a pitch-black chimney?" asked Sigrid. Her interest in the dances had waned for a few minutes, for she had never talked with one of these forlorn little creatures before.

The boy shook his head in reply. He was too busy with his salt herring to waste any words.

"I am going to ask mother if she will let him stay here all night," said Sigrid. She did not know that this outcast, who was so

shy with her, could take very good care of himself. All summer, he wandered through the country, cleaning chimneys. At night, he slept in strange barns or haymows and was very happy and comfortable.

Mrs. Lund talked to the lad and told him that he could spend the night in one of the outhouses. The next day was a holiday and no one would want a chimney swept.

Sigrid's tender heart was at ease again, and she returned to the dancers. The older people stayed up far into the bright night, but the children soon went to bed. From her chamber window, Sigrid could see the huge bonfires on the hillsides far away. The witches are abroad on Midsummer's Eve, and these fires drive them away.

Every one goes to church on Midsummer's Day, which is also called St. John's Day. So the next morning, the Lund family drove several miles to a little country church. Be-

66 Our Little Swedish Cousin

fore they started, Sigrid went to find the sweep. But the little wanderer had started on his travels again.

“Larsson says all the school-children will sing carols, this morning,” said Mrs. Lund. “I am sure we shall have a beautiful service.”

As they drove along the road, they met many country people on their way to church. The women all carried their hymn-books wrapped neatly in a silk handkerchief.

“Why do the men all sit on one side and the women on the other?” whispered Anders. His family sat in a little gallery of the church. Down below, the altar and the square box pews with doors were banked with lilacs.

“Hush, dear,” replied his mother. “You must remember the country people are used to it, so it is not strange to them.”

The ride home and the noonday meal seemed endless. As soon as ever they had thanked their parents for their food, the chil-

dren were out-of-doors again. A big wagon, trimmed with birches and filled with hay, was ready at the door. Midsummer's Day without a picnic in the woods is almost as bad as Christmas without presents.

"Don't forget the nets for the crayfish, Erik," said Major Lund, who was stowing away luncheon baskets in the wagon.

"They are in all right, father. The big kettle in which to boil them and the coffee-pot are under the seat," said Erik.

Even a plain every-day picnic, where you eat sandwiches and cakes under a tree, is fun. But on this picnic, the children were going to help catch crayfish, which look like small lobsters. Then they were planning to cook them over a camp-fire.

The last child nestled into the hay and they were off.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISIT TO SKANSEN

“ I WANT to see the Lapps and the reindeer. Aren't we almost there? ” said Anders to his mother.

“ Yes, little son, we are nearly at the top of the hill, ” replied Mrs. Lund.

The Lund family were on their way to Skansen, a famous park near Stockholm. Soon the car stopped and every one scrambled out.

“ We are so high up that we can see the harbour, ” said Erik, as he trudged along beside his sister with one of the luncheon baskets hung over his arm. At their feet lay the city of islands with its ribbon-like canals of blue. Away on the horizon, the water of the bay sparkled in the sun, like a huge amethyst.

The children halted a minute to look back on the fair scene.

“Out there the Vikings sailed away to new lands,” said Erik, who was never weary of dreaming about the heroes of the old sagas.

“Hurry up, children,” called Mrs. Lund. “We have too much before us to see, to spend time looking back.”

Through the entrance gate, they passed into a grove of pines and birches, with winding roads. Among the trees were many wild animals in pens, and queer houses and buildings, such as the children had never seen in the city or at grandmother's. Every few steps, they met a soldier with a helmet and shield, or a brightly dressed peasant. You would think you had come to a foreign country, and so did Sigrid.

As they turned a bend in the road, they saw a low cottage of hewn timber. It was painted red and had a hood over the door.

70 Our Little Swedish Cousin

In the yard was a wagon that might have been made by sawing a huge wooden cask from top to bottom, and then placing one half on wheels.

“I never saw such a funny cart,” said Anders.

“It is odd,” replied his father. “A long time ago, people used to ride in a wagon like that. Suppose we go over and look at that house.”

“You don’t know the people who live there, do you, father?” enquired Sigrid.

“No, my daughter,” he replied. “But all these people are accustomed to visitors. You see, a few years ago, there lived a wise man named Artur Hazelius, who loved his country very dearly. He travelled from the fjelds and glaciers where the Lapps live to the fertile fields of Skäne, in the south.

“Something troubled him very much. He cared a great deal for the queer old

homes which he saw in out-of-the-way villages. No one makes such houses to-day. He knew they would soon be destroyed. Then he was sorry that only a few peasants still wear their old gay costumes.

“So he said to himself, ‘I will go to the king and ask him to give me a large park. There I will fetch some of these houses. Our children will not have to read in books about the way their great-grandfathers lived. They shall visit the very houses they lived in.’”

“How could he bring a whole house here?” asked Erik.

“That was hard sometimes,” Major Lund replied. “Often they pulled down a house, brought the timber here, and set it up as it was before. Then he had people come here and wear the same clothes and live in the same way they did in the olden times. Nowhere in the world is there a park like this.”

72 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“See that little girl with a kerchief over her head, peeping at us from the window,” said Anders.

A moment later, a smiling peasant woman came to the door. She made a curtsey and invited them to enter.

“Why, I can scarcely see at all,” said Sigrid.

The big living-room was lighted by the tiniest little window. The two sleeping-rooms were also as dark as your pocket, and very small. Hemlock tips were strewn over the clean floor. From the ceiling hung a pole of flat rye bread.

“You dear baby!” exclaimed Sigrid’s mother, for she had discovered a small canvas hammock hung in a dark corner. The baby was asleep in its hanging nest.

“She is a very good child and lies there all day by herself,” said the baby’s mother.

“They never can move their beds at all,” said Sigrid, who was making a tour about the

room. She peered curiously between some striped hand-woven curtains which hung in front of a wooden bed, built into the house. Similar beds lined the walls.

“Many of the peasants use that kind of bed,” said Major Lund. “Once, when I was in Lapland, I slept in a big drawer.”

“Was that the time that you were snowed in and you climbed out through the chimney to dig a path?” asked Erik.

“Yes, that was the same time,” said his father.

“I should think you would have smothered in the drawer,” said Anders, who had been very quiet.

“There was no danger of that,” replied Major Lund. “All around the rooms were wooden sofas. At night, you pulled out a big drawer beneath the seat. The drawer was filled with hay, and over that you spread blankets.”

Mrs. Lund talked to the peasant woman

74 Our Little Swedish Cousin

while the children continued to look about. A huge fireplace filled one corner of the room. On a low brick platform that came out into the room, the fire was built.

Across another corner a rope was stretched. Over it hung dresses and coats.

“What do they do that for?” whispered Sigrid to her mother.

“They haven’t any closet for their dresses except that,” replied Mrs. Lund.

For a moment or two, after they came out of the gloomy interior, the sun was dazzling. They ate dinner under some pine-trees, and then kept on through the woods.

“We haven’t time to visit all these houses. But you would like to see the hut half-buried in the ground. The herdsmen live in such places in summer while they are tending their cattle. And we won’t forget the Lapps, Anders,” said the father, gently tweaking his son’s ear.

“Who are all those people in that carriage?” asked Mrs. Lund.

“I had almost forgotten that this is Bellman’s day. Those people live here. They always dress in the costume of the time of our beloved poet on his anniversary day.”

An old carryall drove slowly past. Within were several men dressed in black velvet coats and knee-breeches, white wigs, and three-cornered hats.

“Later in the day, we will walk over to Bellman’s statue, where I am sure we shall find many people.”

“I see the reindeer,” exclaimed Anders. “There they are on those high rocks.”

Before them stretched the group of Laplander tents of birch poles covered with canvas.

“That dark-skinned girl playing with the dog looks about my age. I wonder what she does with the wooden spoon which hangs from her belt,” said Sigrid.

76 Our Little Swedish Cousin

“Go and ask her, if you like,” said Mrs. Lund. “I don’t believe that she will understand you. That tent has the flap turned back. Do you see that flat stone in the centre? Her dinner is cooked in a big kettle on that stone. When the meal is ready, she will dip her ladle into the kettle for her share.”

“Over yonder is the summer-house of our famous seer, Swedenborg. It used to be in his garden in Stockholm, and there he worked and wrote,” said Major Lund, nodding in the direction of a neat pavilion.

“We have just time before the dances to see the people who are celebrating Bellman’s day,” said Mrs. Lund.

Wreaths and flowers decked the bronze bust of the poet. At the foot of the pedestal a man was reciting, and the crowd was very quiet.

“How he loved to come here and lie out in the warm sun and sing those same songs that

man is reciting!" said Major Lund. They lingered only a few minutes.

"This is what I like," said Sigrid, with an air of great content. She and her brothers had hurried ahead of their parents. They sat watching some lively dancing on a large platform.

"They have begun 'Weaving Homespun,'" said Erik, as the fiddler and accordion player struck up a quaint air.

The peasants faced each other in two lines. Then the men and maidens wove in and out in the figures of the dance. "Like weaving on an old loom," Erik explained to Sigrid.

"I wish I could have a red dress and a stiff white cap with pointed ears," said Sigrid, who could not keep her eyes away from one of the dancers.

"The crown princess also admires that dress," said Mrs. Lund. "She requires all her maids of honour to wear it, in the forenoon, at

78 Our Little Swedish Cousin

Tullgarn. I am sure it is so pretty, I don't believe they mind at all."

"No two of those girls are dressed alike," continued Sigrid, who was still interested in costumes.

"That is because each maid wears the peasant dress of one of the provinces of Sweden, and there are many provinces. One of those Dalecarlian girls has a dress like the one you wore on Midsummer's Eve. In that part of the country, the girls wear their bright aprons and kerchiefs more than anywhere else in Sweden."

"Why, where is Anders?" asked Major Lund. He had been chatting with an old friend and had just returned to his family.

Sure enough, the lad had disappeared. The crowd had pressed in close about the platform. Every one was so pleased with these old folk-dances, that they had forgotten the child.

"Do you suppose he has gone back to look

at the seals or the polar bears?" asked Erik.

It was sometime before Major Lund returned from his hunt. But Anders was with him.

"Where do you think I found the rogue?" asked Major Lund. "He was drinking raspberry juice with a nice old lady who thought he was lost. Do you know what happens to little boys who run away?"

Major Lund looked very stern. But the mother was so glad to find the child that I don't believe anything did happen.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE GÖTA CANAL

THE gong clanged. The big steamer churned the water into foamy suds as it left the wharf at Stockholm. Sigrid and her father and mother waved their handkerchiefs to the friends on shore as long as they could see them.

“Let us find seats in the bow of the boat, where we shall have a good view of the canal,” said Mrs. Lund.

“I never was in such a large boat before. It is just like a house,” cried Sigrid, who was much excited.

“Wait till you see the small state-room with the red plush sofas that turn down at night for a bed,” said Major Lund. “We must leave

all these posies there before we come on deck again."

All three of them had their arms full of flowers which their friends had brought them.

"How long will it take us to get to Aunt Frederika's house, father?"

"Nearly three days. You will enjoy the trip, Sigrid. We are to cross the whole of Sweden. But we shall see beautiful country and many old castles before we reach Göteborg. You won't have to stay on the steamer all the time, for we shall often get off at the locks and wander through old towns."

"Wherever shall we sleep?" Mrs. Lund asked with a smile. The great mass of flowers almost filled the tiniest room you ever saw. They finally had to throw some of them away when they went to bed.

"I wish Erik and Anders could have come too," said Mrs. Lund when they were on deck

82 Our Little Swedish Cousin

again. She almost never took a journey without her whole family.

“Grandmother would be very lonely if we were all gone. Our two weeks’ trip will soon be over,” replied her husband.

“Father,” said Sigrid, a few hours later, “sometimes the canal is not much wider than the boat. Why, it seems just as if we were riding on top of the land instead of the water.”

“Yes, I know what you mean.” Major Lund was amused at the child’s distress of mind. “We shall go through several places in the canal, so narrow that trees on opposite banks arch over the boat. But when we reach the big lakes you will think we are at sea. Sometimes they are so broad, you cannot see the shore.”

“I thought it was the Göta Canal all the way,” said Sigrid.

“So it is,” replied her father. “But that is

like a family name for wide rivers, big lakes, and little short canals that all join hands to make a waterway across the country.”

Long before bedtime, Sigrid felt quite at home in her new quarters. After supper, she again sat on deck with her parents.

Suddenly, they heard a sharp cry. “Oh, Isabella, you will drown! Can’t you get her, father? What shall I do! Oh! Oh!”

Several people hastened to the side of the boat where the cry rose. A pretty child was weeping bitterly, while her father was trying to comfort her.

“She has only lost her doll in the water, madam,” explained the gentleman to Mrs. Lund, who was eager to help. He spoke in English.

“What did he say?” asked Sigrid, who was too far off to hear.

“She dropped her doll overboard while she was waving her hand to some children on the

84 Our Little Swedish Cousin

shore. Poor child! she is all alone with her father."

"Is she an English girl?" asked Sigrid.

"I think she is an American. Perhaps she would like some of your twisted ring cakes, when she stops crying."

When the child's sobs finally ceased, Mrs. Lund said to her kindly:

"Won't you come and sit beside my little daughter? She wants to give you some of her cakes."

The two children glanced at each other shyly.

"May I, father?" asked the American child.

"Certainly, Anna. You are very kind to amuse her," said the stranger politely to Mrs. Lund.

Sigrid could speak in English as well as Swedish, which seemed to surprise Anna.

"What nice sweet pretzels!" said Anna as she nibbled at one of the cakes.

“Mother bought them of a peasant girl who came on board at that funny place where the banks were so high we couldn't see the town,” explained Sigrid.

“Did you bring your doll with you?” asked Anna, who still mourned the lost Isabella.

“Oh, yes!” said Sigrid, “and a whole trunk of clothes. Wait a moment and I will get her.”

She returned with a pretty yellow box on which red and blue flowers were painted. Grandmother had a large chest at home exactly like this toy.

“Oh! you have a peasant doll. How I wish I had one like that! Mother bought Isabella for me in Paris,” said Anna.

During the next two days of the trip, the little girls were often together.

“What a giant stairway! I don't see how the steamer can go up to the top,” Sigrid

86 Our Little Swedish Cousin

exclaimed, the next morning. They had reached the town of Berg, and as she looked at the canal before her, she saw seventeen locks, which mounted to the sky.

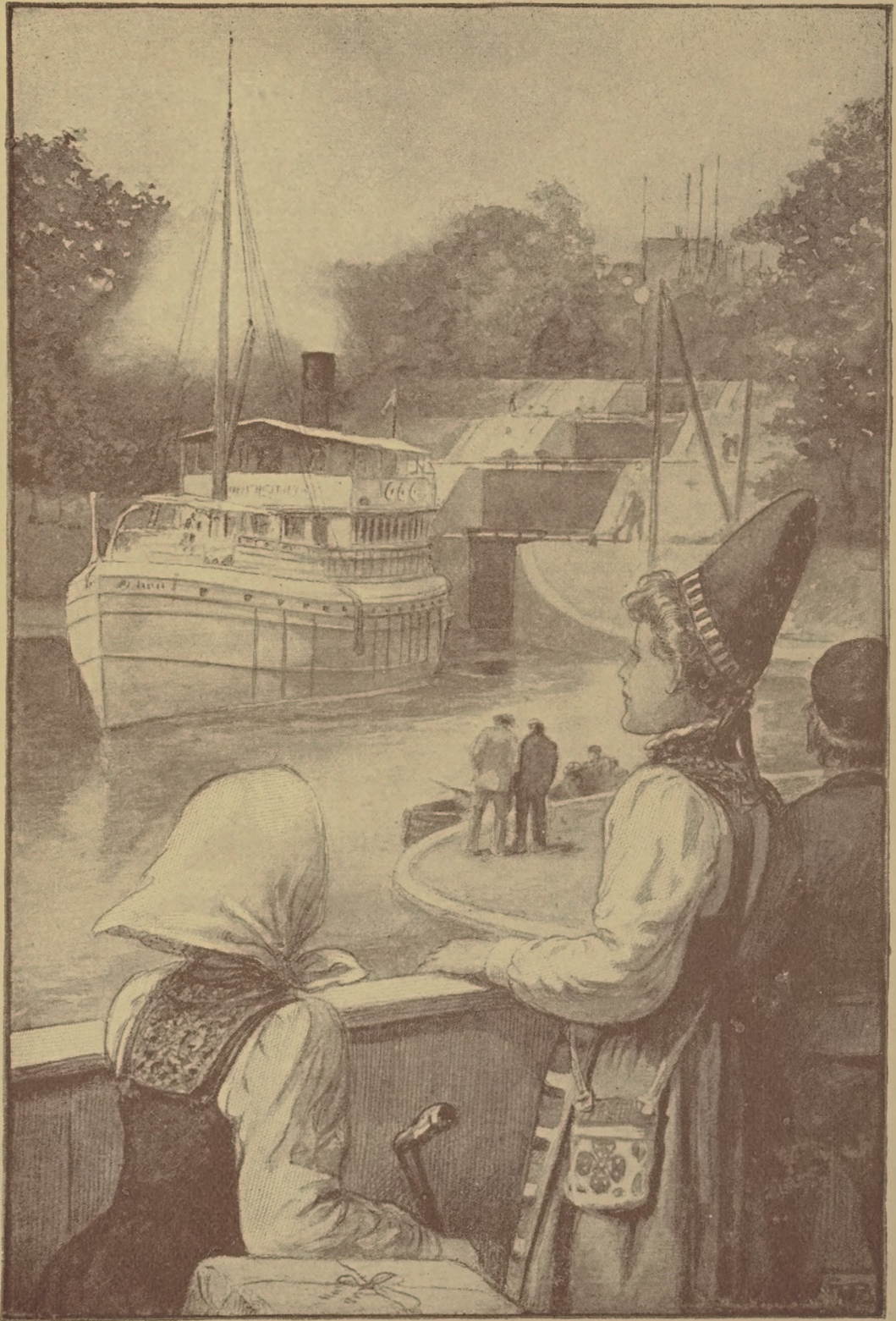
“But it can,” said Major Lund. “Hundreds of vessels climb those locks every year. It will take several hours, so that we may as well go ashore.

“When we come to Vadstena, Sigrid, we shall have just time to cross the drawbridge and visit a grim old castle there. Gustaf Vasa, our first Swedish king, built it more than three hundred years ago.”

“Didn’t we have any kings before him?” asked Sigrid.

“Yes,” said Major Lund. “But he was the first king to unite our people and make Sweden a strong nation.”

“Mother and I took a trip once while we were in Stockholm. Some one pointed out the Castle of Gripsholm, where a nobleman named



THE GÖTA CANAL

Vasa hid during the 'Blood Bath of Sweden.' Was that the same man?" asked Anna, who was standing near.

"Erik told me all about that once," replied Sigrid. "I am sure he is the same man. King Christian, the Dane, ruled Sweden then. He was very cruel, Anna. Why, he murdered so many Swedish noblemen that people call that time 'The Blood Bath.' No one knew who would have his head chopped off next."

Anna shuddered. "Did they kill Gustaf Vasa?"

"His father was slain, but Gustaf Vasa fled away into the mountains," replied Sigrid. Ever since she was a baby, she had heard these stories of the old kings. They were real people to her.

"He had many wild adventures in Dalecarlia. Sometime, if you go there, Anna, you will see where he lived. The people there loved him dearly and wanted him for king

88 Our Little Swedish Cousin

instead of the tyrant Dane," said Major Lund.

"Do tell me about his adventures, Major Lund," said Anna.

"Ask Sigrid; I am sure she knows," he replied.

Sigrid's eyes shone with delight. "I know, I know," she exclaimed. "He cut off his hair and put on homespun clothes, so he looked like a peasant. Then he worked in the mines and on farms."

"Didn't the peasants know who he was?" asked Anna.

"Some of them did. They wanted to save him from the Danish soldiers. Father saw a house where a woman helped him to escape. She hung a towel from a window. With that for a rope, he climbed down and ran away.

"The story I like best is the one about the farmer who hid Gustaf Vasa in a load of straw.

The soldiers thrust their spears all through the straw, but they could not find him.

“One spear did wound him. The farmer feared the soldiers would return and see the blood-stains on the snow. So he took his jack-knife and cut a small place on his horse’s leg. When the soldiers came back, they saw the red spots on the white ground. The peasant showed them the wound on the horse and they were satisfied.”

“Don’t forget about Margit’s quick wits,” said Major Lund.

“She was a peasant woman in whose house Gustaf Vasa stayed,” continued Sigrid. “One day she heard the soldiers coming.

“‘My lord, where shall I hide you?’ she cried.

“That day she had brewed a huge tub of Christmas ale. In a second, she thought of a plan.

“‘Here, hurry down this ladder.’ She pulled

up a trap-door in the kitchen floor and he fled into the cellar. By the time the soldiers reached the gate she had pulled the tub of ale over the trap-door. The soldiers never guessed where the prince was."

"I suppose they caught him, at last," said Anna.

"That's the best part," said Sigrid. "After a long time, he gathered an army. Then he fought the Danes and made them give up Sweden for ever."

"Did you ever fight in a real war, Major Lund?" asked Anna, after a minute of silence.

"Not yet," he replied. "Awhile ago, when Norway wanted her own king, many people feared war between Norway and Sweden. But everybody is glad that Haakon, the new King of Norway, was chosen without blood-shed."

"That Frenchman you were talking to this morning, father, called King Oscar a 'Ber-

nadotte.' What did he mean?" asked Sigrid.

"He was only referring to King Oscar's French ancestor. King Karl XIII, who lived a hundred years ago, had no children. So the people tried to decide who should be the next king. Finally they chose a famous French officer, named Bernadotte, who fought under Napoleon. He was elected crown prince."

"I am sure that must be Vadstena in sight now," said Mrs. Lund. "It will be pleasant to go ashore for awhile. Grandmother asked me to buy her some of the lovely lace they make here."

"You will have to be quick, if you want to see the castle, too," said Major Lund.

The last few hours of the journey, they steamed down the Göta River toward the city of Göteborg.

"Gustaf Adolf chose well when he built a city at the mouth of this river," said Major

92 Our Little Swedish Cousin

Lund to his wife. They were watching the huge rafts of timbers that were floating on their way to the seaport.

“Was he any relation to Gustaf Vasa?” asked Sigrid.

“Yes, Gustaf Adolf was his grandson. A nobler and braver king never lived,” replied Major Lund. He spoke with the love and reverence which every Swede feels for Gustaf Adolf, the greatest king the nation ever had.

“I do hope Aunt Frederika will be at the pier to meet us,” said Sigrid as they approached the landing. “Oh, I think I see her! No, I don’t.”

But Aunt Frederika did find them, and welcomed them warmly. Such a fine visit they all had together! Erik and Anders heard about little else for the rest of the summer.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NAME - DAY

THE summer months had winged themselves away. All through the golden days, Sigrid had lived in the sunshine, as blithe and merry as an elfin maid. To be sure, there had been a short lesson nearly every day with Miss Eklund, for Sigrid's mother did not believe that her little girl should spend all the holiday months in frolicking.

September had come, and with it hints of long lesson days and a return to Stockholm. But in the excitement over Sigrid's name-day party, it was easy to forget such unpleasant things. Karin, Elsa, and Karl, the cousins who had also been making a long visit with their grandmother, had begged to be allowed to stay for the party. Several little friends who lived

94 Our Little Swedish Cousin

in fine villas on the lake were coming to spend the day.

“Be sure to call me at five o’clock in the morning, Miss Eklund,” said Elsa, on the evening before the party.

Miss Eklund promised, so Elsa arose at an early hour and awoke the others. Followed by them, with their arms full of flowers and green leaves, she tiptoed into Sigrid’s room.

“Hush, Anders, your boots squeak. We must not waken her. That would spoil everything,” whispered Elsa.

“Hang the end of your garland over the bedpost, so,” continued Elsa. She festooned the brass post of Sigrid’s bed with the long chain of green leaves. Then she silently motioned to her sister Karin to do the same with her end.

“I’ll tie this bunch of bachelors’-buttons to the corner of the foot-board where she will see

them when she first opens her eyes," whispered Karin.

"My, doesn't it look pretty!" said Elsa. The children then filed out into the hall and peered through the doorway. Sigrid's rosy cheeks were half-buried in her plump arm, which was thrown up over her head. She appeared to be soundly sleeping in the midst of a huge nosegay of posies and green leaves.

"Now I wish she would wake up," exclaimed Anders in a very loud whisper.

Elsa put her hand over his mouth, but not before the quiet figure in bed stirred a little. Suddenly Sigrid sat upright, rubbed her eyes, and clapped her hands.

"Oh! Oh! Who did it?" she cried aloud.

In rushed the children, and then there was much laughing and kissing. Each child very politely congratulated Sigrid because it was her name-day. Even in the midst of a jolly good time, Swedish children do not neglect these

96 Our Little Swedish Cousin

graceful forms of speech which their parents have carefully taught them.

“Here comes Svea with a tray,” somebody called out.

The children made way for the neat and smiling maid. On the dainty tray which she placed in Sigrid’s lap, was a cup of steaming coffee and a plate of crisp caraway cookies. You might think that she had been sick, so that every one was trying to cheer her on her name-day. Dear me, no. Sigrid always had coffee and cakes served to her in bed every birthday and every name-day, just as if she was a grown-up society lady.

Anders and Karin sat on the edge of the bed, and the others drew up their chairs while Sigrid sipped her coffee.

“My big sister has two name-days,” said Elsa.

“Does she have three parties every year?” asked Sigrid.

“Yes, indeed,” replied Elsa. “Her real birthday comes in January. Then her name-days are in July and October. I wish I had two name-days. But mother says there are so many of us children that if we all had two name-days, we should be having a party about once in every three weeks all the year.”

Everybody burst into laughter. Elsa had five brothers and sisters, so what her mother had said was quite true.

In Sigrid’s land, you see, they name all the days of the year. When a little girl is born, she is generally given a name in the calendar. Sigrid’s birthday was in March, but Sigrid day in the calendar is in September. So she had two parties every year.

“Name-day greetings, little daughter,” said Mrs. Lund as Sigrid came into the dining-room for breakfast. Again there was much kissing and hand-shaking. Sigrid’s chair at the table was draped with festoons of leaves.

98 Our Little Swedish Cousin

As she ate her breakfast in silence, she could not keep her eyes away from one corner of the room. There stood a little table covered with a snowy cloth. The centre was heaped with bundles of all shapes, done up in white paper with red sealing-wax. On the white cloth "Sigrid" was written with almonds and raisins.

What good fun it was, after breakfast, to open all the mysterious bundles! Such a heap of pretty things were concealed!

"Here is 'Little Women,'" said Sigrid in great delight. "How did you know it was just what I wanted, mother?" For the tenth time Sigrid got up to run and kiss her mother. The green and gold bound book from which she had torn the wrapping was a translation of Louisa M. Alcott's story, which is as dear to the little Swedish girl as to her American cousin.

"No lessons to-day," said Miss Eklund,

as the children came out of the dining-room.

“Hurrah!” shouted Erik. “Won’t you take us for a sail on the lake, father? You promised to go with us once more before I started for school.”

“Sigrid’s name-day would be a fine time to go. Let me see. How many of you are there?” Major Lund looked around at the bright faces. Gerda and Per and several other neighbours had already arrived. “Twelve—just two more than you are years old, Sigrid.”

“You had better start early,” said Mrs. Lund. “Remember the party this afternoon.”

Just as if any one could forget!

The boys helped Major Lund to unfasten the boat from its moorings. A puff of wind filled out the white sail and they were soon off.

“They thought I was asleep this morning when they were trimming my room,” Sigrid

100 Our Little Swedish Cousin

confided to Erik, who was showing her how to steer the boat.

“Fie on you, Sigrid!” said Erik, quite seriously, but he gave her plump cheek a little pinch.

“It was such fun,” Sigrid laughed softly. “When I heard Elsa tell Anders his boots squeaked, I thought I couldn’t keep quiet a second longer.”

“Look at all those snipe, Erik,” Major Lund interrupted. The boat was sailing quite close to the shore. Several of these long-legged birds, which were picking their way across the beach, were startled by the voices and flew into the air.

“What a queer call they have, uncle,” said Elsa.

“Listen a moment till you hear it again,” said Major Lund.

They were very quiet for a couple of minutes.

“It sounds like the noise old Maja makes when he wants us to give him a lump of sugar,” said Gerda.

“They make that sound with their wings as they fly,” said Major Lund. “The ‘horse-cuckoo,’ some people call the snipe. Do you know how it received that name?”

“Do tell us, father,” said Anders.

“It is just a short story about a careless farmer who had a lazy servant. For many days, the servant rode his master’s horse to pasture without giving the poor animal any water to drink. That was a very dry summer, so the horse suffered greatly.

“One day the farmer wanted to drive to market. So he said to his servant:

“‘Fetch my horse from the pasture.’”

“The servant went after the horse, but it had disappeared. He delayed so long that the master finally followed him into the field. But he could not find the horse either. Just

102 Our Little Swedish Cousin

as they had given up the search, they heard a neigh. In the next meadow, where they had been hunting, they saw the horse drinking at a spring.

“‘Are you really there?’ cried the farmer. He hastened over the stone wall to catch the horse. As he was about to put the halter over its neck, the horse disappeared and a snipe flew into the air. There the bird neighed till sunset.”

“That served the farmer quite right,” said Erik, indignantly, and the others agreed with him.

The broad waters of Lake Mälär were alive with sailing craft and small steamers. Who would stay indoors on such a day! Along the wooded slopes of the lake they sailed past many a lovely villa, half-hidden by trees, and occasionally some ancient castle.

“That is the place where I saw a water-sprite

late one afternoon," said Sigrid. The breeze had died down and the boat seemed to rest at anchor near an old wooden bridge beneath which a hillside brook rushed joyously into the lake.

"Did you really?" asked Elsa. Sigrid believed in trolls, sea-nymphs, fairies, and water-sprites. But Elsa was several years older than her cousin, and she wasn't at all certain that trolls and water-sprites still lived in the wild country, though they might have in the olden times.

"Look underneath the bridge in that dark corner, just behind those rushes. Erik was rowing me home from your house, Gerda. When we got just there, something white and misty rose up out of the water. I heard a soft, sweet note, and Erik thought perhaps he did too. Then I thought I saw him dimly resting on the waves, just as Miss Eklund says water-sprites do."

“Weren’t you frightened?” asked Karin in wide-eyed surprise.

“I wanted Erik to stop rowing so I could listen, but he wouldn’t. Mother said he must never take me there again toward night. Father, won’t you tell us the story of the water-sprite and the budding staff, while we are waiting for the wind to come up?” begged Sigrid.

“It doesn’t look as though we should do much sailing for awhile. But you must all know the old legend, I am sure,” said Major Lund.

“We should like to hear it just the same,” the children all chimed in.

“Well,” began Major Lund, “this water-sprite lived under an old bridge just like that one over there. He was such a happy fellow that he sat playing his harp half the livelong day. One afternoon, a grim and sour-faced old priest came ambling along on his horse, over the bridge.

“Suddenly he drew rein, for he heard the sweetest music. He rode back across the bridge and hunted several minutes before he discovered the merry sprite.

“In his ugliest tone of voice the priest called out:

“‘Why do you play your harp so joyously? Have you nothing to do but idle away the day and the night in such foolishness? A lazy sprite like you will never get to heaven. I should sooner expect to see this staff which I carry grow green and blossom, than find you there.’

“The water-sprite threw down his harp in great terror and began to weep bitterly. What had he ever done that the old priest should frighten him so?

“Without giving further heed to the sprite, the priest rode on. For many years, his own life had been so dull and solemn, that it made him bitter to see other people happy. He

106 Our Little Swedish Cousin

found a cruel pleasure in making the little sprite wretched.

“While he was buried in his own gloomy thoughts, he did not see that the staff in his hands was slowly changing into the green branch of a living tree. Tiny green buds, then leaves, slowly, silently unfurled. As silently flower-buds appeared and opened into rosy blossoms, spicy with fragrance.

“The priest, at last, beheld the branch of leaves and flowers in his hand. He was filled with great wonder at himself. While the dead staff of wood slowly bloomed in his hands, something hard and cold in his heart seemed to melt. Not since he was a small boy had he listened to the singing of the birds with such joy. He dismounted from his horse to gather a handful of wild lilies-of-the-valley.

“He even smiled on a whistling peasant boy who passed him on the road. Then he thought

of the weeping sprite. In all haste he rode back to the bridge.

“ To the sobbing lad, he said :

“ ‘ Behold how my old staff has grown green and flowers like a rose-bush in June. This is a symbol, my good fellow, that hope blooms in the hearts of us all. You may yet go to heaven.’ ”

At that minute, the limp sails stirred, the ropes rattled in the breeze, and the boat was soon under way.

Early in the afternoon, the other guests of the party arrived. I could not begin to tell you all the games they played. Some were like those of their American cousins, but there were many new ones. Next to “ Blind Man’s Buff,” and “ Last Couple Out,” the best fun was “ Lend, Lend Fire.”

All the children sat in a circle for this game. Karin, who had a cane, walked up to Erik and rapping on the floor, said, “ Lend, Lend Fire.”

108 Our Little Swedish Cousin

But Erik replied, "Go to the next neighbour." Half-way around the circle Karin went, but every one made the same answer. In the meantime, the children were beckoning across to each other and exchanging seats. Finally, Karin was nimble enough to slip into a chair which was vacant for a second. It happened to be Sigrid's place, so it was her turn to take the cane and hunt for fire.

Mrs. Lund played for the children to dance old-fashioned ring dances. Sigrid would no more have thought her party complete without these dances in a big circle than if there had been no name-day cake. For of course she had a name-day cake. It did not have any candles, and it was not like any birthday cake you ever saw. Across the top of the round loaf of sweetened bread, "Sigrid" was written in twisted strips of bread, with cardamom seeds and currants sprinkled all over.

Where could you find a prettier, cosier

supper-room than within the round lilac hedge with its wide opening for a door? Here the table was set for the guests.

Inside the lilac-bush hedge, with her other guests, we must say good-bye to our little Swedish cousin. Sometime, I hope you will cross the seas and meet her again. She is such a winsome maid, so healthy, happy, and well-mannered, that I am sure you would soon be good friends.

THE END.

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