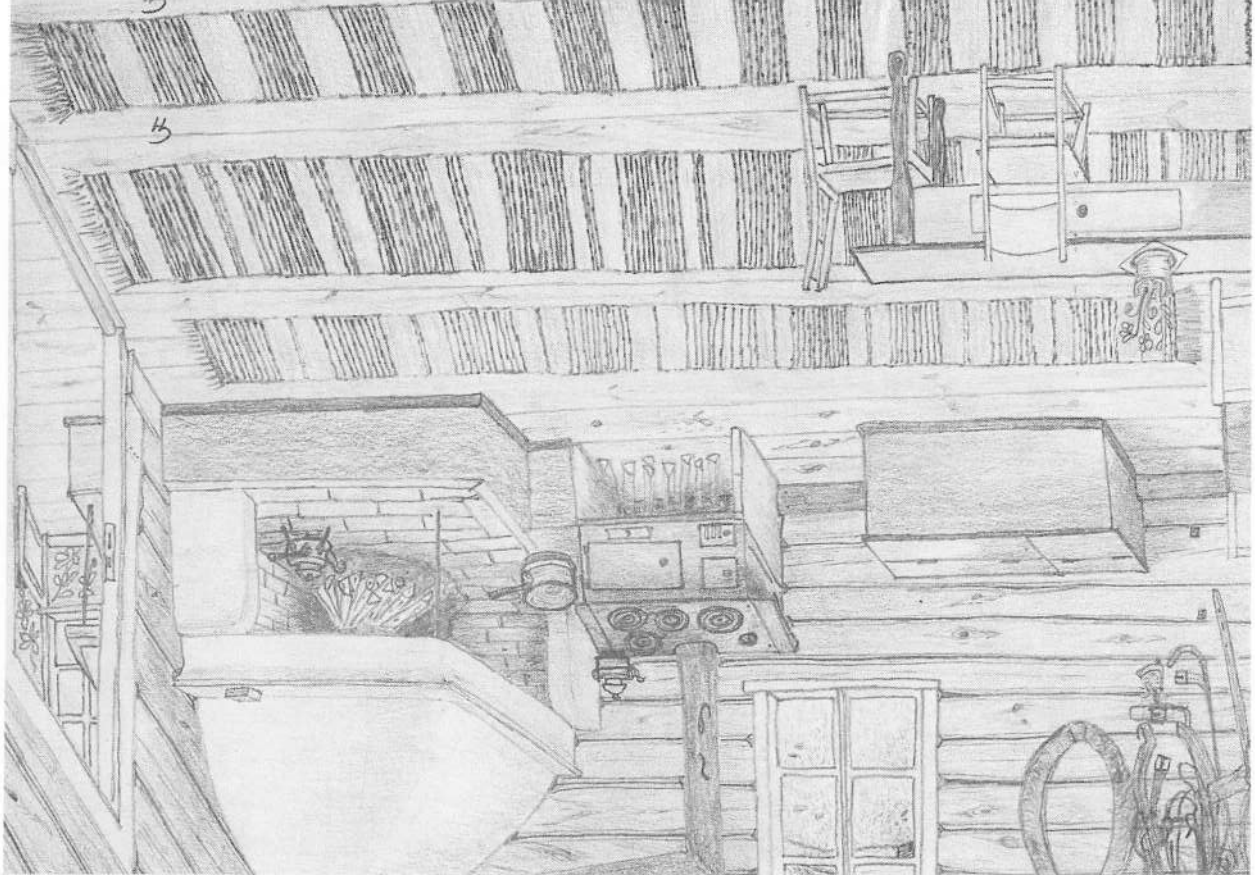
MY ROOTS SURVIVE THE FLOOD

Opposite: The old home in Abacka
Over page: The interior
Line drawings by Gunnar Holmgren



My roots survive the flood

A story from an Arctic village

Gunda Sjögren

GROSVENOR BOOKS · LONDON

To my nephews and nieces
and their children

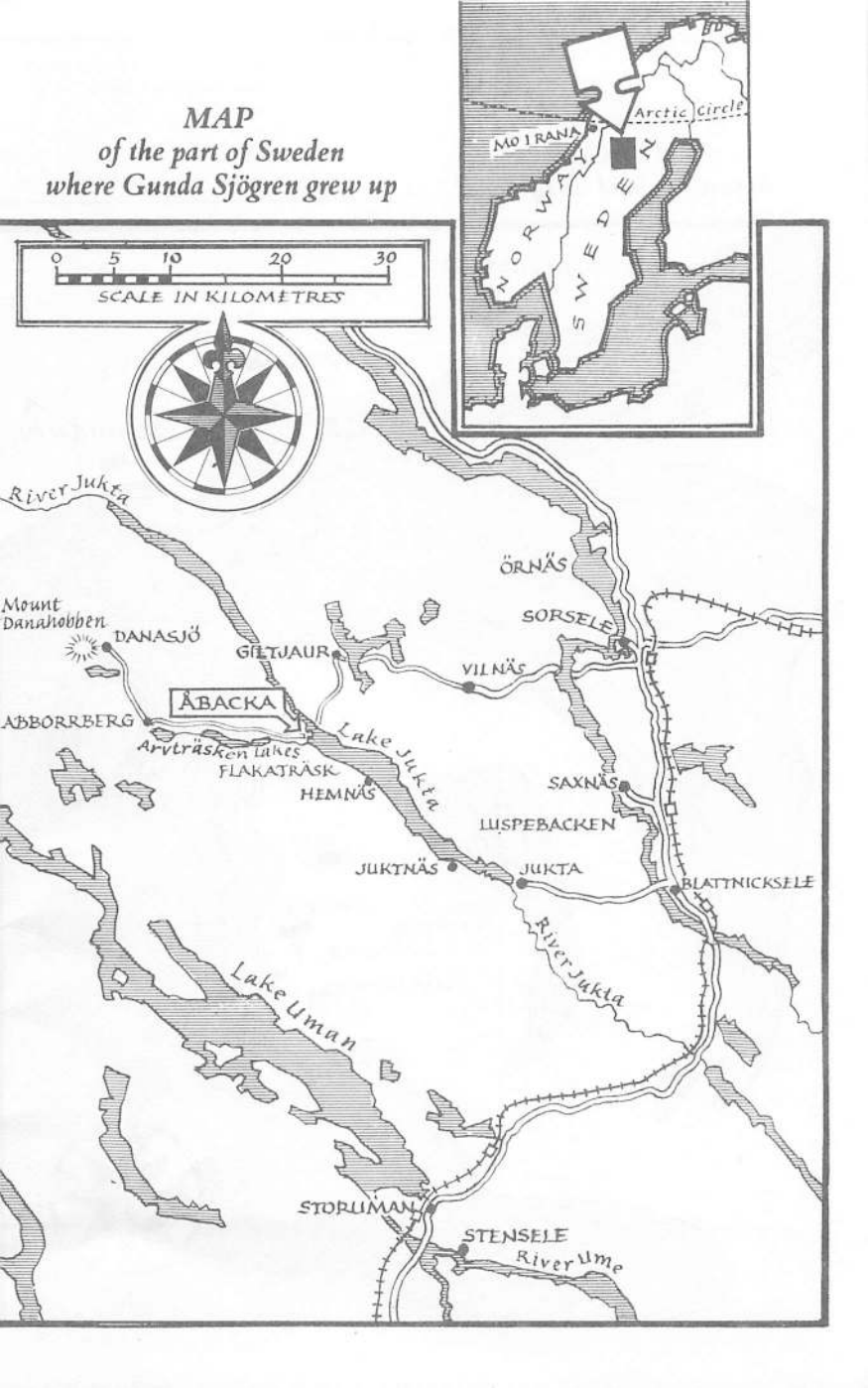
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:
The Swedish language uses accents. I have purposely omitted these when writing the names of people or places. Also, the original contains some passages in a country dialect. No attempt has been made to reproduce this so that the book can be easily understood wherever English is read.
Gunda's story was actually narrated to her friend Gerd Jonzon, who then wrote it down. She rounds off the book with a brief postscript signed with her name. ETG

Originally published under the title *Abacka*
(Ide och Kultur, Stockholm, Sweden, 1975)
This edition published March 1978
by Grosvenor Books
54 Lyford Road, London SW18 3JJ.
ISBN 0 901 269 31 X

Cover design by W Cameron-Johnson
Translated by Edward Goulding
Photoset on Comp/set 500 in Times New Roman
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles of Guildford

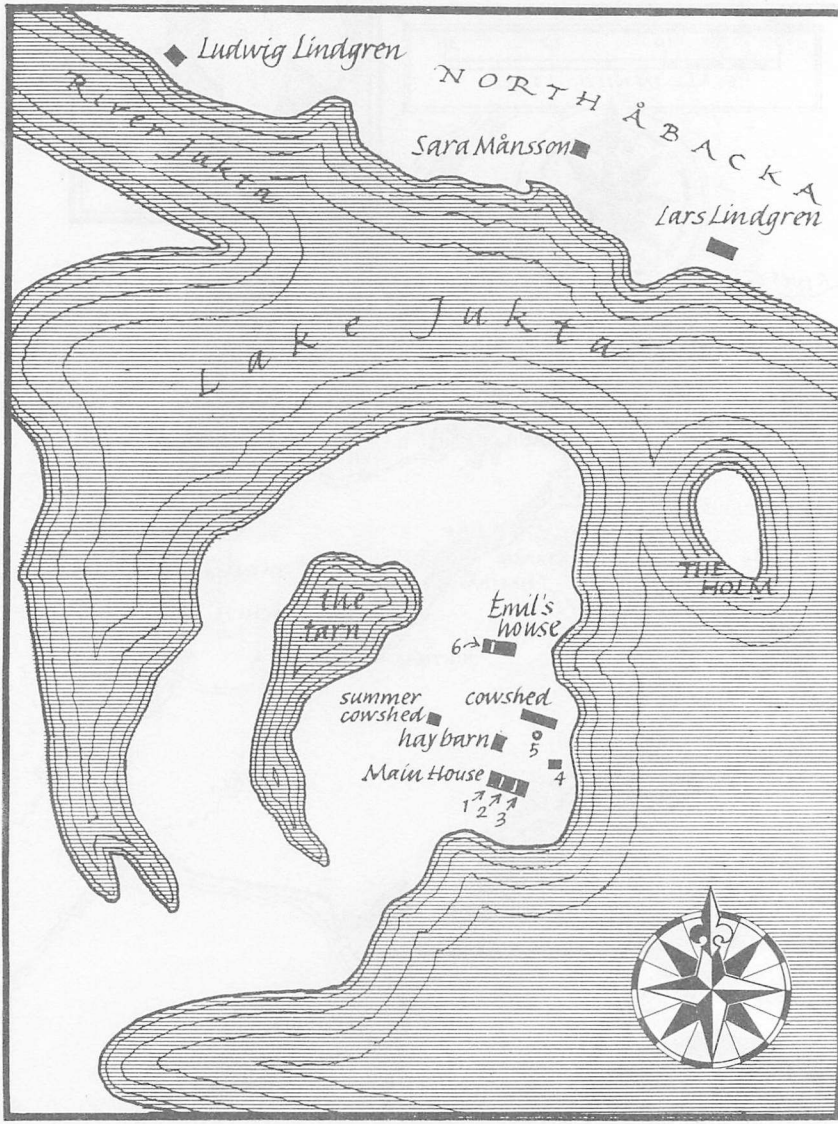
Contents

MAP
of the part of Sweden
where Gunda Sjögren grew up



MAP of the community at ÅBACKA before the land was flooded

KEY:
1 Bakehouse to which family moved
2 Where the teacher stayed
3 School
4 Store
5 Well
6 Where Gunda's grandparents lived



Introduction

My grandparents on both sides were settlers in Swedish Lapland. Born in the 1850's, they were part of a population which put down stakes farther and farther out in the wilderness towards the Norwegian border. This was a forested mountain area, where every bit of cultivation had to be claimed by hard work in the harshest of climates.

People who settled here came from regions to the south or south-east. For one reason or another they wanted to break new ground. Many came from large families. When homesteads were shared between them, there was seldom enough to provide a living for all the children and their families.

The rush to the big cities in the south or to saw-mills along the coast had not yet started; nor had the great emigration to America from this part of Sweden. There was little industry to attract large numbers. The iron-ore mines in Kiruna and Malmberget further north were started around the turn of the century. They offered an alternative to the meagre earnings of small farmers and lumberjacks. But it was not a very attractive one, so far north of the Arctic Circle, with exceedingly tough conditions.

In other parts of Swedish Lapland, which covers an area of 118,000 square kilometres, most families went on timbering their small log cabins and barns, keeping a few cows and perhaps a horse. They used the hay from outlying meadows and marshlands, and grew their special kind of potatoes—they were called almond potatoes because of their shape—on small patches near home. Grain could seldom be grown. The summer was simply too short—although intense with its light nights,

when the sun hardly sets. In the autumn, frost might set in very early and mercilessly take any harvest of barley or oats, just as it often left the potato patches black with slimy stalks and uneatable little roots underground. At times there was real starvation and total poverty among these settler families, even remembered by people living today.

Hunting and fishing were necessary branches of the homestead economy. Some families owned a stretch of forest and could sell their own timber. But for many of the men the only cash earnings they ever had came through their jobs as lumberjacks with the big forest companies. In the winter months when the ground was frozen hard and snow-covered, the lakes and rivers solid with ice, this work had to be done. Temperatures would often drop to 40° -50° below zero centigrade.

The life of the settlers in this vast area was different from that of the nomadic Lapps, the Samic people. These did not break ground nor cultivate it. Some stayed down in the forest areas; others went with herds of reindeer to wherever their grazing areas of lichen were. They would be on the move all the way from the Bothnic Gulf to the Norwegian mountains. Hunting and fishing with unlimited rights was for them also a normal part of life. The Samic people, being of different origin from the Swedish settlers, are bearers of a culture and a language of their own.

Between the settlers and the Samic families there were frequent tensions. Their livelihood was based on completely different interests. Settlers would collect hay as best they could to feed their cattle indoors in winter-time. The reindeer herds were always outdoors, and if they found a fence laden with drying hay in their way they would ruin it. Settlers would sometimes shoot stray reindeer in revenge. For hunting and fishing, settlers and nomads often found themselves in competition. But the basic complaint of the Samic people always

concerned their rights of roaming freely in the Lapland area, also stretching into Norway and Finland, wherever their reindeer needed food. These rights were encroached upon by settlers claiming the land. Gradually this involved more roads, new villages and stores, traffic and tourism—all of it greatly upsetting the traditional pattern of reindeer-herding.

Then a new factor arose, affecting both settlers and nomadic Lapps. It was decided in the Swedish Parliament that certain rivers in the northern part of the country had to be used for hydro-electric power schemes. The development of the country into a highly industrialised society demanded much more electricity, and these large rivers and waterfalls provided natural assets.

The Ume River with its tributaries was affected by this decision. This meant that our tiny village of Abacka, where my grandfather had settled and my father and uncle had made a living for their families, was to be flooded.

Thirty-four families in our area were informed they would have to move. They were not asked for their opinion, but were offered compensation money and given enough time to make their arrangements. This happened in the 1950's, and by 1962 water, at its highest level of fourteen metres, covered the ground where these families had once had their homes. For the Samic people in the area this radical alteration to the landscape caused untold disturbance to their way of life.

An extension of the power scheme is still under construction today, 1977.

Most of my family are still living in the area. And in summer-time we often gather on the shore of the new lake. Home to us may look very different today, but we have never lost our roots.

The village that vanished

The sound of thousands of marching feet grew louder and louder. It swelled into a roar, more and more and more, thousands of millions of people. They strode over me. They trampled upon me as I lay there. It seemed to go on for hours.

The nurse stood by the bed and asked how it was going. I managed to say that it was all right. But the moment I closed my eyes, the tramping feet started again. And through all the noise and the roar I heard a voice, deep and strong. But I couldn't make out what it said. It was just a voice. I felt that it was calling out to all those people.

I was lying in bed in one of the great New York hospitals, fighting for life after a very serious operation.

The doctor had said shortly and gravely, 'The tumour is malignant, you must have an immediate operation. It must be done within two days.'

I couldn't grasp it. I, who had been healthy and strong all my life. I, who had had so much energy to spare that I had tied the stern of the boat to a tree and rowed just for the sake of rowing. My first thought was: 'I must be buried in Swedish soil. We must go home from America.'

It was not to be. We were advised to consult a New York specialist immediately. When we got there it turned out that one of Sweden's top experts, for this precise disease, was at that very hospital. It was he I should have tried to see if I had gone home to Sweden. With his helpful advice, the operation was done successfully.

It became not one operation but two, the second more critical than the first. 'We'll take good care of her,' the

anaesthetist said to my husband just before they carried me onto the operating table. 'There are so many who have volunteered to help.' Those were the last words I heard before the needle went in and I disappeared into a haze. 'There are so many who have volunteered for this operation.' I felt secure, as if I was borne up on many hands.

But when I woke from the anaesthetic in the intensive care unit, I was in such frightful pain that finally I whispered to the nurse, who was keeping a constant watch on my blood pressure, 'I can't take it any longer. I'm giving up.' She went to fetch the doctor. He asked me kindly how it was going.

'If the pain would only stop for a second, I could pull myself together a bit,' I mumbled. The doctor gave me an injection in the foot and soon it didn't hurt so much. No doubt I could have had a pain-killer earlier if I had spoken up, but it was planted deep inside me that you don't complain; you don't moan or start howling when it hurts. And indeed the nurse and I had together fought for my blood pressure. It threatened to sink so low that, if I had had a pain-killer sooner, I might have been so benumbed that it would have been hard to get going again. Gradually I got better, a little better every day. We sent a cable to Sweden that I was making progress.

The anaesthestist stood in the doorway, happy that the operation seemed to have gone well. 'We had something to work with,' he said. 'The heart was strong, the constitution good. Who are you really?'

'Yes, who am I really?' I thought. 'Just an ordinary Swedish girl.'

'I come from Lapland,' I answered. 'I used to go to school on skis.' And I couldn't think of anything more to say.

Who was I really? What had I brought with me from my home?

People streamed to my sick-bed—staff, patients, friends. 'What have you done in life, Gunda? How did you get here?' At

that moment I hadn't the strength to tell them, but later, when I understood that I had been given back the unspeakable gift of life, I knew that I must tell the story.

It began at home in Abacka.

Abacka exists no longer, since the Ume River was dammed in the 1950's. Today in summer-time it is a lake. In winter it is a harsh, frozen, stony, infertile valley. Dead as a moonscape you could almost say. But there I have seen trees felled, fields ploughed, hay mowed, oats harvested. There in a little village four families had scraped a living.

That was Abacka, the village that vanished. Today it is not even on the map. It lies deep under water.

There was our home.

Grandfather and grandmother

Grandfather Holmgren was born in 1851 in Saxnes, near the River Vindel. His home was called *Luspebacken*, 'the beautiful hill'. There were five brothers and they didn't get on too well. They lived in extreme poverty. After grandfather married both the first two children died—there simply wasn't enough to feed them. Grandfather decided to look for a place of his own.

He heard that there was a cabin in Abacka, a clearing on a peninsula in Lake Juktan. For centuries Abacka had been a staging post for the Samic people (the Lapps) on their annual migration with their reindeer herds. One Samic family had settled there but had got into debt. The bank had taken over the place and now it was for sale.

So grandfather went off with his young wife and little son—my father Anselm. It was two days' journey. They spent a night on the way in Giltjaur, which was grandmother's birthplace.

Grandmother Anna-Sara, 'How are you getting along with God today?'

Gunda, Dagmar and little Vera, surrounded by five cousins

The school in Abacka

Mama Signe and Gunda

Anselm and Signe Holmgren with Gunnar, Axel and Gunda

Grandfather Erik Johan Holmgren and grandmother Anna-Sara

Grandpa and Grandma in Danasjo with six of their nine children

When they got to Abacka they had to crowd in with the other family, two brothers, Lars and Ludvig Lindgren. But soon the Lindgrens moved to the north side of the lake. My grandparents set to and cleaned up the place. It was hard work for them both. Grandfather planed the floor, and grandmother scrubbed everything clean.

After a time grandfather started to build a new cabin. When he got as far as putting the roof trusses on the walls, my father who was still just a little boy, started climbing up them, though he had been strictly forbidden to. That's how he remembered the year in which the cabin was finished. In that cabin all of us six children were born.

In Abacka the forest came right down to the shore. Grandfather managed to clear a tiny patch for potatoes. They often froze, and grew so small that grandfather told us how he used to eat them with a spoon. Those were often tough years. The cold was intense. When grandmother went to see her family in Giltjaur she had to trudge through deep snow. Women didn't have stockings in those days, only long skirts. But she was strong and fit and used to making her own way.

There was a good spirit in the village, and it almost seemed that grandfather carried a kind of blessing with him. He could not write, but he was a skilful smith, as was his brother Emil. They made and sold shotguns. Grandfather bored the barrels himself. He was more of a hunter, a fisherman and a smith than a farmer. The region abounded with tales of his fishing trips and hunting forays.

One autumn day he took the village's only boat and went out to the falls on the River Jukta. He was going to spear fish by the light of a lantern in the stern of the boat. When he was coming back he had to wade and drag the boat behind him against the powerful current. Suddenly he lost his grip and saw the boat swiftly swept away downstream. The light in the stern glimmered for a while, then suddenly flared up and went out.

The boat struck the rocks and capsized with the whole catch, the lantern, the spear and grandfather's homespun coat. He found his way home empty-handed in the dark, over rocky unknown ground. And the village's only boat was gone.

Now there was a well-to-do farmer who lived a few kilometres down the river. We called him 'Butter Ollie'. Butter Olof, whose real name was Olof Andersson, was a rich farmer who worked hard and was extremely thrifty. He had a lot of cattle and he sold butter. He was a kind, cheerful man and Butter Ollie was our friendly nickname for him. Butter Ollie used to help grandfather. Grandfather borrowed some money from him, and paid it back very quickly, and this impressed Butter Ollie who had often been duped because he was too trustful about human nature. So he and grandfather became friends. Now Butter Ollie offered to help with a new boat. In the end grandfather found his own again, though he never found his coat.

Another morning grandfather started off very early without breakfast or even a cup of coffee, to go shooting at Lake Arvtrasken. He was away the whole day, and the family began to get uneasy. His sons got ready to go and search for him. But suddenly he turned up, hungry as a wolf, with a sackful of grouse—ten brace, no less!

We made it a rule never to shoot branded animals, like the Lapps' reindeer. But we could shoot anything else that would keep us alive. One day grandfather was out hunting with Erik the tailor and his friend Aron, who were from two other villages. They came upon three elks. Grandfather aimed and fired. The first elk fell. He fired again; the second elk fell. He fired for the third time, and the third elk disappeared. Aron waved his hat in the air three times. 'We've got three elks!' he shouted. Grandfather was not so confident. 'Where's the third?' he cried. But Aron was right; all three elks had fallen, and that meant meat for the whole winter.

When Papa's older brother Emil got married, he built a new cabin in South Abacka, with room in it for grandfather and grandmother. The farm then passed into the hands of the two sons. The new cabin was so cold that the mattress on Uncle Emil's and Aunt Agnes' bed froze to the boards. The timber was so badly warped that you could see through the cracks in the walls. And the children picked out the moss that had been stuffed in the cracks, so that there was an icy draught in the winter.

When Papa and Uncle Emil started work on it, only a tiny bit of ground behind the houses had been cleared. That is where the potatoes were grown. But Papa was keen to dig new ground every year before the frost set in.

Taking over the homestead meant certain obligations for Papa and Uncle Emil towards grandfather and grandmother, who were to have 'maintenance benefits'. These were all reckoned up in the letter of sale dated 4th July 1914; the sons each promised to furnish the parents annually with 'feed for one cow and two sheep, one sack of wheat flour, one sack of rye flour, four kegs of potatoes, ten kilos of coffee, two kilos of tobacco, five kilos of sugar, two pairs of shoes, one fifth of all fish caught, a ride to church twice a year, help as needed for grinding and baking, and all needful help for old age and ill health'.

For signature grandfather drew the cross he always used as his mark. But his name can also still be read, written in rough capitals on the yellowing document, presumably by someone else guiding his hand as he held the pen.

The proposal

Sorsele was our nearest town. It had 'church cabins' where people could stay during church festivals and at market time. Market days and feast days generally coincided. The cabins had room for both man and beast.

People came from long distances. This was a favourite meeting place of youth. The home of my mother, Signe Eriksson, was in Danasjo. One St Michael's Day she came to Sorsele. She was just twenty years old. The family from Abacka was there too. In the busy throng of the market, Anselm and Signe met for the first time. Signe was shopping with her friend Kristina, who was Anselm's sister. They were in high spirits. They had done all their shopping and were laden with parcels. Perhaps Signe felt a little lost among so many people. She was used to a solitary life up on the mountain near the Norwegian border. 'Look, here comes my brother Anselm,' said Kristina. She was quite a bit older than Signe. Anselm knew some of the Eriksson sisters, but had never met Signe. Now he came up and offered to help with the parcels. He was also allowed to carry Signe's pride and joy, a little hand-box made out of birchwood and bark.

That short walk lit the flame. Anselm fell in love with Signe. Anselm was a man of humour and he could make people laugh. He was a good story-teller. Signe had once been at a party with other young people at market time, and had listened to Anselm. He was respected as being a man of his word. He had lots of friends, including girls, but he had never attached himself to anyone before.

After Michaelmas, word got round amongst Anselm's

friends that he was in love. They began to tease him, and finally succeeded in making him lose his temper. Suddenly, in the middle of a party, he grabbed the knitting one of the girls was doing and ripped the whole sock she was knitting in two. Then he rushed out, carrying the door away with him. Strong as a bear was Anselm. His friends were left wondering if the house itself would remain standing next time they tried to tease Anselm Holmgren.

Anselm and Signe started to write to each other and kept it up for several years. Anselm was a lumberjack, and he used a stump of copying ink pencil, gripped in his stiff fingers. Signe replied from her home. Then one autumn came silence. Each wondered shyly if the other had grown tired. Signe decided in spite of everything to send a Christmas card. Anselm replied instantly and let her know that he loved her and would come and see her. They realised afterwards that a letter must have gone astray somewhere between Danasjo and the forest where Anselm was felling trees.

One Saturday, as autumn came on, he walked the long road to Danasjo. He rowed over the Arvtrasken lakes, walked up past Abborrberg mountain, and gazed across at Mount Danahobb, where the Erikssons lived. Would he win the bride he had set his heart on?

Erik Johan Eriksson and his wife Anna received the young man. Of course they had an inkling of what was afoot. The little brothers and sisters were sent out to pick cloudberries for dinner, and this visitor from afar off was shown round the farm. Finally, they stood still and looked out across the mountains towards Norway. Then Anselm asked Erik Johan if he could marry Signe. So they were engaged. They decided that the wedding should be in Abacka the next Midsummer.

It was costly for the parents to let daughter Signe go away. They had been so happy together up there on the mountain. They would always miss her sorely.

For three whole days!

Anselm's family were by no means in agreement with his choice of a wife. They had someone else in mind for him, so they put pressure on him. One day Anselm was sitting with his mother repairing nets. She seized the chance to tell him all that she thought was wrong with Signe. Anselm said nothing, but he thought the more. When that day's work was done, he said, 'You make it sound as if she wasn't human, but I'm going to marry her.'

The wedding in Abacka lasted three days. It was June 1919; food was hard to get. The world war was only just over. But, however they contrived it, all the guests were well and richly entertained. In fact, twenty kilos of butter and three boxes of sugar lumps were left over.

Signe had managed to find some Japanese silk which was made into a wedding dress in Sorsele, and she had some marvellous French lace in the broad collar and the cuffs.

According to custom, the day before the wedding the guests of honour were served coffee in bed. Anselm's brothers paid a ceremonial visit to all the neighbours, even those quite far away, to make sure they would all come to the wedding. Each one was served coffee on a tray. The marriage was celebrated on Midsummer Eve in Sorsele Church. Then the relatives gave a reception for everybody. After that the bridal pair drove to Vilnes, which was as far as the road went. There they stopped, rolled up Signe's veil on a pole and continued on foot. Signe held up her wedding dress to prevent it getting dirty, while her crown sat proudly on her head. It was a good twenty kilometres to Giltjaur. There once again other relatives gave a reception

with coffee, sandwiches and cakes. The newly-weds spent the night there and next day walked the last nine-kilometre stretch over the mountain to Abacka, where they found all the wedding guests assembled. A vast meal had been laid out, with all kinds of cold dishes and meat and fish. A sheep and a heifer had been slaughtered on the farm. Char and salmon had been caught. The feast went on for three whole days.

The bridal pair danced. The bride's crown was heavy and so high that she had to be careful of the roof beams. Next day was 'young wives' day'. That day Signe wore a specially beautiful dress. In after years her eyes would shine as she described that dress. It was blue and shot with many colours, varying as the light fell on it; and it matched her own blue eyes so well.

Time for themselves had they none. They were always in the middle of their guests—but that was how a wedding ought to be, a great and proper festival. It was only at such times that people could meet each other in the countryside. It was impossible to meet at other times. Everyday life was simple indeed; and it began soon enough for Anselm and Signe.

During the whole of the first year, not one of Anselm's family came to visit them. Hadn't he gone and married a woman from 'outside'? When their first son, Gunnar, was born he had very curly hair and a darkish complexion. People looked meaningly at each other: 'You see, foreign blood has come into the Holmgren clan.'

Grandmother even went to the cowshed at different times from Signe to avoid meeting her, though they both had to tend their cows which stood side by side. Next year Axel was born and the clothes-line was filled with children's clothes, little hoods and shirts which Signe had sewed. One day she had a most unexpected guest. It was grandmother. In no time the coffee pot was on the fire, the waffle batter made. It took time to come out, but after a while grandmother said, 'I've been stupid.

One listens to other people's gossip. I've found no fault in you, you've taken good care of your children. They are well and bright. Nothing to complain of in the cowshed either. The cows have had enough hay and have not gone dry. It's been paining me that we couldn't be friends, Signe. Can you forget all that now?'

Grandmother became Mama's best friend in Abacka, but during that difficult time Papa had begun to talk about America. He had cousins there. Perhaps they should emigrate themselves? But when they had talked it through, Papa and Mama decided that in spite of everything it was in Abacka that they belonged.

We moved out for the school

The four families in North and South Abacka had many children; several were reaching school age, and needed teaching. All the families had crowded homes, which were usually just a big kitchen and a bedroom. We had the most space because we had an extra cabin which we used for a bakehouse. The room there was as big as our kitchen. We used to move there in the summer, because it was so much cooler.

It was mother who hit on the plan. Our big kitchen could become the village school. We could 'winterise' the bakehouse and move in there. The bakehouse had a big baking oven in one corner. Our daily bread was baked twice a year for several days at a time. Common in every home in the north, this bread was paper-thin and crisp and would keep for a long time.

We insulated the whole bakery by lining the walls with boards. They were then painted light yellow and the floor was scoured to a dazzling white. Rag rugs lay on the floor in long

lines, and we brought in beds, tables and chairs. Cupboards there were none. That kind of storage space had to be found in a shed down by the lake. Next we moved school benches into the kitchen. The teacher got the bedroom to live in. It had an open fire-place which made it warm.

And so we waited excitedly to see who would come and take on the school. The teacher's name was Anna, just out of college and in her first job. We thought her an angelic creature. There she sat, behind the big table and in front of the blackboard. She must have been as excited about it all as we were! She seemed to get on well with us and we with her. Respect and mutual confidence were quickly established. It was amazing what she did in that village, and certainly the children's eagerness to learn stimulated her.

In our bakehouse there was a great iron stove in the corner. There was a bench beside it. Teacher came here to get warm during the breaks when the schoolroom got too cold. She had put her desk and blackboard furthest away from the stove, so that the children could get the warmth on their backs. When she came and sat in our corner and warmed herself we sat there too. It was a family corner, not for guests but only for us, and it was where we liked best to be.

I was too small to go to school then, but I was allowed to go in during the breaks, and I used to look at the impressive school room which had previously been our home. In February I was six and that term teacher sometimes let me be there during lessons. I learned to read, write and count. Reading opened out a great new world for me. I read everything I could get hold of. I knew Nils Holgersson's *Travels on the Goose* practically by heart. I devoured the poems of Runeberg and others, and lots of grown-up books. But much went over my head.

The school carried on in our home for several winters and Mama managed to keep that clean too, on top of everything else she did. And yet that first winter she was expecting Martin.

A room to himself

It was one night in the bakehouse. The family slept in three big beds. Dagmar, who was only two, slept in the cradle. I was ill with pneumonia and had a high temperature. During the night I woke up and saw Mama climb onto a chair in front of the clock on the wall. The calendar was kept up there, and she read something in it. 'Yes ... it ought to be now,' she said. Aunty Agnes and grandmother were in the room. They lit the stove and put a big pan of water on it. After that I don't remember anything; everything disappeared in my feverish dreams. In the morning Papa woke me and said, 'Gunda, come here and see your little brother.' I jumped out of bed and went over to the stove. I saw Aunty sitting there bathing a baby boy. I had to hang onto the stove rail, for everything went black, and I nearly fainted. But I had seen little brother. I called out for Papa, and he helped me back into bed.

I had slept through the dramatic events of the night. Perhaps it was lucky; Mama had been in danger of bleeding to death. It was February with freezing wind and bitter cold. The midwife hadn't been able to get there in time. Mama tried to hold back as long as she could until help arrived, but at last she could hold out no longer and the child came. It had the cord around its head and the cord broke. Aunty and grandmother were so nervous and had their hands so full looking after the baby that they completely forgot about Mama. She had to tie the cord herself. If she hadn't had that presence of mind, there's no knowing what might have happened.

Where should the new little Martin lie? Dagmar was in the cradle, and there was nowhere else for her to be. We had a big

cupboard in the corner. The top half held china, sugar, flour and bread. But the underneath wasn't full and a place was made there for little Martin. Mama made everything so fine for him. We looked on thinking that he was pretty spoiled, having a room to himself from the very start.

Papa found it hard to go back to the forest. He was especially anxious about me with my pneumonia. He was almost sure I wouldn't be alive next time he came home. Someone lifted me up to look through the window as Papa went off. Soon he was only a little black speck far away on the ice.

Sweets for Christmas

The teacher wanted to stay and spend Christmas with us in Abacka. We invited her husband too, and he came bringing a friend with him. They taught us how to make a wreath of whortleberry sprays, and how to dip candles. We hung the wreath with red cotton ribbons over the big white wooden table. Mama's newly woven green check curtains were hung and looked so beautiful against the yellow painted walls. How we made space for a Christmas tree is a mystery, but there it stood.

Papa drove the horse and sleigh and went shopping in Blattnicksele. It took him several days, but when we saw a little speck far out on the frozen lake, we knew that Christmas would soon be here. Papa had done the shopping for the whole winter; oats for the horse, wheat flour, rye flour, boxes of sugar, salt, and dried fruit in a box which gave off a heavenly smell. We tried to read all the markings on the boxes which had come from abroad. We had fried country sausage for supper—what a feast was that delicious sausage! It was something fresh and

new compared with the elk steak, beefsteak and white fish which we were used to. We all talked at once and Papa was the target for everyone's questions about the big world he had visited.

It wasn't easy to keep secrets from inquisitive youngsters. But Papa and Mama managed to hide apples and Christmas sweets until Christmas Eve. We always decorated the tree with the sweets that Papa bought. Every year was the same. They were our Christmas presents. Each of us was allowed to choose four. The sweets were made of hard icing in a curly pattern, with a paper angel stuck on. They were all of different colours. When we had chosen, we could hang them on the tree. We were each responsible for our own sweets and they had to hang all over the tree. When Christmas was over we could eat them if there was anything left of them. The ones that hung lowest got nibbled. Gunnar and I found it very hard to restrain ourselves. We climbed on a chair to reach those that were highest up. I suppose we thought they tasted better. Since we weren't allowed to take them down, we bit off a corner where we thought it wouldn't be seen. But Axel had all his sweets complete and whole after Christmas when we took them down. We looked guiltily at our half-eaten sweets. It was just the same every Christmas. Axel was always the cleverest at saving. We kept the whortleberry wreath a long time. We would light the candles for a bit in the twilight, but when it got darker we had to use the paraffin lamp.

The great perch catch

Anselm and Signe came briskly along the forest track under the mountain. It was a splendid summer day. But they were tired;

the heat told on Anselm. He wiped his forehead with his gaudy snuff-handkerchief. It always smelt of a tarry ointment, which he used to keep mosquitoes off. His face wrinkled as he looked towards the sun. The day's work in the forest was done. The marsh hay had been cut and laid over strong heavy fences, which were now bulging with it. Last year's dry grass had stayed good and firm underneath, which made the new crop easy to mow. The water in the marsh had been just the right level.

Signe trotted after him taking two steps to his one. She longed to be at home with her children—a neighbour's girl was looking after them for her. 'If only everything is all right!' She had been careful to cover the well with a lid and put a heavy stone on it, but a mother's heart can imagine so many dangers. She walked more swiftly and lightly as her longing for the children grew. At last Anselm and Signe got to where they could see the water. Soon they were at the boat and now they had only to row a few hundred metres across the bay.

'That's it,' said Anselm, and put his rucksack in the stern of the boat. 'Look how nice and still the lake is.'

'Yes, I can see that,' said Signe. 'Why don't I row?'

Anselm pushed the boat out. Signe began to row, but at the first stroke Anselm said, 'Stop! Look at all that big perch! Look, the water's black with perch, huge perch.'

Hundreds of perch had gathered in the mouth of the stream. They just stayed still, sunning themselves in the shallow water. Signe looked. No more time to admire them—home and fetch the net! The oars flew. They rounded the point and Signe saw that the house was still standing. 'At least the house hasn't burned down.' Then she saw two little heads. The children came running down the path through the potato patch. The plants were so high that their heads disappeared, but soon they stood by the mooring waiting for Mama and Papa. Their eyes shone; bronzed by the sun, they were the picture of health.

'Have you been up the mountain?'

'Yes, Gunnar, but now we are going to get some fine perch. You can't come with us because the boat's going to be full of perch, and they're prickly.'

Swiftly they got the net into the boat and away they went, to see if the perch were still there. Signe rowed cautiously, the boat glided lightly, and Anselm could see a long way off: 'Yes, blow me down! They haven't moved an inch. They are all there!'

They lowered the net, and the catch was enormous. They got 365 perch, big two-pounders. The boat was absolutely full. They had to leave the net on the shore to be fetched later. Then they went off and got grandmother and grandfather and Uncle Emil and Aunty Agnes. They sat up all night and skinned the perch. They gave some to everyone in the village. The fish were dried and salted, but some were laid on ice so that they kept fresh for a week. They dried the skins and hung them up just as you hang up bread. They cut the skin up the back to get rid of the spinal fin, and then pulled so that the whole skin came off, first from the back and then from the belly. They hung it from the roof beams, tail-fin up. When it was dry enough you could cut off a little bit and put it in the coffee to clarify it.

Next the perch must be preserved for the winter. There were several ways to salt them. The fish we salted in the summer Mama called *vidbrunne*. It was a great delicacy, a bit fermented, like sour herring.

Next day Papa went out again to see if there were still any perch, but there were none. Mama said, 'You ought to be ashamed. We have caught a fish for every day of the year, and still you aren't content.' Mama regarded this as a special gift of Providence in the middle of haymaking when there was really no time for fishing.

When the angels came

Grandmother had humour. A tease we called her. She had a mischievous twinkle. When we went to see her, we always found her sitting there with her flowered shawl around her head. She would give us such a friendly smile. With a sparkle in her eye she would ask, 'Well, and how are you getting along with God?'

I told her; not too well, maybe. Then she took up her huge book of homilies, which people used to have in those days, and read something from it. I couldn't follow it. She read it in a strange parsonical drone which she only used when she read that book. But it was soothing. Next time I came I said, 'Good morning, grandmother.' I could see that grandmother didn't look really happy, so I asked her, 'Well, and how is Granny getting on with God today?' She said something about faith being a bit weak sometimes, so I took her book and started to read it out. It didn't go too well. Grandmother laughed and took the book back and said, 'I'd better do the reading.' Anyway the ice was broken and she had overcome whatever it was she was battling with. As she read on she became happy again.

One evening on her way to the summer cowshed, grandmother fell down. She dropped the milk can. The lid flew off and she tore her wrist on the sharp edge. She cut herself deep in an artery and the blood gushed out. She came over to us. It was a terribly wet night, dark and misty. We didn't know what to do. Suddenly a boat appeared on the lake. Two men came out of the boat and saw how terrified we were. They grasped what had happened. They put a handkerchief as a tourniquet on grandmother's upper arm and stopped the flow of blood.

Then they launched their boat again and rowed grandmother

eighteen kilometres across the lake. There they got hold of someone who could drive a car and take grandmother to the hospital.

We never did find out what the two men had really come to do. But their coming just on that evening in that awful weather and being willing to help—that was something we never forgot.

Grandmother was a long time away, a bit too long for grandfather. He began to brood. He was never quite the same after that. Grandmother recovered, but she had lost a lot of blood and her arm was always weak afterwards.

While grandmother was away in hospital grandfather often came to see us. He would sit on the steps in front of the house. 'Let's see if I have a sweetie. Would granddad's girl like a sweetie?' 'Oh yes,' I said shyly. 'I would.' And I knew what it was—a lump of sugar.

Grandfather died on my seventh birthday. Grandmother had come to see me that morning and brought me a present, a little cloth with a flower pattern on it for me to embroider. I finished it to be a cover for Mama's sewing machine.

That same morning grandfather had said to grandmother that today they should prepare themselves. It was a fine sunny February day. During the morning, we saw that grandfather had gone out in the sun at the side of the cabin. He stood there, with the whole upper part of his body bare, and rinsed himself with water. He must get perfectly clean. Then he went into the cabin, put on his dark suit, lay down on his bed, and waited for God to come and fetch him. We all gathered round the bed, all except the boys, who weren't free from school until two o'clock. We watched as grandfather folded his hands and quietly shut his eyes. We sang hymns and songs. It was so peaceful and natural. He was the first person I had seen die. There was a mighty peace when the angels came and took grandfather home.

The announcement in the *Vesterbotten Kurir* read:

Erik Johan Holmgren, Abacka
Born 9 May 1851 in Saxnes.
Died 18 February 1931, at 2.10pm nearly eighty years old.
His last audible and intelligible words were,
'Jesus, may all my words and thoughts be pleasing to Thee.'

Resin and smoke

In the winter Papa worked in the forest. He lived there in a cabin, generally a log cabin. But when temperatures dropped to 40° below zero it was not easy to keep warm. The fire was in the middle of the floor and he cooked his food over it. He had his sheepskin rug with him and he rolled himself up in it at night when he slept on the hard bunk. As many as eight or ten men could be working together and sharing the hut's one big room. There too they had to dry off their clothes. Papa was the provisions man for this cabin's team, and he would come back with a full load from the 'Reindeer Co-op' in Sorsele. The lengthy bill might start with 80 kilos of coffee and end with 120 kilos of bacon, 80 kilos of soft rye bread and 20 kilos of hard rye bread. And in between came crane hooks, work gloves, paraffin, herring, 20 packets of snuff, and much else.

Because Papa had a horse he carted logs all day and every day. Some of the team were fellers who felled and stripped the trees. Others were hauliers who used hooks to drag the logs to the bottom road where the drivers loaded them onto sleighs. Papa had to rise early in the morning to attend to his horse and feed him before the day's work began. Wood had to be cut for the fire, but that kind of job was done by turns. Each man took care of his own store of food, and fried his bit of bacon or his pancake in a little pan over the common fire.

It was a long way home to Abacka, and the deep drifts on the roads made it almost impossible to get through with horse and sleigh. Sometimes Papa could only get home once a fortnight to see how we were and fetch clean clothes and fresh food. He spread the forest around him as he came in. He smelt of resin, pine, smoke and fresh air. We youngsters squeezed all his pockets and hunted in them to find the best bits of resin which Papa had saved for us. In the right pocket there were often several fine bits. In the left pocket he kept his watch, so we knew there was no resin there. It was a treat to have Papa home and to have him for our very own. Mama had baked, churned butter and prepared his food for the next fourteen days. She had waited and looked longingly over the frozen lake to see if Papa was on his way home. After dinner Papa rested. When coffee came he would start to tell some of his stories.

The timber which had been cut on the mountain had been rolled down the steepest slope. Then it had to be loaded onto the sledges and driven down the rest of the mountainside to Lake Juktan. It was steep and nobody had ever driven a loaded sledge down there before. The chief forester sensed the hesitation in the drivers. The loads were heavy and the road very steep, and the only way of braking was by the strength of the horses.

'Holmgren is the man for this job. He shall drive,' said the chief.

And Papa drove. It was dangerous. The horse was called Putte. Step by step Putte stubbornly held back the load and went down the steep slopes with the heavy cargo pressing on his haunches. At last, dripping with sweat he reached the lake. Papa had given the rest courage to follow. It was a big thing for him that he had passed that test. After that he drove there the whole winter.

We saw the same toughness in Papa when he dug the plots in Abacka. Every year he resolutely attacked another plot which

had to be dug and cleared of stones and roots. For years crowbar, pickaxe and spade were his only tools. In specially difficult places he also used dynamite, and it was a vast improvement when he got a stump-lifter.

Then—it happened. Papa was digging the last bit by the summer barn. The grippers of the stump-lifter slipped. They rushed at Papa with terrific speed. At the last moment he jumped aside, but not quite clear, and the grippers struck him. They gave him an ugly cut over the ribs and broke some ribs on his left side. Papa had to lie down and rest before he could go in, pale and shaken. When he told us what had happened we were thankful that it wasn't worse, but it was bad enough as it was. Papa was in pain for a long time and had to try to take it easy, no matter what happened to all the jobs that needed to be done. None the less, before the frost set in, Papa had finished digging the plot by the summer barn.

Papa had a wolfskin coat which came right down to his feet. He used it in the winter when he drove home at weekends and the wind blew freezing cold across the ice. Anyone sitting for hours at a time on a sledge needed warm clothes. Probably he didn't have to go far from Abacka to find a wolfskin. One day Mama called to us from outside.

'Come at once, if you want to hear something.'

We rushed out, stood quite still and heard a howling, a sound we didn't recognise. 'That's a wolf you are hearing,' said Mama. We stood a long time on the porch and listened to that horrible howling quite near at hand. But at last the wolf fell silent and we breathed more easily. We never forgot it, though.

Our cousin Birger

The autumn ice had just set. It was thick enough to support a horse and sledge where Papa had to cross the bay and fetch the marsh hay. But round the point there were some currents which made the ice weak and treacherous.

Birger, our cousin, who was twenty, had gone out to empty his bird traps. He had taken his skates with him although his mother had warned him. Papa met Birger on his way. 'Be careful on the ice,' he said.

We children were playing on a bit of open ground near the lake. Suddenly we heard a cry and Aunt Agnes came hurrying down the path. She tried to run but couldn't. She stumbled on, beside herself with anxiety. 'Birger's in the water, Birger's in the water,' she shouted at the top of her voice. She had to tell someone about it—she had to tell Mama.

It had happened on the far side of the point so none of us had seen Birger when he went out on the ice. Aunty had begun to feel anxious and had sent out her second son, Hilding. He heard Birger's cry and ran as fast as he could. He got hold of a pole and tried to push it out to Birger, who was lying and battling with the freezing water, but was quite near the shore.

'Keep away from here, look out for yourself,' shouted Birger, and in a little while he disappeared.

Nobody could understand why he hadn't had his knife with him. With that he could always have had a chance of getting a grip and perhaps hauling himself out. But there at home by the fireplace lay Birger's knife, forgotten. He had laid the fire and used the knife to make kindling.

Papa and Emanuel Nilsson, a neighbour, got a boat and

dragged it over the ice to the hole, where there was no knowing if it would hold or break. They got Birger up at last with a long pole. He was sitting on the bottom of the lake with his knees drawn up under his chin. He had completely emptied his pockets and plainly he had been searching for something solid, once he felt the knife wasn't there. He had taken off one skate to have something to cut into the ice with, but he seemed to have dropped it and it sank.

Birger looked so alive that Aunty couldn't grasp that he was dead. The eldest son, the eldest grandson, was gone. Uncle Emil was also very hard hit. The doctor was called and confirmed that Birger was dead.

'We shall gather at the the river, where we meet to part no more,' we sang at the funeral. Aunty cut myrtle, laid it over him and grieved. It was long before she got over it. Mama said that that boy had always had such a wonderful spirit. It was like a radiance around him, somehow not quite of this world. Perhaps it was not meant that he should be with us any longer.

The great boulder

In Danasjo, Mama's childhood home, there was space and freedom under the treeless mountains. Abacka was in the forest, but the lake made a general feeling of open space there too. Likewise there was a kind of space around Mama. One could never quite get hold of the whole of her. She kept a kind of distance; there was something within her that was out of reach of others. Some people thought her proud and haughty. But we could sometimes sense her inner struggle.

There she was at home, on the go day in, day out, with cows, horses, pigs and people to take care of. There was no let-up at

all. Sometimes she had to go out and think and renew herself. We would see her go off along the steading down towards the lake and we would see her stoop to pick up some piece of stone or tree bark. She would gaze out far over the lake. She loved nature in all its forms.

'Now I'm going out for a bit,' said Mama to us children one day. She had on a flowered dress and her apron and headscarf as usual, but we thought how elegant she looked. Dagmar called out, 'I'm coming too.' Dagmar was the favourite. But Mama replied in a very decided tone, 'No! No one's coming with me.'

We watched her go down to the woods. Hours passed. Still Mama didn't come back. We began to get worried. 'Think if Mama never comes home again!' I gathered my little brother and sisters in the bedroom and we went on our knees to pray to God to let Mama come home again. Maybe she wasn't so long away as we thought, but dinner time was coming soon and Mama ought to be there. We stopped playing our games, and we couldn't fix our minds on anything. We just wandered round and round in the house, drank water from the ladle in the kitchen, chewed lumps of sugar and mumbled to each other.

Suddenly, there she was.

'And how are you all?'

'Well, we managed,' we said slowly. 'But where have you have been so long?'

'I've been in the wood and I've been sitting on the great boulder,' said Mama. There she had sat and thought. 'You know,' she said to me, 'sometimes a person gets evil thoughts, a person needs to talk with God.' Then we told her how we had prayed to God that she would come back. She put her arms around us, and all she said was, 'Oh, my children!'

Later, she showed us the boulder where she had sat. From it you could get a vast and distant view. What had been going on before she went? We felt it when Papa looked at Mama in that

funny way and didn't say much. We sensed the tension. Whatever had been weighing on Mama, she had surely been able to talk it out with the Lord, sitting on the boulder with the wide view. Perhaps she had been homesick for Danasjo.

The hungry wolf

There were many tales to tell from Danasjo. 'Grandpa did it like this,' Mama would say, as she stripped bark off a birch log to light the fire. 'This is how we did it in Danasjo.'

While Mama sat at the spinning wheel, she told us stories. She had a great heap of wool tufts on her lap. The heap gradually got smaller as the tufts disappeared, twined into fine thread on a reel on the spinning wheel.

Grandpa and grandma had reared nine children on the mountainside. Lake Dana lay below in the valley. It was hard work to fetch and carry all that was needed for the homestead on the mountain.

Signe and her sisters had many chores to do around the place. One was to look after the water supply for the cows. There were big tubs standing on a sleigh. These grandpa had made, just as he had made the sleigh and everything else belonging to the home. The girls rode on the sleigh to the spring which was a bit down the hill. There they filled the tubs with water, but the load had to be dragged up the steep slope and steered to the cowshed. The great art was to keep the water in the tubs from spilling. Every day during the winter, when the cows were inside, this job had to be done.

The path to the spring had to be trodden down, for there was no snow plough. Beside the spring stood an enormous fir tree. Under that tree grandpa's father and his bride had rested the

first night when they came up there with their cow and goat. At that time the young couple were looking for a place to live, further on. But some years later (grandpa was then six) they came back and made a home in Danasjo. There they built a log cabin which was quite near a bear's den, and there they lived their whole married life.

Grandpa had an incredible ability to cope with anything. Happily and eagerly he would tackle the completely impossible. When he built his first cabin he was young and strong. He managed to finish it, except for the cellar for storing potatoes. During the short summer months he had to dig fields, plant potatoes and build cabins for people and cattle. None the less, before autumn came, the cellar, a hole in the ground under the floorboards, had to be finished. While he was digging it, grandpa came upon a huge rock. He was strong and used to hard work. But it seemed impossible to get that rock out. When he had almost got it up onto the floor, he lost his grip and perhaps his strength as well. The rock fell full on his leg and broke it. But that rock had to come out and the potatoes had to go in. Once again he heaved and once again the rock fell on the same leg, damaging it even more. Just then a man came walking past the cabin. Together they got the rock out. Only then could grandma attend to grandpa's leg. They straightened it out and strapped round it two strips of birch wood which served as splints. Grandpa found it hard to keep still. The leg healed but he limped all his life after. He really needed a doctor's care, but there was none to be had. Grandpa did not complain. He had a radiant temperament.

Every spring and autumn grandpa made a journey to a place called Mo i Rana in Norway. The cows gave a lot of milk in the summer, enough to churn butter for selling. He took it to Norway, and bartered it there for flour and other necessities. These business journeys were usually done in a long caravan; the first sleigh started right down in Giltjaur and others joined

the caravan from every village on the route.

The horses wore snowshoes so that they wouldn't sink into the snow. On the sleigh they pulled was a wooden hay bin for their fodder. It had a drawer built into the back which held the goods for barter. Grandpa often had furs to sell. The caravan didn't stay long in Mo i Rana; the men did their business and returned as soon as possible, so as to use the same tracks they had made on the way out. Even so, such a journey usually took fourteen days.

Wolves could be heard howling in the dark winter nights. When grandpa was out hunting, or on a journey to Norway, grandma and the children had to look after themselves for several days. Grandma decided that whenever she went from the house to the cowshed she must send one of the children ahead of her. The wolf might be standing there around the corner and waiting in the dark. It was better to risk one of the children than to be attacked herself. She had, after all, three or four more children back in the cabin to take care of.

Whenever grandpa got back from a business trip, grandma had flour to bake bread with. The frost often destroyed their own meagre crop. Then it was a battle to survive. The children were always hungry. Grandma made gruel for them and poured it into a wooden trough that grandpa had made. The children wanted the gruel to last as long as possible, so they dipped the back of their wooden spoons into it, and licked it off to make the pleasure last longer. The sheer joy of eating! They rarely had enough. When grandma ran short of flour, she eked out the little she had with tree bark which she ground up. Another dish was porridge made from lichen. It was a real feast when you could eat fresh boiled 'almond' potatoes and dip them in salt.

It is a mystery how man and beast kept going through those long winters when they were often literally starving. Once the family were saved in a way which they could not explain. It happened at a moment of great need when death was staring

them in the face. Grandma went as usual to the cowshed and opened the trap door to get the manure out. Then she saw a reindeer standing on the manure heap, as large as life. She called to grandpa, who came out with a gun. That reindeer's fate was sealed. But grandpa could never understand where it had come from. He went on his skis all round the farm several times, but found no tracks; and the reindeer had no ear-markings either.

Grandma couldn't give all her children shoes at the same time. She sewed them herself from hides tanned at home. The children had to learn to share everything, and they took it in turns to go out. But when wood had to be fetched, they were sent out into the snow barefoot. Then they got the job done quickly!

Signe thought it was a lovely feeling to stick her feet into a real pair of shoes with hay inside them. She learned how to weave shoe ribbons. Every thread was a treasure. They must be woven carefully and accurately. The shoe ribbon had to be bound round the leg at the top of the shoe so that no snow could get down into the shoe. It was dangerous if shoes got wet inside in very cold weather. They had to be dried and greased thoroughly to keep out the damp. And of course they must be taken care of so that they would last a long time; for the younger ones must have them after the older.

Grandpa could sometimes get an intuition that someone needed help. Then he would put on his skis and go off. One time he found an old Lapp lying ill under a tree, nearly frozen to death. Grandpa went home for a sleigh and speedily got him into the warm cabin where he soon recovered. Other times grandpa would find sick or injured animals.

Nobody could tell stories as he could. Everybody sat entranced by grandpa, who had such wise, friendly eyes and such a big flowing beard. That's how we children remembered him.

And Mama could go on telling stories about Danasjo while

she spun the wool. 'Light of foot was he, my daddy,' she said. 'We used to race each other home from the hay marsh, and in the evening he would play with the little ones who had had to stay at home all day.'

The frozen cream

When the wool tufts were all spun into yarn, Mama carded some more, and then went on with her story. It took lots of yarn to make stockings. Mama also added some for the half wool, half cotton cloth she wove. She made work shirts and long underpants from it for Papa and the boys, and skirts for herself and me.

The silence while Mama carded the wool tufts gave way to the thud, thud, of the treadle of the spinning wheel. Baby sister, Dagmar, was sleeping in the cradle. As soon as she woke I started to rock her. Mama began to describe the very first time she celebrated Christmas.

'I was a serving maid in a place called Ornas,' she began. 'Fourteen years old I was, and Eva, the other maid, was sixteen. We liked our work. There we learnt how to celebrate Christmas. I had never before seen a fir tree cut down and taken into the house. Then they decorated the tree with tinsel, stars, flags and candles—so lovely when we lit them!

'At New Year the farmer and his wife and children went away to stay with relatives. Eva and I were left alone to look after everything, the house and the cows. I was first up in the morning and I lit the stove. It was awfully cold, 46° below. I made coffee before we went out to the cowshed. The milk pan was in the pantry. We wanted some cream in our coffee but the milk had frozen! I had to scrape ice as cream for our coffee. It

looked so silly that we stood and roared with laughter. We didn't worry about being cold ourselves. But the milk was another matter; we couldn't prevent it freezing.

'Next year I was home in Danasjo for Christmas. Now I would show them how Christmas should be kept! I took the other children out into the forest to cut a tree. They couldn't all come—we didn't have shoes for everybody. We agreed on whose turn it was to go out. At last we found the tree, the finest in the forest. Happily we trudged home with it through the deep snow.

'Papa helped us to fix two cross bits of birch-wood and made a hole in the middle with his hand drill. The tree was wedged firmly in the hole, and there it stood, green and smelling so good, right in the middle of the floor. We all sat round the fire and Papa read us the story of Jesus. He was born in a stable and here we were in a warm cabin. Then we made a ring around the tree and sang all the songs we knew. Papa and Mama got a bit tired, but we youngsters kept dancing and singing round the tree. That was our first Christmas in Danasjo and the best of all.'

'Did you get any apples?' I wondered.

'Oh no,' said Mama, 'we never got presents like you do now. We got syrup on our porridge, and it tasted so good.'

A starved soul

Mama used to read books at night. She had hardly been more than two terms at school. She could read well, but spelling was difficult.

She read a lot, not only the Bible. She knew the parables and Bible stories, and she and Papa both knew Luther's Catechism

well. 'We are to fear God and to love Him....' Mama wasn't a pious person, but she did have a certain edge.

She liked to read about people who fought for their faith. She gave money for Bibles to Russia. She enjoyed travel stories and she built up her own picture of people and events in other lands.

Her Confirmation remained a glowing memory. 'Think of being able to sit down and be taught so much, and experience all that Confirmation means!' It was an important turning point in her life.

Signe was eighteen when she was confirmed. She went as a lodger to some family friends in Stensele. She took her own provisions with her, consisting of dried salt fish, some wildfowl, butter and bread, carefully calculated for each day's needs. Her mother had made pancakes which were meant to do for a week. The bread was supposed to last a long time; but after a month it wasn't exactly fresh.

Her provisions began to run short. Nobody might have noticed it, because she had her own little larder in the porch. But one day an uncle came to visit her and found that the girl had hardly anything to eat. Money she had none. Her uncle went out and got her a good solid piece of pork to keep her going.

'When I was confirmed, I gave my life to God,' Mama told us. 'I have never regretted it. Whatever I receive in life—husband, home, children—it's all a loan from the Lord. It's a loan which I must steward.'

Whoever listened to her had to take her as she was. You could argue as much as you liked, it was all the same to her. For her it was the reality she built her life on, and she had no thought of hiding it.

As a young girl Signe had often been afraid. Her first job was to go out into the forest as a cow-herd. She was nine years old, and she was to look after the cows for the whole summer. For wages she had been promised a skirt and a shawl. But she was so

unhappy in the forest. She was in terror the whole time. Finally, she became so miserable she was fetched home and wasn't forced to be alone in the forest any more. But then she only got the skirt and not the shawl, for she hadn't managed to work the whole summer.

The wilderness, the forest, the wild beasts, all this of course had fed her inner fears. And then there were stories people told. There was also the perpetual darkness of the winter. You had heard since you were little about the witchcraft of the Lapps, and some people even claimed to have seen the *'Vittra'* (forest sprite). The bear had his den near the homestead and the wolf was a constant enemy.

Once, when she was sixteen, at home in Danasjo, Signe had been mortally afraid. Perhaps it was not a bear or a wolf, nor yet a *Vittra* or a troll which terrified her. But she had had a battle inside her so fierce that she had fallen on her knees and prayed God to send his angels to her. Perhaps it was life itself she feared, the great unknown, the unwritten future. But then she had looked up, and she had seen among the fir trees an angel coming with outstretched wings....

After Confirmation she lost all her fears.

Help us, please!

Signe stood and worked the separator in the milk pantry by the light of a candle stump. The children were with her. At that time Gunnar and Axel were little. Anselm was away at work in the forest. Suddenly a stranger was standing in the door.

'I want food,' he said harshly.

Signe couldn't refuse. Although she was terrified she could not let him see it. But she tried to gain time and think out what

she could do. She took the children inside with her, and set about preparing something to eat. The man sat in the kitchen and sharpened his knife. She felt the menace of it. It was dark and there were no grown men anywhere near.

The man wanted to stay the night. This, too, she could not refuse. She thought to herself that as soon as the man was asleep she would take the children and they would all go out and sleep in the hay barn. But as soon as he had gone into the bedroom to lie down, she had another thought. She would bed down with the children right there in the kitchen. She said to the Lord quietly but emphatically, 'Here I am, alone with the children, help us, please!'

Then she slept peacefully. So did the children, and in the morning when they woke they were happy, all fear had gone, and the visitor took himself off without further trouble.

Another time, when Signe was working the separator, a stranger came and asked for food. He wanted sandwiches. At first Signe pretended not to understand him, for the noise of the separator drowned all other sounds. When she spoke, it was mostly to gain time. 'Wait a bit, until I've finished.' And meanwhile she hit upon what to do. 'I'll go and borrow some butter from Aunt Agnes,' she said. And when the separator ground to a halt, she went off to our Aunt Agnes and Uncle Emil. Their son, Hilding, came back with her. That was a little more reassuring; the man got his sandwiches and nothing worse happened.

'Weren't you afraid when Papa was away?' we asked Mama.

'Of course, but I had to put my trust in a higher power,' she answered. 'You just had to sing a lot. That made you happy and you didn't get bad thoughts.'

Generally Mama seemed to be in good spirits. But some of her unbidden guests had disappeared with all the valuables she had, some inherited jewellery, and even her engagement ring.

One day I rushed into the house and cried and screamed for

Mama. My left hand was dangling helplessly. I had been forking the hay and suddenly my wrist was dislocated.

'Run to Papa and borrow his handkerchief,' said Mama.

Papa took me in hand and wiped my snivelling tear-stained face with his gaudy snuff handkerchief. Meanwhile Mama had formed her plan of campaign. Swiftly she took a towel, dipped it in cold water and wrung it out. Then she came across to where I stood with Papa. Almost before I knew it, she wound the towel round my hand and gave it a good hard tug. I yelled with pain. But my hand was back in place, and when the swelling had gone down it was as good as ever. As so often, Mama had had to play the doctor and act by instinct.

Another time we children sat round the kitchen table and listened enthralled to our cousin Adele. She was giving a vivid description of what it was like to be operated on for appendicitis. The story was so dramatic that I suddenly choked on a lump of sugar I was sucking. The lump had sharp edges (it was cut off a sugar loaf) and it stuck fast in my throat. I gasped for breath. Mama caught sight of me. She instantly made me open wide and like lightning she shoved her finger down my throat, crooked it and brought up the lump of sugar. And there it lay, bloody, sharp, and for all the world to see. My throat was sore but free and I could breathe again.

Sunday

Sunday meant something very special for us. We used the word 'special' for anything that wasn't concerned with work. Sunday was the rest day. It was God who had decided that, for He had rested on that day Himself. No hay-loads, no floor-scrubbing, no washtubs, no net-mending. Everything rested on

Sunday. It was as if nature itself rested.

As a matter of fact, the whole of Saturday was spent in preparation for Sunday. The last shirts were ironed, the floor was scrubbed glistening white, the butter churned, the bread baked. Buns were made for the Sunday coffee—but they also had to last the whole week. Papa and the boys caught fish for supper. On Saturday evenings Papa shaved and put on a clean shirt. Everything was so clean; it all smelt of soap and water, freshly baked bread and freshly cooked fish. It all seemed to go together.

So that's how it was on Saturday evening. We were in high spirits as we sat down to table. Fresh white fish, almond potatoes, light white bread, freshly churned butter and buttermilk was our evening meal. And Papa always said, 'Well, so that's the week over,' and he might lament that there were things he hadn't got round to, and that he ought to have done, and maybe something had gone wrong. But Mama said, 'We must be thankful for what we have managed to do, it could have been worse, we lack for nothing.'

There was a special feeling about waking up on Sunday morning; the bed had clean sheets and your hair was freshly washed. There was such a stillness, such a peace. We ran out of doors in our nightgowns and stood on the porch, drinking in the Sunday peace. The very air seemed to be standing still. We felt it enfolding us with the pure sweet scent of the dew which the hot sun was already drying. Mama had milked the cows and given them their extra feed. On Sundays Mama would give a handful of the horse's oats to each of the cows.

The dress hung over the arm of the chair, washed and freshly ironed. It was my dress. Mama had made it out of one of her own. On Saturday nights she washed it and hung it out on the veranda. She would turn it inside out so that it wouldn't get faded in the sun that rose so early in the summer. Mama felt it was the easiest time of the year. My dress was made of corduroy

and only took a couple of hours to dry. We children all got washed very quickly. When the water was warm enough for us to be able to wash in the lake, it was done in a flash. It was harder in the winter when the water had to be carried up from the spring and heated. Then we stood in a queue by the hand-basin and the biggest helped the smallest.

Mama got so much done on a Sunday morning. Already we could smell the trout frying, and there was nothing wrong with our appetites. We never got tired of fish, every time it was like a new dish.

By eleven o'clock everything was finished. In later years when we had the wireless, we turned on the church service loud enough for everyone to hear. Sometimes one would pick up a newspaper and pretend to read it, even if one was really listening to the service. Often I would sit clasping my hands hard together not to show how moved I was by what the parson said. You couldn't admit to feelings like that.

And then—the gleam in the boys' eyes as they got an idea. Suddenly they vanished. All we saw as they went was a trouserleg and the butt of the airgun. They knew full well that Mama didn't like it. It was Sunday, and who knew what might happen. Sunday's peace was not to be disturbed. But Sundays lasted endlessly. The boys came back, disappointed. There had been no hunting. They never did find a target on a Sunday. Was Mama right after all? Surely one day they'd be lucky?

Sunday dragged on, with nothing to do. Sometimes it almost frightened you. What in the world would it be like if you never had any work to do? But Mama was supposed to rest on a Sunday. She actually did lie down and rest. In summer we only ate buttermilk and our thin, flat bread, but in winter Papa cut up meat and put it in the cookpot. It was often we girls who cooked the potatoes; they always had to be peeled on a Sunday.

Never a Sunday passed in summer without our having visitors. Sometimes as many as three or four motor boats would

come putt-putting up, loaded with neighbours from another village far away at the bottom end of the lake. The kitchen was full to overflowing. You shook hands and you curtseyed. The women in their gay summer dresses, and the men in their shirtsleeves. The coffee pot was on the stove even before they set foot on shore. Sometimes if we had eaten up all the buns, Mama would bake waffles. Meanwhile, Papa would take all the men out to show them the fields and talk of seed and manure.

The women in the kitchen had plenty to talk about; calves and pigs and the sheets they were weaving and how many metres of floor matting they had on the loom. We tried to join in, but in the end we were just standing gaping. Then Mama would say, 'You'd best all go out!'

That was just what we wanted, but we didn't know for sure if it was all right. Out we went. Who could run the fastest to the lake? We must show our guests our dearest possessions. There were many kinds of fish among the rocks that had been thrown into the water when the fields were dug. The trick was to keep so utterly still that you could catch a little pike with your fingers. You could only hold it a few seconds or it might die. You could keep on with that for hours. Mama began to get worried and called us in, so we rushed in again and ate waffles.

We went early to bed on Sundays, for the next day it must be early to rise. Anyway, we were tired, even by doing nothing.

To school on skis

For four years Gunnar and Axel went to school in Abacka. But during the year when I turned seven all of us children were boarded with families in Giltjaur. My brothers and I were put to lodge with August Johansson and his wife, Tilda. They took

us into the family exactly as if we had been their own children—but now they suddenly had five instead of two.

We only came home for Christmas and Easter. And every time it was just as hard to leave home again. Giltjaur was nine kilometres away over the mountain. At Christmas we went home on skis. I went first and cut the tracks and the boys followed. We were on the way home—and that made the going easy! But still the mountain was steep and difficult. When we got to the top, I said to Axel, 'Now you can go first.' I didn't dare go down the mountain as fast as he. We were never home long enough to get bored. At New Year we had to go back to school, no matter how much we wanted to stay home.

While we were away in Giltjaur we got a new little sister, Vera. She was born on 1st March and we had to wait till Easter until we could see her. What a surprise! We thought how sweet she looked there in the cradle. This time the cradle had actually been free for the new baby.

We had a bitch which had had puppies at almost the same time as Vera was born. The puppies were turned out. But the bitch stayed in the corner and watched over Vera. If anyone came too near, she rushed at him. Once she just about bit the nose off Ludde Lindgren when he stooped to get a look at little Vera.

After two years in Giltjaur I was sent to Sorsele, and lived there in the school boarding-house. I found it a difficult time. My marks kept going down. I was unhappy and felt that the others were getting at me. Mama supplied us with home-knitted stockings and mittens. The school was supposed to provide us with other clothes. I grew fast and soon I was taller than all the others, anyway the girls. Nothing fitted me. One day a parcel arrived from some wealthy lady down south. Among the things was a pair of blue flannel riding breeches, which fitted me perfectly. But ugh! Everybody called me 'long drawers'. I didn't dare wear the breeches. In the afternoons when I had to carry in

wood for the Scripture teacher, I persuaded one of the girls to lend me her green ski pants. Then I felt I looked really smart, yellow jumper, green ski pants. I met a young man who paid me the first compliment of my life. 'How smart you look!'

That young man had a great place in my heart for years.

I grew so alarmingly fast that I was ordered to rest every afternoon and drink cream and eat sugar to put on weight. I was so tall and scraggy. At school they teased me as 'the queen from Abacka'. Later, when Dagmar came to school, they called her the princess, and Martin the prince.

One day a real prince and princess came to the school. They were Gustaf Adolf and Sibylla, the Duke and Duchess of Vesterbotten, who were making a visit to the region.

Flour was distributed to the people. That was a time when many went hungry and still more had no money.

Net and long-line

It was St Matthias-tide. Drops were starting to fall from the roof. Our spirits rose. Our steps grew lighter and swifter. Winter began to loosen its grip and the grey timbered cottages glistened like silver in the sun, that heavenly sun which had now come back to us.

'Matthias with his beard that thaws, lures the children out of doors,' recited Mama. So now we stood looking and trying to imagine the beard. Yes, surely, with a little imagination you could see a beard in the mass of snow hanging from the roof, and close to the wall there were actually some bare spots. But St Matthias' Day was only at the end of February and it would still be long until spring really came. When the earth finally did begin to thaw out, we could start to play marbles in the mud.

Papa had once made me a wooden doll. Otherwise we had no toys. Bits of bark made lovely boats which floated down the rivulets when the snow began to melt. The boys were clever at making little sleds out of bits of wood Papa gave them. And we had cones and moss to play cows and cowsheds with.

Now was the time to fish for pike. It was tasty in the early spring, but in the summer it could go free for all we cared. I was allowed to go fishing with Papa. We wrapped up good and warm and put on long rubber boots. Mama got the food bag ready. In the pocket there were spare mittens, and to be on the safe side, Mama had put in an extra box of matches. You could always do with a good hot cup of coffee, she thought. And out beyond the point it could snow hard in the early spring.

We rowed out to the end of the open water. Then we dragged the boat across the ice to the next open water, and so we kept going till we reached the bay where we used to catch pike. Then we set out the bag nets. Next day we came back and examined them. When we caught a lot of pike we slit them along the backbone and spread them flat. Then we hung them up under the eaves to dry in the sun.

Winter and summer, Papa had pain in one knee. He got it from kneeling on the ice so often to drag in the nets. Just before Christmas Papa would set the net under the ice. To draw it in, he used a horsehair rope and some poles bound together. It was good to get some fresh fish after all that rich Christmas food.

In the summer we put out the long-line. Then we would row far out to where it was deep and we could find the salmon-trout. Papa could read the lake bed as others read maps. Every deep and every shallow, every stone he knew. I loved being with Papa in the boat. The wind might be stiff and the waves high, but with Papa I need never be afraid.

'Hold her just as she is, and row back slowly,' said Papa. It was hard to row backwards and keep her steady against the waves. I

had to learn to concentrate. If I didn't I lost control of the boat and that would never do.

We hauled in the first salmon-trout.

'That was a darned good one,' said Papa.

Fresh bait on the hook, down again with the line. Sometimes we caught a full dozen of the *bortings*, as we called the salmon-trout.

The reindeer trek

'Morning, mother Signe, any salt fish today?'

'Morning, Abraham, of course we've salt fish. I'll put it on to boil right away, the stove's good and hot.'

The Lapps were on the move with their reindeer. They used to stay with us. Abraham was the first to arrive. Mama had to fetch the fish from the outhouse. The snow was deep, but Mama was light on her feet and ran so fast that the snow never got into her shoes. And soon the fish and the almond potatoes were on the boil.

'How's things up on the mountain? I expect you don't like coming down to the woods—how are your children—I'm sure I shan't recognise them now—they grow so fast—and mother Anna, she's all right, I hope?'

All these questions came out in one breath from Mama. There was much to talk about. Yes, this time mother Anna had travelled ahead with the children by bus and train to the lakeside house in the forest. That's where the family lived in the winter.

The herd arrived. It was a thrill. The reindeer pulled sleds in long caravans. The open space in front of the house was completely filled with Lapps, dogs and rucksacks. The

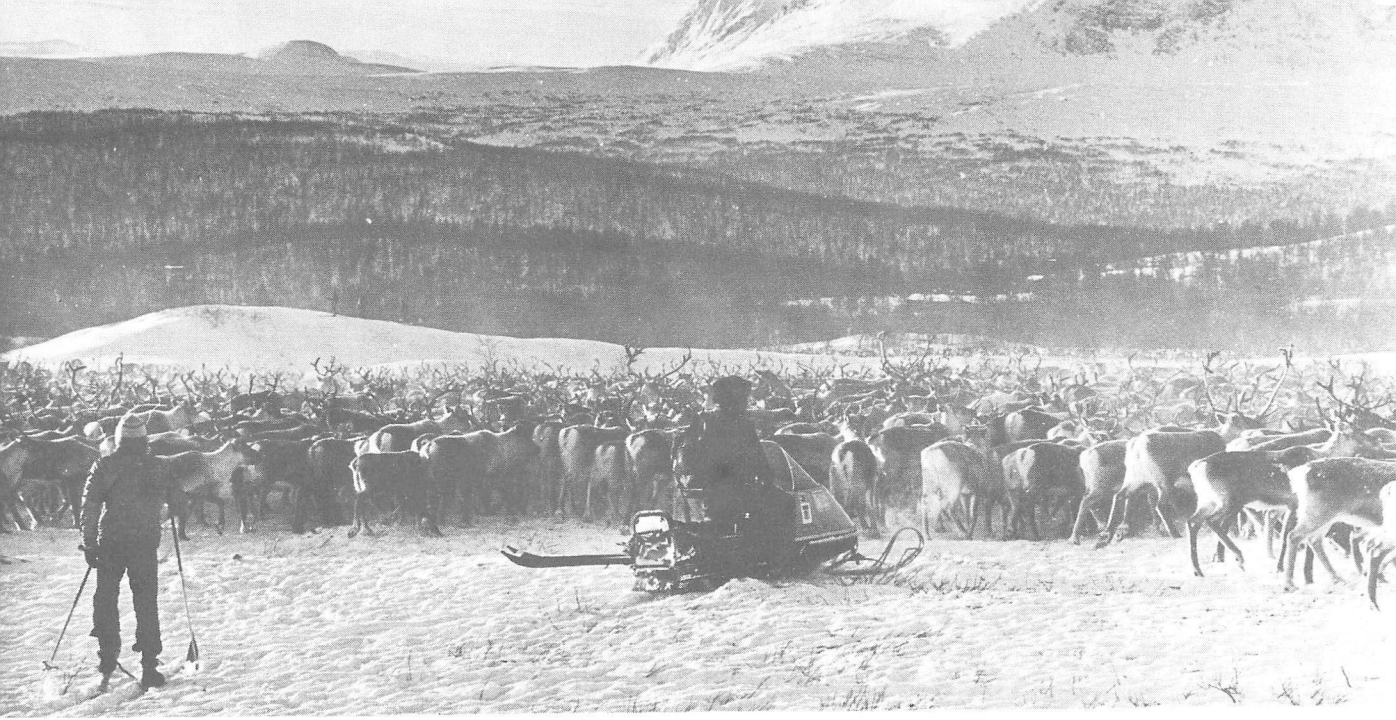
hundreds of deer in the herd had been grazing up on the stony slopes where we children ran barefoot in the summer. Now they were metres deep in snow. The deer had to dig through the snow and eat lichen. Our kitchen was equally full of rucksacks, dogs, men women and children.

The slaughtering took place down on the ice. Small round holes were cut in the ice to rinse the pieces of carcass. Nothing was wasted. Huge cooking pots full of meat were put on the stove. The Lapps were hungry and tired. We fetched wood, and Mama heated the kitchen range till it glowed red. Outside, big cauldrons were hung over open fires.

There was a cosy feeling with the warmth, the good food and the tiredness that caught up on the men. Those who took a nap on the kitchen floor rested their heads on their rucksacks, and the dogs rested, too. It was no joke to keep a big herd together in deep snow. If we came too near the dogs, they growled. We watched out; we didn't want to get into trouble; we had seen their teeth when they gnawed bones.

Mama made beds for us on the floor with extra mattresses which were fetched from the lakeside storehouse. It was exciting to sleep on the floor and it was exciting to meet the whole new world that the Lapps brought in with them. During the night we could hear one of them singing a *yoik* (a Lappish ballad). Papa understood something of their language. This *yoik* told of the Lapp's love of his bride-to-be who was now trekking with another herd in a different part of Lapland.

Abraham used to play with us. We held our arms out over our heads and became reindeer. Abraham lassoed us. The rope sang through the air when he threw it. He never missed. Once when he had caught me, he hauled me over the beams right up to the kitchen ceiling. I was frightened. Axel and Gunnar watched me as I hesitated. 'You've been in the game from the start, don't funk it now,' their eyes seemed to say. So I took courage, and carried on, over the beam and down again.

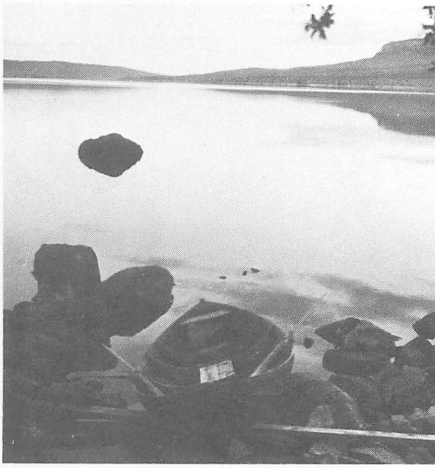


The reindeer trek

Our home in Abacka just before it was flooded

Papa's Christmas fishing

Papa's boat in Lake Storjuktan



Abraham took us out in the sledge, and the snow flew as the reindeer ran. What a fabulous thing to do! How we wished we had a tame reindeer!

Sometimes the Lapps would stay a long time, depending on how good the grazing was. Papa and Abraham had a lot to talk about. There were many points where tensions could grow between the Lapps and the settlers. A lot of the hay could be trampled down if we had failed to barricade the hay-fences round the marsh before the deer came down from the mountains. Sometimes a stray reindeer would even knock the fence down. Once, there was so little hay left that we had to slaughter a cow. Papa talked about such things with Abraham. It was important to have everything out in the open.

'I didn't think much of your old reindeer and their master when I came to that meadow to harvest my hay,' said Papa. They were sitting opposite one another at the table. Mama had added goat cheese to the coffee on that particular day. A crease appeared at the corners of Abraham's mouth, his eyes gleamed and he let out the roaring laugh that we knew so well: 'The old Lapp has said and thought a few things, too.' That was the end of that talk.

It was so quiet and dull at home after the herd had left to continue its trek. We children had to go back to our own beds. The mattresses we had slept on were taken out and brushed in the fresh snow before being carried back to the shed.

But there were still holes in the ice after the slaughter. Gunnar and Axel once played there when they were small. The ice was smooth and lovely to slide on. A sprinkling of new snow had come, but only enough to make patches of white here and there. They bet each other which could slide the furthest. Suddenly Axel disappeared in one of the holes. He was gone. But only for a few seconds. The hole was invisible because of the thin coating of snow. Axel bounced out again like a ball, straight up from the hole. The little boys rushed in to Mama.

Axel was so small that he couldn't talk properly. 'Lickle angels lift me up, lickle angels lift me up.' Off came the wet things. Axel was quickly put into bed and Mama gave him hot milk.

Wild strawberries and cream

There was a well-trodden path to Lake Arvtrasken, three kilometres away. The path followed a brook upstream, and we loved the walk. The brook flowed into Lake Jukta. In the spring the dams were opened and the logs danced in long rows downstream. This was a popular event each year in the village. People came to see the log rafts, and made waffles for the men who were working night and day.

By the river was a sawmill built by the men of the village. It was completed in 1925. There also stood a mill where we ground the corn. Much of our haymaking was done around Lake Arvtrasken. In the summer we went back to the marsh.

In the marsh we had to barricade the hay-fences with branches of pine and fir. At the bottom the branches were stamped hard into the ground, and they were so high that only the top of the hay-fence showed. On the outside we wedged fir poles to prevent the reindeer from getting at the hay.

When you came with the sled to fetch hay in the winter, it was important to know if the ground was really frozen solid. Otherwise, horse and sled, haybox and all might disappear in some unexpected water. To get the hay you had to take away the guard fence. This could be quite difficult if it was frozen solid. You packed the haybox full, and stamped the hay down tightly. When you got back home everybody helped unload.

Gleaming like the eyes of a deer, Lake Arvtrasken was lying there, between the steep mountains. Sometimes we trolled in it,

and sometimes we used a net. One day I caught a two-pound perch—my first! And I managed to take the flapping fish off the hook, too.

Papa and I were on our way home. We had laid out all the nets. The path wound across a high ridge along the brook and far away below we could see Lake Jukta, blue among the dark mountains. It was the loveliest late summer day. The evening sun poured a flood of gold over the forest. We heard the flapping of some birds' wings, but the only other sound to break the stillness was the rustle of Papa's wet trouser legs.

'It's almost a sin and a shame to talk, it just doesn't seem to fit here,' said Papa.

'Yes, that's true,' I said.

Papa continued, 'I've always loved it around here. I think we'll go by the bog and see if the berries are ripe. It's a bit out of the way, but we'll still be home in time to get the fish for dinner.'

We had to be back in time to take up the nets, but we decided we would go round and see if there were any wild strawberries. The path was narrow and went in among high fir trees. Summer though it was, the place was nearly dark. At this time of the year the nights were so light that you had almost forgotten what darkness was like. The path widened and there were the strawberries. They shone red, big, juicy, growing among their green leaves. Almost tenderly Papa gathered them in his big hands. We ate. Papa broke a bit of bark off a birch and made it into a little scoop. We gathered the rest of the strawberries and put them in it.

'Now, we'll see what Mama says when she sees what a fine year this is for wild strawberries,' said Papa smiling.

Some years the rain poured on the tender flowers and ruined them, but this year we could have strawberries and cream for dinner.

The bear

We were on our knees, clearing weeds from the potato patch. It was a hot summer day. Mama had promised that we could swim when we were done. Suddenly we heard something—'Baa, baa.' Was it a sheep? It must be Axel playing a trick on us. But we heard the sound again. Mama stood up and gazed towards the pasture with practised eyes.

'I think it's the ram; he must be ill.'

During the summer the sheep grazed freely where they would in the forest; we set them loose early in the spring and fetched them back before the frost.

We went in search of the ram. He didn't resist as he used to when we laid hands on him. He went slowly into the barn and lay down, and there he lay for several days, refusing food and drink. Mama examined him but couldn't find anything wrong.

Our cousins next door decided to go and look for the flock. With rifles and rucksacks they set off into the forest. They returned late in the evening. They had found the sheep but in a terrible panic.

'We tried all day to round them up, but we simply couldn't,' said Ragnar.

They had seen several mutilated sheep, both ewes and rams. The bear had been in action.

The bear's work was not a pretty sight. Parts of the sheep had been buried in the earth and covered with turf. 'Cunning of the bear to start with the one ewe that had a bell,' thought Ragnar.

We realised that some of us had been walking on that very path only a few days before. We had been close to where the bear had done his deadly work. It was a gruesome feeling.

Next day the men succeeded in collecting the sheep and

getting them home. The rest of the summer they had to graze on the home pasture. The bear had made his mark in several ways. The sheep jumped at the slightest sound and stood gazing fearfully for a long time. The ram gradually got his strength back.

One day Papa told us how he had seen his first bear. He was nine years old, and his job was to take the cows to the pasture near the forest.

'One day I saw a bear come and peer over a big rock at a cow. He wasn't a pretty sight I can tell you. I was frightened. I waved my stick at him and yelled as loud as I could. The bear just stood and looked at me. Then, what did he do but turn round and lumber off into the forest? The cows had rushed off in terror, and I wasn't slow to follow them. I flew over the stones to the marsh. Was I glad when I got home, still alive and still with all the cows. I had never run so fast in all my life.' But next day once again it was off to the forest with the cows.

The cauldron by the lake

The iron cauldron stood there by the lake, shielded from the north winds by some rocks. Mama took me with her times without number when she did the laundry down by the lake. Once when I was fourteen months old I had suddenly stood on my head in the water between some stones. When Mama looked up from the wash-pot, all she could see of me was my feet and legs.

Now I was fourteen and allowed to do the washing all by myself for the first time. Again and again I had asked to, and in the end Mama gave in. Clothes and linen were valuable items in the settlers' homes, where everything was home woven. Years of work had gone into them.

The day before wash day I made everything ready. I carried down sacks of birch wood to make the fire under the sooty pot. All the washing had to be put to soak in big wooden buckets and bowls. Sheets in one, towels in another, coloureds in a third, and woollens must be kept separate—no soaking for them. In the summer every single thing on the farm must be washed; covers, rugs and all the homespun clothes.

Early next morning I was up and lighting the fire under the pot, which I filled with water from the lake. To save steps I took a bucket in each hand. A household of eight meant a lot of washing. I took out the first lot of warm water and put it aside so as to have something to wash with from time to time. The first job was to start all the sheets and all the whitewash boiling in the cauldron. The lye hung on a string in the water. Mama had made the lye herself out of ashes. She used to buy brown soap from the village shop; it didn't cost much. Soap powder we thought of as something extra special, a luxury you allowed yourself very rarely. Once Mama had received a shilling for baking bread from five kilos of flour for a team of foresters. 'What did you do with the shilling?' I asked her. 'I bought soap powder,' said Mama.

Half a jar of lye for so much water, I had learned, so the lye went in and now I stood pushing the white washing into the water with a big knobbed stick. Flames and soot seemed wild to get into the pot with the washing. When the sheets were boiled, I carried them down to the lake and rinsed them carefully. All the bleach must be got out. Soon I was hanging sheet after sheet on the line; I thought the white linen looked so lovely against the green grass and the blue sky.

Soon, too, the handwoven towels were hanging on the lines, clean and rough in the fresh air; red on one, blue and green on another. Mama had told me that ironing was easy if you shook the washing carefully before you hung it up. The sun and the wind did their work. We never put the sheets in the mangle, and

only the top edges were ironed. When you jumped into bed those sheets made you feel you were right in the sun and the wind.

Mama called out that the coffee was ready, and I stretched my back and left the scrubbing board and the blue overalls, which had to soak a bit longer; the dirt was still fast in the knees. Oh my, Mama had made waffles! That was what we most often gave our guests, and now Mama had made them specially for me, for I had done the washing for the first time, all by myself. I was truly touched, and she let me eat all I wanted. Mama served me and I felt really grown up and efficient. But I couldn't sit too long eating waffles, I had to take care of the fire under the pot.

When all was done, all the bowls and pans back in place, Mama came to see if everything was right. 'She will look at the fine clothes-lines and all the clean things dancing in the wind,' I thought. But no—first she went to the shed where the lye, the soap, the matches, the bowls and pans were kept. She looked at the brushes, she felt round the inside of the bucket. I watched her breathlessly, and then Mama said, 'You have done well, you're a good girl. It looks just as if I had done it myself.'

The beautiful horse

Faithful old Putte was gone. Year after year he had hauled timber, fetched hay, pulled the harrow and made long trips to the market for stores. Papa and Putte belonged together in all their daily work. But now Putte was too old for work. We couldn't afford to keep a horse for the fun of it—the hay would give out. So that meant the end for Putte. I preferred not to know how it happened.

Now we had no horse, and life wasn't the same. After a while we decided that Axel and Gunnar should go up to Danasjo and look at a new horse. Mama's brother, Robert, had one for sale. They came home with the most beautiful light-brown horse you could imagine. It was young and just trained. They had had to pay 1,200 crowns and even that was a reduced price as the sale was in the family.

Our neighbours had potato fields on an islet that lay about three hundred metres out from our side of the lake. They had no horse, and we sometimes did work for them by the day. There was a big steady raft which they used when horses and machines had to be transported. One of the men rowed or took a motor boat to tow the raft. In fine weather it worked well. So now two of the men were to take the new horse to the islet to do some harrowing. The raft was broad enough for both the horse and the harrow. It had a pole at each corner, and along each side ran a plank from the front to the back pole. The plank was about the height of the horse's collar, and by this means the horse could be kept from moving sideways and upsetting the balance of the raft.

But as the new horse started to pull the harrow on board, one of the projecting ends of the plank caught him in the groin. The horse was frightened and reared. The raft was not moored, and it glided out into the lake. The horse splashed down between the shore and the raft and stood in the water. But when it saw its masters gliding away on the raft it panicked, wanted to follow, and started to swim. The men called out to a third man to shove the boat out so that they could get nearer the horse, but the heavy harrow turned on its side, and the shafts shifted. One of the harness pins broke and the harrow sank more deeply into the water. The horse fell on its side and kicked out wildly, but could not get upright again. The men tried to get hold of the halter, but it slipped from their hands. They saw the horse's head dragged under the surface. In a few seconds, incredibly

quickly, it was all over. The horse was dead, drowned before their very eyes. That fine young beautiful horse they had bought! The sale was so recent that there had been no time to transfer the insurance to the new owners. For months after that Axel said not a word. He could not speak, he just grieved inside. Papa and Mama were anxious about him. On Sundays we would see him sitting for hours by the aspen tree, looking out over the lake, and for a long time we had no horse.

Our best china!

Mama was the one who managed to say what she thought. She always took a stand and gave her view about things. If she didn't know, she said so. 'No, I don't know. That's how it is,' she would say, with a little smile.

Papa found it hard to come out with his thoughts and opinions. He could tell stories but it wasn't so easy for him to talk about what really went on inside. There were no big discussions when Papa went over the day's work with the boys. They followed a plan for the year which Papa and Mama had thought out together. Which trees should be felled and sold; how the new ditches should be dug, and so on. When the boys got older they had a pretty free hand to do the work as they thought best. When Papa and Mama had gone to bed at night, we could hear them whispering to each other. We liked to hear it; it was bad when nothing was said. There were some years, when I was between eight and fourteen, which were specially difficult.

Men would come over from the next village with their monthly liquor ration in their pockets. We knew exactly who had what, and who were the moonshiners. Tongues were

loosed, the men would talk, and Mama made coffee, but sometimes she slipped away to the barn to get away from it all.

Quite often so many men came that our usual cups were not enough. And one day one of the men swept his arm across the table, so that the whole of Mama's best china set crashed onto the floor. There were coffee stains all over her beautiful white floor.

Dagmar and I lay end to end in a bed near the stove. We thought it was horrid when the men went on like that. Sometimes one of them would come and bend over us and we could smell his breath. 'So here's where the little girls sleep,' he would say.

In the summer it was almost worse, for then it was light all night long. A man could easily take his brandy flask wherever he went. Men would stand around having a drink, and during Mission meetings someone nearly always offered a nip, but then it was done behind the barn.

There was less restraint at weddings or other festivals. Once I saw Gunnar and Papa standing on the hillside with a tight grip on each other's collar. Their voices got louder and louder, and talk gave way to blows. Wild with anxiety, I rushed forward to get between them and separate them, but Papa simply brushed me aside and I fell over. I ran in and called for Mama, who came at once and tried to make them let go. Slowly they cooled down.

Another time, Gunnar was lying vomiting on the ground by Uncle Emil's barn. He was eighteen and couldn't take spirits because they always made him sick, and now he was trying to get rid of his misery by sticking his fingers down his throat. He retched and retched. Papa came by, a bit unsteady himself. But he thought it was disgraceful that the boy should lie on the ground and go on like that. 'What are you lying there for?' said Papa. He hauled Gunnar up on his feet. And there they stood, clinging to each other, swaying a bit. Suddenly they were both on the ground and Gunnar was on top. He lay on Papa and held

him down. However sick he felt, he was proud that he wasn't the one underneath.

Mama tried to get Gunnar to apologise to Papa about that. She often pressed him to, but Gunnar didn't think it necessary. There was no long-standing difference between him and Papa. They both felt very ashamed after things like that happened, but they let it lie. Nothing was said, but we others felt it had been awful. To think that Papa might have really gone for Gunnar! Nobody could know how it might end, for Papa was so strong.

The mixture of fear and admiration meant that sometimes I didn't know what to think of Papa. Our best hours together were in the boat fishing. And in fact I was 'Papa's girl'. Awkward and ugly as I might be in my own eyes when I compared myself with Dagmar, I knew that at all events I had a place in Papa's heart. That time when Martin was born and I had pneumonia, he was more worried about me than about Mama and the new-born baby. He thought he would never see his girl again.

But when I saw how Mama suffered, I became bitter against Papa. I had seen what happened to her fine china and her spotlessly white floor. Mama suffered greatly because Papa couldn't say no to the men, and couldn't keep from using up his liquor ration.

Housekeeper in charge at fourteen

One day in the cowshed, Mama suddenly spat blood, and fainted. Papa carried her inside and laid her on the bed. She was so exhausted that she could not get up for several days. Then she got better, and started to work again.

But the doctor diagnosed bleeding ulcers. There were so many ulcers that he could not operate, and indeed we had often seen her spitting blood into the stove. She tired quickly. Now the municipal council gave her aid for medical treatment in the sanatorium at Are in the next province to the south of us. It was like preparing a journey to the other side of the world. And it was like cutting our heart out to see Mama go away.

I was fourteen years old and had to take over the responsibility of housekeeping. We helped to get Mama ready. She had a perm. We wrote up for a blue straw hat with flowers and a ribbon that we had seen in Ahlen and Holm's mail order catalogue. It cost six crowns.

We sewed flowery dresses for her. Never had we seen Mama look so smart as when she set out on her eight weeks' cure. Papa sat down sometimes at his writing desk, glasses on nose, and wrote long letters to Mama. Vera, who was five, drew flourishes on paper, and Mama wrote back that she knew exactly what she meant. It was earlier that summer I had learnt to do the washing, but mending clothes—that was harder. When I saw the big holes in the knees of Papa's overalls, I could not think how I could even start to mend them. I had just put them on the kitchen table to do something about them when grandmother came to call.

'Bless my soul!' she said. 'And I never thought about it. Here, let me do that.'

After that, I could go over to grandmother's with everything that needed mending, or she would come and do it for me.

My brothers were to go haymaking for a whole week and needed food packets. What do you give to hungry young fellows of sixteen and seventeen? I made pancake after pancake, then I baked loaves. They began to rise so nicely and looked so promising, right up to the last moment when I was going to put them into the oven. Then I saw I had taken the wrong pans and they wouldn't go into the oven. My lovely loaves sank down

and went soggy in the middle. Great grief! But they were eaten anyway. And so we packed fish, smoked pork, a can of milk, butter, coffee, sugar. Fresh food the boys would get by fishing in the lakes up where they were haymaking.

I took my responsibility for my little brother and sisters very seriously. Of course, they didn't understand that. They liked to tease me sometimes. One day I came back from the barn to find the house empty, the door wide open and flies and midges buzzing round inside. Where had the youngsters gone? Then I saw them out on the lake, three little things in a boat. One rowed, and one was sitting in the stern, one perched high in the bows, feet dangling in the water. I was so terrified that I wanted to scream, but Mama had said, 'Never scream at children, it makes them frightened.' Instead, I started to bustle about the house, inside and out, making as much noise as possible, so that they would notice that I had come back. I slammed the milk churns together, and peeped out over the lake. Yes, slowly the little figures sank down in the boat and they steered towards the shore. And was I happy! I didn't even scold them for having taken the boat without permission.

Papa was out all day, working on road jobs which the Government arranged to relieve unemployment. He earned three crowns a day. I was up at half-past five every morning, determined to do every farmhouse chore, the cows, the food, the wash and the children. The heaviest job was scrubbing the floor. One day Papa found me fast asleep in bed with all my clothes on. I was so tired I had rolled into bed just as I stood. Papa began to realise it was getting too hard for me, and wondered if he couldn't find some help. But I set my face against having any woman come from outside. Nobody should take Mama's place. I told Gunnar what Papa had said, and that I was determined to manage it all by myself. After that, Gunnar helped me by scrubbing the floor on Saturdays when he came home for the weekend.

When Mama came home we scarcely recognised her. She was wearing a lovely polka-dot blouse in black and white with frills on the sleeves. She had put on so much weight that none of the fine clothes we had made for her still fitted. She had curly hair and new teeth and she had had a wonderful time in Are. She had been given cream to drink every day and found good care and good friends, but she was happy to be home again. Of course, she had often found it hard to be away, and had thought of us and our problems at home. She had said to herself, 'Now there is nothing more I can do for them. I must give it all over to God, however it turns out.' Instead of worrying, her job was to get better, and she did. In their letters, Papa and she had been able to talk out a lot that needed talking out. Perhaps this helped her to get better; at all events, she never had ulcers again.

A big alarm clock

At the end of her life, grandmother came to live with us. She would sit close to the window and mend nets. She used every last bit of daylight. One autumn she was ill and had to stay in bed. She liked to lie in the bedroom just behind the door, for it was quietest there and she was against the inside wall. One day she was so ill that we sent for the Vicar.

'Anna-Sara wants to take Communion,' was the message to the Vicar in Sorsele, who had recently been appointed. He instantly got on his bicycle and rode the forty kilometres in heavy rain to Abacka to give grandmother Communion and blessing, and then forty kilometres back, still in heavy rain. But grandmother lived through that long autumn.

Often we could hear her voice coming from the bedroom. 'Grandmother is praying again, so she must be bad,' said

Mama. Grandmother was thumping the edge of the bed with her finger as if to keep time with the last fluttering heartbeats. Anselm was logging, a day's journey away from home. But grandmother asked for a message to be sent to him. She had something important to say to him; it couldn't wait. There was something she wanted to ask his forgiveness for. Something that happened when he was a little boy. She felt she had not treated him right, and before she went she wanted to put it straight.

Just before Christmas grandmother was so weak that we didn't think she would live through it. To be on the safe side, we gave her a Christmas gift in advance. It was a big alarm clock which ticked evenly and loudly and had big hands that grandmother could see from her bed. All the same, she did live till Christmas, so then the only thing we could think of for a present was some fruit from the shop, for she had to have something when all the others were celebrating Christmas.

Gradually the whole family assembled to say goodbye to grandmother. Aunt Betty came with our cousins. We took it in turns to watch beside grandmother. Before the end came, we were all gathered in the room. In a last moment of strength grandmother raised herself in the bed. She turned to her sons, pointed at them one by one, 'You Emil, you Anselm, you Oskar', and gave a special message to each one. There were simple clear words in this Will of grandmother's.

Thus died grandmother.

It was utterly quiet after the stormy feelings and dramatic farewell, which we all, great and small, had taken part in. The Bible was laid beneath grandmother's chin.

The coffin came across the ice on a sledge. It had to wait for a time in the room till all was ready for grandmother to be laid in it. Vera and Martin, the two youngest, smuggled themselves into it, and tried out how it felt to lie in a coffin, a bit eerie though.... Mama could not think who it was who had been there and

opened the coffin. As soon as the lid was on, the coffin was moved out to the toolshed. A closed coffin could not be in the same building as the living. Soon the funeral procession moved out over the ice.

White gym shoes

The chief forester and the ranger lived with us for long periods. Mama gave them breakfast and dinner. They looked after their own lunch packet. Mama got a bit of extra money for this lodging; the money was handy for buying the warp for weaving, and other needs.

But 'money is not the most important thing,' as Mama often said. More important than money was having time with people from other places, who had news and told us what was happening out in the world. We listened a lot to the radio in the evenings. And we had heated discussions about what was happening in Germany. Mama was utterly against Hitler; what he was doing to the Jews must be wrong, for all men should be equal. The ranger on the other hand was all for Hitler's Germany and admired what was happening there.

Papa and Mama sided together in the discussions with the ranger, but Mama was the one who went at him hardest. I never in my life saw her so worked up as when she started talking about Hitler. Finally, Papa had to say firmly that now he thought we had talked enough about it. He let it be known that the ranger would be welcome to return but it would be better to find some other subject to talk about.

On one occasion the forester brought some friends with him who were on holiday. Their son had white gym shoes on. Just think—white gym shoes! The height of luxury, I thought. For

the most part we ran around barefoot, but if we had gym shoes at all they were blue, so as not to get dirty too soon. They had to last a long time.

The things going on in the world, as well as our own home life, gave us more and more to ponder over. The war broke out. The boys were called up. They started with training as recruits, Gunnar in Eksjo with the Engineers, Axel with the Riflemen in Boden and Kiruna. That summer Papa was left alone with the whole hay crop to mow. He almost wept, how could he manage everything? But that year, 1940, he did all the haymaking with Dagmar and Martin, twelve and ten years old. The hay had to be harvested both from the slopes and from the marsh. There was a man called 'Sweat' Karlsson, because he sweated so much in the heat. He was a commercial traveller and he moved round and sold flannel shirts, dress material, thread and buttons. We liked him a lot. 'Sweat' Karlsson was a reliable man. He brought us news from other places, for his journeys took him quite far south. This summer he helped Papa with the harvest.

The visits of the chief forester, the ranger, the Vicar and others meant contact with the world beyond our own, and of course you always wondered how people lived in other places.

'Here we are, and here we do our work,' I thought. 'Wash clothes, mow hay, Papa sharpens the scythe, cows calve, sheep are sheared, weeds are cleared, but there must be more to life than that. What will become of me, will I get married here and become a farmer's wife?' There were boys all right who wanted to marry me, but I couldn't make up my mind about it. I wasn't all that keen to get married, there was something more that was to happen first, something more I was to do or learn.

I sent an application in to a Country Housekeeping School in Norrbotten province. That was what I thought I ought to learn more of, but I would have liked most of all to have done something with art. In Sorsele the teacher had encouraged me, and said I had artistic talent and that I ought to on with my

drawing. I, a farmer's daughter, to study art! I didn't even dare mention it to Papa and Mama. Instead, I applied to enter the Housekeeping School. That would look better to them, I thought.

But when I had to pay the registration fee I didn't have the necessary thirty crowns. I could undoubtedly have got some help if I had only made the effort, but it wasn't at all to my taste to ask. I would rather take refuge in a white lie. I said that I had been to the doctor and been told that my eyes were not good enough. So I could not join the school when term started.

The aspen grove

A big aspen stood on the slope down by the lake. The bank was dry and hard, but there grew this sky-high aspen and round it sprang new aspens from the dry earth and soil. Papa had carefully thinned out all the young aspens each year as they took root, but when he saw I liked to sit under the big tree, he let the little ones grow as they would.

What are the dreams of a seventeen-year-old? I dreamed in the aspen grove. I dreamed when we ran barefoot on the stony hills, or climbed the mountains with those wide perspectives before our eyes. I dreamed as I got that shuddering feeling when wading through ice-cold streams.... I dreamed of the future. Think, if, hey presto, something happened, something unexpected, something great!

The blood pulsed in my veins, as swift as the rustling aspen leaves in the wind. Forces stormed and raged within me until I felt utterly exhausted. Where did they come from, and was I alone in feeling them? Was it natural? Question upon question, but where was the answer to be found? 'Oh silvery moon, send a

greeting over the mountains to the one I love.' Love, yes, I was in love with life itself.

The old gramophone was blaring away in the corner of the barn, where Mama had once danced as a bride. Now it was we children and our cousins who were trying to learn to dance. My cousin Ake kept obstinately making long leaps, but we soon learned to swing round in a hambo dance.

Once we cycled the forty kilometres to Sorsele to go to the cinema. On the way we picked up cousins and other friends. It was high summer and we were in high spirits. We had a marvellous time. After the cinema, we drank coffee and ate Danish pastries and cakes at a cafe. Then we cycled home through the night. We had to row across the river with our cycles and everything. Of course, Aunt Agnes and Mama had their fears. 'Suppose one of them thoughtlessly rocks the boat, or someone has got drunk and capsizes it....' But we got home in good shape at half past one and the excitement was over. Everyone slept happily that summer night.

One summer I got a job in Sorsele. There I bought my first pair of shoes, a pair of red sandals. I carried trays, served coffee and washed dishes all day long in a cafe. My feet felt like lead and I had to take off my red sandals. I thought the stony hills were much softer than that cold parquet floor. The head waitress said that I could dry the dishes sitting down. So I was sitting there barefoot, my shoes kicked off, when the boss came in. 'Nobody works here sitting down,' he said. It burned me up, but I didn't dare answer him back.

The forester had come in for coffee in the cafe. 'Your girl's doing fine,' he told Mama. He often dropped in on us in Abacka, and this time he brought good news with him. Next time I came home, Mama gave me a gentle, meaningful look of trust, when she told me that she had heard I was doing well. She trusted me, that I knew. But could I trust myself? Could I beat off all the temptations that rain down on you when you are on

your own? There was so much that I wanted. I had to live all-out. Life is so short and should be full of excitement all the time.

Mama and I were sitting alone in the kitchen. I was knitting a green cable-stitch jumper. We started to talk of what it was like to manage on your own, about friends and comrades and what they thought, about what most people want out of life.

'But you don't go in for that kind of thing, do you?' said Mama suddenly.

It came so straight that I almost gasped. I knew what she meant, but the words rushed out of me,

'Do you think I would?'

'What is one to think?' continued Mama with emphasis. 'One can't help thinking all sorts of things.'

No more was said. Silence fell between us. I could have told her exactly how it was with me but I did not. I felt extremely uncomfortable. Afterwards I was sorry that I hadn't talked things out with Mama, and it was to be many years before I opened up about what really went on inside me. Mama didn't treat me any differently because of it.

However, something definite had happened which lay at the root of my silence. A year after Confirmation, all the confirmands had been invited to a church gathering in Victoria Church which was far up in the mountains. My Confirmation time had meant a lot to me, and I decided to go. But when I got there I found I was the only one of our whole Confirmation group and I felt strange and an outsider. I sat in the pew waiting till all the various services were over. This mountain church was only used a few times in the year, so weddings and funerals could take place on the same day. This time there was also to be a Communion Service. I wanted to go up and receive Communion, but I hadn't expected there would be so many people in the church. There were long rows of friends and acquaintances of my own age, and my cousins, and what would they think if I took Communion? I should be a marked woman, I

should be out of step and I shouldn't be one of the gang any longer. I couldn't get myself to stand up and go forward. But I knew that I had failed—failed against my own conscience.

From then on I was different. I was against the Church and against God. I began to be forward and I also found that I could be attractive. That young man who had thought that I looked smart in my borrowed green ski pants and yellow jumper, interested me especially. But he began to be more interested in another girl, one that he could sleep with. I was hurt—he was my first great love—I couldn't help turning in on myself for a while. But one can't do that for ever. When I started to go dancing again, I saw that the boys were interested in me. It was almost too good to be true. Now I took care not to fall in love with anyone, so that I could not be hurt again. Yet I was full of satisfaction that I had this power within me.

One man who came from the south took me seriously even though I only amused myself with him. He was engaged, though I did not know it, and he broke off his engagement for my sake. I felt the thing had gone too far, but I couldn't stop using the power I had discovered. No wonder I avoided Mama's question. She had every reason to say, 'One can't help thinking all sorts of things.'

Mama's attitude was that we children belonged to God. In one way that made life easier, though still difficult. But why should life be specially easy for me? Papa and Mama had had to go through a lot. Now it was our turn.

Sometimes it was obvious that Mama was struggling with anxiety for one of us. Yet you could see that after a while she became easier in her mind. If you asked, 'Aren't you worried any more?' she replied, 'No, I have handed all that over.'

And then you knew that it was all clear and she would never let it trouble her again.

'You are responsible before God. You must live your life and I must live mine,' Mama said to me.

My next job was milking eleven cows by hand, morning and evening. My employer had a sense of humour, and we got on well together. The cows liked to have their distended udders emptied. I talked to the cows, they mooed, they shook their heads, they munched the fodder which I put out for them. I sang the latest popular songs, and for a change something else like, 'Do the little you can, do it gladly, for chances soon fly away.' I sang for the cows, but just as much for myself. Milking and thinking go well together.

That winter I had a wild desire to go to Stockholm. The thought kept coming back. When I had my next time off, I went home to discuss it with my parents.

That weekend I gave Papa and Mama some sleepless nights. 'Imagine! Stockholm of all places. She doesn't know anybody there, she'll be absolutely alone.' Mama had been in Ostersund but never in any other city. Stockholm! So terrifying, and especially for a young girl straight from the country. A young girl thrown out like that into a stone desert, far from the open spaces, far from home and friends. What might not happen! They could not put up any real arguments, since the dangers of a great city were unknown to them and therefore they could not give them a name. Just as well, perhaps.

At last Papa gave me a considered answer. 'If you wish to travel, Gunda, we cannot refuse you. That would not be right. You are old enough to decide for yourself. Mama and I wish you a happy journey.' It was a serious moment, but I did not dare to feel its full seriousness. No, for if I did, perhaps I would change my mind. I knew that I must leave. The thought had pursued me the whole winter and I had to carry it through.

Two little suitcases

Cascades of birch groves swept past the train windows, and old tough, twiggy fir trees reached up towards the blue summer sky. I could catch the scent, scent which I had known numberless times sitting among the birch trees at home and watching their buds bursting out day by day.

At Abborrtrask station I could see rows of red and pink geraniums on the windowsills, and behind them appeared the head of the stationmaster with his white uniform cap.

Alone I had come to the station in Sorsele, and alone had I climbed onto the train. None of the family was with me. That would have been too painful. It was easier to be here alone, left to my fate. We had already said goodbye at home. A warm glow had streamed into the depths of my soul from Papa's handshake. Mama had looked long and silently into my eyes, which grew more and more full of tears. The parting hurt us all, but the very pain forbade us to express in words what we felt.

I was nearly in a trance at the excitement of the unknown. The whole business of the journey completely absorbed me. It made me quite composed on the surface. I felt shamelessly certain of myself as I travelled, and yet I had a mounting sense of fear. These two forces strove within me as I boarded the train.

I was the only passenger from Sorsele, and I had to change trains in Bastutrask, where we joined the trunk line. More and more people got in. The journey took at least twenty hours and the compartment filled up.

Finally, the train stopped at Stockholm Central Station. I clung onto my two little cases. All askew and pressed hard

down on my forehead was a green hat with a veil, a green pancake! My grey striped dress had been sewed by a tailor in Sorsele from pure woollen cloth woven from the fleeces of Abacka sheep. As I walked down the train corridor, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I was well satisfied, but I was afraid that the other passengers would see how unused I was to all this. I had never been in any city bigger than Umea, and never further south than Ornskoldsvik.

I was nineteen years old, determined to make a go of life, and that with honour, so I stood up straight. The stream of human ants drew me along with it to the great anthill, the main concourse. 'Maybe there are others besides me who are strangers here,' I thought, and my courage rose as I heard some people talking our northern dialect.

A lady approached me with a friendly smile and introduced herself. It was the lady I was to work for. Evidently the description I had sent was enough for her to recognise me by when I arrived in my little green pancake hat. 'Nice to belong somewhere,' I thought, 'when everybody and everything is strange to me.'

We took the bus out to Bromma and got off at a stop near her home. For the lady, who had done it hundreds of times before, it was nothing remarkable. But I was riding on a bus in Stockholm for the very first time, and I had an awful feeling of insecurity. I didn't even know how to pay the fare or where to put my bags.

Once in the house I was installed in my room, the housemaid's room, behind the kitchen. On one end of the kitchen table were a square table mat and a napkin case.

'This is your place, Gunda,' said the lady. My place! I had never seen a napkin case before and had no idea what a napkin was! We didn't use such things at home. We had learned to eat nicely and neatly all the same.

A lonely seat at the end of the kitchen table—this was to be

my new existence. Anselm Holmgren's daughter—nobody knew who she was. Here in Stockholm there was only Gunda from the north, Gunda the housemaid.

The royal capital

For me, Stockholm was the view from the Old Bridge, near the Parliament building. I could wander round there for hours and watch the old men as they rowed and fished with their round nets in the swift current. Did they ever catch anything? I used to wonder. Maybe one day they just might. I could stand and gaze at the willows drooping their pale green branches right down into the water. The chestnuts were in full bloom when I arrived in Stockholm. I loved those big, rich, leafy trees; I thought they were like living Christmas trees with lighted candles.

Sometimes my mistress took me out to see the city and anything that was beautiful, new, or unusual. We took the street car to the Nature Park Bridge. We went up to Skansen, the open air museum with its old houses.

There was so much to absorb, the atmosphere, the people. Stockholmers talked fast. Time was short, minutes and seconds counted.

'Extraordinary people,' I thought. They seemed to be afraid to be looked in on. I saw rows of windows all along one of the main streets, but they had the curtains drawn and pot plants on the windowsills.

'Poor souls, they can't see out,' I thought.

They seemed hard to get at, these people of the great city. Cut off from the world and encased each in his own box, they walked past each other like shadows in the night. Rigid figures apparently burdened, mouths set in a hard straight line.

Perhaps it was a defence against their own inner world and the world they had to live in every day.

By now the war was raging in Europe. Our neighbouring countries suffered its full force. Could this stiff silence among people in Stockholm be because many did not dare, or did not want, to say what they were thinking? It seemed to me that people were using formal phrases to block the contacts that they so much needed with each other. They said a lot of needless things, but seldom what they really thought. I walked about in my own northern silence and in a strange way longed to be able to help and to liberate these poor burdened city-dwellers.

'Why are there wars? How could one strong man take over country after country?' The lively discussions at home between Papa and Mama and the ranger had stayed with me. Mama's simple conclusion was founded upon her faith.

'Power belongs to God and not to man,' she had said. 'The world belongs to God and it will go hard with anyone who tries to alter that.'

But how could one get others to believe that? How could one reach those who led the world and made the decisions?

There was a cafe in the centre of town where I sometimes went. But as I ate my cake and drank my coffee, I always had the feeling that something strange was going on. Men were sitting at the tables, in dark clothes, with turned-up coat collars, talking in low tones. When I came in there was silence for a moment; they all turned to see who it was before they started speaking again. Could they be spies, I wondered?

I would wander up and down the streets, pondering all these questions and thinking about the world and evil, life and death, and—what should I use my life for?

Must everybody be the same? I thought I would be a humbug if I also started pretending, like everyone else. Finally I decided that if I was to survive in Stockholm I must just be myself.

my new existence. Anselm Holmgren's daughter—nobody knew who she was. Here in Stockholm there was only Gunda from the north, Gunda the housemaid.

The royal capital

For me, Stockholm was the view from the Old Bridge, near the Parliament building. I could wander round there for hours and watch the old men as they rowed and fished with their round nets in the swift current. Did they ever catch anything? I used to wonder. Maybe one day they just might. I could stand and gaze at the willows drooping their pale green branches right down into the water. The chestnuts were in full bloom when I arrived in Stockholm. I loved those big, rich, leafy trees; I thought they were like living Christmas trees with lighted candles.

Sometimes my mistress took me out to see the city and anything that was beautiful, new, or unusual. We took the street car to the Nature Park Bridge. We went up to Skansen, the open air museum with its old houses.

There was so much to absorb, the atmosphere, the people. Stockholmers talked fast. Time was short, minutes and seconds counted.

'Extraordinary people,' I thought. They seemed to be afraid to be looked in on. I saw rows of windows all along one of the main streets, but they had the curtains drawn and pot plants on the windowsills.

'Poor souls, they can't see out,' I thought.

They seemed hard to get at, these people of the great city. Cut off from the world and encased each in his own box, they walked past each other like shadows in the night. Rigid figures apparently burdened, mouths set in a hard straight line.

Perhaps it was a defence against their own inner world and the world they had to live in every day.

By now the war was raging in Europe. Our neighbouring countries suffered its full force. Could this stiff silence among people in Stockholm be because many did not dare, or did not want, to say what they were thinking? It seemed to me that people were using formal phrases to block the contacts that they so much needed with each other. They said a lot of needless things, but seldom what they really thought. I walked about in my own northern silence and in a strange way longed to be able to help and to liberate these poor burdened city-dwellers.

'Why are there wars? How could one strong man take over country after country?' The lively discussions at home between Papa and Mama and the ranger had stayed with me. Mama's simple conclusion was founded upon her faith.

'Power belongs to God and not to man,' she had said. 'The world belongs to God and it will go hard with anyone who tries to alter that.'

But how could one get others to believe that? How could one reach those who led the world and made the decisions?

There was a cafe in the centre of town where I sometimes went. But as I ate my cake and drank my coffee, I always had the feeling that something strange was going on. Men were sitting at the tables, in dark clothes, with turned-up coat collars, talking in low tones. When I came in there was silence for a moment; they all turned to see who it was before they started speaking again. Could they be spies, I wondered?

I would wander up and down the streets, pondering all these questions and thinking about the world and evil, life and death, and—what should I use my life for?

Must everybody be the same? I thought I would be a humbug if I also started pretending, like everyone else. Finally I decided that if I was to survive in Stockholm I must just be myself.

The housemaid

Eighty crowns a month were my wages. It was a good position I had got. All I needed was to learn how to do things. Which side of the sink the glasses had to be put when I was washing up, how madam liked the food served when there were guests: cold table and schnapps, main course with wine, cheese board, fruit, coffee and brandy.

The family always ate in the dining room and I in the kitchen. They had a nine-year-old daughter.

One day she said to me, 'Put on your coat when you go out. Otherwise everyone will see that you are a housemaid.' I had a couple of hours' free time in the middle of the day and I used to go out on my bike.

'What's wrong with being a housemaid?' I said, and I got hot under the collar.

'Nothing,' said the girl, 'but they'll all see that you are one.'

Now I felt a hot flush burning my throat. I turned on my heel and rushed for my bike. My apron fluttered as I rode at full speed out on the country roads. That was my escape when I thought life was hard. People were looking at me, or so I thought. Some laughed. 'Let them laugh,' I thought. The farmer's daughter was out cycling in her blue uniform with her white apron streaming in the breeze. Housemaid, what was wrong with that? I earned my own bread, didn't I? I washed and ironed my uniform myself, if it wasn't fine enough for some people to see, O.K. I clenched my fist. The child couldn't have known what she was saying, but it hurt for a long time.

One morning I overslept. At night so many thoughts churned round in my head that at times I didn't get off to sleep until five

in the morning. This time I didn't hear the alarm when it went off at six. The little girl had to go to school without breakfast. But I said nothing to my mistress, she wasn't up that early. 'I couldn't care less,' I thought. When the child came home to lunch she was quite unusually hungry, and then of course it all came out. Gunda hadn't given her anything to eat that morning, for Gunda was asleep.

'Why, Gunda!' said the mistress.

I got on with my work in the kitchen and the mistress went upstairs and studied French. After a time my conscience began to kill me because I hadn't told her myself what had happened. I rushed up to the first floor and in one long breath I apologised. Then I rushed down to the kitchen again. I began to cry uncontrollably. The mistress must have heard me, because she came down to console me.

'Now, Gunda,' she said. 'Don't take it so seriously, it wasn't so terrible.' She put her arm round my shoulders and truly wanted to console me.

'Boo-hoo,' I howled, 'it's much more than that, it's because I want to be a Christian.'

The arm around my shoulder was hesitantly withdrawn. What I had said must have been a great shock to her. And I hardly realised myself that my nightly ponderings had brought me so far that I was ready to say that to anyone, let alone the mistress.

'Well, there I can't help you,' she said. 'But perhaps I can write to the Vicar for you.'

'No thank you, madam!' I gulped, 'I can certainly do that for myself.' And that evening I sat down and composed a long letter to the Vicar of Sorsele about all my feelings and all my wonderings.

When Christmas drew near the mistress came into the kitchen and said, 'On Christmas Eve we all eat together. You will be with us in the dining room. We usually wear long dresses.'

'But good God,' I thought, 'if I'm not fit to eat with them on ordinary days, how can I sit with them all on Christmas Eve?' And I hadn't got a long dress. Thanks all the same, I didn't think I could go in and sit with them on Christmas Eve.

But the mistress was sad, extremely sad, I could see.

'Then our Christmas Eve will be spoiled, for this is our family tradition,' she said.

I thought, 'It's not worth ruining their Christmas', so I agreed to join them. Somehow I got hold of a long dress. Perhaps the mistress lent me one of hers.

Living it up

I didn't want to be a narrow Christian. I didn't want to be branded or put in a mould. I didn't want to be dull. I had been clear about all this before I decided to be confirmed. Confirmation didn't seem to make much difference. Most people were the same afterwards. I had taken a long time to decide to join the Confirmation class. Later on I was glad I had. In Sorsele our Scripture teacher had given us really good instruction. But there were certain preachers who used to come out into the country. After their sermon they would put their arm around the girls and look in their eyes and ask, 'Do you want to be saved?' I couldn't stand them.

I knew that Mama lived out her faith. It was a reality for her, and rock-steady. She built something into us children even though we often tried to run away from it.

But how could you find your way here in Stockholm? You could hardly talk about God and such like. You bottled up all your agonies inside.

And you wanted to live!

The newspapers, the weeklies and masses of books told you all about the joys and satisfactions of sex. All you needed was to get rid of your inhibitions. And wasn't Mama old-fashioned when she said that intercourse in marriage is in order to have children? Mama said, 'If you're meant to be married, then you'll be married, you don't have to strain and fuss to make it happen.'

But now I wasn't under the eyes of the home folk. Why not try this new life? Why not throw away my inhibitions? Get out among people! But the more I got involved in the new life, the more closed up and silent I became. Often I cried myself to sleep after a party where I had been out dancing. An indescribable disgust followed it. I felt as hollow as an empty beer bottle. If anyone kicked the beer bottle it would roll into the gutter and soon be in splinters.

All this time Mama sat at home in Abacka and crocheted lace far into the night. She was so anxious about me that she couldn't sleep. But that I didn't know until long after. She had known before I left home that there was a battle going on inside me. After my outburst in the kitchen, I wrote to Mama and asked her to send my Bible, 'as it might be nice to have it to look at sometimes'. Mama understood exactly what was happening. She sent the Bible at once, and then she began to sleep at night.

My Confirmation teacher had got us to underline many Bible passages in red. He had said that when we came to some point in life where we needed help, we ought to feel at home with the Bible.

These red underlinings helped me now, and I read more and more. I longed for something great, something right and exciting.

Questions about the world, life, faith, everything, streamed into my mind. I borrowed Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* from the library. When we were still in school in Sorsele, we had discussed Communism as a world idea. 'History is the history of

class war,' wrote Marx. I had felt this in my own life—hadn't I become a housemaid among all the other workers in the great city? But when the workers were united in the class war, what would happen to everybody else? *Das Kapital* seemed to me heavy going, mainly because it dealt with theories and the system. The Bible wasn't always easy, but it did deal with people.

I thought that I began to see the true life in the lives of the disciples. There was something classless in it. Peter was the fisherman, Paul the theologian. They were simple people, but together they lived for a new and more righteous society. They left everything and followed Him who called them.

So one evening I found myself on my knees by my bed in the housemaid's little room. No one saw me, no one had spoken to me. The Vicar had sent me a letter thanking me warmly for what I had written. If I wanted to, I could talk to God about everything, he maintained. I felt I was now saying, 'Forgive me my sins, God.' I hadn't been on my knees since I was confirmed.

When I got up, I saw my face in the mirror.

'No, this isn't Gunda from Abacka,' I thought. I may even have said it aloud. I went to the washbasin and washed my face. Then I took my lipstick and all my beauty aids, and went out and threw them into the dustbin.

The doctor's wife goes charing

One day I was basting some pork loin, stuffed with prunes. It was just getting tender and delicious. As I closed the oven door, I heard a voice, 'There is something different for you to do.'

I wondered who had spoken to me, and turned round. There was no one there. But a thought had definitely come, and

would not let me go. Ought I to change my job?

I told this to a friend who had a job in a doctor's family. I had often been there on my Sundays off. My friend told me that every Saturday the doctor's wife went and scrubbed the floor in the home of a parson's wife.

I had never heard anything like it. Do people really do such things for each other, and without any pay? I rang the parson's home, and said I was looking for a job. I said that the doctor's wife had told me that they needed help in the home. The parson's wife sounded so surprised that she practically stammered.

We agreed that I should come at 3 pm on my next free Wednesday. In my eagerness I arrived half an hour early. The lady opened the door in her apron. She was busy in the kitchen. She sent me in to see her husband, who was sitting in a rocking chair in the living room.

I was on my guard. I wasn't going to be caught out by any parson's tricks. That persuasive tone of voice that asks you, 'How is your spiritual life going, and what are your problems?'

But this parson was not that sort. He looked at me with a roguish gleam in his eye. He sat rocking in his chair, so relaxed that it made me relax a little too. After a time his wife came in from the kitchen. Suddenly the parson asked,

'Why do you want to be a Christian?'

I had talked about this to the doctor's wife, and she had told this family that she thought I would suit them, and that they ought to take me on.

My answer was simple.

'Because I need it.'

'Are you in love?' asked the parson. I was astounded to be asked such a question straight out at a first meeting, and I wondered if I ought to be angry, but I answered honestly,

'Yes, I am in love, but I am not engaged.' Now it had come out! I had said it for the very first time.

That was about all that was said about the 'spiritual', but we talked a lot about the practical. I learned what it meant to keep house with three small children and a rather sick mother who also did part-time teaching. They had many visitors and unexpected guests. All this was totted up almost as if to put me off. They even told me about their financial situation and said that the parson still hadn't finished paying off his student loans. But something about the atmosphere captivated me instead of frightening me. A little boy stuck his head round the curtain and said, 'Hi, what's your name?' The wife continued to add up all the things that had to be done, to make quite sure that I knew what I was letting myself in for. But I stopped her almost rudely.

'Madam need not say more,' I said. 'I know that this is where I ought to come.' My wages, as before, were to be eighty crowns per month.

I knew deep inside that it wasn't the amount of work which was the point. I felt that I had been welcomed into a family as an equal. I was to start work on 1 January 1944.

Two words

Now my job was to clean up after the kids and go out with them twice a day. I had to drag out heavy carpets and beat them on the line. I had to be on the go from morning to night whatever I felt like. I was so eager to cook the first Sunday dinner myself that I nearly drove the mistress out of her own kitchen. Cooking was my speciality and I wanted to show what I could do. I told the mistress she could go and sit down and keep her husband company. That was something she wasn't used to, but I think he found it rather amusing.

It wasn't long before I had the entire housekeeping in my sole

charge. Early in the New Year, the parson and his wife said, 'We're going away for a few days and we're going to think for the world.' That sounded both peculiar and exciting. How could ordinary people do that?

The door of the house was open for literally anybody from anywhere. Visitors came constantly. There were authors and artists, sometimes from Finland, sometimes on their way to Norway. The reality of the war came closer to our daily life when we heard what people went through in our neighbouring countries.

I began to take a serious interest in what was happening in the world.

'Read the newspaper,' the parson had already urged me on my first day. 'See what's interesting and then tell the rest of us at breakfast.'

It was a new kind of training to work on something other than my own problems. One day the master asked his wife for forgiveness for something. He did it so simply, right in front of all the rest of us. The children were there, so were his sister and I. Instantly in my mind's eye, I saw our kitchen in Abacka. The silence between Papa and Mama which lasted too long to be genuine. Think if someone had said sorry! Think if I myself had said it when I slammed the door in a rage. How much could have been different. Those men, who came from nearby villages at weekends and drank. Papa, who hadn't the courage to say 'no', Mama in despair, and the vomit on her newly scrubbed kitchen floor, which she had to clean up herself. Think if anyone at home had said sorry. It is such a simple word, but so hard to say.

Each morning I went upstairs at seven o'clock to start cleaning house. It was quiet and still in the apartment. I peeped into the boys' room. They sat up in bed, good as gold, every morning and played with their little motor cars. One day I asked the parson's sister why it was so quiet in the mornings.

'They have morning prayers,' she said.

'Fair enough,' I thought, 'of course a parson must have morning prayers.'

'They listen to God,' she added.

'Listen to God?' I wondered. 'Surely God can't talk.'

'Yes, He can,' she said, 'through your conscience.'

'Oh, my poor conscience,' I thought. It was so tender that it could hardly bear to be named.

'That's something I really would like to try,' I flung at her rather cynically.

'All right, we can do it tomorrow,' she suggested.

Next morning she lent me a book. As I opened it a crumpled pamphlet fell out. Written on it in big clear letters was 'ABSOLUTE HONESTY'. That was all I could see.

I can hardly describe how this bombshell hit me. It was as if time and space disappeared, and all I saw was these two words. They exploded from beneath the layers of all I had done and thought. 'Conscience,' I thought. 'That lies deep at the bottom of the heap of fine phrases like "It can't matter so much!" "It was such a little thing!" "Who minds?—nobody knows about it!"'

And suddenly there could be no more running away. Everything had got to be different. 'What's hidden in the snow, shows up in the thaw,' we used to say at home.

Was the great thaw now at hand?

A sheet of brown paper

It took me fourteen days to find the courage to ask what absolute honesty really meant. The parson's wife took my question very seriously. She didn't answer in general terms, but

told me what it had involved in her own life.

'She's just like me!' I thought. 'How can she be so honest that she can talk to me about her own faults? Why, there's no difference at all between us!'

She had taken paper and pencil and written down everything that crossed her mind. I could do the same if I wanted. Now I really did begin to pay attention. It had plainly worked for her. I took another look at the pamphlet and saw that there were three more absolutes: absolute purity, unselfishness and love. The shock of the first absolute had been so great that it was almost enough for me by itself. But perhaps I might consider the whole lot.

The brown paper Mama had packed my Bible in now came in handy. I wrote and wrote on the big wrinkled sheet until it was nearly full.

The hardest part was simply not to make things sound nicer than they were.

I saw my life passing before me like a film. The chocolates I had stuffed into my pocket in the shop I was working in. The stamps from Mama's drawer. The money I had pinched from the family I had lived with in Sorsele. All the white lies I had told. All the boys I had cheated.

I had never found it difficult to talk to Mama, but still I was too proud to tell her everything. I admired Papa, and we didn't find it necessary to say much. But bitterness against him had come into my life. I thought that Mama had to suffer because Papa couldn't say 'no' when the men came at weekends. When Papa and Mama had a difference, it often ended with Papa becoming completely silent. He found it hard to express what he thought. Nor had my bad temper helped.

Then I thought of a beautiful little footstool which had flowers and a heart painted on it. The name 'Dagmar' was written on it in big letters. Our teacher's husband had made it for her. Was I jealous! Dagmar was as sweet as a little sun with

her bright curly hair. I was five-and-a-half years older, and remembered myself as stringy and tall, pale and angular. Everybody liked Dagmar, and I just stood by, although when she was a baby I had sat with this beloved little sister on my knee and looked after her when Mama was tending the cows. Mama had taught me that you had to be so careful with babies to see that they don't choke. I had opened the stove door so that the fire would throw more light into the kitchen; I needed to make sure she was breathing.

My brother Axel—I had scratched his face so that there were long grooves on his cheeks, all because he was so kind and I was so horrid.

I saw that I had to tell Papa and Mama what kind of a daughter they had. Perhaps I was the one in the family to start saying 'sorry'.

I wrote a long letter. Papa's reply came after a while. 'Of course we forgive you, Gunda.' He also wrote about something he had had on his heart for a long time, but could never say. I was greatly surprised.

Mama took my letter as an answer to prayer. At last something good had come out of the great city, the very birthplace of almost all evil.

But there was something in my letter she felt she had to consult grandpa about. Was it good to have these absolute standards?

One weekend she took herself all the way up to Danasjo to get an answer to her question. First she walked three kilometres to Lake Arvtrask, then she had to row four-and-a-half kilometres across it, and still she had to walk five kilometres before she got to Abborrberg. There she stayed the night with her sister, and pressed on the next morning the eight kilometres to Danasjo. She considered it worthwhile going all that way to get her father's advice on an important question.

Yes, grandpa had heard quite a lot about these four absolute

standards and the Oxford Group that taught them. How he had learned so much up there on his mountainside, none of us could fathom.

'This is a good thing,' he explained to Mama. 'They go to the root of things and clean up what has been wrong. You can be at peace about Gunda. You can just be thankful that there are such people, who have faced her with absolute standards and helped her to find a faith.'

Wanting to help

I ran over the bridge between the islands of Great and Little Essingen in Stockholm. I ran fast, but I was afraid to lift my feet too high. People might see that I had stuck paper into the soles of my sandals where holes were starting. I was running in sandals although it was quite cold. I couldn't afford to repair them or to buy a new pair.

I had been on a trip to Finland with some friends. We had gone there with full rucksacks, but most of us gave away all the food we had and nearly all our clothes. I kept one dress and one pair of shoes. When I came home I began to give seventy per cent of my monthly wages of eighty crowns to friends in Finland who were in dire need.

Go out among the people—use all you have to share with others! I felt an urge to do something. This time it was a material need I wanted to relieve. But I also wanted to share the new experiences that had made my life look absolutely different this last year. Much had happened since the day when I scribbled my thoughts on that brown paper. The most important thing was that I had given my life to God. Now I longed to help others. Sometimes it meant something as simple as

taking time to listen in order to find what, deep inside, you knew was really right.

I had been to visit my former mistress. She invited me to coffee in her garden one summer day. There were things that I wanted to clear up from my time in her family. She, too, had much she wanted to say to me. It was so much easier to talk now, and when she suggested we should use Christian names it seemed quite natural. The class distinction disappeared when we told each other what we really thought. I was invited back quite a few times to that family.

Then came the great meeting in Lund in the summer of 1944. Several hundred people gathered there, many with their children. A couple of other girls and I were put in charge of catering for thirty children in a school kitchen we had been lent. In spite of rationing we managed to get what we needed, sometimes as gifts from the shops.

But it was also important to give your convictions to the people there; they had gathered from all over Scandinavia, although the war was still going on. Surely I, Gunda, could not be one of the speakers? All the same, one morning I found myself on the platform. What had I learned that was worth telling?

'Women are meant to be an inspiration, not a temptation,' I began. And then I told them the simplest things from my daily life as a housemaid. 'If I'm stirring the soup and my thoughts are on my next date or I'm simply daydreaming, you can bet that soup won't be any good.' Thunderous laughter from the audience.

After the meeting I was surrounded by journalists and photographers. What's all this? Who is this girl, who proclaims her message so boldly? Does she mean what she said, and does she live it out? Anybody can talk.

Men had played a big part in my life. It was chiefly a question of power, not merely sex. But it was like playing a game, once

you really understood what power you had as a woman. It was exciting, and what else in life could give you excitement? You had a strong motive to make sure you got married, partly because in that lay the very security of life. Without exactly being clear that you were exploiting others, you continued to live from one man to the next. And when the difficult moment came, when you felt exploited yourself, then you became terrified and wanted to tear yourself loose. It was a sign that I had begun to break that selfish chain of exploitation, when I gave my message from the depths of the heart of a twenty-year-old. 'Woman—an inspiration—not a temptation.'

Dagmar's cow for Caux

Dagmar was keen to know what had changed me, and had come to Stockholm to see. She wanted to try the same road herself. Dagmar and I had been very distant from one another as children. Now we could talk frankly together. Many times she helped me to carry out my decisions.

I had started night school in Stockholm, and at the same time I was trying to do the housework in a family. Dagmar was now working for my former employer.

It was Dagmar who got me out into the world. 'New men—a new world', was the attractive theme of the first world conference for Moral Re-Armament in Caux we heard about. I had a feeling I should take part somehow.

Caux is in Switzerland. If I really was to go there in the summer, the big problem was money. I had managed to save something, but it was not enough. Thanks to Dagmar help came from Abacka. Our parents had given Dagmar a cow

which was to be part of her inheritance. She now sold it for 400 crowns and gave me money so that I could travel.

This was the first time I had been outside the Nordic North. It was the summer of 1948. As I looked out of the train in Germany, the traces of the war were still fresh, and I saw the ruins of their cities. It shook me deeply to see whole blocks reduced to mountains of rubble.

Caux opened the door for me to great parts of the world that I had never thought of before. I met people of all races and classes. They spoke so many languages, but I, Gunda from Lapland, could still feel at home there. I quickly picked up some English.

I had heard of Frank Buchman. He was present at this conference. It was he who had initiated the Oxford Group, which was later called Moral Re-Armament. After World War II, people had wished to create a common basis for the reconstruction of devastated Europe, and to this end they had started Caux.

I knew that Frank Buchman had provoked both harsh criticisms and great admiration. I was excited about meeting him here. One day I did meet him, in the Great Hall. He seemed very ordinary, and not outstanding in the crowd. Still there was something of greatness about him. One of his gifts was the capacity to be very sensitive to people, and he seemed to read what went on behind the facade. He could give you what you needed; he could encourage you, sharpen you up, offer correction, or just give you a large dose of warm-hearted humour. His care for people generally took practical expression. 'What is that man's favourite dish? Why don't we put some flowers in that lady's room?'

He also seemed able to think globally. He was incredibly well-versed in the problems of every country and every continent. At the same time, he gave great care to the people nearest to him. No details were too small or too unimportant.

Of course I gradually came to understand that it all hung together, and that this was ideology. What we all learned through practical teamwork, not least in the kitchen, became a message to be developed for industry, in politics, or between nations. 'New people—a new world.'

Care for people meant meticulous attention to details. How should the guests be received? Was the entrance hall tidy? Were there clean towels? Did the bedside lamp work?

This reminded me of what Mama used to say: 'The first thing you see when you come to a house is how the porch looks.' It should be welcoming from the start. Mama always insisted on sweeping the porch, and in winter the snow had to be cleared off it.

Frank Buchman received everyone without distinction of race or nationality. And to us in Abacka many strangers had come in the course of the years. Our doors had been open to everybody; southerners, Lapps, hunters, clergymen, tramps, gypsies and pedlars.

If you really wanted to think for people, then it was best to be orderly and tidy yourself, Mama thought. 'If you aren't, you can't think straight at all.'

Frank Buchman had some guests one day, and he asked if I could make tea. I replied that we mostly drank coffee in Sweden.

'Well then, we had better teach you how to make tea,' said Frank, and so he did.

It was not only how to make tea that I learned from him. But in all he did for me and taught me, I felt his warm concern and not least his great love for Sweden. He himself was an American of Swiss origin. He told me of his visits to Sweden, and he asked after people he knew there. He could say some pretty sharp things about what he thought of some aspects of Swedish life. But he said them in such a way that I saw he really believed we could give something of value to the world. I got the feeling that

my mind and my heart were being stretched, trying to take it all in.

Sometimes when we sat with Frank there was silence for a long time. People thought, and people listened. 'The pure in heart shall see God,' said Frank. I recognised that from the Bible. Jesus had said that in the Sermon on the Mount. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

'The eye is the mirror of the soul,' Frank Buchman also said. There again I thought I could hear Mama's voice: 'If you have nothing to hide, you can look people straight in the eye.'

For rich and poor

There were quite a lot of us young people in Caux, and most had had the same experiences as I, and later Dagmar. We wanted to use our lives for something great. We were curious and uncertain if this idea of God's guidance would work out. Perhaps He would send us far away to foreign lands.

Both Dagmar and I were in fact abroad for several years, in Switzerland, England and America. Vera was the one who stayed at home with our parents. She felt that this was her responsibility when we were away.

We went into many different homes and varying surroundings. In an extraordinary way though, we felt that we belonged to a great world family and that we could all help to bring in a new spirit where it was needed.

I stayed once with a worker's family in California. The husband worked in the Lockheed Aircraft factory. Their house was so poor that the wallpaper rotted in the winter and the wind blew right through.

Another time I found myself living with film stars in

Hollywood. In their luxurious home I felt an oppressive loneliness. Two people living one at each end of a ten-room suite, who could not speak to each other.

Sometimes I wondered which really lived in the greatest poverty, the poor or the rich. Riches, power and possessions seem to give security, and perhaps help people to feel secure temporarily, but certainly cannot give true security. The poor at least help one another in their common struggle for existence. That is how we had always felt at home. We hadn't much, but we stuck together.

In any case, it seemed that the simple experiences of change in people were valid at every level of society. It was astonishing how we could come to any kind of house and feel at home. The more I saw of life, and of every type of person, the more I became convinced that it is the human being who must change, and that this in turn brings a lasting change to the whole of human life.

We draw our bows and shoot our arrows at selfish targets. These bows of selfishness must be broken. Every day we must find compassion for our neighbour and his need. In doing this I often found that my poverty was my riches.

Dagmar and I received no salary but wherever we went people took care of us. Someone might give us clothes, or money to buy something we needed. The same thing happened with our journeys, which were often over long distances. We never had more than we needed but always enough to live. That was a life of 'faith and prayer'.

We often wrote home and described our experiences. One of Papa's rare letters reached me in California in the spring of 1950. I must record it word for word as he wrote it, all in one sentence:

> 'Dear you my big daughter Gunda I must now write some lines so that you can see that your father's hand has been here upon the pen, I must send you a hearty thanks for the

birthday card it was pleasant to see that you are in good health and that you have come to such kind people that you have money and all you need that is wonderful I would so much like to make some sacrifice and make some gift but I can't afford it for now I have understood that this is the good and right road we should all travel so I pray that God may bless you and all who work that things may progress happily you had wondered how Easter was here yes here it was doomsday weather and it was a real question whether your Mama and I dared go to the barn the snowdrifts were so high but also so hard that we walked right over them today it's I May the sun is shining it's fine weather but it's cold there hasn't been much thaw there is much snow so we have still a long time till summer I must finish for my arm is getting so shaky that soon I shall miss the paper altogether.

'I end with many many heartfelt warm greetings to my dear daughter Gunda

'In friendship from your father

'Anselm Holmgren.'

Much had changed at home. In one of my letters I had written: 'If Papa stopped taking liquor home the whole village would stop too,' and so it proved. Many people had begun to come to Papa and Mama to get advice and help in personal questions.

The battle for freedom

Dagmar and I came back to Sweden in 1955 after several years abroad. We had stayed in many different places. Dagmar had spent time in the East End of London, staying with militant dock-worker families and their many children. Now she and I

travelled north with a large group from many countries who were going to perform two plays in Kiruna.

And so our family met together once again. Mama, Gunnar, Martin, Dagmar and I. Axel was at home helping Papa, Vera was now married and living in Stockholm. We Holmgrens stayed together in a home which the owners had made available while they were away. We could talk about many things we had been thinking and seeing during the years of separation.

In the theatre, which was in the Labour Hall, Mama sat in the front row and took in everything, though the play was in English. When we came back to the house that evening, Mama suddenly said,

'Now tell me, please, where did I go wrong that I couldn't help you properly?' She was speaking mainly to Dagmar and me. We decided to sleep on it. It was a humble question. Did Mama mean it seriously?

Next morning Dagmar said at the breakfast table:

'I think that I have never really got to know Papa. It has always been through Mama, and I have been told that Papa does not hear and does not understand.'

Mama sat bolt upright in her chair. It stung her to hear this.

'I see,' she said. 'It's me that's the trouble at home.'

Gunnar now put in his bit.

'All this last week I've been working with Papa. I haven't noticed that he doesn't hear or understand. But of course if you are told half your life that you don't hear and understand, you get like that.'

Martin tried to cool the whole thing down by being fair.

'Well, we've all got to change, Papa, me, you too, Gunnar, and Dagmar and Gunda....'

But Mama was very hard hit by Dagmar's honesty; it had taken courage for Dagmar to say it, too.

Later that morning the family went home. Some days after, when I was back in Stockholm, Mama rang me up.

'Listen, Gunda,' she nearly shouted. 'Do you know what? Papa hears and understands!'

Their ride home from Kiruna had been in a blinding snowstorm; snow had drifted over the road and Martin had to drive as fast as he could to cut through the loose snow and not get stuck.

In the evening, when she got back home, Mama was greeted with the news that grandpa had died. It was hard for her to think that she had been away just at that moment, she who hardly ever left home. Relatives' reproaches did not make it any easier.

'To think that you were out enjoying yourself while your father lay dying.'

Soon came the moment to tell Papa all about the trip to Kiruna. Some time later Dagmar and I were at home and we heard what had happened.

'We sat down on the sofa in the kitchen and I took both his hands in mine. I asked him to forgive me for all that I'd done. I said that I had run the house and everything without always being at one with him. I told him of all the times I had been hurt and disappointed. I had built myself up in the children's eyes; I had got in the way.

'Papa got such a kind look in his eyes. It made it so easy to talk about the things we had been carrying unspoken in our hearts. We went on talking for a long time. He had so much to tell me that I had never thought of. We had just gone around each other. We got irritated over small things, just stupid.

'Now we have forgiven each other for everything. It's like spring-cleaning in every corner of the house.

'Why, this is the sort of thing the world could do with.'

During their visit to Kiruna, Mama, Gunnar and Martin had seen many Africans. The Africans had been performing their play, *Freedom*. Later the play was filmed, and we decided to show it in the Labour Hall in Sorsele. This time Papa came, and

he and Mama sat there among uncles and aunts, cousins, in-laws, all the grandchildren, neighbours and friends.

Afterwards Mama was very silent, but Papa wanted to talk. He thought it was amazing to see so many black people. Ten thousand had taken part in the film, which was about the Africans' battle for freedom.

But when we got home and sat around the kitchen table, we didn't feel that Mama was quite herself. Then it came out.

'I am bitter,' she said. 'I am exactly like those people in the film. It is dirty to be bitter.' I asked her what she was bitter at.

Then she told us everything. She felt that one of her boys had been unfairly treated at school. It had gone so deep that Mama could never get over it in all these years.

Now she fell on her knees by the kitchen chair and prayed a simple prayer for forgiveness. This took us by surprise, but then we did the same. When Mama rose from her knees she was happy again, and from that moment we never saw her worried about anything from the past.

Stones on the road

Life continued in a rapid stream of events. At Christmastime, 1958, Lennart Sjogren asked me to marry him. Mama wrote, 'I hope you will both be happy all your lives, though there be stones on the road.'

We were married in Stockholm in May 1959, and were very happy. Papa and Mama weren't well enough to come to the wedding, but we went up to see them on our honeymoon. We saw the home in Abacka for the last time. To Papa's delight we managed to catch a few trout.

Now all the Abacka families had to get ready to leave their

homes. A new dam was to be built that would put our homes under water. The families were offered compensation and new homes elsewhere. Papa and Mama were to move to Sorsele and to have a home which was not too big for them to manage as they got older.

Soon Lennart and I had to leave too. We were invited to a world conference for Moral Re-Armament in America. Right after our honeymoon we went there.

'Stones on the road,' Mama had written. We came to them very soon. We had been married less than six months when it was discovered that I had a very serious form of cancer.

Shortly before I knew this, I had arrived at a decisive point in my life.

I had gone through a night of despair, a night of uncontrollable weeping. I was shaking as deep feelings swept over me. I found myself crouching on my heels in the hall; I couldn't stay in the bedroom sobbing so violently, while Lennart lay there and slept.

It was his firm reply which set it all off. I had had the feeling that we weren't united on some small point. 'We can't go to sleep like this,' I had said. 'You have something against me and we must talk it through.'

'No, I have absolutely nothing against you, Gunda,' said Lennart. 'I think we ought to go to sleep now.' He spoke firmly and calmly, but his look almost seemed to be asking, 'What is the matter with you?'

Indeed, I had wondered myself what was the matter with me. Passionate feelings welled up inside me, amid all the insecurity of a new way of life, and that in a foreign land. But I had concealed the insecurity; to all appearances I was the one who wished to decide, to direct, to give advice all the time. Naturally this affected Lennart. But try as I might to stop dominating, I couldn't keep these feelings back, and spoke my mind forcibly on the most inappropriate occasions.

Now, here I was crying like a baby in the middle of the night. Lennart's firmness had thrown me out into the unknown. I saw that he would no longer give in to get peace in the home.

Many pictures passed before my mind's eye that night. I had lost my home, and who cared? Nobody. The houses were gone, Papa's and Mama's life-work lay deep under water. Soon nobody would know that our home had existed. Bushes and trees had been uprooted. Here was a spot where we had once made a garden. Here was the corner where I had carted earth and stones one spring to make a place to sit. Raspberries, currants and strawberries ripened here under the midnight sun. Here lilacs bloomed, though summer was far advanced. Now all was gone forever. What was the good of weeping? But you couldn't be strong all the time. Why did I always have to be so strong and competent? Now I felt weak and I wanted to be wretched. How strange it was that when I got my own way I felt strong, but when things went against me I felt full of fear. I was helpless and alone. What should I do? Whom could I talk with? I was like a child crying for comfort. Lennart? No, he wouldn't understand. God? He was so far away. Mama? Yes, she would understand. I rested upon that thought. I savoured it, but somehow the taste was not right. 'There's something wrong here,' I thought. Then I became completely calm. For I saw what was wrong was that Mama should come first in my life, when I said I had given my life to God. I went in, lay down, and slept.

Next day when I woke I thought, 'You will find out where you went wrong,' and suddenly I saw with blinding clarity an incident from my childhood. I had been so ashamed of it while I was growing up that I had consciously decided to forget it.

Mama had breast-fed me for a very long time. There was nothing very unusual about that in those days. One day I had stood on the porch and shouted to her while she was in the barn, 'Come in, so I can have it off you.' She had not come in. But it

was this scene which suddenly rose before my eyes. I felt the burning blush starting in my toes and going right up to the crown of my head. And I had thought I had forgotten this for ever!

But now I saw what I had not seen before. The great driving force in my life was a hunger for comfort and a desire to be liked. In school, among friends and after I left home I had always run my life so as to be liked. I had told lies if I thought it would help to gain approval.

Mama was not holding onto me. She had released me so that I could do something good out in the world, as she put it. But it was I who was bound to her. The thing that meant most was to know that there was one person who understood me.

I got a strange feeling that I had to begin again at the beginning. I knelt by my bed, with the thought that the only one who could help me must be Jesus. 'I am impure through and through. All I do is wrong. My own nature gets in the way.' So I said to Jesus, 'Here I come, exactly as I am. I need to be washed clean, and you are the only one who can do it.'

When I got up I was different. Fear was gone, and I felt I was afraid of nothing. I was calm and free and full of a great expectation. Was this what it meant to be washed clean? Jesus had died that I might be free and forgiven. Now I could come back every time I needed it. I would live like this every day and expect the power of God's spirit to lead me.

It was just a few weeks later that I learned that I had a mortal illness. Humanly I could have been hysterical and terrified but something within me said quietly and calmly, 'Expect the worst, and leave it in God's hands.'

The surgeon had got his staff together before the operation. 'We don't know if we can do anything at all in this case,' he said. But he told them about it, and explained why I had come to America, and that I worked voluntarily without salary. The result was that several of the hospital staff offered to work without pay.

Thus it was that the anaesthetist could say to me before I went under, 'There are many who have volunteered to help.'

Afterwards the surgeon told Lennart he had had three similar cases. 'Your wife is the only one who pulled through.' Another of the surgeons added that if I had had the least trace of fear I would not have survived.

When the news reached Papa and Mama, and my brothers and sisters, it came as a tremendous shock. 'Gunda has cancer. Immediate operation necessary.' But they replied with touching faith, all signing the telegram, 'We thank God for you.'

So the days passed after the first operation. I seemed to improve. But a rapid deterioration set in with difficult complications. A second operation became necessary, more dangerous than the first. We understood from the surgeons later that they had had very little hope that I would survive.

Soon after the first operation my family in Sorsele wanted to make a tape of a Christmas greeting for Lennart and me in America. Papa went across to Martin's home where they were all together. Mama was to follow in a little while. When Papa had taken a few steps away from his house, he thought he heard a voice behind him saying, 'Gunda will live.' In surprise he turned round, but he saw nobody. He went back into the house to ask if someone had called him. No, nobody had. Yet the voice had said clearly, 'Gunda will live.'

Papa held firmly to this. When the second telegram came about the further operation and the risk of my death, it was he who declared to the family and friends, 'Gunda will live, that is definite.'

In New York they fought for my life. And when I awoke the doctor was standing in the doorway asking, 'But who are you really?'

Then I knew that the girl from Lapland must tell her story.

...And this she has done. I was one of those who listened when Gunda, far away in a foreign land, described for the first time the white scrubbed floors, and the long rows of rag rugs in Abacka. Baking, washing, milking and fishing—all of it became a near reality. Her memory for detail, her sensitiveness to people and atmosphere impressed these experiences upon me. I almost believed that I had been with her in Abacka. But I did not get there till much later, after the little village had already been erased from the map. The harsh stony 'moonscape' had been softened by a mantle of snow, as yet undefeated by the April sun. There was a pole sticking up with a rag tied to the top. 'This is where our home stood,' said one of the Holmgren family to me. 'It has all gone, but you can't keep on grieving for ever.'

My husband and I had come to Sorsele to represent Gunda and Lennart Sjogren at Anselm Holmgren's funeral. They were in Australia when Anselm breathed his last in April 1971. He was laid to rest under the pine trees in Sorsele churchyard by the side of Signe, who had died in 1965. We were deeply moved to see how family, relatives and neighbours closed ranks round these two noble souls. By their spirit and their hard work they had made a mark on the whole region.

Gunda and I got the chance to concentrate on these stories in November, 1973, exactly fourteen years since the days in New York, when she hovered between life and death.

None the less, we decided to end the story there. For if all that has happened since were to be recorded, the book would be twice as thick. We will only say now, 'But that's another story!'

Gerd Jonzon