

The Adventures
Of
Aila and Niilá



Chapter 1

Sweden

Once upon a time there were two children living in Lapland in the northern part of Sweden. Aila was the girl's name and the boy was called Niilá. They lived with their parents close to a mountain where they kept their herd of reindeer in the summertime. In the wintertime the animals stayed in the area closer to the house. The family were Laplanders, the native inhabitants in the north of Sweden.

Aila and Niilá did not have any human friends because they lived in such a remote area but they did not lack friends, all the animals around them. They had a pet reindeer called Várjjalit which means protect in English. They also had five dogs. And they had each other.



One day in early January their parents wanted to talk to them.

- We have to leave you here and go and search for some of our reindeer that are missing, said the father.
- We will be back within a week and your grandmother is coming tomorrow to take care of you until we return, said the mother.
- Why can't we come with you, asked Niilá?
- Because the two of us can search a much larger area if we go alone. And we also rely on you two to take care of Várjjalit. We will bring the dogs with us to help search for the reindeer, said father.

- We really do not want to leave you alone today but we have to get going as soon as possible, said mother.
- And your grandmother will be here about noon tomorrow, said father.

The mother and the father quickly packed a few necessities and got the dogs ready. They hugged and kissed Aila and Niilá and said goodbye. They promised to be back within a week. The children waved goodbye and went into the enclosed pasture to make sure that Várjjalit had enough lichen to eat and fresh water to drink. Then they they went inside.

At first they did not know what to do but after a while they decided to read. They both liked reading very much. They liked to read about places far away and about children in other countries. They sat close to the fireplace readig for several hours.

- I am hungry. Let's make something to eat, said Niilá.
- I just want to finish this chapter. You can start making some sandwiches, said Aila.

Niilá went out into the kitchen and began to make sandwiches.

- I have just finished a wonderful book by Selma Lagerlöf. It would be wonderful to see all those places she wrote about. I really want to see the rest of Sweden and the world. We have never been to any other places than here and up in the mountains, said Aila.
- I have made something for you to eat. Sit down and stop dreaming, said Niilá.

They ate and then they cleared the table and went outside to play in the snow. After playing for a long time they went to make sure the reindeer had enough food and water for the night. Niilá and Aila went inside to have dinner and settle for the night. They reheated and ate some food their mother had prepared earlier

- I am tired. Let's go to bed. I want to read a little before I go to sleep, said Aila.
- Can I borrow the book by Selma Lagerlöf that you told me about, asked Niilá?
- Of course, I hope you enjoy as much as I did.

The next morning they woke up quite late because they both read for a long time before going to sleep. They prepared and ate their breakfast. Then they did their chores like washing the dishes, feeding Várjjalit and tidying up. At 11:30 they started to prepare lunch since their grandmother was expected at around 12 o'clock. She lived 25 km away in the neighbouring village and they knew that she would be hungry after the long walk. But nobody came at 12 o'clock. They waited for half an hour but then they decided to have lunch.

After lunch they cleaned up, gave the reindeer its lunch and played.

- It is 4 o'clock and grandmother has not arrived yet. I wonder what has happened to her, said Aila.
- Perhaps she didn't get the message that she was needed here, replied Niilá.
- What do you think we ought to do?
- I have been thinking about the book I read last night, the one by Selma Lagerlöf. I would also like to see the rest of our country, to learn about how people in other parts of the country live and to meet these people, said Niilá.
- What are you really saying?
- I would like to see the rest of Sweden, to travel and meet a lot of other people, said Niilá.
- But what about the Várjjalit?
- We can ride on him, said Niilá.

Aila thought for a while but then she said that she really wanted to experience the same. They packed a few necessary belongings and some food. They also packed some silver that they could use as money. They saddled up Várjjalit. The children climbed onto the reindeer with their few belongings and off they went.

They began their journey by going east. They wanted to go to Kiruna, the only big town in the north. They had read about the iron mine there.

- We have travelled for hours now and I am hungry and tired. But where can we sleep, said Aila.
- I don't know, but I am sure we will find somewhere to stay, answered Niilá.

They continued for another hour and then they saw a light. They stopped at a small house and knocked on the door. An old woman opened and invited them to come in. She gave them something to eat and her husband made sure that Várjjalit was comfortable in the stable.

After dinner the children told the old man and woman about the adventure that they were about to experience. Then it was time to go to bed and the children were so tired that they fell asleep at once.

When they woke up they saw a table full of food. There was meat, fish, bread and many other things. They sat down and started to eat.

- But where is the man and the woman, said Niilá?
- This is really strange. Perhaps they are outside. Let's go outside and look for them. I hope Várjjalit is all right, said Aila.

They went outside to look around but they did not find anybody. They looked inside the stable and saw Várjjalit eating lichen.

- I wonder where they are, but I am really happy to see that you have been looking after my beautiful reindeer, said Aila.
- I am happy too, said Várjjalit.
- What! Did you hear that Niilá?
- Don't be afraid. We can talk and understand each other as long as there are no other people around, said Várjjalit.

He continued to explain that animals understand all languages but they never speak except under certain conditions. He also told them that the man and the woman only were part of their imagination. He said that he would help them on their journey and that he had magical powers.

- Go inside and pack your belongings and as much food as they can bring, said Várjjalit.

They did what the reindeer had told them to do and soon they were on their way again. They travelled for many days and then one day they saw many houses and streetlights. This was something the children never had seen before. When they came close to the mine they saw a wolf.

- Don't be afraid. I have come to show you the mine, said the wolf.



They went down inside the Earth. It was dark and a little bit scary. The wolf told them about the mine and showed them around. He also told them that the whole town of Kiruna had to be moved because there was a big risk that the mine would collapse. Then Aila did not want to see more of the mine. She wanted to go up again before anything happened.

Soon they came back up to the surface and could breathe fresh air again. The wolf told them to continue to the Icehotel in Jukkasjärvi, where they would be met by another wolf that would take care of them.

Soon they were on their way to the Icehotel. When they arrived they saw a wonderful building made of ice and snow. This was something so much bigger and more beautiful than the igloos they had built at home. A wolf met them and brought them inside. Everything was made of ice and snow; furniture, lamps, glasses etc.



They were tired and the wolf gave them dinner before they settled down for the night on beds made of ice covered with animal skins. They were very tired and soon fell asleep.

In the morning they discussed with the wolf where to go next. The wolf suggested that the town of Umeå, on the coast of the Baltic Sea, would be a great place and completely different from what they had already seen. And off they went.

It was a long journey, but they were well taken care of by wolfs living in the huge pine forests. It was the middle of May when they finally reached the coast. They had never seen so much water before. Then they went into town and were overwhelmed by all the birch trees growing along the streets. The birch trees they had seen up in the mountains were just little bushes, but here they were big beautiful trees in the process of turning green. They reached the Ume-river just where it flows out into the Baltic Sea. Here they were met by a pike that took care of them. She showed them around and made sure that they had food and a place to sleep.



In the morning they had potato dumplings for breakfast and then they went down to the river to meet up with the pike.

- I think you should follow the coast along the Baltic Sea down to Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. I will accompany you as far as Gävle. It is going to be a long journey but I have many friends all the way down the coast so you will be well looked after, said the pike.
- We are grateful for this offer. We have seen so many new things but we still want to see more, replied Aila.
- This is the most exciting adventure ever, said Niilá.

Off they went day after day, week after week until they finally reached Gävle.

- This is as far as I can come along. A very good friend of mine, a beaver, will take care of you when you reach the Dal-river.
- Thank you so much for all your help, said Niilá
- Goodbye!
- See you!



When they reached the river they were met by a beaver that showed them around the town. They saw the factory where they roasted coffee-beans. Both Aila and Niilá thought the smell to be wonderful but they did not like the taste of the coffee. At home, way up in Lapland, they used to have salt and butter in their coffee. But here it tasted differently. In the evening they went to an ice-hockey game and saw Brynäs versus HV71. Brynäs, the home team, won and people cheered and were very happy.

- I am glad to be outside. I have never heard so much noise before, said Niilá.
- My ears are still ringing, said Aila.
- This is nothing compared to all the noise you will hear in the big city, said the beaver.

In the morning they set out for Stockholm.

After a few days they reached the outskirts of Stockholm.

- I can't follow you any further, but I have arranged for a friend of mine to meet you outside The Royal Palace. It is a rat, a very nice rat. Good luck and goodbye!
- Goodbye!



They rode into the capital on Várjjalit and then they saw all the people and cars. They reached The Royal Palace safely. Here they were met by the rat that showed them the palace. The children had never seen such large rooms and beautiful things. There were so many things to see in Stockholm like the beautiful archipelago, the changing of the guards outside The Royal Palace, the Globe which is a huge sports arena and lots of other things.



- Let's go to Skansen today, said the rat.
- What is Skansen, asked the children.
- It is a zoological park, answered the rat.

And off they went. When they reached the park they saw wonderful things. There were old houses from all over Sweden. It felt like home. But then they reached the animals.

- The animals are inside cages. Why, said Aila?
- Because then people can come here and look at them, said the rat.
- But all animals should be free, said Niilá.

When Várjjalet saw the reindeer in a small fenced in area he went up to them. They told him that this was the way they lived all year round. They could never get up into the mountains and roam free.

The children and Várjjalet felt sad because of all the animals kept in cages but then the rat told them that those animals served a purpose to the world. People in the city need to be educated about animal life. They have to learn what happens to animals when forests are cut down, when pollution is spread and lakes and seas are eutrophicated. This made them feel a little bit better but they still felt sad for all caged-in animals.

- I think we have seen enough of Stockholm. Where do we go next, said Aila?
- To Gotland, the largest island in Sweden. But I can't go with you. I don't feel comfortable outside the city. I will arrange for a friend of mine to meet you outside the city tomorrow morning. It is a red fox.



After a good night's sleep they left Stockholm and met up with the red fox. Together they went to Nynäshamn where they were going to take the ferry to Visby, the biggest town on Gotland. The red fox told them that they would be met by a hedgehog in Visby.

They travelled with the ferry for some hours when suddenly the island of Gotland seemed to rise up from the water. It was a magical moment.



They were met by a hedgehog outside the ring-wall around the old town of Visby. They walked around the ring-wall and looked at the beautiful ancient wall with many towers, the wonderful roses and very old houses. This was like stepping back in time. They travelled around the island. They saw the stone formations so typical for Gotland, they ate smoked flounder and they visited Loyst hed where the only Swedish wild horses roam.



- There are many sheep here on Gotland, said Várjjalit.
- Yes, and they are a very special kind of sheep, said the hedgehog.
- Look at this pebble over there. They look like animals, said Aila.
- Those are fossils. Gotland originated close to the equator where millions of sea animals formed this island.
- We have seen many things here but now it is time to continue our journey. Goodbye hedgehog!
- Goodbye! And, by the way, I have arranged for a friend of mine to meet you in Oskarshamn. It is an otter and he will meet you when you get of the ferry.



After crossing the Baltic Sea they safely reached Oskarshamn where they were met by the otter. They decided to go to Ängelholm. The otter told them he would escort them as far as to the border of Skåne. That was as far as he felt comfortable to travel. They travelled through the deep forests of Småland. It almost felt like home.

When they reached the border of Skåne they said goodbye to the otter. He had arranged for a friend of his to meet them in Ängelholm. It was a red deer. They travelled over a high ridge and reached the flat farming-land. They could see that this was a rich area. The fields were turning yellow and it was almost time for harvest.



On the outskirts of Ängelholm they met the red deer that brought them into town. First they went down to the long beautiful beach where the children went in for a swim. The reindeer and the red deer found some shade where they rested and talked about many different things.

- Now I am going to show you a very special place, said the red deer.

The deer led them to a big house by the Rönne-river. There were no people there and the house was nothing special.

- Why have you brought us here, said Várjjalit?
- This is a very special place for all of us. This is a school with close to 200 pupils. It is called Ängelholms Montessoriskola.
- What is so special about this school, asked Niilá?
- Because all the pupils and their teachers care about all animals and the environment. They want to make the Earth a better place to live on. I am sure that there are many other schools that do the same, but this is my favourite school. I often stand close by and listen to what they do. You see, it is the children who can make a difference.
- Where are the pupils now? And all the teachers, said Várjjalit.
- They are on summer vacation. That's why nobody is here now, said the red deer.

The children were happy to learn about other children and how they lived. They were also a bit envious. The children in the school had many friends and also a school to go to in order to learn many important things. They decided that it was time to travel south to the third largest city in Sweden, Malmö.



When they reached Malmö they saw an extraordinary building called Turning Torso. They went to the top of the building and had a fantastic view over the city. They saw the bridge stretching over Öresund to Denmark. And outside the city they saw the rich farm-land stretching for miles.



- Let's go to Trelleborg. I will take you there but then I have to leave you. You will board a large ferry that will take you to Germany. I am sure you will find many animal friends that can help you.
- Thank you for all your help, said Aila.
- Goodbye!
- I hope we will meet again. Have a safe trip. I hope you will meet interesting people and see splendid sights. Goodbye, said the red deer.

They boarded the ferry. They spent the evening talking about all the adventures that had happened in Sweden and wondered what would happen next.

