

Glimpses into the
Twilight of Memories

Aili Jantunen

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Cover illustrations are oil paintings by Aili Jantunen.

Front cover is “Story telling by the wood stove”. Rear cover is (Aili’s) “Mother and Father”.

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Preface

This memoir is not history. I did not want to mix facts I learnt later with my memories. I just wanted to explain to the young ones in the family to the xth generation how I remember having experienced my childhood, and above all the war years. I have no pretence that my memory has preserved the situations correctly, but this is how I have carried those years in my being. For me they are the truth. I have not tried to describe anything that I can't remember, but there is no doubt that my memory differs from the truth, sometimes a lot. In details, and especially in peoples' speech, I have had to imagine what could have been said. Of course I can't remember exactly what actually was said. The timing of various happenings can also be mixed up, but I don't believe that it has any great significance to the reader.

I wanted to use my own Karelian dialect in speech to emphasize the authentic voice of life at home. Sometimes the dialect has even crept in in the middle of a descriptive passage, even in the middle of a sentence. In such a case it is a sign of deep inner voice. In Finnish Karelia every district had its own dialect. I am sure I have mixed up dialects from Vuoksenranta and Jääski, as well as some brought to me by the wind in my wanderings. There is no point in wondering about it. Instead, you may wonder about how these experiences have changed us. And about a lot of other things!

In Helsinki, 1.2.2016

Aunt, great-aunt, great-great-aunt etc.

Aili Inkeri, the '*Adorable Maiden*' of the Finnish folklore

From Little Sister:

In translation I have not even tried to make a distinction between dialect and literary language. The richness of the Karelian dialect just cannot be translated into another tongue, at least not by me.

I have added my own impressions and memories, running them in parallel with my sister's story. Sometimes our stories agree, sometimes not, such is the nature of our fickle memories.

The first thing that struck me when reading my sister's book was that we even had different siblings. Aili talks about Kylli, Ahti, Tanu, Vella, Tuitu, Tellu, Vänni or Nänni, Inke (herself), and various names for me, the Little Sister. In my family, on the other hand, we had Kyllikki, Ahti (the same at any rate), Tauno, Vellamo, Tuulikki, Suoma, Väinö, Aili, and Little Sister, myself, variously known as Ritva, Ränty, Ränty-Iivari, Rätvänä, Sonta (cow dung), Sontajaana, or Lanta (also cow dung). I recognise the names she uses, but they are not natural for me to use. I don't know at what stage this change of names happened. Maybe when the Big Ones left home, they started to use a more grown-up name; I really have no idea.

Another difference is that I have no memories of the time before the war, and very few recollections of Karelia at all. Also, the only siblings that stand out in my memory from the early years are Suoma, Väinö and Aili, the others had left home by the time I started having conscious memories.

In Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, September 2016

Ritva Marjatta, '*Holy Maiden Short-of-Stature*' of the Finnish folklore
aka Krista Sands

1. Our Family

The little girl knows where home is. When I walk in this direction along this road I can see the big road, and then I will know. I walk between tufts of grass along a narrow sand path and all around me there are harebells and daisies. And cat paws! *Funny things the cat paws.* I have heard that's what you have to say. *Funny things the cat paws, Funny things the cat paws, Funny things the cat paws.* Following their rhythm is fun as I walk towards the big road. Ah, there it is already! I know how to do this. Now I have to walk right on the edge, so the horses won't run over me. I will turn to the road following this hand, this one that is clutching a strawberry. And here, finally, is our gate. Or at least the gate posts, big and stony! If you walk between them you get to our yard. Then to the steps. The door is closed, even though it is summer and so hot that one has to sigh in earnest. I can reach the knob by rising on my tiptoes and reaching high. Tellu rushes out and I rush in, and then it is chaos and it hurts so much. Tellu pulls at me and screams:

“Where have you been?”

And I pipe up from under her: “Please, dear sister, don't hurt me.”

We go in together. Tellu makes a sandwich, the kind with a thick crust, that is so yummy to gnaw at, and a mug of milk. Tellu is much older than me. She is already at school, like all the other sisters and brothers. Except Nänni, who will start school this autumn, and then even he will become wise, though it is hard to believe.

Nänni has a rocking horse made by grandfather, and he is always driving to Koivisto village to fetch fish. He hollers from far away:

“Come and buy fish, killed by the Koivisto dames!”

“Oh, oh, Vänni, not so fast, you will mark the floorboards with your galloping” mother fusses.

And then we buy herring, and Baltic herring, and Nänni pushes me away when the grown-ups are buying. But when there are no other customers, even I am accepted in the shop. Though now there is no sign of even Nänni. Tellu said that they took him along to the haymaking as it is good dry weather and they have to get the hay in. For the winter, I know. It is fitting that a schoolkid knows how to make hay, at least rake it. They didn't take me, I sigh screwing my lips up. Then I realise that

Tellu couldn't go either, as she was left to babysit me. Is she ever disappointed!

Tellu goes back to the sofa with her book and I climb up next to her. I nag at her to read aloud. Tellu says that I won't understand a word if she starts reading in the middle of a story. I nag and beg and pester her until she gives in and promises to tell me a fairy tale. In the story there is a small three year old girl, who has left her home yard alone, without permission. To search for an adventure! She walks along the path to the grave yard, because there is a good strawberry patch along it. But what there is as well is a big black dog who barks so loud that the whole village hears him. And the little girl is scared of the dog, and has nightmares which scare her horribly. Therefore she is forbidden to go to the strawberry place alone. I have already worked out that this is no real fairy tale, and I promise right away that I won't go alone again. God's truth! And then I understand why Tellu had been angry and in her anger pulled me about so hard.

“You haven't even washed your hands”, Tellu scolds.

Only then do I notice my strawberry stained hands and stand there staring at them. In this hand, this one on the side of the road when you come from the cemetery, in this hand I had a strawberry for mother, the biggest and reddest of them all. But it has gone. It has just left a really big stain on my palm. In a flash the awful truth is revealed to me. Now mother will see that I have been picking berries. I am engulfed by a huge wave of repentance and shame. “We'll scrub it clean” says big sister and takes me to the bucket of water. All it takes is a ladleful of water and then soap, and a brush, which tears my palm. But Tellu blows on it and soon I have forgotten the pain.

Tellu wants to read and is grumpy when I ask her to play with dolls. At first she pretends she can't hear me, but when I attack her and pommel her and pull at her plaits she gets so angry that she throws the book on the sofa and starts to drag me from one place to another.

“Where's your doll, you have no idea, do you. We always have to look for her. Is she left in the yard again?”

I immediately see in my mind's eye a picture of Molla-Maija, who had been insisting that she needed strawberries for dessert when we were having lunch in our home under the pine tree. It had been a strenuous

day of cleaning up. I had swept all the rooms between the roots, and settled the stone tables and chairs back in their place. I had spread out tablecloths of maple leaves and filled the tin-mug pail with clear clean water. I had made sand-rye porridge in the egg cup I had found in the compost heap, and fed it to Molla-Maija, and ate it myself till I was full to the brim. I had tried to settle the child in the moss cradle, tried to hush her and sing father's lullaby '*pompeli, pompeli poli-poli-pompeli*', but she had started to demand strawberries. Of course I had no desire to go to the strawberry patch, but eventually I had to go, just to please Molla-Maija. I had left the doll in her cradle and run quickly out of the yard and to the road and then to the dirt road towards the graveyard. Strawberries, strawberries! They had squished in my greedy hands and poured out of my mouth. The child was forgotten, and the prohibition by my own mother was forgotten. On the way home I had licked the last berries off my hand, but I had left one for mother, the biggest and most beautiful. And that had got squashed on the way home, I don't know where or why. How could I forget mother's strawberry and let it get squashed in my hand? It must have been when I took fright and climbed on a rock, when I thought I had seen a troll in the bushes!

I am so annoyed that I don't have any heart for playing any more. I grab Molla-Maija and drag her in. Tellu is buried in her book and I sit in the corner doing nothing.

I hear noises from outside, and when I really try I can hear Vella's voice. Already there is banging on the steps. Now the door opens, and the kitchen is full of noise. Kylli, Tuitu and Ahti are there complaining about their troubles.

"I am dead tired!"

"I am so hot I am melting away!"

"I am so hungry I could eat a horse!"

"Why don't you go to the sauna for a wash, and I will start warming up the soup. Bring more wood when you come in. It didn't take you long to start the fire!"

This last of course was for father, whose steps I can now hear through the open door in the vestibule.

I stay in the living room corner listening for a while longer. I would really like to run to the kitchen now, but I stay to see if mother would holler for me, too. Maybe she will have missed me a bit?

“Tellu, Inkeriii”, here it is now! Like a whirlwind I rush to mother’s lap, and then I start bawling.

“I saved the best strawberry for mother, but I must have fallen and it got squished and disappeared totally.”

I show my clean scrubbed palm. After that mother and Tellu whisper something to each other, mother goes to the sauna and Tellu sets the table with plates and commands me to bring the spoons. And she grins slyly.

Tanu peeks from under his eyebrows while I look at the bent heads as father says: “Thank you, Lord, for our meal. Amen.” I can’t understand why you can’t look up and thank the Lord for the food. It is just a custom, is the explanation from the sisters. And there is no blame in Tanu’s brows, only mischievousness. And so I also dip my spoon in the soup in good spirits. Everybody eats in silence; that also is a custom. But when there is no food left father begins to talk. Father says how glad he is that we got the hay in before it rained. The dining room is full of talk, whatever they were talking about. Of course Vänni is boasting about his doings, and the others make fun of him. Ahti had helped him!

All around me they are planning to go swimming. Nobody asks me to go along. I have to start pestering them to take me, too, and I can see clearly enough that the *Big Ones* don’t want me. Mother comes to rescue and promises to go with me once we have finished the dishes. Time creeps at snail’s pace and mother just keeps on washing the dishes. At long last she grabs her swimmers and a towel.

We run to the path which takes us to the gate through which we can go over the big road – there I have to take mother’s hand – next we walk past the neighbour’s along another path down to the Big Lake sparkling in the sun. It is so much fun playing in the water! The boys jump from the pier, the sisters compete swimming from rock to rock and bask in the evening sun. But I bake sand cakes for the big waves, which gobble them up in their hunger before they try to eat me as well. I know how to look after myself. I let the waves roll over me, but I won’t go too deep. Mother swims further and further away with big, unhurried strokes. The others keep messing around. I get worried. “Mother,

mother, come back! Inke wants to go home!” Mother turns and waves at me.

There are visitors at home. Father hustles around to give them cold juice, and keeps all the windows and doors open as it is so hot. Luckily there is no thought of going to bed. Even I get dressed up, in the thin lace dress that Kylli crocheted for me. It is pink! And white knee socks and soft shoes with laces. A visitor takes pictures of us. In one picture my big sister Kylli is standing in her long, narrow summer dress. She is holding a small three-year old girl in a rose pink lace dress with white knee socks and shoes with laces. The girl is holding on firmly, arms around big sister’s neck. The sister is smiling.

2. Little Sister

I am three years old already. When I stand on tiptoes, I can press my nose into the window pane. I move it back and forth, wipe away the mess and do it again. Then, just like that, they are here.

The horse is turning into the yard from the road. The carriage is leaving deep grooves in the gravel, and in between the grooves there are the pits for the hooves. Father is sitting on the driver's seat and is holding the reins. Mother is on the back seat. IT is on her lap.

After this I stare at it from narrowed eyes: the bundle that is carried in with great fanfare. Big sisters are screaming, and the brothers are jumping around every which way. I turn back to the window to squish my nose into the pane. I am about to burst into tears. Mother has returned home and has hardly looked at me. She is just messing around with her bundle. Father is helping mother into the house, and those others are all around them.

They deposit it on the sofa in the living room; on the brown one, not the wine red one which is part of the set. But there on the brown sofa it is now lolling about, and it is being unravelled. "Ai, ai", everybody screams, and they pet it and shush it. Now it is screaming! A small twitter escapes me, as the scream penetrates through the general hullabaloo. Another scream, louder, and I think it knows why it is crying.

"Oh dear, what's she on about now?" a worried Kylli asks.

"One would get nervous with less. You are all at her like pests" says father.

"Give her to me, give her to me" the big girls scream and promise that they will shush it to sleep.

Mother waves the others to the side, lifts it onto her lap and offers her breast. It shuts up, but the sucking noises are heard clearly. And everybody stares as if at a miracle.

I turn back to my window and press my nose to the glass. I don't see anything anymore. There is only darkness in my eyes, and water is streaming onto the window so that I have to mess it up with my palm over and over.

Baby, baby, they say, but they don't mean me. They have given my name to another. They are giving all the kisses and caresses that belong to me to that other. They are even giving my food to it. In my misery I collapse on the floor. There is a puddle around me. My dress is getting all wet. But I don't care, as the others don't care. My ribbon drops into the middle of the puddle. Even my ribbon!

"Where do you think Inke is?" mother asks suddenly.

Everybody begins to call for me. Now they are in a hurry to search for me. They couldn't find me inside or outside, as they didn't look behind the sofa.

"I wonder what that child has thought to do now?" mother says and sounds quite worried. I don't care, let her be worried, I think, and I won't let a sound escape me, although I continue to be wracked by bouts of crying.

And then father comes and lifts me up from the floor. He doesn't say anything. He straightens up my wrinkled dress, puts the wet bow onto the window sill and rocks me on his arm. I push my head into his armpit as far as I can.

"Mother, why don't you bring that parcel to our princess" father says. "We have to change her dress, as somebody has watered the flowers too much and the water has dripped to the floor."

Mother comes. She undresses my dress and underpants, squeezes me in her lap, and smells good. I am going to bite her ear to remind her that she has abandoned me for a new baby, although I still exist. But in the end I don't bite her, I just sniff.

Mother opens the parcel and pulls out a red dress. It is bright and it has bright coloured pictures along the hem. And it has funny sleeves, which you will hear about as soon as I get it on. Because right now I am in a hurry. My arm won't bend to fit into the sleeve, but then it does when Kylli helps and pushes it hard.

"Isn't that beautiful" everybody says many times over. My face is smiling, although my eyes still sting and my nose is still dripping, too. They wipe me up and set me standing on a stool as if to look at a miraculous thing.

We can hear the neighbours from outside, and I rush to the veranda. I go right up to where the stairs are, because everybody can see me there. Jaska and Liisa, our neighbours, are standing in our yard and some others as well. They are all wearing play suits and they all look the same when you are looking at them from the veranda steps.



But I am dancing around and around. I am wearing the black lacquer shoes, the ones with buttons, and white ankle socks. My feet are dancing so fast that the skirt bellows out, and there, as a colourful picture all around the skirt, is a whole secret garden. It lifts up and wraps around me like a huge tulip flower, and my arms are rising higher and higher with the skirt. Everybody can see that the sleeves have a wide puff on top, but down from the elbows they are narrow. They can be shortened for summers, mother says. “*Now it is summer, now it is summer*”, I sing as I whirl around and think of the magnificence of being able to wear this dress all the time, short sleeves in summer, long sleeves in winter. And always it would be as beautiful.

Ptah, somebody says down below, but I couldn’t hear who it was. And I don’t care. I have a marvellous dress. And mother bought it in Viipuri even though she went there to fetch that other one.

Now I could actually even go and see the newcomer. It can lie on the sofa, and it can stay with us. There is nothing I can do about it anyway. And I sigh, a deep sigh. When sister comes to take me near it, I tickle its chin. It opens its eyes, and they are like buttons.

“Little Sister”, I say. And I kneel down on the floor next to it and smell it. “My Little Sister” I say again. And I wasn’t sad anymore, and I helped when it was given clean wrappings.

From Little Sister:

That was the beginning of a close, sometimes difficult relationship. On top of the usual problem of deposing the older sibling from the throne, I was born sickly and demanding, at a time of great upheavals in everybody’s life. The clouds were gathering on the eastern sky, nobody could predict what would happen. On top of this, my mother was 43 years old, worn down by the demands of a big family – I was the 9th living child, and my oldest sister was 21 years my senior.

I have no memory of my first home, but I do have a vague feeling of being carried in my father’s arms – up and down, up and down, while he was singing in his falsetto voice his own particular lullaby:

*Pumpuli, pumpuli, puli-puli-pumpuli,
Pumpuli, pumpuli, puli-puli-pumpuli, Puli-puli-
pumpuli, puli-puli-pumpuli, Puli-puli-pumpuli,
pumpuli.*

It could also be simply because I had seen and heard him do it with his grandchildren and internalised the feeling of being cradled in his arms, who knows!

3. Spring Trip

Vella pulls the cover off me and full of eagerness shouts:

“We are going to Hyrmä today, remember! Up with you, and have a wash and get dressed in your play suit, it is so warm out there that you don’t need anything else. And then come and have your breakfast.”

My head is buzzing with thoughts. It is splendid to be taken on a trip with lunch. It is wonderful that we are all going together, as it is school holiday today – not the big boys and father, who are going to work on the fields, but the rest of us. I jump out of bed in a thrice and run to have a wash, although I can’t understand why I have to be washing myself all the time. I hear mother commanding Tuitu, and soon sister is there with a clean play suit for me, and is helping me to put it on. The baggy trousers are freshly ironed and billowing out, it has a flap in front, and the shoulder strips are crossed in the back like an apron. It is a dress for summer, and it is good for playing in, mother has assured me.

There is a lot of hustle and bustle in the kitchen. Today we don’t have to eat quietly and ask prettily, we don’t even need to sit till the end. Everybody is jumping up and down going every which way looking for forgotten items. Mother is feeding Little Sister and is happy when she manages to get the baby to sleep. Helli, who is our servant, is staying home to look after Little Sister, and mother is coming on the trip with us.

The sun is beaming down from a clear sky, but the morning is still fresh. Our journey is light and skipping, and it makes you want to sing. And it is Mayday, it is Mayday, it is Mayday again! The others are laughing at my attempt; I don’t have the right melody. It is totally unfair and uncalled for, I am always singing. Kylli lifts me up under her arm and consoles me, she can’t sing in tune, either. We make our own tunes!

It is a long way to Hyrmä. I am getting tired of travelling. The first heatwave of the summer makes the road dusty. There is a downhill bit after the next bend, and then we’ll be climbing up again. There is a lot of forest after we get out of the village. And there is a narrow gravel road winding through the green. Why aren’t we there yet, how much longer do we have to travel?

My shoes are really dusty; my knee socks are scrunched down to

my ankles. I am forever stumbling over stones that the others don't even notice. Every so often they run ahead, and back again. They even play catch, even Vänni, who can't be called Nänni anymore, because he is a schoolboy now. I feel like crying. One of the Big Ones takes my hand and chuckles. Drats!

Now we have arrived. There is a spring green slope in Hyrmä with no big trees, only bushes and grass and anemones. I have been here before, I know this place! I had forgotten, just remembered the exhausting trip. But inside, I had felt homesick for this place. I had an inkling that this place was somehow different. On the edges of the slope the big trees are ancient; they have protected Hyrmä for centuries. They have seen it all. All I see is the bright shining meadow. I have never seen a meadow this white. Even the sisters shout out in eagerness in front of this plenty, but they won't let me pick anything just yet. Not till we start the journey home can we pick the flowers, and then only a handful. And we can only run where there are no anemones.

Vänni and I start racing around right away! We race up the slope and down the slope, screaming in our delight. Mother is trying to shush us and the sisters arrive to 'bring some sense' to our play. We look for plants and name birds and stuff like that. When tired, we collapse on the blanket, where mother has piled our lunch parcels. Every last morsel disappears into our maws. And for drink we have *sima*, because it is Mayday! We quieten down to sing '*It is Mayday, it is Mayday*' and '*Now the swallows are playing in the sky*' and other songs besides. Everybody is asking Vella to tell us stories.

So much has happened here in the olden times. Things that are sad, horrible, jolly and happy. There has been a battle even here, in Hyrmä. The enemy had occupied the village, and the defenders had sent the women and children here for safety. On the edge of the slope there is a big rock, and at its base there is a black opening leading into the slope. There they hid from the enemy. I go to the rock and press my cheek into its rough surface: sighs, quiet crying, frightened whispers. Guns are booming, the men are lying on the slope and shooting the advancing enemy. The enemy is retreating, the folks are saved.

The sisters find me crying on the rock. I cry for the time long gone by, I cry for the cruelty and the fate that led into suffering. I cry for the miracle that saved the villagers.

They console me and I am given an extra mugful of sima. My last tears drip into the mug as well. Everybody sits under the trees and listens to their whispering. Then we tell the others what we have heard. To me the tree is telling about the forest gnome who has seen everything that has happened here for the last 500 years. He is the gnome who looks after the trees, bushes, anemones, birds, and people who come here to escape their problems or just to rest a while. Hyrmä gives you peace, the grown-ups say, there nature heals you.

But I doubt that they know about the Hyrmä goblin that makes the grass green, opens the flowers of the anemone, and spreads the tree branches above us to protect us. But I know!

The trip home is as long as going there. But a new knowing about somebody who looks after things gives me strength. With the help of singing we march back home. The yearly trip to Hyrmä has been accomplished again!

I am trying to stay on my chair, munching my supper with eyes closed. The Big Ones take me for a wash, and dress me in my nightgown. I think they even carry me to bed.

It is just like Hyrmä, being in the Sandman's island.

4. Experiences

Near my home is a sandy field where baseball is played on summer nights. I am watching with longing the game where they don't want me. The best view is from an adjacent hill, which is the home of old pine trees. The brow of the hill is steep; the path goes up on the other side. That path is used when you go gathering berries, or mushrooms, or when you are shepherding animals. But when you are going to the forest, you use the steep brow. And you go alone. To collect experiences.

I have walked around all summer in bare feet and gained hard soles for my feet, and rough crow boots for my legs. With these legs I step on the sand, sink in, and step again. The sand slips down under my feet when I try to struggle upwards. Sometimes I slide right down to the bottom again on my belly. Twigs and pinecones carried on the wind scratch me, the sand pours into my top through the neck opening and collects in my panties. At last I grab hold of heather and tree roots on top of the slope. I pull myself onto stable ground, and I have arrived.

I squeeze tufts of grass, stems of lingon-berries and heather into my lap, I press my cheek into the mosses, and I twine my arms around a pine trunk, even though my fingers don't meet. I push my thumb into a hole in the bark, travel with it along the slit, and look for more and more paths to follow. I meet others on the way. Here is an ant with a huge burden, demanding room. Here is a beetle steadily moving along regardless of obstacles. I bow to him, too, and give him the freedom of the road.

The old tree is living with all its might. I can hear its trunk flexing and its boughs swishing in the wind. It talks without a pause. And without a pause its life elixir drips down from its wounds. The smell of resin is strong and good. When I collect resin in my palm, I am holding in my hand the secret of life. I make a ball out of the resin; I knead the ball into a flat ribbon, and massage it into a long string between my hands. Here is the strength of the tree, the strength of life, formed to my liking. I lie down on my back on the mossy cushion. I press my shoulder-blades against the moss, find a hillock to take the bow of my back and a valley to accommodate my buttocks, straighten my legs to press the earth firmly. I arrange the power ribbon on my forehead, close my eyes and hum, hmm hmm mm.

When a grasshopper is playing his violin, when the thrush is singing, when the resin spreads its aroma around and the sun is still hot in its tracks, that's when *That Moment* is happening. I am soil, I am air, and I am the wind, the birdsong, the fireweed and the moss. I am as old as the ground and the trees and my granddad, as old as all these I am as well.

An ant is stinging me, like it did already a thousand years ago. As I am scratching the bite on my arm, I stretch, and suddenly I am floating on the air. My flight starts. Where do I want to go today, with all this eternity to choose from? I do not decide anything; I do not choose any direction. I am flying in a dark cloud, my arms doing swimming motions. I am advancing slowly, the scene is flitting by so slowly under me that I feel no fear. I would like to peep in through the window at my home, but they would be too frightened, and all for nothing.

My speed is increasing, but I feel I have this flying business under control. I have experienced all possible problems and I am able to correct my posture as required. I am not even scared about the sea ahead, as I realise that as soon as I have flown over one boat, I can see another, and I know that I can fly down to rest on the deck of one any time. I wave as I fly by, and do a couple of cartwheels to delight the puzzled passengers.

I flew a long time and finally arrived here in the city of Nurnberg. I stop at the church steeple amongst the bells. I am whispering, for I am hiding. I ran away from home, for my mother and father don't understand me. I am thirteen years old already, and I know what Our Lord expects from me. I have no desire to make my parents unhappy, but this thing is beyond my power. When that piped piper came and gathered all the children of Nurnberg to hear what we had to do, we were ready then and there. Some did think that their parents would never agree. They decided not to tell their folks at home. But I didn't want to lie and I told them that I was going to join the piper and conquer The Holy Land back from the Saracens and rescue Jerusalem. Father and mother forbade it absolutely. Around midday I went to see Meister Martin on an errand for my father, and from there I came straight here. When the folks have retired to their houses at night, I will sneak to the city gate and rush out amongst the last of the country folk. The meeting place is under the mountain, next to a big boulder. I have heard the flute playing there on many evenings already.

If only I wasn't so tearful! Why is there a rock under my heart, although I am on the Lord's errand? Is that the sign I can hear already? The flute, the flute is calling, demanding. Why is it so demanding today? Is a danger threatening? I must leave right away. Wait, wait for Margareta Hansdotter, I will come with you from Nurnberg!

But the church steeple is a steeple no more, the staircase not a staircase. I fall down into the sand which stuffs my mouth and my nostrils. I get stuck on a gentle slope, and slip down slowly down to the playing field amongst a soft sand avalanche. But still the flute is playing! The music of the flute is still in my ears when I slip down from the slope and fall onto the hard field with a cry.

The umpire has stopped the game with a sharp whistle from the pipe, and all the players rush to me. I get pulled free from the sand I brought with me. They undress me and shake away the stinging sand. My scratches are bleeding. Everybody is commiserating with me. Sister carries me home. It feels like in spite of all the commiserating, the others don't know whether to cry with me or laugh at me.

Because just then, when I slid down and they stopped their game to run to me, and sister shouted worriedly: "Where do *you* come from?" I remember having said "from Nurrnberg" – with a real *rrr*!

5. Christmas 1938

My thoughts are churning and churning as I wake up into the dark morning. Something is happening, something special. But what is it? It would be nice to slumber on in the warm cocoon of the bed, but I can't! From somewhere I can hear my sisters singing softly:

“Softly, softly, the Christmas bells are ringing. Through the Universe we can hear the song of the angels. Christmas is here.”

I tiptoe in my nightgown to join my sisters and their singing. Mother joins in with her clear voice as she is bringing bread, butter and milk for breakfast from the pantry cupboard in the entry.

“Did father and the boys go already?”

I am disappointed, because I wanted to go with them. “How do they know to choose the right one? They don't understand”, I mutter to myself as I take a huge bite of the sandwich.

“They will be back very soon. They will bring a big and handsome tree, that's for sure! But now, make the beds, quick march! We have a lot to do before Christmas can arrive in the house”, mother hassles us.

And so the hustle and bustle begins. Nobody is trying to avoid their share of the jobs that mother and Kylli are doling out in competition with each other. Go there; bring that here; do this; no, not that! Dusters swish, brushes collide with dustpans, the rugs get straightened out, tablecloths wave in the wind, and the old Christmas table runners look like new, spread out on the tables. Room by room everything is set to rights. Of course the floors and windows had already been washed on the previous days, as well as the cupboards tidied up and other basic cleaning jobs done and the bread baked. The boys are commandeered to fetch logs for all the stoves right away when they return from the forest. Father of course retires into his study with his papers. There is no mention about a tree. We have to wait until the Christmas porridge has been eaten. It is rice porridge, with *luumusoppa* (prune soup), and it is very good. On the table the menorah, the seven branched candlestick with its candles, is already waiting. In its glow we sing ‘*Christmas is here, Christmas is here*’.

Kylli does the dishes. Tuitu rinses and the other girls dry them. There are lots of dishes, as mother and the big girls have been busy from

the cock's crow baking *pulla* and *rinkilä*, yule tarts, coffee cakes, biscuits and pies. The mountain of dishes is exhausting.

Mother and Vella fetch tree decorations and candles from the attic cupboard. The candlesticks have been cleaned up, some even polished. I am allowed to set the candles in their cradles, and Little Sister is messing around helping. We also have all kinds of Christmas elves and Christmas angels. Some are old; some were made just in the last few weeks. We search for suitable positions for them in different rooms. The boys are galumphing in and shaking the snow off in the entrance.

Father is opening the living room door. We go to the door and we see it: a Christmas tree so beautiful that it cannot possibly exist. It is sparkling and shining with the candles, and there is a star angel on the top. A long string of flags circles the tree, that is because the message of Christmas is meant to be for all peoples, father says. "Ooh" we say over and over, and run to the tree. But it is not yet the time to stay and play around it. Little Sister is sent to bed for a rest, and they tell me:

"It would do you some good, too. Go and lie down to wait for Santa Claus. The big girls will go and milk the cows, as Helli has already gone to her own home. Afterwards, we will set the table."

And that's what we do. I am waiting and waiting, in between sleeping and waking, and sometimes even sleeping, I suppose. Then somebody opens the door, blows a fanfare, and we jump up from our beds and run to the festive table in the dining room. We sing '*Leave behind your daily worries*'. Then we eat soup, and swede-casserole (*lanttulaatikko*) and carrot-casserole (*porkkanalaatikko*) for the main course, as well as ham which has been roasting in the oven all through the previous night. There are also preserved tomatoes, cucumber, mushrooms etc. And we drink milk and juices. For dessert we get prune soup (*luumusoppa*). Only at Christmas time can we have such luxuries.

When the dishes are done and the dining room tidied up, we move into the lounge room. The candles are lit, and father reads the gospel for Christmas. '*Angel from Heaven*' is filling the whole house with its melody. Tanu plays his violin, and then accompanies the singing. We get through all our favourite Christmas songs: '*Leave behind your daily worries*', '*Quietly, so quietly, the Christmas bells are ringing*', '*In the hay in the manger*', '*Silent night*' and many others. Then father remembers that he has to do something he has forgotten, just now, and

leaves the room in a hurry. Kylli joins him to help. The rest continue singing and wonder if Santa will come at all this year. The Big Ones are teasing us little ones, implying that we haven't been all that good. We start singing '*Santa Claus, Santa Claus, you old white bearded gaffer. Come in, we are not scared*', as we are shaking with excitement. When we start singing '*Knock, knock, knock, knock at the door, the door is opening*', the door is really opening, and Santa steps in. He has a wrinkled old face, but his skin is fresh and his cheeks very red from the cold. He does not look frightening, if only you dare to look; at least from the corner of your eye. Little Sister is already sitting on his lap, and is covering her face with both hands, as the beard is tickling her. Santa's hair and beard are a real mess. In the middle of the mess I can see grey eyes that demand the truth about this year gone by.

We all get a present, mine is a new Molla-Maija, and Ritva's is a new bed for her doll. Nänni, who is not to be called Nänni anymore, gets paper and pens for drawing and writing. The Big Ones seem to be getting books, and mother gets a saucepan. In addition to Santa's presents from his workshop at *Korvatunturi*, we also get presents made by ourselves, which we have been making all through the autumn. Santa tells us stories about his travels and his elf helpers at *Korvatunturi* and asks us to sing and play for him. Big sisters take us by hand and we dance '*The lanterns are dimming, all the folks are sleeping*'. In it we tiptoe under a bridge, sit at the table, eat and drink, ask each other if the food is tasty, and when we have eaten enough, we get up and jump around singing '*Tip tap*'. Another song we hop to is '*night of Blue Mountains, where the hard work is finished, and we are celebrating*'. I think '*Little circle is circling*' is also a very nice dance, as we can twirl and shake our finger at people and knock our shoe on the floor. But Santa is not very good at playing, just galumphs around. It makes us laugh, and we are not at all scared now. Then it is time for him to travel on. And we sing to him that he has to go all around the country in his big 40 league boots and we wave him bye-bye. MollaMaija has hung onto my arm all through the dancing and singing, and now she is waving and waving.

But it is not yet time to stop playing and singing, the Big Ones know so many songs. At last mother orders us to calm down. The Big Ones hasten to their books, but us little ones, even Nänni-Vänni for a change, are gathering around the open slow combustion stove following Vella. The embers are glowing orange and red, and sometimes even a

blue flame bursts forth blinding us with its brightness. Vella's Christmas saga begins when the poker conjures a castle out of the embers.

6. Ikiturso Comonaadii

We are standing by the window again. We peek through every pane, above – not the very highest panes, of course – below, both sides, to see the goings-on of the scholars in the school yard during recess. It is so exciting! Will the ones playing ‘*catch me*’ catch their pray! There are too many players in ‘*burn ball*’, they are just getting entangled with each other! The people who are skipping are really skilful; I wish I could be as good. But the most fun of all is hopscotch. You can draw all kinds of different squares on the ground, and you kick the puck from one square to another following all kinds of different rules.

All this you can see from our dining room window and the happenings in the school yard are the unwavering object of our interest from autumn to spring. Some kids we already know from playing with them. I doubt they will have time for playing with us now with school and all that homework. A new life has started for others, but not for us, we sigh. Now the bell goes, end of games. The scholars arrange themselves into long queues by the class. The teacher waits until all are quiet, and lets one queue at a time march in. A glimpse into the big world is over for us. We have to wait a whole hour for the next show.

Little Sister grabs her doll and starts to change its clothes, and in no time I have to help her. It is not easy to push the stiff arms into narrow sleeves. I begin to look at pictures in my new storybook. For quite a while I have wondered how the Big Ones can look at those little marks on the page, tell a story, and say that that’s what it says. What is the problem for me that I can’t see inside those marks? Even Vänni can do it! I turn the book this way and that, but nothing is revealed to me.

“You should start school already, you are so inquiring by nature” says mother. “Though the others used to be as well, I guess”, says she.

Oh-oh, so I am inquiring, inquiring, *inquiring*. One who inquires a lot? Well, I have to ask all the time, because I don’t know things. And it’s The Big Ones who do more asking: can we come; can we go; we don’t need to do this, do we; can we do this; and other nonsense. All life seems to be about inquiring.

I wonder about this going to school business. Maybe there I can discover the secrets of books! Even Vänni is prattling like a sewing machine when he is reading his homework aloud. Homework! I, too, will

have homework when I go to school. But one has to be seven years old to go to school, and I am only six. I sigh with a profound outbreath. Then I realise something. I take Little Sister by the hand and take her with me to a small, dark room. It is not completely dark, though. It has a small window above the bed high on the wall, and you can see to the classroom through it. The Big Ones have shown it to us when we have been to the classroom after school hours. Sister is scared because father has forbidden us to mess up his papers on the table. And we should have permission to come here.

I assure her that father is in Viipuri at a meeting. “Now you just help me climb onto the bedhead. I will peek into the class and tell you what is going on. It will be just as if we were really in school. Let’s pile all the cushions together, and the covers as well, and you can sit against the cushions so they can’t spread under me, do you understand?”

And Little Sister did understand when I showed her how she had to sit and push the cushions back if they started to spread out. I have to try over and over again, until I am standing astride the narrow bedhead holding onto the window clasp. But the sight is worth all the effort!

They are sitting straight as soldiers in the classroom. Auntie Kärkinen, who is the teacher in the first class, is standing in front of the class and speaking, pupils are raising their hands. Someone jumps up and says something, the teacher nods. And the same scenario repeats. The teacher gives some student a stick, and the student rushes to the big map and points to some place on the map. To me it looks like it was in Estonia, which I have seen on a smaller map. Teacher Keihänen’s family has been there on many summers, and it is important to them. Our two families have a lot to do with each other; Keihänen children are friends of our Big Ones.

Now they are starting to read! They all open the desk tops and pull out their ABC books. I can recognise it from the big bright coloured rooster which is crowing on the book cover.

“Can you hear how they are reading? I can’t distinguish what they are saying; I just hear muttering from back here. I wish I could read, too!”

“Me, too!” comes back from the bed, where sister has made such a disturbance that I needs must jump down, tidy up the pillows and spread the covers back down. Must conceal the crime!

In the afternoon we are commanded to front up. Aunty Kärkinen has noticed the peeper in the window. She thinks that if one of the children were to notice me, the work peace would be endangered in her class. After this I only take a tiny peek, in secret, with one eye only.

One day after school hours Tellu takes us to that class. She explains what is where, and what various things are used for and how strict the discipline is at school. We have always been brought up under discipline; it has no horrors for us. Of course it makes you shiver just a little. Then she takes us to a small cupboard and explains that in that cupboard there lives a big warlock. He has a big mouth, and a long beard, and his fingernails are ten centimetres long. When Tellu opens the door to the cupboard, we run for our life to the classroom door, and behind us there is a great commotion with screaming and yelling. We bang the door shut and run home. We scream that Ikiturso Comonaadii is going to eat us. The Big Ones take us under their protection and laugh at us: “Is it Tellu tormenting the girls again? We’ll squash her, don’t you worry!”

Ikiturso becomes a constant tormentor, although not so threatening any more. Especially if you believe that he doesn’t exist anyway.

From Little Sister:

I remember Ikiturso Comonaadii, but only in connection of Suoma alias Tellu scaring Väinö with him.

7. Summer Swarming in the School Yard

Gypsies are coming, gypsies are coming! My mind is filled with a delicious terror. We peep out from the edge of the window, full of curiosity, as carriage after carriage drives into the yard, right under the dining room window. They are travelling with their whole families; there are even tiny children amongst them. Now there are steps in the entrance, now they are knocking on the door. We run to peep from the door. Mother invites the knocker in. They would like to water the horses, and get a piece of bread for the children. Mother chooses a big loaf of rye bread from the pantry and wraps it in baking paper. She tells the men to go to the well with their horses. The women are eagerly trying to sell their handcraft but mother has no need for any at the moment. She leads the women outside, and I follow with Little Sister right down to the steps, ready to dash back if needed. They are such queer folk that one never knows what could happen with them. We have been assured that they won't do anything nasty, they just have different customs from us. But their customs, their clothing, their speech, and their whole being are so different from us that it makes you scared anyway. I try to wave at one girl, but she buries her face in her mother's huge skirts. After watering their horses they climb onto their carriages again and drive away, blessing the good housewife. They have no permanent home anywhere. They just travel around. It gives us pause for thinking, too.

We always rush to the window when we hear rhythmic stepping and a marching song from the road. The home defence troops have started practicing. I suppose they are soldiers, as they are carrying guns over their shoulders. We run out to the steps to check if we know anybody. Somebody we know a little bit, as he lives in our neighbourhood, so we wave at him. He doesn't wave back. The brothers say that you are not allowed to wave at girls when you are on a march. "Nonsense", we say and give them a grimace, only a quick small one so mother can't see it although she is sitting on the balcony knitting.

The civil guard house is next to the school building. There is a gate in the fence, and we use it to cross over to the other side. There is a housekeeper's family living in the house. We play with their children every day, things like catch or ball games. Our neighbour Jaska is the nicest boy that I know.

The big girls have visitors often. They come on their bicycles from Viipuri and even further away, from the neighbouring counties. They are class mates. And of course people from our own village come, too. They withdraw with my sisters to whisper secrets, and mother says they must not be disturbed. We admire their bicycles. The sisters have to ride old wrecks. But we want new bikes, if we ever get to actually ride them. Today, though, they have a visitor that makes us stop bragging about our future new bicycles for a while. We didn't see this girl coming, but we heard that her mother brought her in a wheel barrow. There she sits and prattles with the others and is glad to see them. When it is time to go, she slips down from her chair onto her hands and walks on her hands, feet pointing to the heavens. Now she is already far away on the road! What determination in her travelling! We are gobsmacked, quite dumbfounded.

One Sunday there are a lot of people gathering in our yard. Some of them make two long queues, which come together at one end like the V of flying geese. In the apex there stands a man with a flagstaff and a brand new flag. In the flag is written '*Riento X*'. It has been sewn by our Kylli, who is standing by the flag. Father is on the other side and is making a speech about the flag. It is the flag of the Temperance Society. This is the dedication ceremony for the flag. It is being dedicated for its purpose. And then we sing for a change! On another Sunday there is a long line of young people with their bicycles, our big brothers and sisters amongst them. They are going to take the message about abstinence onwards. Vella is the first in the line. She has knotted her long thick plats, although she has threatened to cut them as they are time wasters. But what a shame! She has a man's bicycle, and is wearing long black trousers.

"That attire will arouse talking in the village" mother says. "There are many others" a neighbour regrets. "Where is this world coming to?"

Now we can hear singing throughout the village. The Karelian people's own song and the temperance songs give heart to the messengers, who pedal off with the song swelling to a mighty roar as they ride out of the gate. It is a sight powerful to hear and to see. It will be talked about often.

There are also various celebrations at the school. The yard is then full of strangers. We have taken part in Mothers' days, pre-Christmas celebrations, end-of-school parties in the spring, and the Temperance

Society parties since we were little. We have sung and played with the others. There have even been real artists performing both for the school kids and for big audiences. An artist from far away will probably stay with us overnight, and we look after him. Then sister and I will peek through the gap in the door, wanting to see this famous visitor, who is having coffee with father and mother around the round table in the living room.

Gatherings talking about God and Jesus are also common. As the church is far away in Viipuri, many prayer meetings are held at the school. There they sing hymns and preach and pray. People wear their best Sunday clothes for these occasions. Mother dresses us, too, in a tidy frock, and ties a ribbon in our hair. Ritva can run away, if she can't sit still the whole time, but I struggle to stay till the end, at least almost to the end. For I am a big girl! Luckily they sing a lot of hymns. I am fond of listening to them. Such songs as *'There is a path in the Garden, which takes you to Golgotha'*, *'I cast my eyes up to the Heaven'*, *'Thank the Good Lord'*, *'Spirit of truth, lead us on'* and *'I am a wretched worm, an earthly traveller'*. To me that one has the most beautiful melody, as it is very low and sways like being on an ocean swell. In the proper church they have a pipe organ, and the singing is even more powerful than it is in the school with only the pump organ for accompaniment. In the church the sound swells and resonates and swirls around the whole vault. One can see its progress in the ceiling structures.

But there is one hymn which is favoured above all others, now. It is played in the radio all the time, too. And there is no occasion happening without it. This autumn it has been necessary to have such a power hymn, so strong that it can support the whole nation. Times are dangerous, big strong men keep repeating, and shake their heads. The news is about going to negotiations, coming back from negotiations, and yet new negotiations. Father listens to news diligently, so do the boys. And mother and big girls aren't ignorant either, although they have not got so much time to listen to the news of the world. Do we have reason to worry? Surely not, as I can hear again that hymn: *'God is our stronghold and our stay'*.

8. Seamstress at Home

Auntie Hyttinen will come today. Every autumn at an arranged time she arrives, and stays for a week or two. She has a huge suitcase. When she makes her home in the corner of our dining room, where we have cleared a space for her, and opens her suitcase, the hidden grandeur of it is revealed. It is chock-a-block full of cotton reels, ribbons, press studs and buttons, elastic, pins and needles, scissors, various different materials and patterns for clothes. This widow with a soft smile is a well-known and skilful seamstress. One can book her for a certain time to sew all the presentable clothes the family will need. Although mother is a handcraft teacher she hasn't got time to sew everything. She makes our everyday clothes herself, but better wear is ordered from the seamstress. Auntie Hyttinen has also made the clothes for father and the boys for a long time. You can tell her all your wishes. Whether you get what you wish for is dependent on money. There are so many money holes. Ritva and I probably won't have any particular wishes. It's a different story for the Big Ones. Their enthusiasm and imagination is in full swing.

When all the decisions have been made, Auntie starts working. The sewing machine is settled in a spot with good light. The dining table is now transformed into a cutting table, and little bits of material start dropping to the floor. We brats – that's what the Big Ones call us, but never mother and father – crawl under the table to collect them. I am allowed to use the smallest bits for dolls' clothes. I join the little bits together and then make some piece of clothing, even if only an apron. Auntie is very frugal with the material. Nothing is allowed to be wasted. Auntie cuts, sews and tries the garment on many times. Father gets a new jacket for school, and looks very handsome in it. Mother complains that the elbows wear out too fast in father's jackets. They will now get a double re-enforcement. Mother is quite podgy. She gets some decoration on her front, but otherwise the frock is simple. The schoolgirls get their skirts and Vänni gets real trousers with suspenders. Ahti and Tanu have already left for their studies, but they too get a pair of strong trousers, made to measure. But what about us, what do we get? It is always mother who makes our clothes. Or remakes the old ones abandoned by the Big Ones. We use material to its last thread before it is consigned to become a cleaning rag.

Mother brings white and grey skins to the table. We admire the soft beauty of them and stroke them tenderly. I wonder what these will become. The fur is so shiny that it blinds you.

“Just like our bunnies, the ones that were taken away” I say without thinking.

“That’s them”, mother says. “You knew we couldn’t keep them over winter. We did tell you that we would make you warm winter coats.”

Ritva is sniffing, but she doesn’t say anything, just puckers her lips. I don’t know what to think either. So I, too, press my lips together. I let my thoughts mull over this.

Mother and Auntie Hyttinen begin to plan. They turn the pieces of skin on the table, take measurements in every direction, and study them hand on cheek. Some bits are so thin that they can’t be used at all. It seems to be very difficult. Whatever are they planning! Helli comes to the door to say that table is set in the kitchen.

After the meal we are measured carefully, up and down, and around, even the hand separately. Then we are released to go and play.

Auntie Hyttinen doesn’t call for us until after breakfast the next morning. We rush to the dining room. There are two would-be fur coats hanging on their hangers. We are assisted with getting into our own. Mine already feels warm, although only the side and shoulder seams are done. Now they fit the sleeve, and you can already see what a fine fur coat this will be. At the same time there is an uncertain sadness in my heart for the bunnies we had been feeding. Do we have a right to be glad? I suspect – no, I am sure, that sister is pondering the same thing. After many more fittings we both get our rabbit coat, a grey one for me, and a white one for Ritva. There are enough tiny pieces left to make a hat and a muff. The muff is soft on the inside. It is like a parcel with an opening in each end for you to slip your hands in. The hands stay warm, and of course you have mittens as well. The muff hangs around your neck from a ribbon. This is a bit too grand, and I feel embarrassed, especially because of the bunnies. When it snows, we promenade in the yard like fine ladies. We can’t stay that elegant for long. You can’t do anything with your hands, not even make one snow ball. But when we go for a sleigh ride to the neighbouring village, we can take the muff.

Then it will keep you nice and warm. In your own yard or in the forest it is better to have a snow suit.

Talk about war has become constant. Today it is going to be on, tomorrow not so. Rumours are scary. Something weird is happening. But what is it? Where is it? What does it mean for us? Why are the grown-ups so peculiar? If you ask them, they answer that they don't know. And yet, they glide from one room to another without joy, and sigh. They whisper to each other and look scared. There is an announcement on the radio that all Finns living near the border have to make gasmasks for themselves and their families. The women's auxiliary, the *lottas*, advise how to make them in every village. You have to get some gauze material, make a bag a couple of hands long out of it, and have a ribbon attached to both ends, which can go behind your neck. Are they making another muff? These ones are far too flimsy in the cold. Then they take coals out of the fireplace, fill the bag, and take this gasmask with them every time they go out anywhere. If war is coming, it is possible that there will be a gas attack. Then you have to breathe through the coal. Soon we are wandering in the forest and in the yard with our new charcoal muff around our neck, practising a new kind of breathing. It really is a messy task. When the charcoal gets broken in the bag, it starts to flow down through the thin material and makes a mess of the whole girl. You have to wash the material, maybe even the girl, and you need new charcoal in your bag.

9. The Last Day of November 1939

First there are the airplanes over the roofs, and the men rush to fetch their rifles and try to shoot towards the planes from the sports field. Then we run to the forest dragging blankets under our arm. The bigger people make a bower of fir branches and we stamp the snow down for a floor. It is very cold in there. We crouch down and shiver. When a bomb screams by, we scream. My hand covers my mouth, it is very embarrassing. After dark we creep home through the forest and the yard, which is empty of men with their rifles now. We can't even hear the sound of the planes.

The kitchen door squeaks as we enter, and Mirri lets out a resounding miaou in her angst. She has been scared all that day, but she didn't find her way into the bower with the rest of us. Next to Mirri there is a small brown cardboard briefcase. It belongs to sister Vella, who is working in Viipuri. She had intended to go to the University in Helsinki this autumn. The grown-ups had been discussing the news all autumn, and they were somehow restless. Father's opinion was that there would be time for study after things quietened down. And so Vella stayed at home and has worked as a sales assistant in a bookstore belonging to one of our acquaintances. In the evenings Vella tells us stories by the fireplace. The stories come forth from the fire, and disappear back into the fire, and they have us spellbound. Now we'll have another story, I think, and stop to wonder why sister's lunch pack is hanging on a string from the handle of the briefcase. Hasn't Vella eaten anything all day! We have gorged ourselves with a whole loaf of bread in the bower, and we are still hungry. I am wondering if Vella would give her lunch to me.

There is a great commotion in the kitchen when we stomp in. Although everybody is talking somehow hesitatingly, swallowing half their words and shifting their gaze here and there nervously, there is a lot of noise, nevertheless. My ears always ache when there is too much noise. I like it best when there is a blazing fire in the fireplace, and sister's calm voice utters words quietly, reverently.

“What happened in the city when the airplanes came?” father asks agitatedly.

“People went totally wild. Everybody rushed out to the marketplace and stared up to the sky. Some were waving kerchiefs, some crying. Then the soldiers came and drove them away from the market.

They said you must not come to an open field to be a target to the bombers, and that to try and shoot the planes with an ordinary rifle wouldn't help one iota. There was a big explosion somewhere near, and there were flames. It got smoky and people were screaming.”

Vella tells how she looked out from the shop window. She, too, had run to the marketplace right away, but then she had remembered that you couldn't leave the shop even at a moment like this, and came back to lock the door. Nobody knew what had actually happened, but everybody was repeating: “The Russians are bombing us, this is war!”

War, I pondered. What does it mean? I had been told how the Romans waged war, and how the Greeks waged war, and how the Finnish *hakkapeliittas* were fighting in the German war. But it was a long time ago. And I also knew that this was a different kind of war.

The grown-ups had been talking about the possibility of a coming war. How does it come? I don't understand this coming, however I ponder on it. Big sister had come home from the city; we had come home from the bower where we had been playing. But will the war come even to our home, and what does the war look like, I had no idea. The one thing I know is that war is where lots of bad things happen. People are scared of dying. Dying means that they can't walk and talk with other people any more, that we can't even see them. They only exist in Heaven, and in the stories of others.

The following makes no sense unless you know that in Finnish the word 'kuula' can mean both a bullet, and a shot-put. So in Aili's mind she was thinking 'shot put' when others meant 'bullet'.

The grown-ups say that bullets are flying in a war. I do know what a bullet is. My home is next to a sports field, and I have lifted a bullet up in my two hands and dropped it again. Good thing it didn't fall on my toes, mother said. But you can avoid the flying bullet, I realise. It is not so dangerous after all, this war business. When a bullet flies on the sports field you just have to make sure you are not in its flight path. Just run away from the place the bullet is heading to. But if there are a lot of the bullets, of course it is more difficult, as you have to look in all directions. And some are flying low and some others high. You have to jump over and dive under and step aside from them. I have practised in secret on many days already, and I think I am pretty good at the avoidance game.

I won't be scared of bullets, however many they'll chuck my way, I assure myself.

Vänni is my big brother and Vänni says that airplanes are dropping bombs in a war. They drop a bomb, which is like a big stone. Then the stone breaks into little pieces and the pieces get into everything. Vänni and I have at least 100 paper airplanes in our hangar. It is a big wooden box that father has given us. We have excellent markings in the airplanes, and we fly them every day. Vänni gets angry sometimes when I can't fly them properly, but the others have forbidden Vänni to scream at me. Now Vänni wants to play bombing all the time. He puts small rocks inside the plane and then makes the plane fly in such a big circle that they do a cartwheel and the stone can fall.

When the real planes now came to our skies, I was waiting for them to start bombing. But they didn't do a cartwheel, they just kept on flying straight, and their sound was much louder than our planes, although Vänni kept commanding me to make more noise.

They must have made a cartwheel in Viipuri, I say in a loud voice. What is the child talking about now? The grown-ups marvel. But Vänni is tittering; he is guessing what I am thinking. Big sister asks me in a whisper what I meant. I tell her. She says that real airplanes don't have to do cartwheels, because they have a hole in the floor. I give Vänni an angry stare and poke my tongue out at him. Serves you right! Now I know how matters stand.

"Hasn't Vella eaten anything all day", mother gasps as she claps her eyes on sister's lunch pack. I feel like laughing, as the others haven't noticed the parcel, although it is hanging there right where sister hung it in the morning before catching the train. Vella says that the day in Viipuri was such that nobody would have even thought about eating. Even coming home in the train, nobody thought about eating. All anybody could talk about was the bombing, and the fact that we were at war now. But nobody really knew what it meant that we were at war. I don't dare to ask if I can eat the rejected lunch.

Bombers fly over us more and more often. One evening there is a knock on the door, and in comes Uncle Nieminen, who seems like a stranger. He bows and bids us good evening. And then he says something to father and mother. Everybody starts to rush around and wail. Big kids fetch things. Mother commands Vänni and me out to have a pee. It is

pitch black outside and Vänni tries to scare me. Then he says I must not scream because there is a war on, you just have to grin and bear things. I can bear things much better after I have had a pee and run back inside.

We, Little Sister and I, get dressed up and lifted into a sleigh. The sleigh is full to overflowing. We travel in the sleigh a long, long way in the dark and we go to Illilä. It is a big house far away from us, and father's uncle lives there. I sleep as we drive along, and I wake up feeling dreadfully cold. But then we are there already. Aunty takes me by the hand and lifts Little Sister in her arms. Even now I can still see that lunch pack hanging from its string. We eat supper, and sleep.

When I wake up in the morning, father has already gone back home. Mother and the smallest children are fleeing from the war here. Even Tellu, even though she thinks she is so big. I wonder why we couldn't just avoid those bullets at home, but then again, avoiding the bombs falling from the airplanes could be more difficult. Anyway, I think that Illilä is a very nice place to be, although I don't say it aloud. In fact there is so much more space here that it is easier to avoid the bullets. However, you can't avoid the bombs, even here. They just come from above, and don't give any warning. I wonder how we can make a shelter above our heads. Like an umbrella, but much stronger!

Although I am occupied by these thoughts about military matters, the days slip by in play, both inside and outside. There is no time to listen to the prattling of the grown-ups. Of course our ears are tuned to the whisperings of the grown-ups whenever we find them gathered together. They are talking about the war, for sure.

10. The Evacuees

At night strange men come and wake us up. They say that all people have to go the railroad station right away. People are evacuated in a hurry, the enemy is already near! We are here only as visitors, so we don't have much to pack. Almost everything is already waiting in the cases. But the Illilä folk start running around. They pack things into big wooden crates, and the crates are packed into the sleigh.

“We have to leave that, too. There is no room for it” great-uncle says to great-aunt who is trying to fit the wall clock into the sleigh.

“But this is my inheritance, my dearest possession!” great-aunt screams and squeezes the clock with both arms. There is no room for it in the boxes, but it gets a place teetering on top of the load. I give a sigh of relief, for I have a secret inside the clock. It is Vella's story, and I take it out every time I feel really miserable. The story is behind the watch face, and it comes out from there when the clock chimes, if you know how to cajole it in the right way.

I am directed to another sleigh and wrapped up in a blanket, together with Little Sister. Mother is with us in that sleigh. It is very cold, and the stars are as bright as God's eyes. It is a long way to the station, and I don't know which station it is. The road is crowded with folks with their horses, and on foot. They even have cattle with them. Sometimes we make very slow progress when the cattle block the whole road.

“Even they don't want to leave, poor cows”, mother sighs.

“Mother, where are we going?” I ask.

“Away, away from the war” mother whispers, and a tear freezes on her cheek. Only the other day we had escaped the bombing and gone to the relatives. Now the war has arrived even here. And mother didn't know where they would take us now to escape the war. Strange men run in-between the sleighs, urge us onwards and shout when the bull calves start a fight, and everything comes to a standstill.

“Why is father not here?” I ask again. Little Sister wakes up to demand for father as well.

“He can't come, he has to stay. He knows we are taken somewhere, he himself is arranging for the people in our own village to get away.”

Will father ever find us again? What about big sisters and big brothers? I do not even dare to ask, I am shaking. Little Sister sleeps on under the blanket and feels warm. Tellu and Vänni are speechless.

There is a big commotion at the station. There are big carriages, both human and cattle carriages. The cows are driven up to the carriages along narrow planks. They don't want to go, and they have to be forced. The men are shouting all the time and they tell us to go and queue at the passenger carriage door. We get pushed in speedily, although the carriage is completely full. There are no seats left, and you have to fight even for your standing room. There is not much talk, people just stand and stare. But then one old granny bursts into tears and cries so loudly that the whole carriage can hear her.

“My home is gone, everything is gone, will I ever see my own home again, and here I am penniless in my old days.”

Others begin to sob, too, and tears fly here and there. Then there is a clonk, and the train starts moving.

When there are no more people getting into the carriage, they begin to arrange a place for everybody to settle in. Little Sister and I are still wrapped up in our blanket, and we get directed to sit on the floor amongst other children. Even though it is dark, we know that the entire floor is filled with sitting people. We have to pull our hands off the floor so they won't get squashed.

Opposite us there is a boy called Pekka, who has a big gap in his teeth, and snow white hair. I eye him off in the dark, but as he doesn't say anything, neither do I. I have a whole host of questions: where are they taking us, why are the windows covered up, what is going to happen to us? Let it be, I think, and pinch Little Sister, who is falling asleep again.

“Watch out, soldiers are coming!”

And so they were. It seems that they are coming and coming, all the time. They are traipsing somewhere above our heads, step on our blanket, once it hurts when a big shoe steps on my foot. They do always warn us and say “Watch out, here we come.” Then we pull ourselves into a small package.

“Boy, the air is strong around here” one soldier says as he steps over us. I feel embarrassed, I wonder if sister has let rip, as I know I haven’t.

“It isn’t you, is it?” I whisper in sister’s ear. But she just shakes her head and sniffs. I have to be satisfied with that.

Then the train stops and there is a noise of things rattling against the carriage. “They are shooting, they are shooting”, people shout. The soldiers come and someone bellows for quiet. He bellows again, and silence descends.

“Everybody out, and go as far into the snow as you can make it. Scatter, not all in the same place” he says. Somebody grabs our blanket and says “What is this bundle on the floor?”

“Mother”, we scream, but mother is right there and holds onto the blanket as the soldier carries us out and into the snow. He tells us to dig in deep and not stir.

We squat there, and around us the planes are roaring. Bombs are exploding everywhere. But we are untouched as we pray with mother the whole time. After an eternity it gets quiet, the planes fly away. The soldiers are shouting that we have to get back onto the train. But it is very difficult to climb up from the snow, as we are stiff from cold.

We get taken into a different carriage. There is no sign of Vänni or the great-uncle’s family. Mother is worried: “Where is Vänni, where is my son?” Outside the soldiers are shouting, telling them to bring the wounded into this carriage. Somebody has a cut in his forehead, another in his foot or somewhere else on his body. It is the shrapnel, the first aid women say, as they help. Vänni is not amongst the wounded. One woman is brought into the carriage and she is crying out loud, and I understand that her daughter has been wounded. Other women offer her drink and try to show her to a place next to them. Vänni appears at our carriage and says he has been looking for us in the midst of all the chaos. Mother is sitting on the floor with us, and suddenly she grabs us firmly in her embrace. I hear mother crying quietly.

Next morning we are taken out of the train and told to go to the station building. The train won’t travel in the daylight hours as it would be too great a risk. A risk means that the enemy bombers could bombard

the train even better in the daytime than in the night, that's what the soldier tells us.

We sit in a corner at the station. Mother has an end of a bench, and we sit on the floor around her. The women's auxiliary serve us soup in tin plates. We have to go and pee behind the station building, as we are not allowed anywhere else.



When evening closes in, we get to travel on. It is getting familiar, and we are accustomed to it now. We nod away. It is totally dark when the train arrives at a great station building. They take us all out of the train now. There are lots of people at the station. They take baggage and children on their sleds. We are directed to a sled with a plank over the front legs. There I can squat down, although it is quite difficult. Little Sister is tied to the seat. Vänni is pushing us, and mother walks beside

us with Tellu, dragging the baggage. We are taken to a big building, which is full of benches. Real benches, on which you can spread out and sleep! And we do, right away, as we are very sleepy.

When I wake up in the morning I can see that the building is really a church. All the people are sleeping in their coats either on the benches, or on the floor, leaning against their baggage. They are sleeping peacefully, because they are in a church.

We are taken to a little village near Jyväskylä. Lots of people came to the church to see who they could take to live with them. It was just like an auction, Tellu said. They all scattered this way and that with their hosts, only a few families stayed at the station.

We aren't chosen by anybody either, as we have too many children. Tellu went to ask what will become of us, and got told to wait. And we wait, and we wait. Finally they take us to a big horse carriage and we are told to climb in. We have to be lifted up, it is so high. Tellu and Vänni can at least climb up by themselves.

We sit and get driven along a winding country road; there are uphill and downhill, and stately pine trees, which I like very much. Although right now I have no heart to like anything, as I don't know what will happen to us. Everybody is so still; mother sighs and consoles us alternately. Tellu doesn't say a word, neither does Vänni. Ritva is hungry.

Suddenly we turn to a yard in front of a long, low building. It doesn't look like a human dwelling, but we can see curtains in one window. We are taken inside and told to go to the back room. It is like a cell, and there is a small window with a spider web as a curtain. Even in the twilight you can see that this hasn't been a human dwelling for a long time. There isn't any furniture, either. "This room is your home now. Go and get wood from the shed to get warm" the man says as he leaves us. There we stand in our thick fur coats and our muffs, stunned, until mother spreads the blanket on the floor and commands us to put the baggage in the middle and the children to sit around the edges. Mother distributes the food we got from the women, and as we munch on that we ponder about the problems of living space. Mother goes looking and finds out that there is a fireplace we can cook on in the front room, if only the chimney is functioning. But it must be, as the man told us to get wood.

“And right now we will make a start at cleaning this cow byre. I saw a brush by the steps. Throw away all the broken rubbish, and then brush the ceiling and all the corners to start with. I will go searching for somebody who can lend us a basin and a rag.”

Tellu starts to collect loose rubbish and commands me to wash the window. Vänni carries the rubbish out. Little Sister, such a small creature, sweeps the whole floor as she crawls amongst our feet pursuing some little critter. On the other hand, I am a big girl, and I can wash the window. It is covered in spider webs. The old webs are full of heavy dust, torn and ragged; the newer ones are still light grey and pretty. But all of them have done their job and imprisoned a multitude of small, black critters. Flies, I surmise. I don't want to touch them. I just can't. But I have to! With my eyes closed I do a wiping motion with my rag. I feel dust everywhere. Soon I am inside the web myself, I can't extricate myself and I get more and more tangled in it. The sticky web gets into my hair, my head is wrapped up in it, I try to wind it around my fingers, but there is more and more of it. I turn around and around and get wrapped up from head to toe. Mother hears my screams of pure terror and helps to free me. But they have to turn me around and around in the snow and shake my clothes in the frost. Meanwhile, Tellu has washed the window. I sob.

“It is looking very tidy already” the stranger says as he brings in a small table.

He goes out again and soon brings a chair. Mother is thanking him profusely.

“There are no beds, but I will send some straw to spread on the floor” the man says. “And here are two candles, and some matches; I think the old lamp might be unusable.” That's what he says, and goes out.

We do what we were bid to do and lie down on the straw bed, one blanket below us and one above. All in our winter coats!

We can hear voices from outside, they move soon to the steps, and the door opens. The startled family jumps up from their straw bed and starts looking for their flashlights. The newcomers calm us down, they are evacuees, like us, they had been pointed to this hovel to stay in, several families of them.



The embers in the stove have almost extinguished themselves, but more wood is chucked in, and soon there is warm water in the kettle. The newcomers have still got some provisions; they offer us some, too. We pretend we don't need any, but eat the pastries greedily when offered. When the eighteenth fugitive has found a hole to lie down to sleep, peace descends in the hovel. All has been told: who we are, where we came from, how we got here, what we have experienced, what suffered, what lost. Warm water in our stomachs calms us. Heavy breathing is replaced by snoring; sleep has overcome the exhausted ones. During the next few days our troops are placed around the village. Our family gets this hovel for our new home. For Christmas we have a tiny tree and Christmas songs.

Later on we embellish the story of our first night in our new home; when one turned over, everybody had to turn over. Are we exaggerating a bit, I don't know. I hardly think so!

From Little Sister:

My own memories of that time are rather vague. From hindsight I have pieced together a scenario which had a great impact on me. My parents had about 2 hours to gather together everything they needed, and be out of the house, out of the village, and fleeing for their life. To get me from underfoot they locked me in the backyard. I was sitting on the back steps, looking at the closed door, an abandoned waif. I was sure that everybody had forgotten me. Needless to say, I was devastated. That feeling of being abandoned still comes over me in some situations. Of course, in the end it turned out that I wasn't forgotten at all, but the damage to my psyche was already done.

Now this doesn't tally with Aili's account of the happenings. I couldn't really have been locked outside in the middle of winter, could I! Maybe I am mixing up happenings from different occasions! I am still convinced that somewhere, sometime, this was what happened. It is also possible that they locked me up in some room on this occasion.

I have glimpses of being thrown out of the train into the snow and told to keep still. I think I was hiding behind a snow drift with my sister Aili. I also remember trying to sleep on the hard church pews and being very cold. As for the henhouse, I don't remember anything. Only one day stands in my memory. Mother was reading the newspaper, and suddenly she made a terrible noise and started crying and carrying on. I understood it had something to do with my older sister Vellamo, who had stayed in Viipuri with our father.

11. Vella Is Gone

It is snowing, and we kids are enthusiastically building a snow fort, gliding down the slope on our bottoms, and throwing snowballs at a post. Our clothes feel heavy; they are augmented by kilograms of snow in the pockets and hoods, and even in our felt boots. I will just roll this ball; that is the end of my stamina. We lift the ball on top of the castle and eye the results of our labours with satisfaction. This castle is worthy of defending, the enemy will never conquer it!

Then, our world collapses. Mother runs from the neighbour's crying. She is carrying the 'Karjala' newspaper under her arm. "Come on in" she whispers to us barely audibly. Scared, we rush to the steps. The others stare after us without stirring. When we crack the door open just a little, we see mother sitting at the edge of the bed curled up into a ball. She is shaking from head to toe, she is keening, her voice rising to a shrill scream and splitting into repeated squawks.

"Mother, mother, what is the matter with you? Are you in pain? Shall I get camphor drops for you?"

"Pain, pain, my whole soul is hurting" mother cries. "You have no idea how much I am hurting. And so will you."

With round eyes we stare at mother and wait.

"You don't have your sister Vella anymore. She was killed in the Viipuri bombings way back on the 14th of January."

Mother holds us all to her and we all cry. When the Big Ones return home from their war duties, gaily shaking the snow from their felt boots, I fly to intercept them. They can see right away that something terrible has happened.

"Is it father? Have the brothers been killed?"

I shake my head and can't say a word. We rush in. Mother stumbles towards the Big Ones and cries:

"Vella! In Viipuri bombing!"

The Big Ones surround the shaking mother, us small ones push into the circle; we form a shaking, spluttering ball.

The world grows grey, the sun has disappeared, even the clean snow doesn't entice us out; we stay inside doing nothing. We try to be good for mother, we help her without having to be asked; we peel potatoes, set the table, dry the dishes, sweep and carry logs to the stoves in the kitchen and the room. We don't squabble, we don't shout, we don't rejoice. We study mother's countenance stealthily, with confused feelings. At night silent weeping was heard again in our small hut, and the Big Ones had crept to mother. They have murmured that there has been no news from father in Viipuri. What in the world has happened there? Is father himself still alive? The whole war so far, from the forgotten lunch and the hiding in the fir bower, to Illilä and the bombing of the evacuee train, and the big church and the auction of families, and coming here to the henhouse, are all jumbled in my mind. But we don't know anything about father. We don't know anything about the big brothers, because they are on active duty, *Somewhere There*. We don't know anything about Kylli, as she is also *Somewhere There*, a *lotta* at the frontlines. And Vella is a mention in the paper. Vella will never again come home.

One day there is a strange man standing in the kitchen. He looks like a ragtag hobo, but he is hugging mother, and mother is in tears again. When they notice us, me and Little Sister, they turn towards us. It is father! Now father hugs us tight and we start to cry, too.

"Why didn't you write and tell me about Vella's death, I had to read about it in the neighbour's newspaper? It was too harsh", mother says.

"Of course I wrote, seems like the letter never got this far. As we are at war, everything else is more important than letters by civilians. It will get here one day, I warrant."

We sit down around father and father tells us everything he has heard about sister's death. Some woman had been in the shop as a customer when the bombing started. She and Vella had started to go to the bomb shelter. At the door Vella had remembered that she had to take the till with her, and turned to go back in. Just then a bomb had hit a neighbouring house and the air pressure had destroyed part of the shop as well. When they found Vella, she had only a small cut in her forehead. That's where a piece of shrapnel had entered. We stay quiet for a long time.

“Did you have time to bury her in the home ground?” mother asks after sighing several times.

“Ahti was allowed leave to come to the funeral, and Kylli came for a little while, too. So the three of us covered her with home soil in our own burial ground and the army chaplain did the blessing. We sang as well as we could, with the planes rumbling in the sky.”

Mother rushes to fill the firebox and stays for a long while with her pots and pans, commands us to fetch water, although there is still water in the sink, and starts to bake pastries for father.

In the evening after the day’s business is finished we sit together and sing Vella’s favourite songs. We remember. We cry. The thick vale of sorrow surrounds the family in the tiny cupboard that we now call home. Sister is somewhere else now, not to be seen with our eyes, not to be heard with our ears. In other worlds! For ever! It is impossible to understand. One wants to rebel against this sort of world, where children can lose a beloved sister. And in such a cruel manner! What can be the purpose of Vella’s death? Was it perhaps some kind of a mistake? Even that can happen in the middle of a war.

Vellamo, *‘Lady of the water’*, she was different, somehow. She wrote in her diary such wise things that I understood nothing of them; about God, and belief, and the work of a human being in this world. That the whole purpose of our life is to be servants of God, and do what He wants us to do. I only peeked into her books once in a while. She was a girl guide, was a leader in guide camps, always thought of something fun to do, and helped everybody. Even told stories in front of the stove! Even in her last week she was said to have lead discussion groups for the soldiers living in the school. Why did you, God, take my sister away? Was she ready for Heaven already? I don’t understand!

From Little Sister:

The only specific memory I have of my sister Vellamo is one involving rolling empty cotton spools along the corridor. They were, of course, magnificent steeds pulling carriages. Vellamo was a story teller par excellence, and could shroud the most mundane everyday objects with the golden glow of wonderment. I have always had this sad feeling that I have missed out on something wonderful in not knowing her.

12. Life in a Cloud of Sorrow

Life is depressing without Vella sister. And without home! And without our home village! Mother and father drown their sorrow in work. Big sisters drag themselves through their work or whisper to each other looking at mother from the corner of their eye. Or rush to offer help at home even though mother hasn't asked for it. Little Sister and I mumble quietly with our toys and our books and peep out in all directions to see how the situation develops. And suddenly we get lost in our play. For a while there is peace on earth, there are no bombers thundering above us, and we have plenty of pretend food. We are conducting a funeral for Vella, much grander than the one father has told us about. But Vänni refuses to be the pastor, although he preaches so well. The funeral has an unhappy ending. Quiet as mice we go out to the entrance to continue bawling. Finally Ritva screams that we should ask Tellu for a pastor. Vänni laughs because a woman can't be a pastor! And why not, demands Little Sister ready to cry again, with no answer but "hah"! Mother is heard to call for us. Shamefacedly we creep in, each to their own occupations.

Outside the snow is coming down thickly, real *granny's slippers*. I am watching through the window wondering if anybody is out there making snow castles, but no such thing, not a soul anywhere. I go and see what Ritva is up to. She is looking at an ABC-book and whispering to herself.

"Are you pretending to read, or what are you muttering" I ask her intending to make fun of her, because I myself am just about to find out the riddle of those little squiggles. Sister spells out in clear voice and triumphantly:

"S-u su, s-i si karhu".

"What do you mean? How could you get 'karhu' out of *su* and *si*?"

"It has a picture of a bear!" (*karhu*)

Sister cannot find a wolf (*susi*) in the picture, so I have to believe her. But my curiosity is awakened as far as her reading is concerned, and I put her on trial. I turn several pages and choose a place for her to read.

“T-y-t tyt t-ö tö tyttö l-a lau-laa” (*Girl is singing*), Ritva enthuses. And indeed, she can read and she doesn’t even need to spell it out! We rush to mother with the book yelling in competition as we jump around her.

“I can read”, sister jumps.

“Ritva can read, and without spelling it out, too”, I jump.

Mother stays calm, but she wants to see it, too. Do I ever feel jealous, when sister takes her book to all and sundry to show off her skill, and she gets admiring praise! And when I have trouble with some difficult word, she is happily giving me advice! The feelings of grim defeat and smarting shame become familiar to me, and I have to learn to live with them. And jealousy! How can she learn to interpret those marks so quickly? What is wrong with me? I find myself crying. Help! If Vänni would see me now! In a thrice I wipe my tears off with the hem of the apron, as Vänni is already heard in the entrance. I go to mother and ask for cardboard.

“What kind of cardboard and how much? What do you need it for?”

“I’ll make playing cards for us so we can play. What would be a nice game for us to play and easy cards to make?”

“If I help we can make *Halepralla*. Do you remember us playing it at home? Black Peter is so difficult to draw. I don’t know where we can find cardboard, as we don’t even have any boxes to cut up.”

Mother opens the pantry door and examines the shelves. And there it is: the last box of sugar! There are not many pieces of Sirkku sugar left.

“We won’t need this sugar box anymore; there is no more sugar available anyway.”

And so the cardboard sugar box gets cut up for a better purpose, *Halepralla* cards. They are small and handy for our small fists. Only the big people complain that they won’t stay in their hands. In one card we draw a big circle with a pencil, and in the circle a laughing mouth and small dots for eyes – I add sticking-out ears – and a few curls around the ears. All admire the pack standing there on the table straight as a soldier. Each card has a number on the white side, and everyone is beautiful light

blue on the other side, because it is from the Sirkku sugar pack. The last one from before the war!

The night is closing in already, so there was no time that day to play. The oil lamp needed filling. We can only use it very little, and the windows have to be completely covered with black-out curtains. It is also difficult to find candles in shops. Usually they are made by melting left-over bits of old candles and building them up dipping a wick into the melt. The Big Ones have to do their work, and there are no candles to waste on us. It is bitter, for sure, but there is a war! Everything we were used to is in short supply. We can't even count on being alive. Radio tells about skirmishes, dead and wounded; bombings at the home front, and the anguish of people.

In the morning there is a pleasant surprise waiting for us all. We have a message from the station that they have received a wooden box with our name on it.

“Finally! It actually got here!” father shouts.

“What did?” mother asks puzzled.

“Yes, what is it?” we all are eager to know.

“There are all kinds of important things, whatever I had time to pack while the soldiers were urging us to get going” father says.

“Oh, did you manage to save some of our things? Did you pack saucepans and crockery, and was there room for bedclothes and rugs?” mother questions.

“Did you put in our dolls and books” we girls insist, and Vänni shouts something about soccer ball and airplanes. But father stays quiet, and only while we are eating he addresses us all.

“You'll see when we fetch it home. Let's take the wooden sleigh and some string. Who will come with me?”

Of course the lot of us go with him, pleased and curious, everyone with their own expectations. Something from the old home has survived and come back to us after many months. That important box has been searching for us all over the place, indeed. There are many addresses, all crossed over, and then last of all, this address.

Father tries to decipher the addresses and says: “It has been to all the places where people from our county were settled. No wonder it didn’t get here earlier. I really didn’t think it would get to us at all.”

The box is triumphantly lifted onto the sleigh and pushed and pulled through the snow into the new home. It is heavy.

The box is full of father’s books, thick and heavy, a few photograph albums and on top to protect the books a small rug woven by Kylli. Father is happy and squeezes to his chest ‘*My Country*’ and ‘*Danielson-Kalmari*’ and ‘*Yrjö-Koskinen*’ and whatever else of his treasures. Mother is disappointed, as are the rest of us. But when she finds in the bottom of the box the glasses that father had dropped and lost, a tear rolls down father’s cheek. Maybe even mother’s.

The winter goes on, the snowdrifts grow, the frost bites in earnest. Vella-sister is shivering in her grave under the sea of fire.

From Little Sister:

I can actually remember how adamant I was that the picture in the book was a bear, not a wolf, whatever it spelled.

I think part of the reason I taught myself to read at this early age was our itinerant life. We started every new school year in a different place. I didn’t want to make friends, because I knew that I would only have to part from them at the end of the year. The books were constant. I could take them with me, at least in my mind, if not literally.

13. Peace

It is a normal bright frosty morning in March. We are likely to be bombed, as the visibility is good. The enemy knows where to drop the bombs. A city with its important targets is near. There are bridges, factories, and a railroad station. We have not escaped the threat of bombings even here in the middle of Finland. We take our time to get through the morning chores, although a beautiful clear day is waiting for us outside. Our thoughts creep here and there as if looking for a safe hidey-hole.

The children in the yard seem to be gathering for a snow fight. They are repairing the castle and other defences. They roll big snowballs in front of the opening of the castle to protect it. Little Sister is there already, all covered in snow. And Vänni is obviously giving orders waving his arms about like a traffic cop. I dress in snowsuit and felt boots, beanie, scarf and two pairs of mittens. Almost against my will I join the others on this day and start to shape small snowballs in my hands to store for the defence of the castle. The importance of the job makes us all hard-working. Soon we would get divided into defenders and attackers, and an almighty ruckus would begin.

Why do the church bells start ringing? Something must have happened. A huge bombing raid maybe? Or has the front given way? A window opens in the building and we hear a shout: "Children, come in. We have peace, but we have lost Karelia." For a short while we had felt a blessed peace in our souls, a release from the lurking fear had brought a deep feeling of happiness. And then, in the same breath, we drop into a frightening emptiness. No more home, no Karelia! I take Little Sister by hand and walk towards the steps. Vänni rushes to join us and the three of us push in.

After we told mother what we had heard in the yard she hastens to the neighbour who has a radio. The president has spoken on the radio. It is all true! Karelia has to be given to the Soviet Union. We have no possibility to return there. What can we do now? The Big Ones return from work. They know already. There has been a small meeting for them, and then they have been allowed to go. In the evening, father returns from work. We don't know what to feel. On one hand we rejoice for the peace; on the other hand emptiness, dark as a coal cellar, invades our souls. We cry together and we cry alone. At night in bed peculiar

pictures push themselves into our dreams. What are these Russians about? They come with their war machines and take our homes and fields. Wonder if they are real people even? They have long arms and they are grabbing into their arms everything they can reach. They are like a tribe of long-tailed monkeys on a raid.

I wake up from a horrible nightmare into the brightness of a March morning. The thick snow cover is already strong enough to support a child. We rush around, some go through the snow, some it supports at least for a while. And you can never tell who will go through and when. That's where the beauty of playing on the snow is: getting a fright as you fall, but knowing at the same time that the snow is not too deep. And you can scream with fright as you fall. And if you can't get up yourself, somebody will come and help you up, laughing.

Inside we remember again, weep, and soon we are singing. *'I was born a Karelian. Now I am homeless. Child of Nature, what do I care, as long as I can be free? Why are you wandering, they ask me. I don't really know myself. Let Molotov answer that, let Stalin himself advise me about it.'*

Day by day the snow is melting. Small streams are beginning to make their way through the frozen slush. The yard is full of big puddles. We can't get in or out from the steps with dry feet now. Mother has already complained about the soaking wet felt boots and sighed:

"Where in Heaven's name can we get gumboots for you lot? We have no money, and the shops have no boots, anyway. Father doesn't let us ask for anything from the authorities, because there are other people who are worse off than us."

I go with Rätvänä - that's Little Sister - to see what we could do to ease the situation. We clear new runnels leading away from the puddles and make the old ones bigger. The sun is helping as we hack away at the ice. A day comes when we can make a new channel by just running a stick through the slush. And then we can see bare earth. First small patches, soon they get bigger and bigger. And finally the great day is here.

The felt boots have been discarded, dress shoes that somebody has given us are worn. The first grid of hopscotch is drawn on the bare earth. We make it a base-six grid, two side by side, three in a row. You throw a square wooden block, the put, into the first square on the right, step on

one foot next to the put and kick it to the next square, repeating until you have used all the squares. When you have been through them all, you can step out of the grid, of course. It is important to kick the put between the squares using only one kick, and important to get it in a spot where it is easy to kick it on again. And all this time you have to stay jumping on the one foot. You can make new rules about the order of proceeding; make it a zigzag if you like. All the children in the yard play hopscotch. But when the bare earth extends to the walls of the houses and the sun is nice and warm, we switch to various kinds of ball games. You stand near a wall, you throw the ball to the wall and when it bounces back, you send it back to the wall time and time again, using your hand. When you are very skilful, you can bounce it back with your head. Or you can throw the ball at the wall behind your back with one or two hands. We are inventing new ways to play all the time.

With the coming of spring, a new life opens up for us. There is much to do outside, as nature is waking up to show its miracles. A widow's leaf is a miracle, a finch is a miracle, even a half-frozen lowly beetle is a MIRACLE. With a song we rush out into the wide world.

I cannot think yet what the spring of peace is like for mother and father. I do notice the unexpressed hopelessness, the secret bouts of crying, and the worry about the future. It was not as easy for them to set aside their worries as it was for us. Of course there are happy moments, too. Kylli and the big brothers come home from the front, stay for a while, and depart to continue their studies or their jobs. But father doesn't know where he will be sent as a relief teacher, and where our home will be. Mother worries about money and food and dwelling, as mothers are wont to do. Everything is still up in the air. And behind it all, there is the longing for Karelia.

In the evening, when Little Sister and I settle in our bed after saying our prayers, our thoughts are beginning to revolve around the home we have lost. Big sisters telling stories around the big wood heater in the living room, the embers glowing in awesome colours! Mother stroking my cheek after I had stumbled against the sauna fireplace and burnt my cheek badly! It took weeks to get better. I was sleeping between mother and father with my face protected from touching anything. Mother and father ready to go to a party in their Sunday best, beautiful and solemn. Christmas Eve. Home. Karelia.
Sleep.

14. Mother and Ritva in Estonia

Through the spring mother and father have been whispering together secretly. Sometimes the Big Ones are in on it, occasionally even Vänni. But not me and not Rätvänä. Whatever are they planning! They have closed the door to the room, and you can't hear the words through the door, only the sound. We start to bang at the door and demand a book, or paper to draw on, or anything at all. That will put a stop to their secrecy. Yes, yes, we will tell you when it is all clear and decided. What is? What is going on? Father pats our head and says: "all in its time, all in its time."

The time comes one sunny late spring day. We are all together. The gloomy wall of secrets comes down. Father admits to having been negotiating a trip to Estonia for mother and Ritva. Mother is in need of rest, and Ritva is too young to stay at home without her mother. That's why she will go with her. The women in Estonian temperance society are offering a trip to evacuee mothers of big families to have a rest, all expenses paid. I retire into a corner, sit on the floor and sulk. And I have tears in my eyes, and I can't do anything about it. Why can I not go as well, why? I feel like an abandoned, orphan creature, like Little Annie in the Karjala newspaper comic strip. Here sits Little Annie with a wet apron, in tears because sister can go with mother to the wonderland of fairy-tales. Why not me, why can't I go to Haapsalo and Kuresaari and other places I have heard father and mother talking about with the Keihänens. The Keihänens have been to Estonia many times, and they have only happy, beautiful memories about it.

The summers in Estonia are always sunny, the wind gentle and caressing, and the water warm for swimming. The road verges are full of flowers, and the birds, oh, the birds they have there! One big bird builds its nest on the crest of the roof and teaches its babies to fly there. And there it stands watching the nestlings. These big storks are in every house and they bring the human babies into the houses, too. That seems a bit odd, though! Where do they fetch the babies from? I must look into that. There are no storks in Finland. Father had to go to Viipuri to fetch mother and Ritva. I wonder if some Estonian stork brought sister to Viipuri, but couldn't come all the way to our home. It was mother who went to fetch sister first, but then she rang up father to come and help her. That's what had to have happened! And now sister gets to go to Estonia with mother. But what if she can't come back to us?

I am horrified. Should I tell the others? Doesn't anybody else notice the danger? They just mill around the suitcase and wonder what mother will need and what not. I eye them from the corner of my eye. In the evening I finally whisper my thoughts to mother. Mother doesn't believe there is any danger; she assures me she will bring sister back home. We say our evening prayer and wish each other good night.

They leave in the morning. Father accompanies them to Helsinki harbour. I give up my Molla-Maija to be a companion for sister.

All day I feel peculiar. I have no playmate, no little one to command, nobody to whisper with about the doings of the others, not even one to quarrel with. And no mother to settle the quarrels, listen to your secrets that you whisper to her, tell us both off when needed, hold you in her lap and kiss hurts away. Why did they have to go? Why did they leave me here? They did explain it and explain it, but the explanations don't help anything. Because I miss them so! The Big Ones are at work, father is sending off mother and Rätvänä. I am totally alone, abandoned. And that's when the tears really come. I can't help it! The corner of the apron gets wet and crumbled in my fist. Sniffing, broken sobbing, and finally full-blown lamenting! Life can't get any worse than this. Gradually the tears cease. Shamefacedly I wipe the last tears with the corner of my apron. I do remember what it was like to start the long journey to become an evacuee; to pray in the snow that a bomb would not find us right there; what it was like when Vella died; what it was like when we had peace, but lost our Karelia.

I look out the window. There is nobody in the yard, but maybe somebody will come. Where is Vänni? Even Vänni would alleviate this longing, even though, now that he is a scholar, I can't play real games of imagination with him anymore. He will scream: "That's not TRUE! You THINK, but you don't KNOW!" And the worst is when he spits out: "*Höpö löpö*" That's something he hasn't learnt at school, anyway, the Big Ones are forever saying it, and even mother and father almost every day. Whatever does that mean? I rather think it is the same as GET LOST.

There is a knock at the door. It is the aunty from the neighbouring house, and Liisa. Aunty asks if I have had any food. "The Big Ones gave me some in the morning" I answer. Auntie goes into the bedroom and straightens up the bedcover. She looks into the pantry cupboard, which looks empty. "The Big Ones are bringing food when they come home",

I say quickly. Auntie takes the empty bucket and fetches water from the well. She peeps into the lower cupboard and looks happy that the pea bucket is empty. "I suppose you know how to sweep the floor?" she asks turning towards me. Liisa and I are in the middle of a play, and I have no time to answer an idle question. We have to dress the paper dolls for a big adventure. One of them is a ghost. But which one, we haven't come to an agreement about that yet. The dolls stay lying on the floor without being dressed, as auntie takes me to eat at her house. I can't refuse, because auntie and my mother have agreed about it. Vänni comes to fetch me from there later.

In the evening, father returns from Helsinki. Mother and Ritva are sending greetings to everybody. They are in Estonia by now. Oh yes, even Molla-Maija gave a cheerful wave.

I have ahead of me many days of longing. In the morning the Big Ones leave to go to their jobs, father to his. I sit around with a book; I take care of the dolls for a bit. Occasionally I peep into the yard to see if Liisa is around. The time stretches and stretches for ever. Then Liisa arrives to fetch me for a meal. In the afternoon we are playing hopscotch and wall ball again. The Big Ones come home, prepare the evening meal, and when father comes home we eat. Wonder what they are doing in Estonia right now? I bet they are eating supper and talking with the host family. Then mother will read a story to Ritva. They will remember us, too, in their prayers, as we remember them, and then we all sleep with thankful hearts. We'll be all right like this for a few days, both here and there. What is important is that mother gets a good rest and doesn't have to worry about anything. Soon we will get a letter, I think.

That letter is not coming. Father runs in carrying a small radio and turns it on, and keeps on listening closely. The sound is bad, but we can hear a few words. Soviet troops... the whole of Estonia, no communication.

"Father, what does that mean? What about Estonia? What?"

Father's face is contorted; he covers his face with his hands and sways from side to side, sobbing. "Why did I let them go, I was afraid, I was afraid of just this!"

Father pulls me on his lap and squeezes hard. We both are shaking with tears, although I don't quite understand the reason yet.

After he calms down, father explains that there are problems in Estonia, links to the rest of the world are broken. That is why the letter hasn't arrived yet.

“You just go and play now, soon we will know more.”



The Big Ones rush in like a tornado. “Father, can they get back? We heard in the yard.”

Father hasn't heard anything new. The radio has promised to let everybody know at once when communications are restored. They are optimistic, and we have to be as well, father says. We listen to the radio all evening, although it is coughing and rattling. Father's ear is glued to the radio, and the rest of us run to it when we hear the sound that means news broadcast. The following days intensify our fear. A Finnish plane has been shot down over the Gulf of Finland. Troops and people are mobilised in Estonia. There is a letter to father from Tanu. Ahti comes to see us at home. He can't say anything new either. We don't know what to do. Tanu has been to some attaché in Helsinki to ask what will happen to Finnish tourists. Of course they will try to get everybody out, but who knows! The Estonians too are escaping in their boats at night, and many drown. The occupying army are watching the harbours like a hawk, no boats can leave.

Two weeks go by. We pass each other like ghosts doing our necessary chores, we munch our porridge from the strength of habit, and the Big Ones are even trying to bake Karelian pastries. I crimp the edges, too, but I seal them with my tears, and the sisters don't like that. They do give me a hankie, at least, and give me a cuddle.

"I have such horrible fears in me, I can't help it. That's what makes my eyes water" I sob in embarrassment.

"So have we all", the girls nod.

But Vänni has set his mouth and is spreading potato mash in the pastry case. The pastries go into the fiery oven and soon we are eating them with good appetite. We are as merry as we can be. Father sits by the radio again and shouts at us to be quiet. We rush to him. The Soviet Union has allowed one boat to leave Tallinn harbour. It arrives in Helsinki very early in the morning, carrying the Finns who have made it to the boat. Other boats are not released. We have no idea if mother and sister are on this boat. The possibility gives us some hope, anyway. Father takes the night train to Helsinki. We continue waiting. The Big Ones begin to clean up the house, and I have to take part in it as well. We organize the cupboards; we air the bedclothes and beat the rugs. The floors get a thorough wash with a stiff brush. Early in the morning we go shopping! We buy what is available. There is not much food, but as we hustle about with joy in our hearts, we will make it go around for everybody.

Towards the evening we hear noises from the entrance hall. Everybody freezes on the spot, our hands crossed. The door opens, and mother comes in with Little Sister. There is joy and crying, squeezing and hugging, even with the big girls. Finally it is time to ask questions and tell stories.

There are enough stories to last for a few weeks. The friendly families with their meals and coffee mornings, the laneways of old Tartu full of history, the beauty of the Erma river banks and the quiet peace! And then the occupation and the end of the old world! The endless thud of the boots of the occupiers! Nobody comes, nobody rings up, you must not go out, and you must not know anybody. The host family tiptoes in the house making sure nobody can see them from the outside. The visitors do likewise. At night they have received a message about the Finns being taken to a secret place. Some Estonian acquaintances are taken to a train to Siberia. Long lines of people dragging their suitcases, all stooped down.

“You cannot guess how horrible it all was.”

Mother breaks down crying and shaking. We all rush to hold her. We whisper together, and separately.

“You are here now, here at home. You got away”

“We did, but the Estonians didn’t.”

Mother doesn’t tell it all, at least not to us children. Not about the days and nights when the borders were closed and they had no idea if they would ever get away.

That night our home is full of true Christians.

From Little Sister:

I was now 4 years old. From here I went on my first overseas journey in the spring of 1940. The Temperance Society women's league in Estonia was wanting to give some evacuee mothers in Finland a trip for rest and recreation, and my mother was put forward to be a recipient. Apparently my father was against the trip, but finally gave his blessing. Mother thought I was too young to leave behind, so I got to go along. Alas, we had only been in Estonia for a few days when the Russian troops moved in as conquerors and cut all communications outside.

My poor mother, what a 'recreation leave' that turned out to be. She didn't know if we would ever be able to go back, or end up in Siberia, and those back at home were equally in the dark about our whereabouts. Finally, after two weeks of frantic searching for a way home, friends managed to smuggle us onto the one ship allowed to leave for Finland. Some of those helpful families were already on their way to Siberia. My strongest memory is that some kind ladies had given me a doll which opened and shut its eyes when you moved the doll's body. By the time the ship landed in Helsinki, I had destroyed the eye mechanism in my search to find out how it worked! A typical scientific approach!

I of course did not understand any of the tragedy of those times, but it left its mark nevertheless, as I found out years later in 1988 at the time when the Tall Ships from all over the world came to visit Hobart. I was standing by the street enjoying the spectacle of the troops of various countries marching by, playing their drums. But when the Russian troops came marching in front of us, I went completely rigid with terror, and I had to hide behind people, shaking inside, until they had passed. So I obviously *had* seen them marching into Tallinn, and understood something about the terror of it. Body memory is amazing!

I experienced my first bitter disappointment in Estonia, the first that I can remember, anyway. My mother had gone to the shops with her friend, and they asked me if I wanted them to get anything for me.

Well, I had an answer ready. I had been admiring the doll's carriage of another little girl greatly, and that was what I wanted, a doll's carriage. With breathless anticipation I waited for them to come back

with my present. Alas, I got a doll's carriage all right - but it was made of chocolate. Even though chocolate was an almost unheard of delicacy, the present did not match my expectations, and I was inconsolable.

I also remember the wonderland in Tallinn. There was a hall with a glass ceiling, and I thought it was pure magic, how people were walking upside-down above me. I never could figure out how they did it!

What a different life I would have had if we hadn't been able to get onto that last boat! Siberia was definitely in the books for us. And how did mother and father survive the suspense of it all! People were resilient in the wartime – they simply had to be.

15. The Call of Kainuu

Birch leaves are falling as a yellow carpet on the ground. The rowan adds reddish streaks to it; the aspen shakes lighter shades on top of it, the maple adds deep gold. The summer is coming to an end. Father gets a position as a relief teacher in Kainuu, in the North, in the district of Paltamo, the village of Mieslahti. We look it up on a map with misgivings.

“It is an awfully long way!”

“There aren’t even any trains going there!”

Father doesn’t know the place either. Even he has never been as far north as that. You can get as far as Kajaani on a train, but from there you have to go on in a bus. We have very few possessions, no furniture at all. The train goes on and on. The track dissects a thick forest. We eat from our provisions many times. We stay overnight in an inn in Kajaani. They bring an extra double bunk into our room, and Rätvänä gets her own bed constructed out of two chairs. The following day father and mother go shopping. Then we take the bus to Mieslahti in Paltamo. That trip takes a long time as well. Excitement colours our cheeks red as our thoughts gallop on to our new home. Father and mother can’t answer any questions, nobody knows anything.

We wander around the empty rooms in the new home. We have room enough again. Like at home in Karelia. This will be our new, permanent home. We lay our coats and whatever else we find to soften the floor of the living room, and sleep away the troubles of the journey.

In the morning mother visits the shop. It is quite near, almost opposite the school on the other side of the road. Meanwhile the Big Ones boil some water in an old ladle which we find hanging from the damper of the stove. We have our own mugs in our rucksacks. We even find a knife in mother’s bag, and soon we all have a good-looking piece of bread in our hand. It is a treat to eat breakfast after a good night’s sleep. And the bread is good.

“Can we go out to play?” Little Sister and I ask.

“And we would like to have a look around this place” the big girls are saying.

And mother says: “How about we clean up the whole place first. I saw a basin and some rags in the cupboard; brush and dustpan are in the porch. There is something for everybody to get the job started.”

“Why right now? Couldn’t we just look around a bit first?”

Mother contends that work comes before play. There is no help to it but start working. Even Vänni is commanded to split logs. Father has gone to meet a school board member. A few hours go by before the windows and floors are shiny enough.

“A truck is turning in. Our things are coming!” Vänni gasps from the steps and rushes to meet the truck.

Father is also in the yard to receive the stuff. But what is this they are lifting down from the truck? A sofa, lounge chairs, a small table, dining table and benches, beds, a bureau of drawers! But we didn’t have such things. Is this a wrong truck? Father and mother had gone to the Kajaani shops to buy us new furniture for the new home.

We hadn’t got anything yet to replace the ones left behind in Karelia. Triumphantly we carry them in. A place is found for everything, and suddenly the new home looks like home. We have a sofa with tapestry cover – we have to stroke it – and on both sides there is a cupboard, and on top of that another small cupboard with a glass door. The glass is greenish. Behind it objects look mysterious. One gets drawn to stare at them. Same fabric covers the big lounge chairs. Mother and father have got for themselves fine wooden beds, which we can jump on with permission. The others have trundle beds in the dining room and the living room. Trundle beds are a new invention. The frame is of thin steal pipe, the bottom netting made from thin iron wire. Underneath one bed is another bed, which can be lifted up to the same level as the top bed. This way it is just like a normal twin bed. For the day you lower it down and push it under the top bed. We can go and fill the mattress bags from the hayloft of the neighbour. Now they wait for their tired owner, who is spreading her own treasures in her very own spot in the common family cupboard.

Everyday existence repeats itself, and soon we are almost genuine locals. I am able to go to the shop by myself to buy things for mother. The Big Ones take us to the meadows and thickets nearby. Soon we know every dip and every rise. The whole family goes to pick lingonberries. We are carrying many big buckets and baskets. Ritva and I have

our own small baskets. Berry picking had been a tradition already at home in Karelia. The satisfied family returns with baskets and buckets full of berries. At home we clean them and crush them in a big vat with a potato masher. The vat goes into the cellar. When the frost comes, it is brought to the corner of the porch. There the berries keep in their own bitter juice through the whole winter. Unless we finish them before spring!

The beginning of school year is near. The big girls, Tuitu and Tellu, leave to go to school in Oulu. We haven't found a cheap enough boarding house for them in Kajaani. Auntie Siiri, mother's sister, is willing to have them for a small payment. They are now packing their things; soon we will take them to the bus. They are laughing and crying at the same time. I am sure they are excited and a bit scared about the trip, and about the family of auntie Siiri. And missing us! Ritva is hanging onto them and won't let them go. I am brave. Of course they have to go, to continue their schooling. There they are now sniffing in the bus, on their way to Oulu.

I have been with mother and father – and of course Rätvänä as well – in MY SCHOOL to see what it is like. My school is the elementary school, and it is not in the same building as the upper school, which is where we live. To get to my school you walk along a small dirt road starting at the corner of our yard, for almost half a kilometre. It is a long way along this gravelly carriage road, where grasses tickle your feet. First you walk along our yard, then through a small thicket, then along an open field, and there IT is! A farm house, with many desks fitted into the great workroom. It looks like a real school room, although at home in Karelia we didn't have a big baking oven in the classrooms. The master and the mistress of the house invited the new teacher to inspect and accept the room converted for the elementary school space. The elementary school teacher had already visited us and I had made a deep curtesy to her. My knees were almost giving way, as Ritva gave me a push just then. I poked my tongue out at her as soon as it was possible.

Full of respect I sit at a desk somewhere halfway along the room. I cross my fingers on top of the desk and listen. The whole room is enchanted; my hands are shaking with excitement. I open the desk top. It squeaks a bit. Welcome, remember to be an industrious scholar! I am a scholar! Finally the strange world I had glimpsed through a little window up in the wall, teetering on the head of father's bed, would be

mine. I would follow every suggestion of the teacher and I would learn lots of things. And there would be another world as well, the world I had observed with Little Sister from the big dining room window. All that gay laughter, jumping around, ball games, all the fun playing in the yard! All that is going to be my future world! I turn happily towards the others, smile, and step solemnly away from the desk. Mother rests her hand on my shoulder, father makes a funny face and I take Little Sister's hand. We go home.

Wake up, scholars! I hear vaguely through a thick blanket of a dream. The dream gets thinner and thinner and the voice gets louder. Suddenly I recognise the shout and jump out of bed. The cover falls to the floor and gets tangled around my feet as I rush to wash. Mother is still enticing Vänni to get up. He looks neither enthusiastic nor excited. What is eating him? But Ritva is jumping up and down and singing that she, too, is going to school.

Mother takes me through the thicket to the edge of the field, where I can see the school. They seem to be playing catch and laughing. Somebody is standing alone at the side. Maybe she doesn't know anybody from before. Just like me. I turn towards retreating mother once more. Mother waves, I wave. Now I am alone. I am responsible for myself. With determination I start along the carriage ruts to the first class of primary school. At Christmas the teacher wants to move me to the second class, because I knew how to read and calculate a bit, too, before I started school. Father is reluctant; he doesn't like the idea of children advancing beyond their age cohort. He has found in the bookshelf a book wrapped up tidily in paper. On its spine is written: 'Ani Swan: too little men in forest.'

From Little Sister:

I actually remember a lot about our time in Mieslahti. I was 4, Aili 7 and starting school. I was terribly jealous that I couldn't go to school. In my imagination it was a splendid place where all sorts of wonderful things happened. Finally, after my pleading and pleading, mother gave me permission to go one day. Proudly I marched into the schoolroom – and promptly got a strong case of stage fright. Embarrassed older sister had to take me home then and there. Needless to say, I didn't get to go to school again until 3 years later.

A very scary thing was when my mother sent me to the shop to buy something she needed for her cooking. Imagine little 4 year old Ritva, small even for her age, in a shop full of farmers and their wives, trying to be seen and heard amongst them. My head couldn't even be seen over the counter. Finally, deliverance came in the form of my mother, who was coming to find out what was keeping me. I think she was angrier with the shop keeper than with me!

Another thing I remember clearly was the enormous ski jump in our back yard. To jump on that on my little home-made skis was the stuff of legends. Some 50 years later, when I had a chance to take my husband to visit this place, I was looking for that ski jump all over the place, but it had clean evaporated! Such a disappointment!

16. The Big Rat War, And Other Memories from Kainuu

As the autumn advances, we get to know our new village and its people. One day we walk to lake Oulujärvi, where tar boats plied their trade in the olden times taking their barrels to Oulu. Father enthuses about the tar production in Kainuu, and the tar producers of Oulu. I don't really understand it all, but I understand something at least. I am more interested in the endless expanse of water, the like of which I have never seen. I can recognise its power. I admire it, and I fear it. The wind, too, is howling ever stronger. Waves are eating the sand from under our feet. Somewhere in that direction, behind many peninsulas, is Hövelö, the home of Eino Leino. That is something I would like to see.

The Big Ones are fond of *'Helkavirret'* (collection of old folk poems, collected by Eino Leino), that's why we know them in our family.

For instance, I myself am Inkeri *'a dark mother's berry, born scared. I see horrors everywhere. I see only bad elves, never good ones...'*

The journey home is tiring, because there are hills everywhere in Kainuu. As we climb a big hill, Ritva is starting to cry. Father picks her up and carries her on his back. I do my best to keep climbing; mother pulling and pushing me. Father starts to hum *'Hear the whispering of the wilderness, the splashing of lakes'...* The song helps us to get to the top of the hill. From there we have a slight down-slope, then small hills and downhill all the way home.

One house has a peculiar construction on its roof. Father knows that it is a weather forecaster. You can tell what kind of weather to expect by looking at it. This house belongs to a famous weather professor. Even father can't answer any more questions. One day father and mother are invited into that house for a visit. We children can go as well. The house is on a slope, behind a field. It is a big house for this village, not high, but long. Old aunties in their Sunday best give us a warm welcome. I understood that at least one of them is the professor's sister. Inside there is room after room, right through the house. Every single one has beautiful furniture, beautiful textiles, and beautiful books everywhere. We sit down around the coffee table. Ritva and I wait for our turn, salivating. Our juice glasses are filled and we will have our share of the goodies after the grown-ups have had theirs. Some are familiar, just like

we had them in Karelia, before the war, some totally new to us, specialities of Kainuu. Like squeaky cheese, which the grown-ups break into their coffee. I didn't even dare to taste it, though they all said that it tasted very good.

The aunties talk about their home, and about a little boy who grew up in this house and decided to become a professor. He was already interested in weather as a child, and he spent a lot of time wandering outside and studying nature. They also talk about the construction on the roof, but I don't understand anything at all. I am thinking I will ask Vänni at home, just in case he understands. He seems to be listening closely, anyway. Ritva looks like she would like to jump up and dash off to play, but I am holding her back. Coffee parties are not for running around! As we are leaving, father and Vänni have another look at the thing on the roof and nod sagely. Mother just glances at it and nods. Sister and I rush off galloping with glee. We have a nice memory of the house and its owners.

When autumn has shaken leaves out of the trees and left them in colourful heaps on the road, I get a horrible surprise on my way to school. I have just picked the last lingon-berries by the road, and straighten up. In front of me I see a grey, hairy creature with its hands waving about in the air, and its feet dancing, sending sand into my eyes. I turn into a pillar of salt with fright. Its open maw comes nearer and nearer, its hands are already on my shoulders. Now it is barking, and devouring me, I think. It is barking! It is a dog, a great big wolf hound. Never in my life have I seen anything more terrifying. I close my eyes, but I can see it still. I shake it away from me and run for my life. It comes after me. I fall down. I bury my head under my arms. My heart is beating wildly. I wait. There is no barking now. I open my eyes stealthily and look up. A big grey wolfhound is standing in front of me and looking with amazement at the shaking, terrified girl, who is getting up cautiously. It tilts its head and gives me a long appealing look. Then it disappears into the forest, and I disappear into the school. The road is empty.

On the cold autumn nights a new kind of activity starts in the yard. The area surrounding the tip has been a dreadful mess for several nights. Some animal is doing this, people say. Then several people see hairy balls flashing here and there around the place. They are big mice, we say. Rats, that's what they are, the locals say. They always come to the

tips to eat in the autumn. This year there seem to be more than usually. When the situation gets even worse, I don't dare to take the compost bucket out any more, at least not in the dark. And going to the toilet is not simple any more, even in a big group.

In the gloaming we play baseball in the yard. There are quite a lot of us from all the nearby houses, girls and boys. The rats appear and run between our feet. Sometimes we can't tell if the dark shape coming towards us is a ball or a rat. That gets the boys furious. The most courageous boy grabs the ball from amongst the rats and, screaming with rage, starts to hit them with his bat to scare them. In no time we are all rushing after the rats with our bats and sticks, and trying to shepherd them to the forest. Ever more troops come out from the tip. There is a mighty clash, we know no clemency. But the rats seem to be very wise animals, and they know how to work together. We have to revise our strategy. We advance from the end of the yard, side by side, our flank re-enforced. War cries are bellowing, sweat is flying around, the winning army advances. We don't count casualties, we give it everything we have. The enemy flees that time. A horde of tired, redfaced, silent, sweating heroes return to their homes. "How come you are so exhausted", many get asked. "It was a hard game" they answer.

In the morning the caretaker is the first to arrive on the battlefield. Bloody rat corpses, rubbish dump scattered all over the place, sticky bludgeons here and there, and baseball bats stuck to each other in a heap. Explanations and investigations follow, as well as *The Great Clean-up*, which is performed by the mighty warriors thoroughly. The final solution of the original problem is completed by a program of poisoning by the county authorities.

After the snow arrives, the school holds a ski competition. I puff and struggle with my small poles, falling now backwards, now forwards. Sometimes my skis are on my feet, sometimes they are lost in the deep snow drifts. There is no connection between my felt boots and the broken bindings of the skis. And besides, I haven't got a clue how to ski. I am alone in the dark stand of fir trees; I can hardly distinguish the ski trail now. Unhappy and lost, I arrive at the goal half an hour after everybody else. I am awarded the 6th place in the race. There were six of us participating!

Christmas 1940 is a Christmas of peace. The big girls have come home. They talk about the school in Oulu and about living with Aunty Siiri. Her girls, Sinikka and Helky, go to the same school with our two.

The older son, Kalevi, has already left home, but the youngest, Tuomo, is in a lower class in the boys' school. The most important 'news' about him is that his mother peels his potatoes for him at the table! The Big Ones are OK staying there, but they also miss home. But now it is Christmas, and they are here!

Our home is glowing and spotless. We have been to the Christmas sauna, eaten the Christmas meal, listened to father reading the gospel, and sung, and Santa has again brought presents to all the good children. Even the Christmas candle has burnt to the end. Christmas logs are glowing in the fireplaces. There is hardly need for any other illumination. Just in case, we have a stack of shingles in readiness. We have used so much electricity this day that it is not available any more today.

After Christmas I will be going to the second class! Father bowed to my teacher's better judgement and my will!

17. Haapamäki

“Mosquito, look, it says mosquito over there! How can a house be called mosquito?”

“Well, you are a nitwit! Don’t you remember when we saw cows on the meadow from the train window, and father commented what a big herd of mosquitoes it was.”

“But what does that have to do with the house?”

“That house is a shop, and they sell a lot of food. It is an Ostrobothnian chain. Mosquito means cow, and cows produce milk and meat. Isn’t it a good name? Even you noticed it!”

It is Vänni giving advice to the little one, full of his own learned authority. The siblings have been sent to the shop to buy what is needed for the dinner. Vänni is sent along this first time, although the shop is very near, and we can even see the sign from our own yard.

“Can we have half a litre of milk with these coupons and bread with these ones?”

Vänni handles the many-coloured pile of papers in his hand with ease, and tells me to learn their secrets as well, because soon there will be even more of them, as everything is going to require coupons soon. When we have collected our shopping, we curtsy – except Vänni who bows – and hurry back to our new home.

There is a lot of work unpacking everything. Mother is worn out with worry. Father has been sent here, to Haapamäki, to teach. The school is a big stone building. It looks mighty, and a bit scary, to this scaredy cat, who started her schooling in the big working/living room of a northern farmhouse. The yard is a huge, deserted field, meant for ballgames, I think. We live in an old wooden building by the field. It reminds me a bit of the old henhouse near Jyväskylä, where we lived during the winter war. But now we have several rooms. The furniture we bought in Mieslahti will all fit in; we just have to find a place for everything. Father and Vänni carry the heavy stuff and mother finds a place for it all. Hours fly by, and it is getting dark. The tired family prepares for a rest in their new home.

Gradually we become Haapamäki folk. We get to know people, and the environment. This is a much bigger place than where we have

been before, a real population centre. Nearby there is an important railroad hub, the shrill whistles cut the air ever so often. At the narrower end of the rail-yard a road goes over the rails on a mighty bridge. Going over that demands faith, hope, and courage! It could collapse any minute. ... Just like in the war! But you have to step on the bridge, if you want to visit the beautiful pine forest, where the mossy carpet is greener than green, the lichen is greyer than grey, and the pines are higher than high. There is also a small lake or tarn, where you can swim. Near it there is also the secondary school where Tuitu and Tellu are enrolled, and Vänni, too, if he passes the entrance exam.

If you walk in the other direction from the bridge, you come across some mighty stone buildings, although they are not as magnificent as the school. Soon a typical country scene with its fields and its wooden houses opens up in front of the wanderer. And the forests! There seems to be enough of them. One small hill after another, full of tempting paths! I wish I had the courage to go there by myself to see the fairies. I would love to see the wood spirits, but at the same time I am scared of seeing them. It involves too strong a feeling to bear! It is the same with Santa Claus. I have seen him many times, and I am still alive. That's right!

My Haapamäki is not very big, but it gets bigger by and by. Mother sends me on errands to a neighbouring shop, or to some house nearby, to buy eggs or some other fresh produce. Basket or milk pail draped over the arm, Little Sister clutching the other hand, we travel and get to know Haapamäki before school starts. But by then the world has changed again!

18. The Voluntary Army Auxiliary

“We have to cover the windows, we won’t be able to see anything soon!” mother croaks, worried. “What can we use, as we didn’t think of getting those black paper rolls in time?” “Calm down, I’ll find my own blanket and nail it to the window. That should be enough for tonight. We can see to sleep even without light, or what do you kids think?” father tries to be funny.

“We won’t be able to read in bed”, the kids mutter annoyed.

When the blanket has been fixed and the sides strengthened with adhesive paper strips, the tired family sits at their evening tea in the light of the small ceiling light. Vänni is sent outside to check that no ray of light comes out of our window.

The war is on again. The continuation war, that is. The old enemy has attacked again. The big brothers are at the front, sisters working for the war-effort, Kylli as an auxiliary, Tuitu and Tellu somewhere as helpers. When school begins the school girls will probably come home and attend the co-ed school near home. Vänni has to pass an entrance exam. But nobody knows yet what will happen in the war. Just now the Russians have had to retreat a bit. We have conquered back some of our land. What a celebration that caused!

“Mother, can we go back home?” we scream in our eagerness when the radio spreads the news. Is it possible, mother?”

“War is unpredictable. We are against a big country; we can’t beat it in one or two battles. They have lots of soldiers, they can send in new fresh men to replace the tired ones. We have to deploy the same ones all the time, men like your brothers. Just now we are fighting to get back our homes, but who knows about tomorrow. We can only pray that we can go back. And hope! War is not easy for anybody.”

There are bomb attacks all around Finland. They are trying to destroy especially factories and bridges, disrupt railroads. Finland is trying to escape into darkness. If there are no lights, there is no habitation. No factories. This is why every house has to be in the dark.

The bombers come at night, my brain repeats when I curl up under the blanket. They will blow up the houses and butcher us. Do I hear a plane? It is good flying weather tonight. This is a railroad hub.

That is their target, if they come here. It is right next door! What if we don't exist anymore tomorrow? What is dying like? Vella has experienced it already, she knows. I wonder if she will meet us if we come in the gates all together, Gates of Heaven. There is a whirring noise; the bombs are dropping now... Stalin and Hitler had made a pact but then they attacked each other instead... and then Hitler made a speech saying that the Finns and the Germans will fight together against Russia; they in Poland, and we in our own country... and then Stalin sent the bombers here... we were at war again.

As we are conquering Karelia back, even the school is needed for army use, at least through the summer. The recruits in training are housed in the classrooms. They are in double – even triple bunk beds. There is only a narrow walkway between the bunks. There they lie in the evenings, tired from exercising and hungry. We kids know it well, for we are needed to help, and we offer our help gladly. On several nights now I have seen boys and girls I know going into the school building carrying a tin pannikin or plate. I asked one girl what they were bringing to the school. She whispered the secret into my ear. My curiosity was awakened, and now I am in on the secret. We go around asking who would like extra food from the restaurant. A hungry one hands us his pannikin, very often from the top bunk, hands down the money into our waiting fingers, and we run off to join the queue at the back door of the nearest eatery.

The queue is sometimes very, very long. The boys start to play up in the queue and we get a warning. When we finally get our pannikin filled, we run with it straight to that top bunk. The restaurant gives the leftover food to the soldiers cheaply. We as delivery service get a few pennies for our trouble. I, too, hasten home happily, and hand over my money to mother. Mother probes, puzzled, wondering where the money came from. After I explain, she makes me tell it to father, just in case. Father might forbid the whole trade! I am already so enthusiastic about my money earning that I don't want to give it up. But father might even be angry! I have to tell him. Father goes to the kitchen of the restaurant and asks how the delivery is organised and whether it functions well. Back home he gives me permission to act as a quartermaster (what a long word, but official words are always awkward) to the army, but I am not allowed to accept payment from a Finnish soldier. I am not so keen any more, but I keep doing my job regardless, the pennies notwithstanding.

In the end we all have our regular customers. We stay faithful to them, and they to us.



When the soldiers march in the school yard or on the road, a horde of children follows, singing for all they are worth. We must not go too near, though, in case we cause too much disruption in the ranks. Often we make our own marching circle in the yard, each carrying a stick or a baseball bat over their shoulder. And there we stomp in bare feet. We practise commands: “attention, at ease, turn right”, rings from our throats just as well as from the recruits. The recruits know that a new generation of soldiers is on the way already!

The biggest single operation as army helpers is in the field of health, however. A few adults have drawn attention to the habit the recruits have of spitting in the school yard. They claim it is dangerous for the children. That way, diseases can spread. And we hasten to verify the observation, of course.

“Over there, look, over there!”

“And there, look at that, a real giant gob!”

“Yikes, I won’t come here again.”

“Deserter, deserter!”

The deserter’s lips are trembling; fist hits the air in the rhythm of the words: “I am not a deserter!”

The word deserter is loaded with meaning for the children of war. It cannot be tolerated. Everybody understands the seriousness of the occasion, and the instigator of the accusation, and those who joined it, apologise. We go to the edge of the yard to sit and negotiate.

“We can’t tell the soldiers not to spit”

“And the adults can’t tell the officers to tell them”

“But what if they are spit balls from tuberculosis patients”

“I’m sure they are. I heard the women talking about it at the shops!”

“Yikes, we’ll get it as well if we step on a gob.”

“No, no, nooooo!”

Terror is rampant in the troops. Somebody is crying and saying that she already stepped on one, yesterday. The others are staring in horror. A long silence! The least excitable and bravest of the lot approaches the crying child.

“Show me your feet. Is this the one that stepped on it?”

“No, it was this one!”

“They sure look exactly the same, no problem with either! You are right as rain, for sure! But now we have to think how to solve this problem. Let’s all think together.”

The outcome of group thinking is executed right away. Everyone fetches a spade from home, somebody brings an old, broken tin basin, and it is covered with old newspapers. We then form a line at the far end of the field and advance towards the other end all together. Soon everybody finds something to scoop up, and with great joy we bag our game. The basin has to be emptied many times, and that causes some friction. It is a much more disgusting job than digging with the spade.

The biggest kids make the sacrifice, for the father country. When we have cleaned the whole yard, we shower the spades with great care. And we wash our hands! Not a drop of the poisonous globs can stay clinging to us, we understand that.

At night the grown-ups are talking about how much tidier the yard looks. Are we ever proud, but we don't say anything. When new globs appear, it gets too difficult to keep the yard clean. Truth comes out. We have to stop this labour for the country. The school board contacts the commander of the troops. The soldiers will look after the exercise field, keeping it tidy. Soon, they are sent to the front.

The school can open for business only after a thorough clean-up. The desks are arranged for days, and other necessary things are brought to the school rooms. Everything necessary is in readiness for the students.

From Little Sister:

In Haapamäki there were quite a lot of children living around the school, so I had plenty of play mates. Somebody told us that tuberculosis patients used to spit their phlegm out on the yard, and it was very infectious. I have no idea if this was really the case, or if somebody took us for a ride, but we spent a lot of time going around finding the little gobs and carting them somewhere on spades.

The only friend I remember from that time is another little girl who used to play with me often. We had lots of dolls, but I was not the maternal type, so I used the dolls as characters in adventures that I created to act out. We'd rescue the hapless dolls from earthquakes, hurricanes, enemy bombs, ferocious wild animals and everything else I could imagine. I was reading voraciously everything I could lay hands on, and it all provided me with new ideas for adventures. Sometimes the adventures got a bit too real, as once when we somehow managed to set our dolls on fire. Luckily someone was on hand to rescue us from my foibles.

Times were very tough, we were always hungry, and people didn't have enough clothes to keep them from the cold. I remember once when I came inside, there was a young woman in our vestibule where we kept all our outside clothes. She was very flustered when she saw me, and started asking if Mrs So-and-so lived here. She left when I said no. My

mother thought she was looking for a coat to steal. I also remember going to the cow barn to pinch some cellulose pellets that were fed to the cows. They tasted like nothing, but they filled your belly nicely. Maybe I developed my taste for rather bland food from that.

My big brothers Ahti and Tauno were in the army already. Aili and I loved it when they came home for a short leave. Why, you may ask. Well, army people were given goodies unheard of by us civvies, like chocolate bars, and my brothers always brought us something, even if only a small piece of chocolate. I hoarded these treasures and made sure I always had a little bit left when the next windfall came. I had a great collection of candy wrappers and chocolate bar wrappers, which were always being taken out and smoothed and arranged according to colour or size, whatever took my fancy at the time.

19. School Begins

The morning is freshly autumnal and peaceful. Vänni has his entrance exam, and he is apprehensive about it. The big girls return home from their women's auxiliary duties, schools will begin in a couple of days. The clothes of the scholars have to be washed and mended, shoes polished – but with what – ribbons for plaits ironed. Vella's plaits were the thickest, and she kept them tied up in a knot on weekdays when she had no time to worry about ribbons, the thought flashes in my head. A drop escapes my eye, and of course it landed on the just ironed ribbon! Mother manages to almost hide the spot inside a knot, luckily. Rätväna wants a new ribbon, as well, and whimpers, wanting to go to school with me.

“Your time will come later, just wait till next autumn. Just think, only a year and you will start school. Then I will get you a handsome red ribbon.”

Full of excitement I leave to go and find my future classroom in the stone building. It is full of noisy students. Everybody seems to know everybody else. I find an empty desk and sit down. This is a big occasion in my life, and I am shaking.

Going to school is not too bad. We don't have much homework, but you really have to do it, that is self-evident. You have to listen to the teacher, you must not whisper with the neighbour. When you stand up to answer a question, you have to stand stock-still, straight, and keep saying your words loudly and clearly to the end. If the teacher addresses you, you have to jump up right away. Our class teacher is nice, but a stickler to the rules. They have many more rules here than they did in Kainuu. And you can't climb into her lap, like you did in Kainuu.

I like reading most of all. Probably because I have read books from the school library since I was six. I also know many that we read in the class, but it doesn't matter. They are different every time, anyway; Even *'Tales of Topelius'* and *'Our Land'*. Sometimes we even read girls' books: *'Poor Iris'*, *'Eeva's class'* and others. I also like History, Zoology and Geography. They, too, contain much which is familiar, as I have always listened to my siblings reading aloud from their school books, or otherwise spreading the bounty of their knowledge to the younger ones. Gymnastics is wonderful, too. We play ball games outside, and in the

winter we are sure to be skiing. That scares me a bit, as I am still clueless at it. But what really terrifies me is cursive writing class.

“Mother, mother, where is my pen wiper, I can’t find it anywhere?”

“It was on top of your books last night. Maybe you put it in your bag already. Feel around carefully, as you have so much junk in there”

“It isn’t here, you can see yourself!” “It might have fallen on the floor, under the table. I thought so, here it is. Oh no, it is only a holey old sock.”

“I am going to be late! I can’t go without a pen wiper. We have cursive writing today! Do you understand? Ritva! Come here, at once! Have you taken my pen wiper, have you?”

“I have not. You took it away from me yourself last night when I used it to wipe paint off the floor. You put it in a safe place, that’s what you said when you put it in your apron pocket, under a hankie.”

And there is the precious thing, in the apron pocket. Mother and I had made it together, following the teacher’s instructions. You sew together several round pieces of material, through the middle, and you decorate it with a nice small button. You can also crochet the edges, if you want to be fancy. That’s all there is to it, but you can’t go to a writing class without it. Another necessary item is a pen. You have to keep it in your pencil case with its nib carefully cleaned and protected from touching other items. Other necessary things we get from the teacher at the start of the lesson. That’s what we do today, too.

You fetch your writing book and an inkwell from the teacher when she calls your name. You must remember to curtsy and say “Thank you” when the book is handed to you. Often you have to wait for it unhappily, while the teacher is leafing through it and maybe commenting about it. Then you are embarrassed, myself more often than not. Writing is not my forte, especially not cursive writing. You go and fetch the inkwell from another table, take it carefully to your own desk and set it in its special hole in the desk. Then you have to open the cork carefully, without stirring the bottle. Inside your writing book you have a piece of blotting paper. You have to put it on your desk in such a place that it is always ready to use when catastrophe hits. And it is sure to hit, for many reasons. Because you cannot erase it, you just have to dry it where it is

with the blotting paper. And so you have nailed all your mistakes for ever and ever: the umlaut that slipped into a wrong place, the cross beam of the letter t on a wrong letter, big letter or small letter in the wrong place, unnecessary exclamation marks or question marks. To avoid this, we practise every letter separately for pages and pages. With my heart full of angst, my hand shaking, the nib scratching the paper and the blotting paper fallen to the floor, I write row after row of kkkkkkkk... But not evenly and beautifully, my pen is like a drunkard staggering here and there. I have to dip for more ink. I dip the pen in deep to get enough ink. I haven't even started when a big blue puddle has appeared in prime spot in the middle of the page and spreads down.

“Oh no” I yell, and the tears are already dripping onto the paper. “Blotting paper!” I whisper to my neighbour.

I manage to dry up the puddle, but it is immortalised for ever. The teacher eyes us with speculation and asks what the matter is. I stand up, curtsey and say, shaking:

“I dropped my blotting paper, may I pick it up?”

As I crawl between the desks I know that once again everybody's eyes are on me. With resignation, I wipe my pen and my fingers with the new wiper I had made with mother. It is covered in ink all over, but I stuff it into my pencil case with the pen. The bell rings for a recess.

That night I ask mother for new patches of material, and cut them into rounds. Mother asks what happened to my pen wiper. I dig it out of my pencil case and hold it by the button. Mother doesn't ask anything, just says: “save the button, and throw the wiper into rubbish!” That's what I do. I sew the button onto the new wiper and mutter to myself that I will never ever learn to write.

20. The Joys and Sorrows of Winter

The snow flies again during recess. We have been waiting for the beginning of winter impatiently. Last night there was a real snow storm. The whole big yard was covered with snow drifts. The snow is sticky. You can make it into great balls to attack the other side, the enemy, as we are in the middle of a war. With great brouhaha we make our balls fly back and forth, sometimes advancing, sometimes falling back from the overpowering enemy. Just before the winner is determined, the bell rings. We let fly the last hard throws, rushing to the line in front of the steps. Teacher commands the rows to straighten and the scholars to be quiet before he lets the first line go in. Our own teacher checks that our aprons are tidy and our hands clean at the door to the classroom.

There we sit, our class! I have friends already. I know Pirkko and Liisa and Anna-Liisa, I have been playing with all of them even after school. Now I already know about the others, who throws well, who accurately, who you can trust in a tricky situation, and who would rather step aside. Even boys are becoming individuals with their own characters. Usually they mess around in their own gangs, we girls in our own play. A common front like we had today is rare.

After school we often go skiing. Last winter in Kainuu I could not ski yet. Now I am braver, and I can almost stay standing even skiing downhill. But it has been hard work and lot of practice. Often I have had to leave home without Rätvänä noticing, as she wants to come with me. With sister we can only go around the school yard and go to the edge of the forest, where the ski trail begins. I do play with her every day, but sometimes we big girls just want to be on our own.

Ritva and I have a huge number of paper dolls, and we make new dresses for them. And they have parties and they travel, and sometimes even work. Then they complain, just like we do. Why now, I haven't got time yet! But we have to drop our play at once when mother requests us to set the table or stir the porridge, or run to the shops for an errand, although nothing is available any more in the shops. I can't understand anything about this coupon business. Different people have different coupons; there are coupons for grown-up women, for grownup men, for children of different ages, and even for babies. All food, and mostly everything else is on coupons, and the amount you get with your coupons is getting smaller and smaller all the time. When I hand the right card to

the shopkeeper, she knows what coupon to remove, and gives me my shopping. Often all she has to sell is “don’t have it”. Mother complains at home when I didn’t bring even one little egg for a rye-flour cake, even though we have visitors coming. But I hand a small cardboard box to her with pride and say: “Egg powder, the shop auntie gave it to me. It is imitation egg. They say it is very good!”

Mother mutters something and starts to prepare the cake. It is dark and has not risen, but the visitors eat it, and we get the crumbs. They are good enough, too.

Mother has fetched, from either the women’s auxiliary or the ‘*Marthas*’, knitting wool – unravelled from old garments – to knit socks and gloves and balaclavas to go under the helmets of the soldiers. She doesn’t have much time through the day as she has to do all the work at home. Now it is useful that I can knit. Slow though it is, and sometimes a bit messy, after a few times of unravelling and starting again it begins to resemble a sock. Mother, or more and more often big sister, knits the heels and the endings. Gloves are difficult, as you have to make a separate small tube for each finger, but for the index finger of the right hand you have to make a tube such that you can draw your finger out of it. That’s so that you can shoot with it, they say. In mittens you just leave an opening for that purpose. I knit mittens. Balaclavas are nice to make, although they take a long time. You make a hood for around the head, and you leave little holes for the eyes so they can see to shoot. The winter war was so cold that they are now getting better prepared against the cold. They are making snow suits in a great hurry, only problem is that they lack material. Sheets were used up from many houses already during the winter war. Now we use paper sheets to sleep on. Mother sews more snow suits if she can get sheets from the *Marthas*.

Vänni comes home from school and commands sister and me to fetch the logs for fire, which is our everyday chore. For that purpose we have a big sled which can carry wood enough for two or three stoves. Another full load is needed for the kitchen stove. These are all for tomorrow. Mother gets up at the crack of dawn and lights the fires with the dry logs. The delicious warmth penetrates our bedclothes. We don’t have to get up in the cold, even though we are in the middle of war. But if there is a bomb warning, we can’t light the fire. No smoke must come up from the chimneys.

War is ever powerful as the backdrop for all we do, and often it is right amongst us as well. The soldiers march on the sports field, they march on the streets and roads singing ‘*Kaarina*’ or ‘*Greeting the home ground*’ as their boots provide the rhythm in a good steady Finnish style. A herd of children sings and marches along with all their might. Young boys are either going to or coming from the front. During the winter war there was a lot of bombing here on account of the railroad hub, but luckily most bombs went into the forest. We fear again, especially on bright nights, when stars are twinkling in the firmament. That’s when they will come. Sirens are going on and on.

The Finnish Karelia has already been regained, the old boundary broken. The grown-ups are debating about going on to East Karelia. We are defending our own country, why should we cross over to Russian territory? We will be in a stronger position in peace talks, others say. Then they will talk about some order of the day, and the talk gets more and more agitated. We are unprepared. We should have better equipment for the soldiers and the *lottas*, but there is a dearth of goods in the whole country, and there is no end to the war. We are hungry. When you are hungry, you have no stamina. When you are hungry you are without hope. Why can’t the war end now? We have won Karelia back, haven’t we!

Tonight, too, we cross our fingers in gratitude. Thank you for our Karelia. Please, let the war end now! And again, the sirens howl.

21. 'The Christmas-tree Is Up', 1941

The days of the war winter have shrunk to their shortest. Christmas is knocking on the door already. The preparations are different from before. There are no candles to decorate the tree with; or maybe just one. We managed to get five candles from the shop against our coupons after a prolonged campaign. Two of them we set in candlesticks we have just made. A potato – slightly frozen, of course – is cut in two, we make a hole for the candle in the rounded side, and the whole is wrapped up in red crepe paper, leaving an opening for the candle. It is awesome to push a white candle into that hole and see how valiantly it is standing there. Ritva carries it onto the living room table on a saucer. The other candle is waiting in the middle of the kitchen table. They will be lit on Christmas Eve. Two others are hidden securely in the cupboard.

Big sisters also made crepe paper curtains - with the inner edges beautifully scalloped - and they give the rooms a festive air right away. I was allowed to try the scalloping as well, but my fingers were too small and I made a mess of it. My mess was hidden below the window in a corner, so I didn't cry any more. Now the only thing needed is a paper runner on the Christmas table, and on the sideboard! The rest of the crepe paper is cut into streamers for the tree, or made into little gnomes to sit on the branches. The house, tidied up, thoroughly washed and decorated, is now ready for Christmas.

Barley porridge is simmering in the oven. We have been hoarding those kernels for a long time, as well as the drop of real butter for the eye of the porridge. We are allowed half a decilitre of milk with the porridge. We even have secreted away a few slices of meat. There are still vegetables in the shop, but often they are frozen. On normal days we add swedes to the rye porridge. Normally, the rye bread tastes of cellar, but today it is good. Mother and the Big Ones have also made cakes and biscuits out of rye flour, without butter, of course, and the sweetener is sugar-beet syrup made at home. Of course father and Vänni have also helped in the preparations, but talking about decorations and food I forgot about the men. They of course fetched the tree from the forest, set it in the stand they had made, used the extra branches in front of the steps outside, and brought in logs for all the stoves. Now they are sweeping tidy paths in the yard for Santa. I can hear them coming in.

Now it is time for Christmas sauna. You must not say a word, only giggle into your palm, because *'whoever speaks in the Christmas sauna gets tormented by flies in summer.'* We didn't quite succeed. The flies will torment us next summer at least a bit, as we screamed "too hot", or "no more hitting" or "I want down" etc. But luckily the flies won't be here till summer. Mother tells me to wait for Ritva in the dressing room.

Now it is a quick march over the yard, on with the festive gear and into the living room to wait for the festivities to start. Little Sister and I sit in the pitch dark smelling the tree, and the peace. I whisper to her asking if our presents are in the porch, in Santa's sack. Together we rush off to bring the presents we have made into Santa's sack. From there Santa will pick them up to add to the presents he has brought. When we get back to the room, we can already hear the voices of the other sauna goers in the kitchen. They are shouting to us to come and help set the table. Father and Vänni are only going to sauna just now.

We'll have plenty of time to organise the table. The Big Ones begin to sing and dance the *'Tip-top'* song, and then we dance through all the verses. Suddenly Vänni rushes in and says that father wanted to stay in the sauna and rest for a bit longer. But he didn't feel sick, he said to tell us so we wouldn't feel worried.

We move to the living room to wait and sing. The Big Ones are teasing us about being good. The situation is nerve racking enough without this torment. I am about to burst out crying – from sheer excitement – when we hear the door creak as father comes in. There is a knock on the door – it isn't father, after all – and they start singing *'Santa is knocking at the door'* and Santa answers *'may I come in'* and we answer *'welcome, Santa, to celebrate Christmas with us'*.

We ask Santa to sit down; the grown-ups interrogate him about Santa's workshop (*Korvatunturi* in Finland), the busy time for the gnomes, and of course the bombings. Santa is sighing about his busy schedule and praises his gnomes, but he doesn't want to talk about the war just now. He has taken a parcel to our brothers and to Kylli, though. Then he inquires about our being good, as always. We make a quick curtsy, but we can only make a faint noise, we are so excited. Santa asks Ritva to sit on his knee, Ritva looks for help from mother. I have to show good example, and soon we both are sitting on Santa's knee. But we are really scared, at least I am. When the presents have all been shared out we sing to Santa *'Santa is going away now. He has to go all around the*

country in his long seven league boots'. We all wave at him when he throws the empty sack over his shoulder and leaves, bobbing to the tune. We continue playing and singing. At some stage father comes in from the sauna and regrets that he was too late. He asks if Santa might have left a present for him.

Once we are in bed Ritva whispers into my ear that Santa had a very bad cut between his ear and his cheek. She had seen it quite clearly, although it was shadowy. Poor Santa, luckily he had all the elves to help him. I don't say what I think, namely that Santa had been wearing father's spectacles. Pondering these peculiarities we fall asleep that Christmas eve.

22. Everyday Life and Dreams

After Christmas we dive into January frosts. We badly need warm footwear, as the old felt boots are getting too worn out for wearing in the snow. Mother goes to a footwear sewing course and begins to gather the needed materials for sewing. The legs of the worst felt boots are sacrificed to make soles for new footwear, the shafts are pieced together from the remains of father's old wool trousers, and the stuffing is everything that she can lay her hands on that resembles material in any form. The shaft is open in the middle; small holes for shoelaces are sewn with great care. Then the shaft is quilted to make it firm, and in quilting you can use your imagination to your heart's content. The felt boots are all individual, reflecting their makers. Some want to bring some joy into their melancholy lives and sew a colourful patch on the shaft. These shoes work fine in the frost, but when there is a melt we walk around wearing sopping wet rags. They are spread to dry by the stove. And our noses drip.

We get news from the front daily. Sometimes our troops have advanced two kilometres, sometimes retreated. Gunfire destroys everything under it; then everything is quiet for a long while. The front has stopped in a position deep in Eastern Karelia, safely far from Finnish Karelia. Grown-ups are anxious anyway as there seems to be no hope of peace. Refugees have started to return to the ruins of their homes. The nearer spring comes, the more fervently father, too, talks about it. The whole family is keen, although we know that there is no home any more, just ruins. It is going to be joyful and tragic to return, the grow-ups say. The authorities don't recommend that families with children return just yet, because many roads are full of bomb craters, the bridges have been blown up, only a few houses are still standing, and even they are in a bad way. There aren't any shops, either. Commerce will return with the customers, little by little. The enemy bombers drop their bombs only infrequently now, but it is always a surprise. It is better to wait until summer at least!

At school we are learning new things, geography of Viena Karelia and Aunus, customs and livelihood of their people. It is exciting to notice that there is a Kemi river and Sirkka-Kemi even in Viena, that Paanajärvi, which we know from Lönroth's rune-collecting trips, can actually be found on the map, and that the home village of the rune singer Arhippa Perttunen is also on the map. Enthusiasm for the Finnish-related

peoples is now spreading further than before. Some want to create a new country for Finland and its closely related peoples, others want to just emphasise the cultural connection. In our house we don't talk about Great-Finland, but a lot about the tribal ideas. Because there is a lot of singing in our house, the tribal songs also become very well-known and loved.

That spring we start the *Mörö-mörö* club. It was Tellu who suggested it after we complained once again about the emptiness of our lives. From thought to deed immediately! Anna from next door is invited to join us. Everybody gets a new name; the club has its own newspaper called 'Star of Hope', and its own signature song. Every meeting starts with a song and ends with a song. Our song contains the whole purpose and design of the club.

*The tribe of Mörö-mörös
Are gathered here today.
There's Mökö, Hyry, Nökö
And Pupu, all ready to play.
Pöpö-mörö also
Is trying to join the fun.
She mostly always struggles, though
The play has just begun.*

*We all are busy working
To help our mothers out.
But just as much as
slaving We also play and
shout.
We don't know any
worries, Crying is not for
us. We sing about our
glories Always together
thus.*

*If hearing our name alone
Will make you faint with fright,
Believing we have hearts of stone,
You will soon see the light.
Hearing our song burst out*

*From every throat around,
Recovering from your bout of doubt
You will be laughing loud!*

Although we promise that crying is not for us, our life gets worse and worse, especially around food. The cold winter freezes the potatoes and swedes in our porch. Inside, they melt into a stinky gruel. Add to that rancid butter, and the whole house stinks enticing you to dine – not. Rätvänä-Ränty-Iivari and I search the cow barn for alternative nourishment. Mother is giving the cow additional food, cellulose. The sheets of cellulose are soaked in water for a long time first. That looks so slimy that we don't dare to try it. We pinch big bits of the dry sheet and eat that. It seems to stick to the roof of our mouth. We freak out and search for water to help. It takes a long time to work on this food before we get our mouths free. But we don't want the stinking gruel either. Without speaking we sit at the table and pretend to push the spoon in our closed mouth. Father watches us but doesn't get angry.

“In the beginning of May I will go home and seed the fields. That way we'll have our own food for next winter.”

“But what about your school?”

“I will try to get a replacement for a couple of weeks.”

“Do you think that is safe, you are an old man? And where will you find food and the grain to sow, and the seed potatoes?”

“The municipalities and the state have earmarked some help for sowing. And from now on, peel the potatoes roughly. You can grow new potatoes from the peelings, as long as they have eyes.”

“You'll believe anything! Even these frozen ones?”

“That's what I will do. And Tellu can come right after the school is finished. She can cook for me, and look after me otherwise. And we must get a kitchen garden started, too. You'll come, won't you, Tellu?”
“I will come home to Karelia right now if I can. But cooking – that's not my forte. I am uneasy about that. What do you say, mother?”

“If it is like father says, you will have to start learning about food after school every day, you will keep neither yourself nor your father alive otherwise.”

“But it is I who father will need to help in the field! I am strong and I know what to do.”

“You, Vänni, would you cook and clean up in between field work? You are too young to go, anyway!” mother says.

“Your mother is right. And you have to have a man in the house. You, Vänni, are now the man in this household. I will need womenfolk to help me in Karelia. I heard from those who have been home that the little cabin in the middle of our fields is still standing, just a bit worse for the wear. The stove has exploded and the floor is splintered, and the windows broken, of course, but the walls are almost all still standing. I am sure we can make it liveable for the summer. And before autumn they will repair one big building in the old boys’ home for a school, and they will build a home for us in it. We’ll worry about it when we have to, or rather we’ll celebrate it, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, we’ll celebrate!”

We are in no hurry yet to go anywhere, the winter lingers on and on. A new optimism invades the whole house. We reminisce about life before the war more and more often, and we talk about it openly. Now it is not as painful as it was. Except Vellamo! I remember mother’s scream and the nightly crying. Nobody mentions Vellamo. One day mother tosses her work on the table and cries, shaking all over.

“What’s the matter, mother, are you hurting somewhere?”

“I am crying with joy! I will get to see Vella’s grave after all!”

Waiting for summer has now taken on a new meaning. We have to prepare for the journey home. We have to secure permits to travel to the regained territory. We have to think what it is that they will need immediately to take with them. We have to find out about availability of supplies, as there is no shop yet. We receive a letter from Kylli and Tuitu. As women’s auxiliary members, *lottas*, they have been fumigating the remaining houses, including some in our village. Our cellar is intact. After they had cleared away the rubble of war, they found perfectly preserved jam jars on the top shelf and took them back to their camp in Viipuri. After some hesitation they opened a jar, and it was perfect. They have both been commandeered to the office for prisoners of war. They write that now even civilians can return, as the few houses still standing

have been cleared and disinfected. There have been oodles of bedbugs and flees.

Mother is going through the piles of coupons and trying to find a way to save our rations for later. She doesn't think father can perform heavy labour in the fields without extra rations. But it is very difficult, as the coupons are often valid for only one week. Tellu has to be introduced to this game of coupons even more closely, she has to follow, through the radio newscast, when to use what coupons. And then she has to prepare food, whether you have the ingredients or not. The kitchen is full of steam when Tellu is home from school. And we have something to eat, always!

And then spring is with us. The gutters are dripping, the drifts of snow are melting as we watch; bare patches are inviting us to draw the first hopscotch grids in the sand. The felt boots are thrown in the corner, but soon it is time for summer shoes. The shoes made of paper string are beautiful, but get soaked on the damp earth and the soles, glued together from little bits of wood, come undone, while the saturated paper innersole is worn right through jumping hopscotch. It only takes one good rain to destroy everybody's shoes. Bare feet are the best shoes for summer, and in the autumn we are sure to have boots, crow's boots, on our feet!

Before father departed he gave me a special job. There is an enormous amount of material in the willows at the beach. Everybody knows that you can weave baskets out of willow, but few know that the bark, too, is very important. Father had the owner's permission to pick the willows nearby and peel the branches while fresh. It is quite easy to do in early summer. Father shows me how to go about it. First you cut a bunch of willow branches with a machete, and then you peel them. The peel comes off in long narrow strips, if there is enough sap. Sometimes nothing seems to work, and you have to throw out the whole branch. This exhausting job is mine in the last weeks of school, and in the beginning of the summer holidays. Every afternoon after school is out, I rush to the thicket. I become an acknowledged master of the machete, but the stripping doesn't work as easily. And it goes on and on, hour after hour, day after day!

I get a respite for a few days when Tuitu comes for a holiday and gets her school leaving papers. She is declared graduated without the exams, as is everybody who was at the front that year. Of course we beg

for news about Viipuri and home. Eagerly, but sometimes choking back tears, she tells us what she has seen and experienced. Only a few days, and Tuitu and Tellu leave for home; a home which isn't there anymore. We all wanted to go, but mother can understand father's thinking. First prepare the cottage, and then bring the family home. We accompany the girls to the train with a joyous commotion.

I return to my willow bark. The outer covering of willow is called bark, and I take it to a collection point. There they weigh it and write the weight down. In time of peace leather tanners buy it. Now, during the war, it is in great demand, maybe for other purposes as well. I am on my own and I am a bit apprehensive. I try to toughen my resolve by thinking what it was like for my sisters in Viipuri, and brothers at the front. One horror after another conquers my mind. Finally I have to vanquish them with determination and focus on my work. Some branches have already dried too much; the peel is stuck, and comes away only in bits. I tie them up in small bundles anyway, maybe they will be accepted. This branch is better! Truly, I strip away a good metre or more of peel without breaking it. This is what they mean by the joy of work! It is nice the way the birds are calling so melodiously, the wind is humming, and insects of all kinds are buzzing around me. Occasionally some bright-coloured butterfly flutters around wondering why this crazy child is raping nature by breaking branches. He doesn't say anything, just looks and dances away.

Ränty-livari appears with my food and we sit there together munching away. She begs for a machete to help me, but I am not allowed to give it to her. She is far too small. I command her to collect the little branches and tie them together for the cow's fodder. But that job is not to her liking, and sister runs away. For an instance I feel jealous, if only I was too small, too. But then I remember what the father country demands from me, and I feel chastised. It is a question of life and death everywhere in Finland. Even I am needed.

When I have finished the day's labours Vänni arrives to help me carry the bundles of bark, little branches and twigs. I take the machete and try not to fall down with it.

Tomorrow I will be here again at the usual time.

From Little Sister:

In the summer of 1941 another phase of the war started between Russia and Finland. As the Russians were busy fighting on other fronts, Finland re-captured Karelia. It didn't make life any easier. The rationing was at its severest in the winter of 1942. Coupons allowed you a very small ration of the essentials.

Aili wrote: "You did not want to eat the porridge made out of spoiled swedes and mouldy rye flour, our normal everyday food. Father sat with you at the table, waiting. You just sat there, waiting. The rest of us were also waiting, waiting to see who would give up first."

My recollection of the matter was father sitting there with a birch switch, a scary figure. I don't remember if he ever actually used it on me, in any case, I wasn't going to give in; the food was truly disgusting and made my stomach roil. No wonder I have had digestive problems all my life!

My sister Suoma (Aili's Tellu), was very good at entertaining us little ones. She started a club for us, called 'Tribe of *Mörö-mörö*'. *Mörö-mörö* is a completely made-up word, but it conjures up something troll-like and possibly quite nasty. She wrote for us a theme song and all. We all had special names: I remember Mökö, Hyry, Pupu (that's me), Nökö, Pöpö, and there were others. It was a question of honour for us to always speak the truth and always help mother cheerfully – there might have been some lapses there, I suspect, but we were really in earnest about it! Suoma also kept us busy rehearsing and performing plays for the families involved.

My own theatrical career had a very short duration. We were doing a Christmas play, and I was a pig in a sack. All I had to do was to fall out of the sack, grunt, and run and hide, but even that was too much, and I rushed off the stage crying my eyes out. I felt terrible, as I had let down the troupe. Sometime later I had another try, as 'the big and famous magician *Abdul ben Abul*. I was on the stage with a sack over my head – the sack again! – and I had to tell what the items were that Suoma was waving in front of me. We had rehearsed this time after time: 'If I say 'bla-bla-bla', it means the item is this one', for all conceivable items. Easy peasy! But no, my stage fright made me forget every instruction, and I retreated in tears again. And thus a great star was not born to grace the Finnish theatre!

Story time was my favourite. We had wood burning stoves in the rooms, and on the long, dark winter evenings we would all – at least the children, I suspect mother had other things to do – gather around the fire place, and the big girls would tell stories based on the flames in the burning wood. One story that Suoma was telling particularly fascinated me. It was a serial, continuing for many evenings. Unfortunately Suoma had to leave home to attend school far away at an auntie's place before she had finished her story. She promised to tell the rest when she came home for holidays. Well, I waited and waited, but when she finally came back, she had forgotten all about the story. They say disappointments strengthen your character, but it is a small consolation to a heartbroken little girl. I bore a grudge against her for many years. I reminded her about it again on one of my trips back to Finland, but still got no satisfaction.

23. Back Home

Finally the day we have been waiting for, praying for eagerly, but yet not quite believed in, that day is here. After a week and a half of hard labour every parcel has been stuffed into the baggage carriage. It took a lot of help to get everything together, and we received it. Now we are sitting in the train ourselves, the train pounding along steadily. Haapamäki was actually quite a nice place. We even left some friends there, although Anna's family, too, will go back to Nuijamäki before autumn. I wonder if we will ever meet again. A trace of sadness crosses my mind, but is soon forgotten as I join in Ritva's cheerful singing.

"Here we are now going home, going home, going home!"

"Mother, what is that home like?"

"If you mean the house, I don't know any more than it is a small cabin in the middle of fields. But when we say we are going home, we mean the whole district, our village, and all of Karelia. That's where we are going now, God willing."

"Why would he *not* will it?"

"You know well enough what surprises the war can throw at us. Now we are glad and thankful to be able to go back, you just remember that! Our cabin is very, very small; it has no room for fighting, and no room for bad moods, either."

"But we won't stay in it for long; didn't father say that we will get a home in the school building by autumn?"

"We will see about that when the time comes."

The train journey lulls Little Sister to sleep gradually. Vänni studies the timetable and I waver between sleep and wakefulness. Mother is talking quietly with some other woman. The journey is intolerably long. We have to change trains in Riihimäki. We struggle out with our bags and baggage and drag ourselves to the waiting-room. After a while they call for the passengers to Viipuri to mount a carriage. We repack our just unwrapped provisions into the rucksack and rush into the new train. Now we just have to wait till we get to Viipuri. Father has promised to come and meet us there with horse and carriage.

We wait and wait, many a long hour. Occasionally the train stops. The conductor assures us that there is no bomb threat, just some disturbance on the track. Finally we get going again.

Father is at the station with the horse. He helps mother up to the driver's seat next to himself, and we children climb into the carriage. Fitting the baggage into the carriage is a difficult job. Every available space is filled. We drive over Papula Bridge towards Tali. We leave behind the ruins of Viipuri. Tammisuo also is rubble. In Perojoki mother points out where a family friend's house used to be. Only the chimneys are still standing. The splintered trees in the garden are sharp sticks. We continue our journey through the green fields of early summer.

I have a clear memory of a striking pine forest; I loved the orange-red tall trunks. But there is nothing there but broken slivers, good for nothing but fox traps. The whole forest has been splintered by the fighting. Bases of trees have been chopped down to a metre or so, above it nothing but tatters of the stem. That's what they used to do in order to make a fox trap in the olden times. They would set one or two thick poles with ragged tops standing in the ground. For bait they would place fox delicacies hanging from the top. When the fox tried to reach the goodies, he was in trouble. That was a long time ago, in the olden times. I had never seen them myself. But this forest, this former forest of forests brings to mind these paw traps on this paw hill. We might end up in paw traps ourselves with this devastated home ground. I have to sigh deeply, I feel so miserable, but soon I feel glad again.

We are at home, home again! Father is talking about the wrecked houses by the roadside, and about the possibilities of rehabilitating them, and about the people. Some have returned already, some are known to be coming back before school year starts. They believe that Karelia can be built again. To believe, to hope, and to build, that is our job!

We drive through the home village and stop in our home yard. What a sight! Chimneys reach out towards the heights, bombed to pieces and black from soot. The foundation and the stone kitchen-steps sit in the grass. We sit on the steps. Hand is caressing stone, bare foot presses firmly at the surface of the home step. Here we are, at home in a home that doesn't exist anymore. The eye finds familiar meadows and gravel roads all dug up. But the hump of the earth cellar still exists.



In silence we climb into the carriage again. We drive onto the cemetery road. Vella is there. We have to leave the horse by the main road, as the village road is all ravaged by bombs. Father leads as we weave our way between piles of stones, hollows and craters. It is difficult to find sister's grave as everything is chaotic. The grave stones have disappeared. Finally we stop on a spot that looks like a former grave, is near the former road to the cemetery, and therefore is likely to be one of the last graves dug here for a Finn. We form a circle. Everybody places a wild flower they have picked on the way onto the disturbed soil, father starts Vella's favourite hymn. We cry as we sing.

We return to the road and climb into the carriage. Nobody talks; there is no way to break this silence. Polle clomps along without a command to the next village, where our fields are. In the middle of the field a small grey cabin squats. It has one window. Tellu rushes out and

lifts Little Sister from the carriage and hugs us all. We step into our new home with our chattels.

The room is small indeed. There is room for a table, a small bench and a couple of stools. No beds in sight. They are unattainable luxuries here. But there is a straw pallet for everybody. They are in a pile in an otherwise empty corner opposite the stove. The pile almost reaches the roof. Under the window there is a table, and on the table a small white paper tablecloth, and on the cloth, in a litre measure, there are daisies, harebells and other wild meadow flowers. The low evening sun filters through the small window panes and for a while lights up the whole room. Mother admires the tidiness of the place and praises Tellu as a good housekeeper. Tellu seems to blush, and glances at father, who only nods at mother's words. Some secret is behind this, for sure. As the sun is setting further, we sit in the gloaming quietly talking about what we have to do tomorrow. Everybody is given a task to do. Then we turn the table and push it next to the wall and spread the mattresses on the floor. There is a spot somewhere for everybody. The tired travellers sleep. Intense snoring rumbles in the thickening air. There are no bombers tonight.

Our summer is filled with work. We had been expecting that. Tellu is now free to join father and Vänni on the fields for the entire day. Ritva and I alternate between house, vegetable garden and berry picking. Strawberries and arctic bramble-berries get devoured, and when there is no more room in our bellies, mother preserves the rest with our help. We go picking blueberries with either mother or Tellu. Berries and other nature's offerings are important, as there is no new grain or root-vegetable stock yet. We exchange indispensable items with new-comers. When the grocery shop opens again, life gets easier, although the shopkeeper can usually offer us only '*don't have it*'. The rationing of everything continues, getting more and more severe all the time. And going berrying is always dangerous. One has to know where mines and unexploded bombs, duds, have been removed by the army.

When you have your own cow munching in the meadow, your own chickens clucking in your yard, and a sheep is bleating under her woolly blanket in her own pen right under your window, your food and clothing situation is as good as it can get during a war. What is a nuisance is keeping the books, and the duty to give away anything you produce that is over and above the amount allowed by rationing. Inspectors go

around making sure you are operating within the legal limits. Father is appointed to work with the local inspectors as well. And of course he could not be seen to slip up on any point. Mother finds this hard to take. The children are hungry, she complains. Everybody else is hoarding things.

“We live according to rules” father rumbles. So much for that morsel of butter!

With the hay making we all are needed. Father has carved a rake for everybody, a very small one for Little Sister, a bit bigger for me, and full size for everybody else. Sun is blazing down; the dry hay is easy to move. But when you are doing it strip after strip and there is no end in sight, your thoughts inevitably start to turn toward the swimming beach. It is not far, just a little sprint. Some days we get to run to the beach, some days absolutely not. The hay has to be rushed quickly on the poles, as rainclouds are collecting in the sky. Once the strip is cut and hay spread out to dry, you can't let it get wet again. With hay scratching our sweaty skin we labour on till the end. Summer shower washes the hurt away already on the way home.

In the cabin we can smell newly baked rye bread. Of course it is not pure rye, but rye in any case. Father cuts out a huge piece.

“Oh my, what good bread mother has baked!”

“Get away, you, we'll be eating soon.”

“This really tastes like bread, how did you make it? Why don't you tell us while you are getting on with your jobs?”

“Why would I start telling you about making bread right now? You only need to...”

“Really, you have to make it rise? And make the dough very firm?”

“What are you on about? There is some strange meaning in your querying.”

Tellu steps forward and explains what is behind this strange interest in the making of bread, exhibited by father. She had intended to surprise father by making fresh rye bread, and she had done her very best. But the rocks she removed from the oven could only be eaten after a prolonged soaking in water. They gnawed at that soaked bread for

weeks, as there was no more flour. Tellu is embarrassed and almost in tears, but father consoles her.

“Don’t worry about it anymore. Now you know what went wrong, so next time it will be perfect.”

“It was my fault. I didn’t teach you the whole process of making bread in that confusion.”

Thus the mystery between father and daughter on that first day was revealed. On occasion we still hint to it, making Tellu grimace.

We have to wait for the hay to dry on the poles. Meanwhile, we weed and thin the vegetables. Rows of carrots are long and exhausting, but other root crops are easier to deal with. But it looks grand when all the seedlings are standing in their allotted place and all the rows are straight as rows of soldiers on parade ground. The soil is watered and aerated so it is dark, the paths cleaned up. Even father is happy with the results.



Then it is time to remove the hay from the poles to the barn. Somebody climbs up to the hay cart to tamp down the hay; others fork it up to the cart with a pitchfork. When the load is so high that you almost fall down off it, it is taken to the hay barn to keep over winter. The children can then jump up and down to their heart's content in the dry hay, for we have to get the whole hay harvest into the barn. It is of course the most fun job in the whole process. We are drenched in sweat, the hay is billowing dust, and our throats are tickling dry. Sunlight can be seen through the logs as thin strips, and reveals the amount of dust in the air. It is as if we were in a thick fog. We rush outside to breath. But a new cart is coming already, and the stompers are commanded back to work. We feel that the loads are coming in faster and faster. At last we are told that this is the last load. Evening has come. We slide down to the floor, shake bits of hay from our hair and stagger back home, exhausted.

Father has diversified this spring and sown a crop of flax. It is more and more difficult to find clothing in the shops; you have to make your own cloth. We pull the stalks from the ground and make loose bundles with them. These bundles are spread out on the lake shore, in low water, for ages. Occasionally we examine the bundles to see how they are coming along. You have to know when it is the right moment to lift them out of the water and spread them out on the shore to dry. And again, we have to examine them every day to see when they are dry enough. There should be no rain at this stage. The dry stalks are stored in a shelter to wait for scotching, beating and many other procedures that are needed before you can spin the flax. In the late autumn we will have a flax working bee in the neighbourhood as of old. This way we can separate different grades of flax to be used for different purposes. Lawn flax needs the long, straight inside fibres, whereas tow flax is a pile of messy short bits. Both types can be used for spinning, one for better wear sheets, blouses, shirts and aprons, and the other for every-day towels, dresses and work shirts. You can't make whatever you like, though, you have to relinquish flax as well as everything else, wartime as it is.

From Little Sister:

This is what Aili told me before:

'Soon we all went home. The houses had been burned, only the chimneys were standing intact, but the baking ovens were functional! We even had a small cabin still standing on the field that father had rented. But there was no toilet in the cabin. In the middle of the field, about 200 metres away there was the old toilet belonging to the burned-out house. When you, Rätvänä, wanted to go, I had to go with you as a guard. And you used to sit there for ever! What if the bombers come! Soon the bombs are sure to be all around me! Believe me, those moments lasted for ever!'

Oh yes, I can remember that toilet very well. It was tiny, and of course there was no light. I was petrified, which of course made it very difficult to perform my errand. And it was all Aili's fault, somehow! I don't think I ever thanked Aili for this service she provided.

24. Hunting for Bedbugs Gives Us Extra Holidays

September is almost upon us, and the school should start soon. Repairs to the proposed school building are advancing as promised. My family moves to our new home. From the main road we turn before the bridge to a leafy parkway. What a beautiful avenue by the river! How did it ever manage to survive intact through the war? There are holes here and there, though, with the stumps still sticking out from the ground. The horse walks placidly under the foliage. Some of us jump down, too, to walk towards the new home in the cool shade. What a mighty sandy cove with its waterlily leaves! The load travels ahead of us, gets smaller and smaller. We are not taking many things from the cabin, just the straw mattresses, some crockery, and of course our clothes. Furniture and other heavy items we fetch from storage.

We organize the rooms eagerly. There is a trundle bed in the living room for Ritva and myself. In the daytime it is just the size of one single bed, and it doesn't spoil the order of the living room. There is no possibility of your own room for everybody here, either, although this is the biggest dwelling we have had since our own home. When we have found a place for everything and everybody, the dwelling looks to me almost like a real home. I ask Little Sister as well if this feels a real home now. She shakes her head in denial, because there is no dark room here where we could climb up on father's bed to watch the kindergarteners in the Ikiturso class. I have to wonder how big an impression was left by Tellu-troll screaming with fury in the mind of a three-year old. Or maybe it was the peeping in secret that left the impression?

Behind the house there is a wide river, although it becomes a narrow rivulet in some places. There, in a nice sandy cove we can wade and study the water plants. There are also tiny islets with one or two trees, and boulder fields. There is even a beach where we can swim, with a diving tower. We are not allowed to climb the tower until it has been repaired. But nobody forbids swimming, if we have finished our chores first. But not too far in the deep water, or the current will take you, mother warns us.

It is September, and school is starting in this fully repaired building, which the war has left standing. The students and their parents are gathered in the classroom after the bell has rung. The first hymn has

been sung and father is standing to speak. His words echo through the classroom strong and precise. I am sitting at my desk. I feel that there is something wrong here. I can hear strange scratching behind me. Father stops frequently, waits and goes on again. Now father stops talking altogether. I look behind me. The parents that are standing by the wall are facing the wall drawing lines in the freshly painted surface. Somebody tells out:

“I am sorry, teacher, But this wall is full of bed bugs and we are trying to kill them. They are all over us already! Nobody can put up with this!”

What follows is a lot of tut-tutting and scratching. Father declares the house repairs not satisfactory and asks everyone to move outside. There he states that the school cannot open yet, it needs to be thoroughly disinfected. Some children jump with glee – or maybe because of being bitten by the bed bugs – but some had been ready and curious to start school. For the parents the extra help for autumn jobs is welcome. There is a lot of shaking heads, but everybody understands the situation, as they feel it in their own bodies.

At home, just behind the wall, the same wild chase is going on. Even before this, some individuals had been foraging in the trundle bed, but now there is a real invasion. All furniture is carried out, clothes hung on the clothesline to air, all nooks and crannies in every room washed with Lysol. Every piece of furniture is washed with the poison, and all the joints in wooden chairs and beds are scraped clean with a knife. Secret hiding places in the trundle bed are examined. They are the sort of places where bed bugs hide. And airing, and airing, there is no end to it! Luckily it doesn't rain! Everything that can be left out for the night is left out. Finally everybody takes off their clothes and goes through them carefully. Then we have to wash from head to toe. The tired family sleep on the floor wrapped up in blankets that have been inspected over and over. What a to-do! Only thing missing was the bombers!

The war against bed bugs is not finished yet. Never ceasing pursuit sees them retreating from the family rooms, but even another two weeks of renovating doesn't dispose of them from the class rooms, just reduces the numbers slightly. But where did they come from in the first place? This big building has been the barracks for the Russian soldiers the entire time during the period of peace! Bed bugs love soldiers of all nations. When big brothers come home for leave mother always makes them

change their clothes before they even come in. Then every garment is inspected carefully and hung on the clothesline to air. The undergarments are thrown into wash.



The unexpected continuation of summer takes us, too, back to the fields. But one morning we have a surprise. We are going to the forest to pick lingon-berries. A clothes basket, nothing less, is packed in the wagon for the berries. Oh dear! Is that how much berries we have to pick! This must be an all day long trip! No wonder mother was packing sandwiches in the empty basket. The carriage is swaying pleasantly; the horse makes his way along at even pace. The wind is caressing. We feel like singing. Mother and father join in.

We have to travel many kilometres before we find an untouched berry patch. But when we find one, it is brilliant red with berries. Down from the carriage, take your own little basket, and start picking. When the basket is full, empty it into the clothes basket. I am not tired at all! Mother and father holler occasionally to see that everybody is near. They

say that this forest has been carefully cleared of mines and unexploded grenades, but once in a while you can still find one. There will be a small death notice in the paper, after the news from the front. I shake gloomy thoughts out of my mind and empty another basket-full to the common pile. Rönty-Iivari is already standing on a teetering tree trunk with a sandwich in hand. We sit down to eat. We chat. We are all getting tired. We pick up, and start the last assault. When the clothes basket is full, we fill up our individual containers. Mother is humming, happy, as she shepherds us into the carriage. On the way home our song is quieter, almost humming. *'Bleak is our land as it is missing the vanishing summer'...*

At home there is more to do before we are finished. The berries have to be winnowed, and there are a lot of them. We pour the berries on big trays and roll them from side to side, picking off leaves and sticks. We try to pour them onto a spread canvas from on high, hoping the wind will help us and blow away the light litter. But it is a hopelessly slow process. Father advises us to build a long incline. Then one of us can pour the berries on top of the incline, and as the berries roll down the track, many hands can pick out the leaves and other debris on the way. We do just that and the work is much faster. Mother is mashing the berries cheerfully in the big barrel. There they will keep until spring, preserved in their own juice, unless we will have run out of them. We retire to our well-earned rest after a long day. The evening of late summer is drawing in. There is no point in wasting the meagre carbide ration even in reading. We are too tired today! Brilliant red dreams are calling for us.

One day I am walking in the thicket between the railroad station and the school. I want to be in peace with the forest, get to know the forest creatures. I look for rocks they can use as a lookout, for holes they can live in. Without care I jump from one tussock to another and stop to inspect cavities. I hear "Food's up!" from the yard. I don't want to go yet. When I hear my own name I know everybody else is there already and they are waiting for me. I start running in a hurry. And that's when it happens: I fall into a ditch, which is actually only a former ditch. Now it is full of soft sludge. It stinks. I feel I am drowning in it. I try to grab hold of branches, rocks, grass, whatever I can reach. But time after time I miss. I lift my feet towards the surface, but I have no firm platform to support me. Already I am up to my waist in it, and I am sinking further

down. I shriek as loud as I can, but they don't hear me. You can't even yell when there is nothing under your feet. I am petrified, drowning in mud. But then I chance to think of something even more dreadful. Mud preserves you and sucks you in, makes you part of it. Mud is full of people; wounded soldiers, and animals. The forests are full of bones; the bones are also in former ditches, in this ditch as well. Worms that have eaten fathers, brothers, uncles, the neighbours, everybody! Dear God, help me! I am sinking amongst all of them, and the same worms are going to eat me. I become one with the remains of the fallen soldiers.

Terror escalates into a rage, which gives me strength. Finally I reach up to the willow branches. They take my weight and finally I can pull myself up, out of the ditch. Uncontrollably, I cry by the ditch and roll around in the mosses to get rid of the worst muck. I am rolling to get rid of the war, but it clings to me. I go home, where they are rushing at me to demand explanation for my being late. But they don't need an explanation when they see me. Off for a wash, right away! Gradually I stop shaking when I am wrapped up in a warm blanket in my own bed. I tell them how difficult it is to climb out of a muddy ditch. Even my teeth have stopped rattling now. But I don't tell them what is hidden in the mud of the ditch.

Willow is an important upholder of life and hope for me now. That's why we bring home catkins in spring. And next summer, when I peel willow bark from the twigs hour after hour, I don't complain about the monotonous work. It is my saviour I am handling here.

School is starting again, recent clean-up and renovations are finished. I am a bit apprehensive about joining the others. Luckily Kaarina, from our summer neighbour's, and someone called Liisa, who lives near the school, are amongst them. I recognise some others as well, though I haven't played with them. Then there is one boy, whose family I have visited with my family. We go into the classrooms in a double queue. All the upper school kids are in one room. One lot is reading or writing while the others are being taught. Father thinks it is very awkward, especially as we keep getting more and more students. Many families are returning only now. Soon we get another teacher. She is Sirkka Tammi, and she is young and pretty. I would like to have her as my teacher, as father is very stern. You always have to know the answers! Stewth, there are other things to read besides homework!

The school library has been saved by some miracle and is now returned to its place. We, myself and sister, borrow new books almost every day. And at home the walls are covered with books again; if father gets near a book store he comes home with a thick tome. And mother grumbles about it all night. We never have any money. Regardless, we want a book as a present whenever mother and father go to Viipuri. And most often we get one, even if only '*Family Kiljunen*'. While we read, we are not required to help everybody. Reading is greatly appreciated in our family.

Yesterday the parents were planning a trip to Viipuri today, after school hours. We intended to ask for a book, but realised soon that it didn't help to badger them about it. They are about to go now. We pull out the biggest and heaviest black book from father's book shelf and squat behind the sofa to manfully read it. Aloud, of course, and taking turns! Mother seems to worry.

"For goodness sake, where are those girls now! We will be late in a minute!"

"I can hear rustling here in the lounge! Here they sit behind the sofa, slaving away! Why are they labouring so, as if they are sounding it out? Come on, girls, show me what you are trying to decipher! Ah, you are interested in law now! Sure, it is an important book, but isn't it a bit heavy going for you two. What made you want to read that?" "We have read everything we have, we need some new ones! Mother, you will bring us some, won't you?"

"I really don't know if we have enough money. Why don't you girls sweep the floors and do the dishes! There is a bit of the breakfast porridge left in the pantry if you get hungry. We won't be long. If there is a bombing, you go to the cellar. Oh dear, there's the train already whistling at the station!"

They will make it to the station in time, running. Father in front, holding the train up for mother, who is conserving her heart. The martyrs climb out from behind the sofa, return the volume on law into its place in the bookshelf, and begin their labours. We sweep the floors, we wash the dishes. And of course we also have to do our homework. That won't take long. Then we play battleships and cruisers. We remember the porridge waiting in the pantry.

When we hear the whistle we rush to the window. There they come, with the scholars. We rush to meet them. Mother gets changed and starts to prepare supper. We get yummy potato gruel. After Tellu has done the dishes, Vänni has dried them, and I myself with Röntylivari have taken the dishes back to the cupboard, we are seething with excitement. Mother hands over a new book. It is called '*The three of us, and Ritva's protégées*', by Anni Svahn. Even the picture on the cover is beautiful! Sister tries to grab it first, invoking the name, but I claim the rights of the senior. The sparring ends in the fear that father would come and confiscate the book. It has happened before. We agree that I get to read ten pages first, then Ritva. And then it is time for evening wash already, anyway. The dark has surprised us again! There is no more electricity today, we have no oil, and our carbide ration is almost gone. Mother has lit a cardboard shingle in the holder at the kitchen table. Father is trying to read the newspaper, but it is no good. He growls and throws down the paper.

The handle of mother's milk pail rings brightly as it hits the tin edge. This lets us know right away that it is morning. Tellu and Vänni are already getting ready to go to school in Viipuri. Warm milk and sandwiches are ready to go with them. The rest of us scholars are only starting our porridge with fresh milk. Father hasn't even woken up yet. Father is a late riser. It annoys mother, who for her part is an early-tobed person. Finally father appears, gulps down his porridge and goes to his schoolroom. Sister and I go after him, but we go to the school yard.

When the bell goes 'ring, ring' we all rush to form a line. The teacher gives us permission to go in, just like in Haapamäki and Mieslahti. My group has Geography, the rest are doing arithmetic. We talk about Central-Finland, which is called Heart-Finland, and its inhabitants. We know about quite a few famous historical persons from Turku. Then the teacher asks if anybody knows of any important person from Uusikaupunki. Everybody looks open-mouthed. I lift my hand. I stand, and pipe up: "Crusell!" Even father has nothing to say for a while, and then he asks me who this Crusell is. I answer that he was the most famous composer in the 1700's. Father asks where I got my information and I say I got it from the bookshelf at home, from the encyclopaedia. Father nods and turns to the class saying: "Well, as you can see one can find much useful information by reading." Then we go on about Heart-Finland. For a while I feel very proud of myself. I even have a suspicion

that father didn't know about Crusell. What, father didn't know? I must be imagining things. I have become far too full of myself. I get a confirmation of that in the very next class.

Father is giving back the exercise books to the class. He is pleased as he hands out the books to everybody. It is my turn to stand by the teacher's desk. Father flips open the book. I see all the pages full of red marks. Father looks at me and asks where all the missing letters have gone. "You better look for them and put them back where they belong! You have to learn to be more diligent." The whole class can hear it. Although, father didn't say it very loudly! Maybe they didn't hear it after all! I slip into my place without looking at anybody. My desk is creaking as I sit down. I throw a quick glance around me. Somebody looks up and makes sympathetic faces, another makes funny faces, I respond with a resigned stoop. There I sit without moving for a long while. Then I start hunting for the missing letters.

That evening I avoid father. It is sometimes difficult to separate father-at-home from father-as-teacher. After evening cuppa I retire to bed without a word. I guess the others are wondering. Let them wonder! Mother comes and feels my forehead. No fever! I cover myself completely and ponder why letters get lost from my fingers and why I plonk them down in wrong places. I don't find an answer, I find sleep.

25. 'Autumn Is Here, Earth Is All Bare'

The songs of summer have been sung, at home as well as at school. The world has turned colour into grey-brown, and misty. The wind moans and whistles in the corners and on the lane. There is hardly room for anybody amongst it. We have had a potato break from school. We have a good crop of potatoes even though some of the seed potatoes were mere peelings. Even mother has to believe it, now that she can see it with her own eyes. Satisfied, she fingers the smooth, fine tubers. The root crop also gets dragged to the cellars in readiness for winter. Cucumbers and some of the beetroot are stuffed into jars. The last tomatoes are ripening on the window sills. Some are preserved green. But of course anything that is over and above the rations allowed for a family of this size with children of this age has to be handed over to the public facilities.

It is quite a job for the housewives. There are no men at hand to help, from the front it is difficult to estimate stores, or calculate how much is needed at home, or even ponder about criminally hiding some. It is all on the wives' shoulders, their responsibility, their reasoning. At present the men have been given leave for harvesting, anyway, as it is all trench warfare at the front. Each army sits in their own foxhole, keeps an eye on the enemy's trenches, and throws a grenade or two. The opponent answers, but can also make an assault and advance a little way. Or possibly not. Bombings are scarce also, thank the Lord.

Around Michaelmas mother focusses on inside jobs. The handsome plaits of *aivina*, best quality flax, are now ready to spin into yarn and to weave. Mother spins well. The tow material is easier to spin, and the yarn can be uneven, with thinner and thicker spans. It is so easy to spin that even I manage to make some sort of rope. It is no good for even mattress material. "You can try again in spring when it is lighter", mother consoles me. Spinning wool is even more difficult. Mother can do it even with the spindle, when the spinning wheel is being used for flax. Ritva can't do either, yet, though she would love to do it. It is easier to card tow-flax than wool. We are both given a pair of carders. The intention is to mix the tow thoroughly and make a soft ball the size of a cat, which you fix on the distaff to spin. Lots of them have to be ready when mother starts to churn out thread. A foot pedals the spinning wheel; hands adjust the running of the tow to form thin thread around the

spinning spool. The spool gets fatter and fatter. Soon mother can weave new, shiny towels. The paper ones are quite useless as towels!

The autumn days visit us fleetingly like on a chain buried in long darkness, and hide finally in the lightless blue of winter. But at night it gets brighter, the frost deepens and the heavens open. Stars and the moon light up the land. Snow glistens in thousands of crystals. We rush to make angels in the snow. The yard full of Christmas angels! It is on nights like this that the bombers come.

Later at night we creep to the outhouse. It is the communal boys' toilet at the end of the yard of this former corrective institute. We always go there as a gang in the evening, alone would be too scary. We squat there side by side puffing away. We get through a lot of newspaper. As we are breaking it into suitable pieces, we can hear odd sounds from the depths of the manure well.

“What was that?”

“Shush, don't talk!”

“Don't make any more noise!”

“Maybe it is the paratrooper.”

“Paratrooper!”

“The one they wrote about in the newspaper.”

“He will shoot at our backsides; why else would he be under there?”

“Getting warm! He has been dropped from a plane to spy on us.”

“Yeah, it makes a lot of sense to spy on our backsides. Wonder if he will report our firepower all the way to Stalin!”

“And Iitin Tiltu will spread the news to the entire world that Finland has four new howitzers defending Viipuri, brand new all. And they sing beautifully.”

“Stop talking nonsense! How do we get out of here?”

“He will come after us and shoot.”

“Let us crawl out one at a time, maybe he won't notice.”

“Maybe we should all run together. He won’t get us all.”

Cautiously down the steps – there are six steps up to the seats – without a word, out and run. He didn’t have time to even see us, let alone shoot. Running in the cold made us pant. We buzzed around in the porch for a bit before stepping in.

“Whatever kept you so long? We thought you had been stolen by a robber.”

“We are all right, time just slipped away.”

“Your mother is forever carrying worries around”, father explains.

“You said yourself that all kinds of tramps have been seen in our village!”

“Hey, is it true about the paratrooper, that one has been seen coming this way? They say that he only travels at night. Do you know anything about that, father?” Vänni queries.

“Let’s believe it when we see it. Don’t talk about it where the girls can hear you, they’ll only get scared for nothing”, father murmurs.

That night many restless sleepers are queuing to get to Feather Island with Sandman. The paratrooper follows them, they can’t shake him.

Several times a day we have to visit the wood shed. What if there is a paratrooper lying in wait there! Should I throw the wood aside and grab the axe, or how should I defend myself? If there is an axe around, the paratrooper could use it, too. Maybe he is already waiting there with an axe. When we return home after a day’s work, we search every cupboard. The paratrooper might have been looking for food, or money, or hid himself in the attic. Or when we are walking along the road, we imagine the paratrooper following us. If we get to the next telephone pole without being shot, we will be saved. We rush on immediately and catch our breath by the next pole. The journey can be long. Of course we know that it is not quite that simple. However, there is some magic there. The fear fades if there are no alarming stories from the village. If there are, it blazes again furiously for a while. It is a fact that paratroopers do move around in the district. Some food disappears from the houses, traces of campfire are found in the forest, lone women are scared by the peculiar behaviour of a stranger. We have that feeling that somebody is

watching us. If a paratrooper has been seen, they give out a warning in the radio news. They also warn if a prisoner of war has escaped from the camp.

The bright winter nights are anticipated with dread. Although windows are blacked out and there is no glimmer of light escaping, the bombers navigate over us to Helsinki, Lahti, Kotka, or even further away. Viipuri is right on our doorstep, and on the other side is the important Karisalmi Bridge. When the siren goes, we grab our winter woollies and squeeze into the earthen cellar. There we can smell the overpowering smell of moist earth, of course, but there is no other place. At least we are safe from shrapnel, and we have food! Sometimes we sit in the cellar for hours. When the bombers return from their long flight, they drop any left-over bombs in this area. When you can hear the whistle and the explosion near, it means business. At those times we hold each other and pray each in our minds: "Dear God, please don't let a bomb get us!" If there is a siren in the daytime, when we are skiing or playing at the edge of the forest, we take off deeper into the bruised forest, where there is a conifer bower waiting for us. There is also any number of trenches from the winter war, and they can give us shelter of sorts. Luckily we don't get bombed every day. We are still in the middle of trench warfare, and the front is far away, in the East.

Wartime Christmas comes and goes in the usual fashion. Decorations are of crepe paper as usual, flowers are the ice flowers in the windowpanes, and our only candles are jealously guarded treasures. But we receive wonderful gifts. From the wool of our own sheep, mixed with unravelled wool from old knitted things, we had spun new colourful yarn. It is full of lumps, but that doesn't matter. We get socks, mittens, and even a new scarf, all knitted by mother or the Big Ones. Of course, Santa brings them as well, together with his presents. Santa is older and skinnier, but still the same as ever. We sing all the old carols again, and read the gospel. We pray for peace on Earth and good will amongst people. We think about the big brothers at the front. Tuitu and Kylli are with us on a short holiday. They spend the Christmas Eve and Christmas day with us. We have more food than in Haapamäki, and it is better quality. Now we have fresh rye bread made out of the grain from our own field. Pulla is made partly with wheat flour; cake is raised with a real egg, produced by our own real chicken. The Karelian pastries are made with rye that is not mouldy and potatoes that are not frozen.

That is the end of our splurge. After Christmas we have the lean ox-weeks to look forward to. The Finns had already learnt in the distant past that you had to have half of your produce still left in storage in your cellars and your granaries at the end of January. Now, with the war going on, it is just as important, as we can't import anything from overseas. The rations are getting smaller again. The grown-ups sigh and gripe. We can't be bothered to listen to them. We go outside.

I choose grown-up skis. The bindings are too big for my small felt boots, and I use a flax string to bind my foot to the binding. Röntylivari has her own skis, small enough for her to actually be able to move with them. Vänni has made a ski trail snaking in the grove between the station and the school. It is perfect for Ritva, but I am ready for a more demanding trail. The dry snow falling last night has collected into drifts and obscured the trail here and there. We advance very slowly, looking for a stretch of trail. We cross the ditch where I nearly drowned last autumn. Now the ice will hold, for sure. Nevertheless I felt very cold suddenly. I had to get rid of these thoughts. Safely I ski over the icy ditch, and I am back at home in no time. One can't get lost in this thicket; it has been thinned so much by the bombs. Over there, half of the former station building is still standing; turn your head and the school in all its glory is in front of us. We struggle up the last little rise, and we are in our yard. Mother is already calling for us. Ritva flies in, but I have problems untying the frozen string with my icy fingers.

It is Friday. We have come home from school and changed into our work clothes. We run over the yard to the sauna. The washroom is steaming white. You couldn't see mother if she stayed still. She had put the clothes to soak the day before and boiled them in soapy water in the big sauna cauldron this morning. She lifts each garment in turn from the boiling water with a wooden pole and rubs each one on the wash board. I move the finished garment from the wash board into the rinsing tub, and on to Röntylivari, who rinses it again in another tub. There are a lot of garments to rinse; maybe a whole autumn's worth. Finally we lay everything on a sloping board to drip. Mother and I take opposite ends of the garment and twist in different directions. This makes things a bit lighter. We continue until the wash basket is full. Then we take it to the river. We have to cut the hole in the ice a bit bigger, it closes easily in the cold. We rinse many basketfuls in the icy river water and wring them the best we can. When everything has been rinsed for the last time, we

take the washing into the attic and spread it on ropes. There they can dry over many days. We come in tired, teeth chattering, and rubbing our frozen hands. Our socks are wet through, and need changing. Mother has set a kettle of readymade potato soup to reheat at the back of the stove. We can sit down for supper feeling satisfied. The heavy laundry day is over. For that we express our thanks in the meal blessing.

26. Games in Heavy Snow

It is snowing big snowflakes, real *granny's slippers* we call them. The whole world gets softer and merges into a white vastness. So much snow! We dive into this vastness like into a great unknown. We can make absolutely anything out of it.

We, who have experienced being evacuees, build homes. First of all you outline the size of your home by stamping down the outer walls. When the three families in question have been located in the terrain, we start the work of interior decoration. We delineate the living room, the dining room, the bedrooms and the kitchen, without forgetting the pantry. We start by stomping around the table to bring it out of the snow. In the same way we give existence to beds, armchairs, benches and cupboards. So far they are just high towers of snow on the trampled floor. Now they get shaped according to their purpose. Because we are building a permanent home, every piece of furniture has to be frozen. One pail after another, full of water, is carried from the river.

When the family is happy with their furniture, they start acquiring other things. Of course conifer branches are brought to set by the front door. Dried flowers found sticking out of the snow are picked for fresh flowers. For crockery we have twigs and bits of plank from the wood shed. A scarf becomes a tablecloth; a beanie will serve as upholstery for the armchair. There is not much else we could make from our clothing. Anyone who experiments with her mittens as a rug will soon realise that it is impossible to do anything in her home with bare hands. If you have had the foresight to bring several pairs of mittens, you have luxuries enough in your home. The mothers begin to wonder why we have such cold hands that we need several pairs of mittens. And the lot are wet through when we go home.

Families are formed according to who gets on with whom at the time. There are plenty of mothers and daughters, but fathers are in very short supply. Even grandfathers! Small boys serve as children. Vänni and his mates might stay for a while, stamping down the walls, planning the size and position of rooms or organising common roadways in between the houses. They want to be paid builders and road makers, who will soon disappear to their own games. They point out that there are no men in the homes, as they are all on the front. Somebody might agree to be a grandfather - gramps - to get his hands on a piece of bread. He is

next seen running away with the piece of bread, yelling that he is going to collect firewood. Phooey! It is the ski slopes that they go to! Quarrels between families are not over men, but over children. The children don't understand a thing about neighbourliness. The size of kids' bedrooms is a constant bone of contention with neighbours, as the children in their fervour to build more, trample down the neighbour's walls. Occasionally the families have to swap children as they don't like their original mothers or sisters anymore. A law is passed that forbids moving into another family in the middle of a game. Temporarily, though, you can stay at the neighbour's if you like it better than at home.

What do you do in a snow home? You eat pine needle porridge ceremoniously, you drink chicory-coffee snow with pinecone cakes and bread, and you go visiting other families. When someone comes out to the lane, there is great excitement to see which house she will visit. All housewives start preparing new offerings. Of course, a house that has many visitors is valued. A family that gets no visitors might not want to continue the game at all. We start to keep better track of whose turn it is to have visitors. Harmony is maintained. Children are allowed to come along to the shops. We travel along the meandering road several times around the houses, for the shop must be far away, just like the real shop. We buy chicory and salt with our coupons and we ask:

“Has the radio announced anything else to be had this week?”

“No” the shopkeeper says.

“Is there anything we can get without coupons?” “No”.

“Mother, we want lollies, lollieees”

Mother of course gives in and the shopkeeper gives her a small cone full of dried carrot pieces. The children are allowed one piece, the rest are kept for another festive moment. In the shop we also hear what is happening in the other homes. The shopkeeper aunty tells us which house has a man on furlough, but in bad nick because of wounding; where a baby is expected; where they have infectious whooping cough. The satisfied family returns home to let everybody know that you can get lollies today without coupons. And that there is whooping cough around!

When thaw returns after a period of frost, and it is still snowing, we build big snow castles. Now we get even the boys joining in. The

snow castles are warm if the wind doesn't get in, and we can secretly burn small birch bark rolls in the fireplace. These homes are also fortifications, for the boys want to conquer each other's castles for some reason. The girls join the melee enthusiastically in the end. We have to endure long sieges. When mother's call to eat is heard, we have to stop immediately, or father will give us a scolding. We try to fight against this rule.

"Father can be late!"

"Yeah, lots of times! And mother wails about it, wondering where father is again."

"Why can't we?"

"Father often has an important job he can't interrupt."

"Is there anything as important as defending your own home against enemy attack? Is there, father?"

"We had an emergency, and air alarm!"

"Well, let us agree that if the situation is critical, you can even be late, especially if you have warned mother about it"

We make an agreement. But at once when the dishes are finished we disappear into the middle of the siege. After supper we often could not go out again. Now nobody forbids it. We get back home in time for evening tea. Tired, but happy! We are invincible!

27. Ritva Rätvänä Ränty-livari

Marjatta Lowly Maiden

Holy Maiden Short-of-stature

One day snow play gets a new meaning. Near home there are deep trenches filled with snow. We realise how easy it will be to make covered caves in them, when a firm snow cover is provided by the frost. We can do all sorts of exciting things in the caves without anybody outside being any the wiser. Promptly we discover how you can dig away the snow without breaking the surface, apart from a small opening. To avoid breaking the surface either intentionally or unintentionally, we make up strict rules about moving around. Even then many parts of the trenches are destroyed, and that is very annoying.

Living in the trenches is so exciting that we can hardly bear being inside at all. Whenever we can avoid being detected by a parent we run into the forest. It is best when there is not a trace of us visible. For the parents this of course is the worst. The children have simply vanished into thin air. When we see through our periscopes that a search party is nearing the forest, we have to get out of the trenches in time. Otherwise a seeker might plunge into a hollow ditch by accident. It is our intention to keep the cavities going as long as we had snow. And to keep it a secret!

Everything is revealed suddenly. Many children have got sick and dropped out of the game. Whoever is still able, beetles off to the forest as usual. Little Sister comes along. She is sick but doesn't want anybody to find out. She gets worse, feverish. But nobody has time to pay any notice to her. When we finally remember her, she has disappeared. We search every passage. We don't keep to the cavities now. Now we make holes for the light to get in. There she is sleeping on a snowy bed. Her cheeks are flaming red. We realise that she has been lying there for a long time. We have to get her out of the tomb. The snow gives way under our feet and the ditch is deep. We can't do it even if we try all together. We have to call father for help. He comes running, picks sister up and rushes home. There is a lot of "Oh my God!" and flapping waiting for us as we slink home, our tail between our legs. Father doesn't say a word. That is the worst. Everybody knows that he is boiling inside, for he is a very short-tempered man.

Only after Ritva has been taken to the hospital in Viipuri, we get to ponder about our transgressions. Mother cries quietly. Tellu takes her some camphor. Father sits quietly holding his head in his hands. We crouch on the floor by the fireplace in our agony. We don't dare to ask aloud that terrible question that our lips are forming all the time: Will Ritva die?

In the evening, when the taper has been extinguished, and mother has whispered her good night to us, we creep into Tellu's bed. We hold onto each other and shake like in aague. Will Ritva die? And all because we are guilty! Tellu starts to pray again there on her knees by the bed. We kneel down as well: "Please, God, don't let Ritva die! Please, God, don't let Ritva die!" We climb back into Tellu's bed. In the morning I fall down off the bed as mother and father come in.

Mother is crying, and for a while we stare at them stunned. But father tells us quickly that the hospital has rung them. The worst is over. Ritva has survived. She will recover. It is not diphtheria, although that is going around. We burst out in joyous celebration. Mother is shushing us to have some sense. It will take days before recovery is granted. After a week Little Sister is brought home. She is a skinny waif, but her eyes are bigger, and vibrant. She is asking for food! Ritva, who always had problems with food, is actually asking for it!

Later we go through all the ifs about Ritva's illness. If it had been declared diphtheria, would some others of us been infected? Quite possibly! Would we all? That is possible, too. Would one of us have died with it? Possibly, even now many are dying of it.

"It was not diphtheria" mother says emphatically and commands us to stop the idle speculation. But it stayed in our consciousness. We did not play at the trenches again.

From Little Sister:

Again, I have just a slight inkling of the occasion in my memory, but my body remembers, sending a paralysing shock wave through me whenever I am threatened to be stuck in a small dark place. I had always wondered why I reacted so strongly to these situations, until a few years ago when Aili told me this story. Twice in my life in recent years I have been stuck in a toilet cubicle with a defective lock, and gone completely berserk. At the time I was just ashamed of my reaction, now I can be a bit more understanding and forgiving of my own foibles.

I remember having been extremely sick and feeble and envying Aili and Väinö, who were racing around the bedroom hooting and hollering, while I just wanted to lie down and die.

28. Towards a New Summer

The icicles on the edge of the roof are getting longer by the day. Already we have to be careful that they don't drop on our neck. Crust is decking the snow on the meadows and on the low slopes. We enjoy running on the snow crust, until it gives, and we are through the crust. That's exactly where the fun is. There is no need for roads or ski trails. We can wander wherever we fancy. The frost pinches our cheeks and bites our fingers, but the sun laughs them warm again. School is waiting, however, school and home duties, and the war.

We have a problem in the school cafeteria. Usually we have potato soup made with imitation milk, or oat-, barley- or rye-gruel. We are used to them, and they taste good, especially if there is some preserved lingonberry left. During the war people are worried about having enough nutrition for the kids. With great difficulty the municipality has managed to organize it so that the schools can get meat soup occasionally. Great, the parents say. At first the students are happy, too. "It is meat soup day today, hurray!" the girls shout. "Yum, yum" the boys grin.

After a few times, the feeling in the air has changed. Everybody slinks into the classroom. Your best friend gets a nod, others are ignored. The teachers are puzzled. Even the cleaners are puzzled, and finally they tell the teachers. They are finding piles of pieces of meat under every desk. Every time it gets worse and worse. The teachers have to find out what is going on. The cook, too, is desperate, the cleaners say. The poor woman is crying because her soup is rejected. And she can't understand where the problem lies! The teachers ask their classes. No answer. They talk to every pupil in turn. Nobody knows anything. I feel that I get heavier bombardment than anybody else. I get rattled and fear that I will cave in. I run home and throw myself on the trundle bed and cry.

Eternity goes by and I am still crying. I hear father coming into the room. He has left the interrogation and followed me. He is very angry because nobody says anything. He will force me to tell, and he will send me to the shaming corner, or hit me, even though I am a big girl! And there is no way I can say anything, none at all! I am not going to be a traitor to the gang just for some bits of meat! I am terrified. Why is he looking at me like that? Now he is lifting his hand to hit me!

But he is stroking my hair and lifts me up into his lap. He waits till I am completely soothed. He just holds me, and soon I am not shaking

with sobs any more. Then he starts telling me about those pieces of meat, quietly. What big sacrifices had been made to get hold of them, how weak people were getting with the lack of nutrition, how all the grown-ups had been so happy about getting this wonderful nourishment for their children, how even the cook had lifted her joined hands to thank the Lord for this real meat soup in the midst of a war.

The school board has heard about the problem. We won't get any food at all to the school until this thing is cleared. Father says he understands that it is not easy to rat on a secret. Sometimes, though, you have to look deeper and weigh the consequences carefully, from the point of view of everybody. I burst into tears again. With the tears the gruesome piece of information slips out as well.

“But it is human flesh!”

“What did you say, human flesh! Where have you heard that?”

“Everybody knows that, we have been whispering about it all the time.”

“How can such a fabrication get started? Who brought it to the class?”

“You mean that it isn't? Do you mean it is not human flesh?”

“It absolutely is not! The best beef donated by the Swedes to the children of Finland! Who in the world can have started such a rumour?”

“The women had been talking in the shop.”

“Is that so? I think I will go to the shop before supper. Will you please tell mother, as she is not here! And do get up like a good girl and help your mother. This matter is going to be cleared now, for sure!”

Father goes into the shop and asks if anybody has been talking about the meat destined to the school kitchen. The shopkeeper doesn't remember anything. After thinking for a bit, he remembers that once – a long time ago now – the women had been very happy. The scholars will get delicious Swedish meat, best for human consumption. They had been going on and on about it. Real Swedish meat and all! Father says he said thank you and asked the shopkeeper to drop in at the school to explain the misunderstanding. This is what happens, nobody is named, and nobody gets the blame.

The days get longer in great strides; soon we don't need the shingles for light. We can keep on doing handwork later and later in the evenings. Old cardigans are unravelled, and old useless mittens are robbed of every bit of usable yarn. The rest is carded to be spun anew. The crinkly yarn is wetted in a skein and dried on the clothesline in the sun. This straightens it up to be reknitted. The dry skein is then suspended between two chair backs. Then you stand up on the chair and start winding it into a ball. From the heights of the chair it is easy for even a short knitter. Of course this is only at times when a skein holder is not available. When the ball is ready, the cast-up done and the first few layers knitted, you can grab a book and read while you are knitting. Father jokes that we are always knitting with the help of an instruction book.

The life in the village has gradually revived and is now functioning almost like it did before. The women work in *Lotta* organisation, (the women's auxiliary) or the *Marthas*, (the Country Women's Association), old men in their own organizations. The girls attend *Little Lotta*, the farm club and girl guides; the boys attend boy scouts, young civil guard and sports club. The workers' club is also very busy. A *Toivonliitto* or *League of Hope* chapter has also been established in the school again. This league is a country-wide temperance society for the young. The grown-ups have their own. Father is an eager temperance supporter and often goes on trips as a speaker. "Too often", mother complains.

In *Little Lotta* meetings we always wear a lotta costume. Kylli sewed my costume. The grey dress has an extra white flap over the collar, which you have to sew on by hand, the same for the cuffs. That is a nuisance indeed. These white additions get dirty each time you wear the costume, and they have to be clean all the time. Yesterday's pieces have to be ripped out and the white bits washed by hand and ironed dry. Then they have to be sewn back on, and off you go to the meeting. One has to behave with dignity in a lotta-uniform. We get taught how to give first aid. After many hours of practise, the bandage sits firm on a finger, on a wrist, on an elbow.

It is a long way from these skills to become a medical lotta. Sometimes we listen to the anti-aircraft lotta; why her work is important, how she goes about it, how she feels on her lonely watch, high in the tower. The work of a supply lotta is familiar to everybody in itself, but

the circumstances! We understand that we are nowhere near becoming a real lotta. We keep on knitting socks and mittens, bake something nice to send with them, save a morsel of our butter ration to include with the parcel and send it to our brothers or to an Unknown Soldier *Somewhere There*. Girls older than me are eager to go to the front. So are the biggest boys. Many of them are dreaming of saving Finland, if they have a big brother or father in the war. The mothers are scared.

The school has an excellent sports ground, where all kinds of activities begin in the spring. There are running strips, jumping pits, places for ball games. Vänni and I spend every evening there in competitions. If there are enough people we play baseball. Rönty-livari is underfoot, as she is too small. But we can't push her away either.

Before spring a sad thing happens. Diphtheria spreads in waves in Karelia. Students are missing classes, some several weeks of them. Karjala newspaper has notices of dead children. People are scared in every house. Wet socks and mittens are replaced by dry ones. They would like to keep the kids inside, safe from cold and the danger of contamination. They take swabs of our throats. We have clean throats. Gradually the situation eases and life returns to normal. But for me it is different. My head is aching; I have no heart even for sports. Sometimes I feel so faint that I have to clutch the chair back with two hands. Before evening I crawl into bed and just lie there. Mother takes fright. She tests my head and brings a thermometer. This shows I have quite a high fever. Father commands the rest of the family to leave me and looks into my throat. He pushes my tongue down to see better. My throat is red and sore, but there is no white showing.

"I don't think it is diphtheria! But you can't be sure. Let us see what happens overnight. If the fever gets any worse we will try to get a doctor."

"Tellu, go and fetch the camphor, and hack a crumb out of the sugarloaf. Let's give that to the poor girl!" mother fusses. "What do you think, father, shall we give her Hota powder?"

"I don't really believe in that. Inke said she is not hurting anywhere particularly."

"No, just a bit of a sore throat", I pipe up half-heartedly.

They wipe my face and hands with a damp towel and change my dress for a night gown. I just lie there without volition and let it all happen around me. Ritva's bed is pulled out and raised to its night position. There we roll around side by side. Sister leans on her elbow and touches me gently with the other hand. She asks if I am going to die. "I don't know" I answer. Mother comes in a few times at night. She pulls the cover up, tests my forehead and sighs. In the morning my temperature has come down a bit, but I don't feel at all well. I try to eat a bit, and even manage to swallow something despite the sore throat. The warm porridge feels really nice and I let it stay long in my throat. Then I return to bed. Sister's half of the bed has already been pushed under my half, and sister has gone to school.

I am feeling better every day. I can already spend hours reading in the easy chair. Father brings schoolwork home for me so I won't get left behind. Mother keeps an eye on my eating. Tellu, Vänni and Ritva tell me about their day. I want to join them now. Out of the blue the doctor is back with his papers. The tests confirm that I really did have diphtheria, after all. According to regulations I have to go to the hospital for epidemics. They have a ward for diphtheria patients. Incredible, going to hospital when I am healthy already! They equip me for a journey I don't want to take. I want to take books and paper and pencils. I would even take Little Sister, who is now under quarantine. Another girl from my class is in the hospital as well. She has already asked that I share a room with her. That gives me a bit of solace in this misery.

The hospital is an enormous building. Even in the yard there are a lot of soldiers. They are convalescents. Some have their hand, some their foot in a parcel, some have bandages all over their head. It is hard to look at them. But at least they are convalescents, they will live. At least until their next skirmish! This war makes me shudder. "What will happen to my brothers?" I cry out in my head. They take me to the other end of the hospital, to an isolated ward. The big stairwells are like rugged mountains, going up them is scary. They wash me and give me a hospital gown to wear, and then point me to a bed in a big room. Heads turn to watch the newcomer. Conversations stop. I creep quietly to my bed and look around from the corner of my eye. The nurse tells them my name and hopes that I will thrive in this company. When she leaves I lie down. I close my eyes and contemplate the situation. Should I start a conversation, or should I wait till one of them talks to me?

I can hear quiet whispering in the room, someone is tiptoeing toward another. I open my eyes. Two girls are standing by my bed; they say their names and giggle. I am feeling giggly as well as I sit up. Then the barrage of questions starts. Everything that is important to us girls is explained. The ensemble around my bed has grown. But I don't see the girl, Liisa, who had wanted me to share her room. I asked if they knew about her. She had been there all right, but had been moved to a private room. I don't feel too bad about that. It seems there are new friends by the dozen on offer here.

When the worst of the verbal diarrhoea is over, we play games. We drown ships on grid paper and we get hung on gallows. Or we read the books from the ward library. Time passes really fast, funnily enough. Every day somebody goes and somebody else takes their place. Families are not allowed in, but we can go and see them through the big window downstairs. They'll try to say something through the window, but we can't hear it. We think we can read something from their lips, but who knows! Tellu and Vänni sometimes come on their way to school, father on his way to one meeting or another, but it is not often that mother can come all the way to Viipuri.

Today they assign me to another room with no explanation. When I ask about the reason they tell me I will find out soon. We walk through many twists and arrive at a small room with a big window and two beds. They direct me to the empty bed, and I place my meagre possessions on it. As I turn around I meet Liisa's pale face with sunken cheeks and a smile. She must have been very sick while I have just been having fun with my illness. I decide to be very nice to her. Every day one or another of Liisa's family members comes to see her. She watches the wall clock and tries to guess who will come this day. And there they are already, Liisa's mother and father, behind our window. A handsome couple! After greeting their daughter they turn to me. They are obviously happy that their daughter has company now. They point to two small paper bags and nod to us. We guess that we will soon get these bags from a nurse. As we munch away on the sweet dried carrots, I can't help asking:

“How come you have your own room?”

“I was so sick that everybody thought I would die. They isolated me completely as mother and father demanded.”

“If you have no strength to do anything but be sick, it is OK to do it on your own, at least for a while. But what about when you are getting better? We had so much fun in the big ward.”

“It was getting as tedious as a year of starvation. When I heard that you were going to be in the same hospital, I said right away that I wanted you in my room. Father and mother agreed and organized it. They are influential, you see. Did you already have new friends there? Did you mind that they sent you here?”

“I had lots of pals there. But every day somebody moved out and another one moved in. There never was time enough to make real friends.”

“See who is behind the window!”

“Tellu and Väinni! How did they know to come here?”

I rush to the window like a streaked lightning. I spread my hands along the window to hug them. I laugh, I shout, I jump around. They ape me, but in a low-key way. Pressing my mouth almost to the glass I try to ask how they all are at home. I can just hear something faintly through the glass. We can exchange short sentences. They ask about the test results. No, they are not clear yet. Maybe next week! Greetings from home! Greetings back! The last wave is done. I stare after them.

“Quite different from the armoured glass downstairs” I comment when I return to my bed.

“Isn’t it just! It is indeed the best thing about this room.”

There is a lot to talk about, but we have to be careful about not straining our throats too much. We play battleships and cruisers or other quiet games till we are exhausted.

The following week they let me go home, the newest test is clean. Liisa is on her own again. Although, according to me, I wasn’t even sick any of the time I was in the hospital, the new experience left all kinds of traces in the corners of my mind. I was alone, without my family, in a strange place. The wounded soldiers in the yard, the very sick children in the wards, the rumours about the dead, the hopeful convalescents waiting for the latest test results, the thankful relatives fetching home the released ones, all this was whirling around in my head for a long time after. The others got edgy whenever I even tried to talk about the

hospital. Everybody was amazed that Ritva didn't get infected. Ritva is small and eats like a sparrow, and she slept next to me in the trundle bed through my whole real illness.

The spring advances in great strides while I lay about in a weakened state after my sojourn to the hospital. Sister prattles on enthusiastically about her school day, but only gets a subdued grunt from me. In the school I sit at my desk nodding. Nothing seems interesting. One day, however, I am very restless on my seat. I move from one side to the other on my bench, wave my arms about, almost jump up. I don't raise my gaze from the top of my desk.

The teacher has to raise his voice before I realise that he is talking to me. He asks why I am so restless. Agitated, I jump up and squeal that there are eight bedbugs crawling in a crevice of the desk. Father hastens to my desk, kills the bedbugs one after another, and confirms that I had counted them right. Everybody starts to look at their desk, and shout that they have some, too. Here, and here, and here! The whole class is searching for bedbugs and that is the end of the lesson. Everybody is instructed to empty their desk, shake their belongings well outside, and take them home for the night.

The cleaners again wash the desks and the floor with a disinfectant solution. The next morning the school bell rings as usual. We stink of disinfectant for a long time. It is no fun, but we spin more and more yarns about it, embellishing the stories ever more. In the end nobody knows what is true, what was invented for the fun of it. But the bedbugs are definitely true!

The spring sun is melting sandy spots in the yard, and the first hopscotch grids are drawn in the moist sand. Skipping rope doesn't start until the following week, as the long rope, which has a person operating it at both ends, requires a big space without snow. The jumpers form a queue, the first one has to establish the pattern, and the rest follow the suit. As many people as can fit inside the whirling rope can jump at the same time. If you mess up the rope, you have to become the twirler. Our skill grows all the time. The very advanced won't even bother about queuing up; they jump in from the wrong side. That is really hard, as you have to time your jump differently from everybody else. We don't always manage it without a quarrel or without falling over. Some people have brought their own short single rope, and jump happily alone, or in pairs.

Ring-ball has to wait even longer, for that, half the yard has to be free of snow. We draw a big circle; the players go inside the circle, only some staying outside. They throw the ball toward the inside players, but these try to avoid the ball. If you get hit by the ball, you have to go out of the ring and become a chaser. The game goes on, if the bell hasn't interrupted us, until the ring is empty. And if you don't want to be part of the ring-ball game, you can always play wall-ball either alone, or with another person. The players are free to invent their own rules.

In May the whole yard is unfrozen. That's when the baseball season begins. That's what they play in the last two classes of upper school. The players bat furiously while the pitcher serves, and the runners who have made it to a base try to get to the next base, or home from the third base before the ball gets back to the pitcher, or to the next base the runner is aiming at. You have to be a good batter, a good runner, a good catcher and a good pitcher. This game is played by the grown-ups as well, even in national matches. But school is where it is learned at first. So far we are just learning the basics. In the school yard we also long jump, high jump, run hundred meters and even a bit further, throw the javelin or hurl the shot-put. They all have their own area in the yard.

At the end of May we are once again free from school! But free for what? Free to work hard in wartime Finland, to ward off hunger and lack of all sorts.

29. The Working Bee of the Young

Last summer our vegetable patch had been at the end of a plot. It is three kilometres from home. It is necessary to have the kitchen vegetables nearer home. We dig a new vegetable patch next to the leafy bower of lilac trees right next to the house. When it is all prepared, bar the planting, father commands Rätvänä and myself to sow the seed and look after the plants until they are ready to harvest. It is rumoured that we can ask for help. We can ask mother for advice, and Tellu is going to start the seeding. The horded seed is sown, the seed bags are fixed at the end of the rows to show what is planted, and the ground is well watered. We are dead tired. Mother feels sorry for Rätvänä and allows her to rest for a while. We can write down many hours of work for this day in our new work books. And we feel proud of that.

We belong now to the Young Working Bee. Foreign trade is completely blocked. There is lack of all materials, from nails to food. New substitutes have to be developed. Even the ersatz coffee now has a substitute. All people over sixteen are obliged to work during the war years. They can be sent anywhere in the country, where-ever workers are needed, for whatever work. City housewives are farming and looking after the cattle to help the country wives.

Even the children are enticed to work ever more. Everybody is given a diary of the Young Working Bee, in which you write down the type of work and the hours worked every day. When you have reached a benchmark, you get a pin. And then you start earning the next pin. There are lots of different jobs, from helping at home to collecting various substances that can be used as substitutes or material for anything. In addition to the usual housework we now write down things like looking after the vegetable garden, picking berries, raking hay, and thinning chicory.

Father has trialled growing chicory this spring, because it makes ersatz coffee. The common dandelion has become an important utility plant. The root is roasted for coffee, the flower and the leaves are used as they are for salad. Black currant and raspberry leaves make tea. Sorrel can be used in soups. But there are also brand new objects of collecting.

The industry needs iron. The raped forests of Karelia are full of pieces of iron of all sorts. Father warns us not to touch anything that might look like a bullet. We can only take a piece of iron that is clearly

on its own. There are bits of pipe, skin of a tank, part of a caterpillar track. They make a huge pile quickly. The basket actually breaks taking the loot home.

It was also very lucrative to collect bones. They were needed for many things, not least for glue. We head for the nearby forest again with a big laundry basket. We pick like it was lingon-berries, a bone here, another there. We don't think about what animal the bone comes from. Into the basket with it! How can there be so many? Even the forest animals have been through two wars! We drag the overflowing basket to the end of the birch lane. That is where the old gazebo sits, the one we had admired in the autumn when we arrived here. It has now been made into a gathering point for bones, and mother is in charge of it. The new loot is weighed and entered into the book. When the hut is almost full, mother will let the factory know. A car will come to pick up the bones.

Mother suggests that we bring two basketfuls tomorrow. Then she can ring for the car. And so we, sister and I, go to the forest again the next day, a bit deeper in than before. Suddenly Rätvänä begins to scream at full volume. I run to her imagining all sorts of accidents, but all I see is the screaming girl and a big pile of white bones. I hold sister and try to calm her down. There seems to be a skull of a horse jutting out of the moss, and the whole skeleton has collapsed next to it. The vertebrae have come adrift. I don't want to look at it either. Wander whose Polle that was. It could even be ours, sister sobs. Indeed, we had a Polle, whom we had to give up for the war, as he wasn't necessary for us any more when we were evacuees. I try to explain to sister that this horse has been helping the soldiers at the front, and that's why he is dead. It could be Polle, but it could just as well be somebody else. It is just as precious either way. I am very satisfied with my solemn speech.

The exhausted sister wants to go home. She is not going to collect any more bones, not anybody's bones! We go back home without our loot. Mother holds the sobbing girl on her lap for a while. The car is postponed till next week. The gathering of bones continues through the summer.

Collecting resin is fun, although even here we are reminded of war wounds. We scrape the dried resin from the broken stumps of pine trees into a paper bag. For a tool we use a whittled wooden stick that resembles a butter knife. The best booty is in the trunks that the war forgot to ravage. The shrivelled, windblown pines are our favourites. They have

quite low branches that you can lean on when you scrape the elixir of life from the wounds on the trunk. Sometimes the resin just pours into the bag. The ancient people considered it something very precious. It has been used as a remedy for all sorts of problems, and especially as a medicine for wounds. An old auntie once told me to place a softened ball of resin on my forehead and go to bed. All sorts of worries disappear and you get your vigour back. Now it is needed as a substitute for rubber and other things. But of course it can bring that vigour to the whole country!

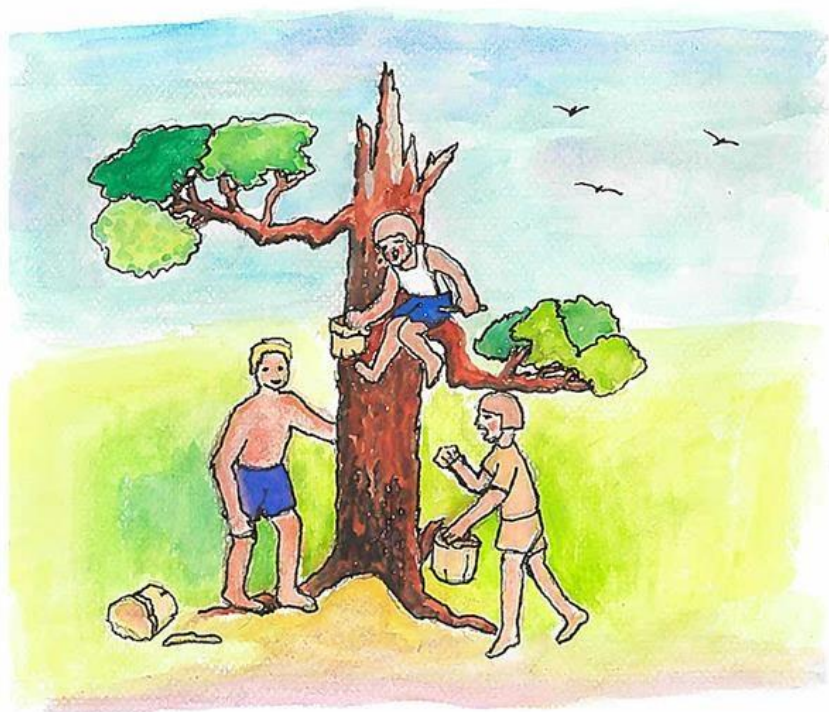
Vänni likes coming to pick resin as often as he can get away from the fields. Just now he is on the highest branch, nearly at the top, and makes the tree swing. Just one break and he will fall, I think with horror. Why do boys have to be like that, stark raving mad in their daredevil adventures. Not a scrap of intelligence in their head! For goodness sake, now Rätvänä is begging to be up there, too. She says somebody has to lift her. She tries to climb, but keeps on slipping down. There's nothing you can brace your foot on, just a smooth trunk. What was the black thing coming down just here?

"Vänni fell" I scream in fright. I look down at the heap that Vänni was just a second ago. The heap starts to get up, shakes its legs and stretches its arms and then lifts Rätvänä onto the lowest branch. I am so frightened by it all that I scream in my rage.

"You make sure she won't fall! You hear!"

"Sure, sure"

Rätvänä starts to sing '*The squirrel in the tree had a cone in his mouth*'. We all burst out laughing. We continue getting the resin for quite a while in peace and harmony. We arrive home with full bags; we weigh them and record the weight each in our own diary. Tomorrow we will be here again. With a paper bag in hand we will swing through the branches, dig up resin from its grooves and breathe the pine-fresh air. The sun is merciless, but the branches give a bit of shelter. Every time we go collecting resin, we lie on the ground for a while with a ball of the elixir of life on our foreheads for the best for ourselves as well as for the whole of Finland. Even Tellu does this, but not Vänni. He doesn't believe in the elixir of life.



From Little Sister:

We kids were not allowed to be just playing; we had to be actively helping the family and even the war effort. Recycling was the way of life in those days, and kids were expected to collect everything recyclable around the yard and the forest around us. I remember the great competitions as we raced around sighting and catching every usable morsel of paper, bones, old cloth etc. We also climbed the pine trees to harvest the resin, which made excellent glue. In the autumn time it was berries, mushrooms, dandelion roots – war time coffee – and birch twigs for *saunavasta* (the bunch of birch leaves used in the sauna ritual). There were lots of bones around the forest, it having been the war front not so long ago, and once we came across a human skull. Being kids, we were all very cool about it, but I doubt I was the only one who shuddered inside. It brought the reality of war and death very close to home.

Funnily enough, I don't remember having freaked out at the horse bones at all. Aili remembers the human skull, though, so it must have been real.

30. A New Family Member

Ahti, *the King of the Waves* – we all have names from Kalevala – declares that he has got engaged. He is stationed in Kainuu. While visiting Kajaani, he met a nice young woman, who has now promised to be his bride. He is bringing her home on their holiday. Mother is in a tizzy planning food and baked goodies to honour the new family member. Her own big boy is going to bring a bride home! The girl is very young, wonder if she will be too childish and scared for this uneasy area. Where will she sleep, as we have no room to offer her?

There are enough worries. But one thing is certain: the house will be cleaned, and all the children help with that. The bedbugs are slaughtered, the floors scrubbed, doors and windows washed, fresh birch branches are brought in with wild flowers from the meadow. Last job is making the beds with fresh sheets. The pillowcases have ties crinkled with the help of a knife. We have had enough real sheets woven with our own real flax to give a set to the bride at least. The rest of us still rustle in paper sheets.

The train leaves the station towards Karisalmi. People go in all directions. A tall officer and a tall woman are walking this way together. It is Ahti, sure it is! We run to meet him. But we don't rush at him this time, but stop a bit further away. He has that strange woman with him, the bride. She is so young, just like our Tellu, but much better looking, with curly golden hair. *I wonder if she is proud*, I wonder at the same time as my feet are running after sister to meet the newcomers.

At the table everybody is still feeling a bit shy, and too polite. Only when we take her around the place to show her the yard, the river, and the leafy avenue do we start to thaw out. By the river we take a picture of the whole family. Even Kylli and Tuitu have come on an evening furlough. Throughout the evening we ask all the important questions both ways. Sister and I have to laugh, when Marjatta tries to learn the names of all nine children. She will mix them up, for sure. She herself has only one sister.

As we go to bed it becomes clear that the little kids – that is Ritva and myself – have to sleep on an old stretcher bed which is set up in mother and father's bedroom. There is room enough for it there. We are not too happy, though, as it is not a comfortable bed. And so we try to delay the inevitable with all our ingenuity. Finally father commands us

to bed. The grown-ups retire to discuss the future plans for the young couple. I suspect that the present situation on the front is of interest as well. But I believe that cannot be talked about.

Sister and I spend a long time whispering in our stretcher bed. Is she nice? Is she beautiful? Has she got a sense of humour? Yes, yes, yes! We accept this odd apparition. Wonder if she can sing? She was heard humming '*Hills of Karelia*' with the right melody, when we were singing by the river. So everything is fine, we can sleep in peace after the evening prayer.

At night I am woken up by loud whispering. The parents are whispering about the expense of the wedding and the long journey all the way to Kajaani. There is no money; we can't get any more loans. The never ending money worries of the family stay in my subconscious and transform into high mountains that I have to traverse in my sleep.

At breakfast all worries seem to have evaporated. There is enough food, we cross our fingers feeling satisfied. The engaged couple leave for Viipuri, the rest return to the fields and to the work at home. The holiday makers have only a couple of days to stay home. Ahti accompanies Marjatta to Kajaani and continues to his own regiment *Somewhere There*. We have a new, exciting topic of conversation for the evening twilight as we are waiting for sleep.

From Little Sister:

Somewhere in that interval back in Karelia a new person entered our family. My brother Ahti met his future wife Marjatta and brought her home for a visit. I thought she was a bit of all right. She was tall, blond, pretty and very young, only just 20 when they got married. She related well to us children, and we were all over her. Later on, much later, when I was a teen, she acted as my 'mother number 3', as I was living with Ahti and Marjatta during my school year in Pukinmäki, a suburb of Helsinki. She also provided my mother with her first and second grandchildren, Marja and Martti, and later another, Annakaisa.

31. Just Like the Viipuri Blast

It is a bright but nippy morning in early summer. We venture out from the warmth of our home, each to our own jobs. Mother is setting the table for breakfast. Tellu has left earlier on her bicycle to the meadow, where our cows are kept in an enclosure. Father and Väinni are trying to repair a cart so they can leave for the fields. Ritva and I loiter in the yard in between weeding and collecting bones.

“Weed the carrots at least, before you spend the whole day quarrelling”, mother shouts at us through the open window.

We abandon the quarrel and leg it to the vegie patch. I do understand why bone collecting is still so difficult for sister. But really, weeding and thinning carrots is the pits of all the nasty jobs we have to do. I would rather do anything else. There I now crouch and deliberate which tiny seedling I should leave to grow, and which ten to throw away. It is getting to be stifflingly hot, as the sun has climbed higher and is now shining right onto the carrot bed. I straighten up and stand.

At that moment, a rumble is heard and big clouds of dust are bellowing from the house. A bomb! It is a bomb! We crouch close to the ground at once. We wait. Our hearts are pounding in fright. We wait. No sound of an airplane? What has happened? More dust is billowing from the classroom. Mother rushes out having heard the mighty bang. Väinni shouts from behind the curtain of dust that father had gone to the classroom. We all rush towards the outflung doors. “Father! Father!” Out through the door comes a peculiar looking creature. Head covered in sawdust and other debris. It drips from the shoulders; sticks of wood, bits of newspaper and various bits of remnants of clothing are dropping at every step.

“It is the ceiling, the ceiling has collapsed!” father gasps, as we divest him of his clothing. His eyes are smarting and his throat rough, but otherwise father is OK. He was at the other end of the classroom, and there the ceiling stayed put. Mother rushes some camphor to him, just in case. Tellu arrives at the steps with clanking milk pails and rushes to us. She had heard a bang and seen smoke from this direction, and she had assumed that some house was on fire.

The villagers are beginning to gather. There is a lot of ‘o-mygod’ going on. Everybody had thought about a bomb first. But there were no

planes to be heard. Then they had thought about a dud, an unexploded missile. They arrived to check the damage on the spot, and of course they were anticipating the worst. But all is well, as this is all there is. Almost just a scare! At the same time they organize a meeting of the school committee. The clearing has to be done as a working bee, and the repairs started in good time. The school would be opened at the usual time in the autumn. This is decided, and the decision adhered to.

Father is already an old man, not even in the reserve army. Being the victim of a surprise explosion is not a small matter for him, especially as he couldn't figure out in the chaos what was happening. Tellu goes to the sauna with him to wait while he gets washed. Luckily there is hot water waiting for the cleaning of milk pails. Father wants to sit down while washing himself. His knees are shaky, although it is not mentioned. Mother makes ersatz coffee and gives him a hefty piece of bread; she has even found something resembling butter in her cache. After that, father is persuaded to lie down in the bedroom. In the afternoon he is already back at the fields.

Soon the inspectors arrive. Father explains what he knows about it. They find that the thick beams have rotted through. It seems that the roof has been damaged through the winter war and the armistice. When it was repaired the previous autumn when the school started, they didn't pay enough notice to the condition of the beams. Moisture kept on damaging them until this collapse. The rest of the beams have to be examined carefully. If more damage is found, all have to be taken down and replaced. Luckily, such a huge repair job is not needed, after all. Half of the roof is saved.

Many villagers come to watch the repairs. They are worried about their own old houses that they repaired in a hurry when the families were returning. Are their houses safe for sure? There were holes in the roof; maybe they didn't take enough care when patching it. What will become of their life if all the time they are worried about the roof falling on them? Many decide that they will have to examine their houses again, better.

It is not uncommon in the wartime that your house collapses around you. We have heard enough news of this in the last few years. For a while it has been quite peaceful, however. The front is far away. We are getting used to living without the constant fear. Air raids are always possible, of course, but we don't dwell on it. As we were screaming: "bomb, bomb" after the explosion, we realised how thin our

feeling of security really was. There's nothing to it but to turn the whole matter into a joke. The new Viipuri blast is chuckled over for a long time. At least until the ever more frequent bombing raids cure us of the desire to joke about it. Then we are faced with the reality of the war, unfortunately.

From Little Sister:

Again, I had a quite different take on this incident. In my version, it was Aili and myself who barely escaped from the collapsing roof. This is my memory of the incident:

We were living in an old building belonging to a youth corrective institute which had survived the bombs, and which had been converted to a school and the teacher's residence. We often played in the classroom when the school was out. One day Aili and I were just about to go into the classroom. We had opened the door and were at the threshold, when there was an almighty roar, and the ceiling fell in, choking us with dust. Luckily we escaped without any injury, just shaken by the noise and falling planks and dust. Mother heard the noise and rushed in to investigate, not knowing what had happened. It must have been a relief when we emerged unscathed.

No doubt Aili's version is the correct one!

School rooms, however, were a danger to me. One day I was fooling around by myself in the classroom, swinging on the desks, when I slipped and fell down very heavily on my back. I was lying there, hardly able to breath, when somebody found me, and for years afterwards, whenever I had a jolt, I was gasping for breath for quite some time. I don't think I ever mentioned the old injury to a doctor until I was pregnant with my first child.

32. 'On the Banks of Karelia'

This morning I didn't wake up early, because I read in bed last night for as long as I could see. In the morning, a mighty blast by my ear sends me out of bed in a rush. '*Rise up, Inkeri, wake up to work, the dawn is brightening...*'

Tellu is singing with accompaniment by Räänty-Iivari. The lofty national hymn of Ingria has thus been brought down to private usage, but in such an appropriate way that I can't get angry for the sake of the Ingrians. I jump into my Monty-suit, which has become the most popular garment for the youth. It is a modified copy of the battle suit of General Montgomery in African battle fields. It has shorts and a short sleeved shirt with its many pockets and buttons. The material is heavy cotton. I can't remember when I have worn something different, unless the heat is relentless. With my shirt billowing I splash some water on my face, and I am ready for breakfast. A gulp of oatmeal porridge doesn't take long. I am in time to board the carriage with the others.

The horse is trotting towards *Lähessuo*, (Near-marsh), where we are intending to make hay today. It is a former marsh area, but has been drained to become a meadow growing wild grasses. Even now it is still damp, and the yield is not great. "Every little bit helps" father says and commands the whole family to come along. Even Tuitu is with us again. There is no way for the mower to get there, so father and Vänni have mown the whole area with a scythe. We rake the hay into small heaps. Then mother and the big girls lift them up to the poles as fast as the men of the family - that is father and Vänni – can fix them in the ground. They only put a thin layer on the poles, as the hay has to dry fast.

We can't come here many times. This 'Near-marsh' is so far away. That is why there are many species of birds nesting here. The birds fly around restlessly looking for food as the rake-wielders begin their work. The twitter gets more raucous as well, and loses its smooth flowing. The Big Ones make us guess what bird is singing when. Of course we know a lot of them, but even the big sisters don't know them all. It is the same with flowers. We try to identify various wet meadow plants all together.

But now father is calling us to work swiftly. We wield our rakes in step with a song. From '*the banks of Karelia*' to the '*statue of the son of Knut*' we sing one song after another. The work is like playing. Only

after we stop singing do we notice how the hay sticks to our clammy skin and tickles our throats. We eat our lunch and have a spell for a while. Tellu is spreadeagled on a pile of hay when we are being photographed.

The big sisters have remembered a strawberry patch on the far end of the field. We search and search, but find nothing. The grass is too tall in this thicket. But when you push the blades of grass aside carefully, you notice the red berries flickering underneath. Hand dips in deep and soon your palm is full of succulent nourishment. Your mouth grinds on, your tongue keeps licking, and your eyes crinkle up from sheer pleasure. But something is missing: the smell and taste of burning heat in the strawberries. That cannot be bettered by anything! Well satisfied we eat these products of shade, nevertheless.

We know many sunny hillsides right near home. Here, on the other side of the hay field, we find rarer delicacies. The surface of the berry is like raspberry, but dark red, almost burgundy. They are the greatest delicacies you can imagine. Even their name is nectar-berry in Finnish (arctic bramble berry, *Rubus arcticus*). Somebody has started to dig a ditch here sometime, but the job has been abandoned. The berry leaves are covering the fallen-down sides of the old ditch.

“Mother, mother, come here and see this!”

“What’s the matter with the kids now? Mother is coming! Wow, there are a lot of them! You don’t often see so many.”

“Can we eat all of these?”

“Not even *your* bellies could take all that.”

“Mine does, anyway!”

“And mine, just feel it!”

“Rubbish! Let us go and finish the hay, there are only a few poles left to do. Then we can all come and pick these berries. We’ll get many jars of nectar-berry jam for the winter out of these. Just imagine, with flapjacks!

“I will eat one more handful, I can, can’t I?”

“And me, too? But I have a smaller hand! I should get two!”

Little Sister insists.

There is nothing we can do but obey. The gluttons are commanded to man their rakes to collect the last little bits of hay from around the poles. We finish it all quickly. We feel like going swimming now. But first we have to pick the nectar-berries. We have no dishes with us! But we do have wrapping paper for our lunch. Mother bends back the edges of the biggest bit of paper so that it begins to resemble a small basket. She spreads her scarf in a crack of the stone and sets the paper basket on top of it. Each picked handful is brought to the basket which is full in no time. We knot the corners of the scarf together, and it is easy to carry it. A new basket is made out of Tuitu's sunhat, which is also lined with the remaining paper. And so we pick on!

The hat is heaped overfull, but it is difficult to carry. We make it easier to carry it by pinching a few berries so it is not so overfull. We bring the berries home happily. We dash off to have a swim and to get rid of sweat and bits of hay. We don't stay in the water for long, because at home berry cleaning and jam making are waiting. We still have a bit of the cone of sugar left from the last ration. We break small bits out of the sugar cone with sugar scissors for the jam kettle. That job belongs to the grown-ups. I am stirring the puree so it won't burn to the bottom of the saucepan. Mother makes sure it is all good. Tellu and Tuitu bring the clean jars and fill them to the very top. Everybody wants to scrape the saucepan clean. The cooled-down treasures are carried to the cellar to wait for our Christmas table.

The pine forest is my forest. The aroma of a dry pine forest on a scorching day invites me to sit on a stump or a mossy stone. If you sit there with your eyes closed, you'll soon begin to hear the thousands of noises of labour which hum and purr, seethe and rustle, chirp and chug, tap and rap as the wind works its drone in the mutilated top of the pine tree. From further away you can hear the never-ending rush of the waves.

An anthill is rising toward the heights; thousands of little creatures are building it. The bees are charming mead from the flowers into their cells. It will be sold soon as far away as Helsinki. The birds are building their elaborate nests and feeding their young who are screaming their hunger. They don't neglect their work. We human children move in the nature with our senses open. We watch, listen, touch, smell and taste. It gives us a feeling of belonging. Nature does not rest, without a pause it pushes up new growth everywhere.

Our baskets are filled with fallen cones. They have already spread their seed in the ground. The open cones are burned for warmth in our fires. In the kitchen stove they bring quick heat for boiling. Every day we carry a few basketfuls to the kitchen. We also keep them for winter. It is easy to collect cones. There are masses of them below the pines; your basket is full in no time. Even a full basket is still light to carry. The problem for us is that there aren't very many treetops left in the nearby forests. The forests further away are not familiar enough. You can't let the children go there. And so we empty the near forests of cones.

The river is essential for our summer happiness in this new home. The old home was near a lake, and on its shores we could swim and play. Behind our new house there is a wide river channel, which narrows and divides between the stones into many separate streams, only to combine after the rapids into a broad backwater before joining the lake. The swimming beach is next to the house, with its shallow sandy beach. Although we don't make sand cakes any more, we do build sand castles and statues, and we swim and learn to jump from the high tower. The diving tower has been restored to its original purpose. The Big Ones show example from the heights, and we smaller ones climb to the first platform to see if we have the courage or not. The Big Ones seem to have fun. They race past us to the higher platforms, jump down and race up to the tower again. Time after time! I stand at the edge and stare at the water. One day I will jump, too! But not yet, not today!

The Big Ones come to the shallows to play water ball with us. We run after the escaped ball, swallow water and splutter. There is no end to our jubilation.

33. From The Blaze of Colours to the Autumn Grey

A new autumn has taken us by surprise. Harvest has been gathered, from the fields as well as from the forest. We had a big crop of grain and root vegetables. We are drying chicory tops in the attic of an abandoned collapsing house next to our cabin. Father is intending to buy the neighbour's war ravaged house and repair it to use as our home. They have already spoken about it, but I don't know how far the negotiations have advanced. We have permission to hang strings in the attic for drying the tops. Each top is inspected, divided into two parts and hung on the string. It is very slow work and demands that the whole family does their share. The tops have to be inspected and turned and their moisture checked several times. The dried tops are supposed to be sold to a tobacco factory. This is a brand new venture for us, and a bit dubious, as we don't use tobacco in our family.

The flax stems are waiting, scutched (beaten) and broken, to be spun. The cows and the sheep are driven again from the fields to the cowshed. The big yearly lingon-berry trip has been done. The cellar is bursting with jam jars and juice bottles. Only potatoes are still in the ground. The house, too, is cleaned from ceiling to floor. Not a bedbug in sight, either! The school can begin.

Ritva is ecstatic. She is embarking on the long journey of schooling, eager and full of expectations. She cannot think yet of all the coming years with their frustrations and sometime tedium. Every new book, starting from ABC-book, is a treasure, although she has been reading for years already. Every classmate is an exciting acquaintance, a potential friend even.

Little Sister is starting on the road to knowledge without the big red ribbon, which mother had promised her to start the school with. Now the times are even more frugal than they were when I started. Even ribbons have been used up during these war years. We march into our respective classrooms without pointless showing off.

For me, the beginning of a new school year is a disappointment which I find hard to swallow. I was supposed to go to high-school in Viipuri. The times are troubled; the world war is taking a new turn. It is feared that the situation is getting worse in Finland as well. Mother and

father are hesitant about sending me in a train to the big city, which is bombed time and time again. I am indeed a year younger than other starters. There are several high-schools in Viipuri, even one where you start after six years of primary. That high-school graduates you in six years instead of the normal eight or even nine years in the all girls' school. For this school I have to continue going to primary school for another two years. Only then could I start high-school, provided that I passed the entrance exam, of course.

I am annoyed and disappointed. I had expected to have a big change in my life as I went to the school in Viipuri. Dragging my feet I march to the fifth grade classroom, just behind the wall from my bed. For a while I sulk in my seat without taking any part in the lesson. The teacher pays no notice to me. After a few days I realise that all my manoeuvring is just useless clowning about, and I give in to being a fifth form primary student. Soon I realise that it isn't bad, actually. I have no need to get up at an insane hour and run to the station after Tellu and Vänni through the autumn rain and wind. I don't need to drag a heavy schoolbag with its books and lunch all day long. I don't need to worry about a pen or eraser forgotten on the sideboard although I had made sure I had them ready. That would be worth detention if the teachers notice. I let go of my disappointment when I realize the many benefits of the situation. Humbly, though with a grimace, I admit that I also wanted a change in status from little girls to big girls. But I am still the bigger of the little girls, anyway.

The many-coloured splendour of early autumn gives way to a greyness only occasionally interrupted by the low rays of sunshine. We have a potato harvesting holiday from school. Buckets, hoes, forks, bags (with patch upon patch) are thrown into the carriage and off we go to the potato field. A whole bucket of soup is taken for a meal. The day will be long. The days will be long.

In the field we each start at the end of a row of potatoes with our hoe and bucket. Two or three are sharing a basket for small potatoes. As you pull the stem up, it already brings to the surface most of the yield. As you carefully hoe around in the resulting hole you realise that the biggest and most spotless ones are in the bottom of the pit. When you go really deep, your hoe might split a hidden one. What a pity, it was the biggest! Without mercy it is thrown amongst the small fry.

Tellu is powering through her row and we squabble about where the basket should be. Rönty-Iivari comes last, I am in the middle. All potatoes have to land in the basket, or at least very near it. Tellu promises to help Ritva, and that makes us more equal. We start again from the same level. Our buckets fill up quickly. They get emptied into big sacks, which are then lifted onto the carriage. We continue in this way until we are called for the soup.

The family is gathering in the old cabin for a meal for the first time in ages. Mother has left the field earlier, poured the soup into an old saucepan and heated it up. It tastes great with a bit of bread, although it only has various vegetables. We are tired. Tellu pretends to sleep and Vänni commands us back to work. Of course we have to go on, but a tiniest nap would have been appreciated by the others. Mother stays to wash the tin plates and spoons. Father and Vänni are already marching along the edge of the plot; we girls shuffle along after them. We feel so full and heavy that we have to sing. It always helps. *'This land was tilled by my father, and by my father's father'* is soon heard as far as the cabin. Mother with her beautiful voice and good ear is soon backing us giving strength to our choir.

The work gets slower as the evening advances. Even singing is no help any more. Being bent over is painful for mother's back, and the youngsters don't like it either. Every strike of the hoe has to be considered; evaluation of the potatoes varies, and throws land wide off the basket. Father goes around picking up the biggest ones and tells us to collect the strayed ones. This makes us guess that it will be time to go home very soon. Hope gives us strength to make a last effort, and we have another bucketful.

The men of the family are already lifting sacks into the carriage. There is still room for us to sit on the edges. Polle is neighing in his harness ready to go. What a blessed feeling when we turn towards home! The feet that had been so tired a minute ago are merrily swinging in rhythm with Polle's gate as we dangle them over the edge.

Tomorrow is another day for digging potatoes. So is the day after tomorrow. After that this particular job will be finished. After the rationing service has got its share, mother will take two full buckets aside. They will be used to make potato flour. This is something new for us. The tubers are washed and peeled. Mother shows how you have to carefully remove all the spots. Then the potatoes are chopped and ground

in the meat grinder. A big barrel is half-full with this mash. It is completely covered with water. Mother gives it a stir ever so often.

Curious, we lift the cover sheet and peek in to see what is happening in the barrel. Mother says that when the water is clear, the flour will be ready. One day the water is drained out, and a dense layer of flour lies in the bottom of the barrel. It is dried and placed on the pantry shelf to wait for a baking day or a feast of berry fool. Just think, we have real homemade potato flour, not some substitute for an ersatz!

Mother manages another new and unfamiliar feat. She makes soap. The bit of soap we manage to get from the shop with our ration coupons is really small, if the shop has any at all. It melts away in your hands, however seldom you use it. The bed linen has been boiled in some peculiar lye through the whole war, because soft soap has been unavailable. But the housewives have discovered that they can make their own soft soap out of home ingredients. When farmers have their autumn slaughter, the government inspectors keep an eye that all innards are included in the scrutiny. However, they are not as interested in guts as they are in heart, liver or the lights. They look at it from the point of view of food. If the guts can be kept at home, it is the start of a treasure. A neighbour might have a pile of guts that they do not need right now. A third might have some more. That will be enough material to make some soap. I know only very little of that procedure. It looks and smells so revolting that we kids are spared the labour. It is boiled in the big iron pot in sauna so long that the liquid evaporates and the remainder is almost solid. They mix some materials into the liquid, but I don't know what. These might give the stuff its cleansing properties. The guts are probably the source of the fat that is needed.

When mother deems the mixture ready, she scrapes it out of the pot thoroughly and spreads it out on a big baking dish with high edges. There it will dry hard in a few days. While still fairly soft it is cut into pieces with a big knife. The cuts are re-enforced several times during the drying. The result is pieces of soap just the right size to pick up in your hand, all spread out on the tray, when the mixture has dried sufficiently. The happy maker is rejoicing in her future clean children and laundry, the gut donors get a portion as thanks for their contribution. At home we wonder where mother has learnt to make even soap.

“You can learn all sorts of things in this world, children, remember that! It doesn’t pay to ignore any learning. You never know when you might need that skill.”

Mother sighs and sinks down onto the chair. Mother is sitting without some craftwork in her hands!

Tomorrow we will return to school. Potato holidays are over.

Mother and father have to go to Viipuri. Mother has had a pain in her heart many times already, but usually a few drops of camphor in a bit of sugar has taken care of it. Now they have to go to see a doctor. Today the school day is short, even father gets out at midday. Mother is wearing a nice dress. She is wearing a gold brooch made out of the graduation badges, or ‘lyres’ of the children. So far she has four of them. When Tellu graduates next spring, mother will get a new part for her brooch. What a splendid row she will have sometime in the future when even Ritva has graduated from school. Mother looks like a stylish woman, even though she is quite sturdy, and her hair is knotted in the back of her head. She has to wait for father who is still tying his shoelaces. He promises to run after her. Now he just has to find his spectacles. Father runs to catch up with mother. The train is already whistling to the station. Ritva and I stay home by ourselves. Mother has brought two spinning wheels into the kitchen, as well as a basket full of flax and another of wool, to stop us from getting bored. There is also readymade food in the pantry.

Mother’s attacks of pain make us worry. She might be seriously ill. She has so many worries. We must make her happy! But how? What would give her most joy? After a long while of thinking, we decide to clean the house. Out with the rugs, beat them and shake them, let them air while we get on with the rest. The same treatment is given to the bed linen, as well as other textiles. But the paper ones we just shake and bring into the dry veranda to wait for being taken in again. Of course we can’t take out the paper curtains, but we dust them to the best of our ability. We sweep the floors and wash them with a scrubbing brush, no less, especially the kitchen floor. Who has tramped the muck into it so firmly! The whole entrance seems to be the same. Scrubbing the floors is heavy work. No wonder mother sighs as she is doing it.

We haven’t done the dishes yet, and sister is already badgering me for food. No way have we got time to eat. Wash up quickly! It is late

already. It is raining outside! Bring the bedclothes in quickly, rugs, too. We'll take them to the veranda out of the rain! It is panic stations. We laugh hysterically in our wet clothes as we collapse on the kitchen bench. We have undertaken too big a job for the little time we have. We still have to dust before we make the beds. Then set the tablecloths and little knickknacks in their place. We spread out the rugs last. The paper ones feel damp, but they will dry quickly.

The rain has stopped, we can go and collect some colourful autumn leaves for the vases. There are even some late flowers in the garden. We make a beautiful arrangement for the tables in the living room, dining room and kitchen. Sister threatens that she is not doing another thing as she is completely whacked. I remind her about the spinning. The cupboard shelves are left out of the operation by mutual consent, although they were part of the original plan.

After a short period of persuasion we both sit down with the carders and try to do what we have been shown. It is not the first time for either of us, but it still feels very difficult. The wool refuses to conform to any regular shape, but the thread will only run evenly from an even bundle. Sister has an easier time with the linen. She is already spinning thread onto the spool. That is, if you can call it thread. I am still turning the carders this way and that trying to find the right shape. Finally I take hold of the wool gently and pull it in my fingers twisting it into thread. I attach it carefully to the spool and start pedalling. The thread keeps breaking all the time, but eventually I manage to repair it. I notice that I am producing thread all right, but the quality of it does not delight. Here is a thin piece followed by several thick clumps.

My small carded piece of fluff is finished in a thrice. I have forgotten mother's advice that you should card a basketful before you start spinning. That way you have something to use as you spin. Off with the spinning wheel and start carding again! My hands are tender from all the scrubbing and other cleaning. Sister is singing away happily as she is transforming her basket of flax into very lumpy thread through her unruly fingers. We sing all the funniest nonsense songs we know, such as *'Ellillillii ellin nova, runtiini, runtiini pom'* and *'Sing sing saana elikulipaana, tekeliki konifara putsan hai' ...*

We can hear the whistle of the train and we fly to the yard. Mother and father are coming through the small thicket. Wonder what they will say? This is the moment we have been waiting for, the moment we

thought about as we were making everything topsy-turvy and back together again, albeit tidy and clean. And we even had spun some thread! What will they say?

The parents are tired from the journey. They take off their coats in the entrance and slump at the kitchen table. Mother starts making coffee substitute and notices that the range is clean and the dishes washed and in the cupboard.

“Why don’t you go and sit down, mother. You got tired in the city. We’ll make the ersatz. Shall we prepare some bread as well?”

“Make small sandwiches. And you have some as well, with milk or juice. Where did that father go now?”

“He is listening to the radio in the lounge. Father!!! Come and have ersatz!”

Next thing is mother, too, rushes to the radio muttering about more frequent bombing raids they have had again all over Finland. Sister and I stay whispering in the kitchen. “They say that the front has collapsed in East-Karelia. Our troops have to retreat” I whisper into sister’s ear.

“Will the enemy come here again as well?” Ritva squeals. “We can’t know what will happen. But it is horrible to think about. We are such a small nation! They are coming from the lounge now. What did they say in the radio?”

“That the advance has been stopped and the former positions regained. At least for the time being.” father informs us and holds out his cup for the ersatz. “They are going through a new phase now, I reckon the soldiers won’t be doing any more craft work for a while.”

“If only we could have peace and the boys home alive”, mother sighs. Only when they have finished their coffee does mother look around. She notices that the floor, the beds, the tables, the tops of cupboards, they all are tidy and fresh looking. She claps her hands together and says:

“My, what a job the daughters have done. The whole kit and caboodle are clean and tidy. Thank you so much! I am so happy! But why is the rug so damp? Did it rain when you took the rugs out to air?”

We talk over each other as we explain about how the rain started quietly, and accelerated rapidly, so we didn’t notice it at first. Mother

comments that the carpet will dry by tomorrow if we set some logs under it so it is up from the floor. We do so, and put a warning sign on it. Meanwhile mother has examined the results of our spinning and is heard laughing in the kitchen. So that's how it is!

“How did you have time to do even this? This is real thread, though a bit lumpy. You must practise a bit more. But I can't get over the fact that you tried to do everything. That makes me as happy as a finch.”

Mother lifts us both on her knee. Only now do we dare to ask what the doctor said about mother's attacks. Father, too, comes from the lounge trailing a newspaper in his hand and peeks at us over his glasses.

“What attacks are we talking now?”

“The ones mother is having.”

“My heart is fine. There is something the matter with the heart nerves, but the doctor says it is not dangerous.”

“That's what he said” father confirms.

With relief we start our evening jobs. Mother is showing father the results of our spinning efforts. We hear them chuckling together. The Viipuri scholars arrive home. They ask about mother's health right away. After being assured that all is well they rush for their evening tea and munch their bread, laughing away. They had had all sorts of funny incidents at school. All are eager to tell about what happened to them.

We all chuckle together. We are feeling so happy! We have a tidy home, the evening is cloudy and peaceful, as the bombers don't come on a cloudy night; we are all healthy in our family, nothing upsetting is heard from the front, either. Big brothers wrote from *Somewhere There*, and Tellu had greetings from Lotta Kylli and Lotta Tuitu.

“Let's pray together that life will stay this peaceful in the future, too” I whisper to sister's half of the bed. It creaks a bit. Sister has travelled to Sandman's island. I would like to do so, too, but restless thoughts are bubbling up. In the dark of the night I have to fight an evasive battle. The Sandman finally carries the exhausted battler to the Feather-Island. There is a big field of flowers and a never-ending sandy beach. Big trees sigh gently and swallows fly from bough to bough. The buzz of grasshoppers and the drone of bees accompany the hovering of

colourful butterflies around me. The place is beginning to seem familiar.
Is this Hyrmä? That's what it must be!

34. Family Visit

The autumn is totally grey in the end. When the multihued leaves fall from trees and bushes, there is nothing left but naked melancholy. And in our forests even the naked trunks are few and far between. There are quite a lot bushes already. They will grow into new trees eventually, over the years.

The autumn jobs are completed; it is the season for inside industry. We live a quiet life, in the world of school, everyday chores at home, handcrafts and books. We get more than enough excitement from the radio news from the front. Things are not good there, for father is often shaking his head whilst listening to the reports. And mother sighs after whispering with father, and clutches her chest.

One such day a letter comes from father's sister and her husband from their village, which is towards Imatra from us. They are having an autumn get-together, and they are inviting us along as well. Mother is enthusiastic at first, but soon starts to fret about the difficulties with the journey and all the arrangements they will have to make. We are talking here about a trip of at least two days. Who is going to act as father's replacement on Saturday; will the children get leave from school; and who is going to look after the cows and the cats and the dog?

Father undertakes to explore the possibilities, he is clearly eager to see his relatives and find out how the rebuilding of his home village is progressing. Everything falls into place. Right after the school is out on Friday we catch the train, trundle along for a while and get out in Antrea. From there we go on in a bus to Vuoksenranta. There the host is already waiting for the party guests. All of us fit in his carriage. A handsome, shiny horse, the pride of the manor, runs with even pacing along the meandering village road.

Father is commenting enthusiastically on the familiar scenery and houses, or the lack of them, as the case may be. He knows every house and its inhabitants except for those born during the war, in foreign parts. He asks about his acquaintances that have died, had babies or been killed at the front. Uncle answers evenly, with no hurry, as is his wont.

And "whoa, steed, whoa!" We have arrived, the horse turns through the gate and stops in front of the main door. The wheels squeak and grit scratches their surface. We jump down almost before we have

stopped and wait for mother and father to step down in a stately manner. Auntie Anna hugs us, but uncle just pats us on our shoulder. And we girls of course curtsy, the best we know how. Two boy cousins also come to greet us. The older is a skinny boy of Vänni's age, the younger big and clumsier. The boys disappear somewhere right away. Ritva and I follow the grown-ups as uncle shows us the yard and the repaired farm buildings, and as we move on inside.

All the rooms have been decorated for the party. Father is interested to know if the house stays warm in the freezing days. So many houses that were barely standing were condemned to be torn down after people moved back. But even auntie had been warm enough in the winter.

We are invited to come and eat. The table is overflowing with food even though it is not even the party day yet. It all tastes splendid. After the meal sister and I look through the book-case for something to read and crouch down in the corner of the sofa. Tellu seems to be asking for news about the cousins. That's completely unnecessary, as she will be seeing them all tomorrow.

We don't feel like reading, as there is not a girly book in the whole house. Cushions make the sofa so soft that we can't help but fall asleep. It is very embarrassing as we have come a long way to see the relatives. But we can't help it!

In the morning we wake up between linen-white sheets in a strange place. For a while I have to ponder where we are. Auntie comes to invite us for breakfast. The room has to be tidied up for the day as well; the whole house will be full of visitors.

There are a lot of hostesses now, the party hostess with her helpers. We'd better escape outside or at least to the back room. The house is full of earnest industry, especially in the kitchen. More folks are arriving in the yard. The host hastens to welcome them. There is hugging and patting each other.

Our family gets a special welcome from everybody, as we haven't visited father's village of origin yet after the evacuation. I can't remember who is who. I think I know who father's sisters are, but their husbands are all mixed up in my head. There are cousins galore in every house around here. I try to keep them straight in my head as I curtsy every which way.

The whole big family becomes a new and different entity in my head. I am one of them. They are all part of me, and I am part of them. Gee, it would be splendid to live here amongst the relatives. They'd all be well known to me, I wouldn't feel so shy. Tellu came here to stay with grandmother as a child many times before the war. She is laughing and carrying on with the cousins so easily that I am full of envy.

I only remember a few things about granny's place, like the veranda and the long summer rugs in the living room. I do remember this Uncle Juho and his wife Auntie Aini, and I remember the children. I think I might even remember granny, as she visited us quite often. She sat in the veranda by a table and knitted socks. Granny and grandpa had already died before the war. I don't think I remember anything else about this auntie's house except the people, Auntie Anna and Uncle Taavi and the boys Tatu and Anssi. They talk about other aunties' families at home quite often, so I do recognise their names. Now Uncle is clearing his throat to indicate that we are ready to start and Auntie Anna is asking everybody to sit down.

We move to the festive table. The house is full of merry chitchat, and folk are trading news. We spread out to every room with our plates. Party food, including roast and pastries, is flowing in spite of the war and the scarcity. And there are *pulla* rounds the size of an oven tray on offer with ersatz coffee. Sister and I make gluttons of ourselves and Tellu looks daggers at us. We go out to play in the wind.

After farewelling auntie Anna's family we drive to granny's place, where father's brother now lives with his family. The house seems familiar with its veranda and living room rugs. I begin to jump from stripe to stripe along the rug again, through the great hall. But my memory is of the summery sisal rugs that I had been jumping along before the war. They don't exist anymore, Auntie Anna says and sighs.

We go outside to see what familiar things we could find there. We go and visit the cows, the pigs, the chickens and the sheep, as well as the horses in their stables. Afterwards we run down the garden to the creek, which is almost filled with the handsome leaves of yellow and white waterlilies. We take off our shoes and socks and wade in to see if we can find fish fry in the creek.

We didn't. Our feet are cold, the autumn water is icy. We rush back to the house with shoes and socks under our arms. We get dressed

in the windless veranda and step in tidy. But our teeth are clattering and our hands are stiff with cold. Mother has already been worried as she noticed that we had disappeared. They have made our beds already. “Now for a nightcap and into bed!” auntie commands.

We do get permission to read for a while in bed at least. We read for a long time and fall asleep with a book over our face, as the grownups have forgotten us while they talk about the world situation!

After breakfast uncle takes us to see Auntie Aina and Uncle Tuomas. There, too, we get excellent food, and they, too, have books. Cousin Aira is the same age as Tellu. Right after washing up those two retire into the bedroom to whisper about their business.

As we are leaving, we go around the yard and are told what sheds had to be repaired and what had been lost outright. Then uncle takes us to the next house. Auntie Hilja and Uncle Toivo are also on a farm a few kilometres from granny’s house. Auntie Hilja is slim and looks sweet, Uncle Toivo skinny and very tall. Here they give us lunch and ersatz coffee and juice. Again we go through the buildings both inside and out with their damage and their repairs. They are happy that it has been warm enough even on the cold winter nights. There are a few cousins here, but the girls Sirkka and Salme are older than me, Tellu’s age again. Seppo is just a bit older than me.

It is time for us to leave for home. Uncle Toivo takes us all the way to Antrea in his carriage, and from there we can go on in a train. During the drive father asks uncle all sorts of things about horses. All the men in the parish are horsemen and proud of their horses. They have even won competitions. The horses here are indeed shiny and well groomed. They look really noble in my eyes. We have plenty of time to catch the train. Home awaits the satisfied travellers.

Tomorrow we have school. I wonder about the homework. Snores.

In our thoughts we often return to Vuoksenranta, father’s home village. As a young farmer he left home to go to a teachers’ seminary in Jyväskylä. Father talks about his family and his home village often. The big brothers and sisters have visited there many times and they have happy memories to share with us.

35. Logging Bee

Every day a great amount of firewood is needed to heat the stoves in the bedrooms and the living room. Same with the kitchen stove. Splitting the firewood is usually Vänni's job. I then take them in with Ränty-Iivari. This is what we have been doing since the time we were evacuees. The big wooden sleigh is heaped with logs and bound from front to back with string. We struggle in the snowdrifts and push the load in front of the kitchen steps. Fill your arms, up the stairs and start from the back room, two armfuls for every stove. A new load is needed for the kitchen. Vänni is still chopping away when we go for more. I would like to try as well, but Vänni just laughs.

“You, chopping! Listen, you, this is men's work, and dangerous at that. If you slip, you can cut into your foot or even hand. If you don't hit the right spot the whole axe and log can go whichever way.”

“And you can get a splinter in your eye and go blind” sister adds. “You are just kidding, and want to scare me. You haven't had any accidents.”

“Well, I am a man and I know this job. I know exactly how and where I have to hit this piece. Just watch! It divided in two perfectly. That's what I call a skill!”

“And I am going to learn that skill”, I promise myself.

The next few days I slink into the woodshed after school. I begin with caution. The log just turns over with my feeble blow. Gradually I get better, but I am not telling anybody my secret.

Today they have a logging bee again. In the logging bee every grown-up and even every over 15 year old has to take part, the government has decreed so. Even many younger children feel that they are duty bound to participate. The country is short of firewood. They need big stores of it in the cities. Electricity is only available for a few hours every day; oil cannot be wasted for civilian purposes. Even cars use wood to run, logs are piled into the firebox in the middle of a journey, at least before every hill. Because all able-bodied men are at the front, women, the elderly and the children make the log stacks as well. Even all city folk are obliged to work and so make log stacks. I have a desire to do my share as well. At least one log stack.

The villagers gather in the forested plot designated for the purpose. Everybody is bringing a saw or an axe. The leader of the group explains what kind of trees are to be felled and how. He fells one for an example. In this area there are a lot of broken trunks standing. They get felled first. The cross-cut saw needs two grown-ups to use it. One person alone can only saw through thin trunks. They are a job for the youngest.

I try to saw through a standing trunk of a broken tree as I am lying down on the ground. It is a sweaty job although the autumn is chilly and wet. It is easier to get the tree down using an axe, if only you make sure it goes down in the right direction. Next you lop off the branches and saw the trunk into one meter lengths. You choose an even base for your log stack, set sturdy poles to mark the two opposite sides, and lay down the first row. By then you need to fell another tree. It is a matter of honour that you cut down the trees yourself, although I must admit that other people help me a little. Partly it is because you are not allowed to fell a small tree unless it is right next to another, or badly damaged.

Gradually I collect even quite thick bits of trunk to be sawn through. The stack starts to grow speedily when you have sawn through even a few of these monsters. This has to be the heaviest work I have ever done. I can't do it anymore, I just can't!

Somebody throws few more logs on top of my stack and it gains the right measurements. It has to be one hundred by one hundred centimetres. I look at my handiwork with admiration. There are of course other girls with equally magnificent stacks, but I believe they are older than me. Later I get a small axe pin for my lapel as a reminder of my first logging bee.

We make many more log stacks both together and separately through that long winter. During the school breaks father and the Viipuri scholars Tellu and Vänni join in. Wading through the snow in worn-out felt boots is a cold task. Your mittens get soaking wet immediately though you might wear several pairs together. Leather gloves are too stiff to handle the small trunks and branches, or saws. But somehow we have to manage. I help where I can, but I don't dream of my own stack any more. Now I have time to follow the squirrels flitting from branch to branch and try to guess what bird has left its footprints in the pristine snow. Really, I am only ten years old. My conscience doesn't prick me anymore when I quit, beaten by the wet and the cold. Father gives me permission. I *am* only ten.

I run home weaving on my stiff legs. Mother exclaims about my dampness and demands that I change into something dry and warm. She rubs my skin with a rough linen towel and drowns me in woollen clothes. Finally mother wraps me in an old blanket.

Even Ritva comes from her reading corner with a book in hand to witness the pampering of the hero of industry. Mother boils tea for us and gives us honey on a rusk. I want to lie down on the trundle bed and ask sister to read to me. Mother comes to check my forehead several times. Sister looks at me and starts singing '*Baby bear is sick, we must cherish him, anoint him with unguents, our friend Teddy*' I join the singing and the laughter when we get to sing '*Let us give him a warm milky rusk, and we will have our poor friend feeling good by Christmas*'. I feel happy. I don't feel that I was a traitor to my country by leaving the others at work. It is wonderful to be ten!

36. 'Christmas Is Here, Christmas Is Here, Dishes Are Full of Porridge', 1943

Antti will yield perch, Pekka small fishes. (An old Finnish proverb) From Antti's name day the autumn fishing starts, and so does the time of advent. Fresh perch and salted herring are important winter food. We, too, have a wooden tub full of Baltic herring waiting for the frosty days of winter. *Liisa's slips* (the icy, slippery ground around Liisa's name day) are indeed predicting a hard winter.

At advent time we prepare for Christmas. Sunday services are listened to faithfully, even more so than usually. While the service is on, we can't do anything, just sit still. If sister and I try to whisper to each other, we get silenced just by a look. We like singing the hymns, especially the advent hymn. Hosanna sounds so magnificent.

After the service mother makes dinner and we help her set the table. Tellu stirs the barley porridge. When all is eaten and dishes washed, we are free to sit still and read. We are not allowed to make any noise. We are to go outside to get some fresh air, but no rambunctious play is allowed. The Holy days are for resting. Therefore we creep around looking for paratroopers only in our own yard. We consider that very peaceful, as we don't want to come across a paratrooper, and he probably doesn't want to come across us.

Inside, mother and Tellu are making supper, and we get to set the table again. Afterwards, Tellu washes up and the rest of us dry up, even Vänni. We move to the living room to sing the first songs of this Christmas. A teardrop escapes mother's eye. The third Christmas without Vella is upon us.

Christmas cannot happen without haste; after all, it is the high point of the year. We clean up, we bake, we prepare presents. During the war Santa's elves make so many presents for the soldiers at the front that we have to make them for each other. And for the unknown soldier that the elves might miss. Our own brothers will get a parcel as well, with its socks, mittens and Christmas goodies.

Kylli and Tuitu will probably get leave for Christmas. When the parcels for the front are ready and sent, it is time to finish off the parcels for the folks at home. Socks, felt boots and beanies as well, usually;

maybe a book for luxury. The last touches have to be left for the evening, because it is high time to start the big Christmas clean-up.

At Christmas the house has to be clean. Whether rich or poor, every house gets a thorough cleaning. We start with the windows. The old paper curtains are shaken and wrapped up carefully and put in a cupboard. We then wipe the ceiling and the walls with a fir broom. The windows get a vigorous cleansing with soft soap both inside and outside, but not in between the panes, as the inside pane is there only for the winter, and it is firmly attached with white adhesive tape. Each room, however, has one window without the masking tape, to allow for airing. In between the window panes there is a beautiful white roll of cottonwool, and on top of that, a twig of rowan with its bright red shining berries, placed there in the autumn. The branches and berries are a bit dried out, but still beautiful on their cottonwool snow. Of course it is not real cottonwool, now, just ersatz out of cellulose!

Organising the cupboards and the shelves is no fun, although sometimes you get rewarded by finding an item you have lost long ago. All clothes are taken outside to air, the dirty ones of course to the sauna to wait for the big Christmas wash-up tomorrow.

Before the war it was a huge job to clean and polish the silver cutlery to gleam at the Christmas table and to soak the glass dangles of the chandelier to shine like crystal. But then the servant did it; now there are no silver cutlery, no servants, and no chandelier either, I think. Now the silver has been melted for better uses and the servants gone to the front as lottas, and the chandeliers have burnt to cinders. And we are now big girls and able to help mother. Even Rönty-Iivari is bringing her clothes back to the cupboard already. I wonder if she has washed the corners thoroughly. But she was sweeping with the fir branch just now; at least she had one in her hand. I wonder if I should go and snoop for spider webs in the corners.

When all things have been returned to their places, we won't have to traipse in and out of the rooms any more. Now we can wash the floors, the worst spots with lots of elbow grease. While the floors are drying, we have a quick snack in the kitchen. Mother explains the order of jobs.

“Ritva and Inker can still tidy the kitchen cupboards today. I need Tellu at the sauna as we have to get the laundry to soak overnight. We will start washing and boiling the laundry early tomorrow. The girls can

sleep a bit longer. But I need you all for the rinsing. Father and Vänni can carry all the water needed for it before they go to the forest.”

“And what time would your early be?” Tellu sighs.

“Around 4 or 5. Don’t worry, I will wake you. That way we will have the afternoon to clean the kitchen and the pantry.”

“But it’s still two days till Christmas Eve!”

“We still have to clean the kitchen and the porch after baking, and do a big wash-up. Not to mention the Christmas decorations! And the Christmas curtains are not up yet. They are still in the top cupboard in the living room. Take them down carefully right now and check how badly creased they are. I am sure Vänni will help you when he comes in from his outside jobs. It seems to be snowing *granny’s slippers*. Luckily we don’t have to fear bombers as the weather is bad for flying.”

We follow mother’s plan for the next two days. Everything necessary gets done. The laundry is drying half frozen on the lines in the attic, warm bread and cake spread their aroma, the kitchen is squeaky clean, and a fresh forest aroma spreads from the tree. The windows are adorned by the old crepe-paper curtains with rucked-up edges that could not be refreshed any more. The black-out blinds are pulled down as soon as the first flame is lit. Tables are covered in paper Christmas cloths, so is the linen press. There are fir branches and straw decorations in a vase, as well as in the big fir tree in the living room.

The Christmas sauna has been heating up for hours already. Father has tested the stones and everything is ready for the bathers. The big cauldron that was boiling our laundry just a while ago is now steaming with clean water, and in the tub the icy-cold offering from the river is sparkling. The bundles of dried birch twigs, revived in hot water, smell of summer. The women, including Kylli and Tuitu by now, are making their way in the afternoon twilight, in the midst of snow drifts, along a narrow path through the yard. There is a feeling of Sanctity. In silence we enjoy sauna, in silence we bathe, in silence we leave. The men take their turn in the sauna.

The carbide lamp creates a small circle of light around the family as we sit down for our repast at the dining table.

The dishes are washed quickly; there are enough of enthusiastic wipers as well. Everybody is in a hurry to get to the living room, where

father is already lighting the fire in the stove. There is one candle in the tree. Father reads the gospel for Christmas, and we sing one Christmas song after another. We have a never-ending supply of them. In between singing we wonder what kind of Christmas the brothers are having at the front. According to the news there haven't been any big attacks, at least so far. We wonder if our parcels got there by Christmas. The post to the front is very unreliable, we know. We pray for the brothers, and for the sons of the whole nation.

Finally we start singing Santa songs. We are getting a bit anxious when we hear no clomping although we are singing already a second time '*Santa is knocking on the door, may he come in*'. Where is Santa? Have there been bombs in his way, maybe Santa has even been taken prisoner? I am a bit puzzled. Father is in the living room stirring the ambers in the stove. I know that father has been Santa before. When it became clear to me after many Christmases of doubt, my whole world seemed to crumble. The problem was not that I had been lied to, but that the real Santa did not exist. And neither did the elves that made presents in Korvatunturi. I accepted it gradually. But that enormous excitement which accompanied Santa's knocking on the door and stepping in has never disappeared. Even now I am shaking with excitement.

We can hear the bells jingling, we hear voices, steps. Now there is a knock on the door. In comes Santa dressed in an inside-out greatcoat, back first. He is dragging a heavy sack over the threshold. At the same time he is singing in a broken voice '*Santa is knocking on the door. May he come in?*' And we answer in full voice: '*Welcome, Santa, to celebrate Christmas with us!*' Santa turns around. Our eyes are glued to his face. Gas mask! Santa is wearing a gas mask! Is it so dangerous travelling from Korvatunturi to this far south?

A gasmask is familiar to us all, although ours here, far from the front, is not as elegant as his. During the winter war even all the children had a bag made out of gauze hanging around their neck. It was filled with charcoal and we had to have it with us all the time when outside. At that time they were scared of gas warfare. Recently that scare has evaporated with the international agreements. We have even seen a mask as elegant as that one and learned how to use it in the *Little Lottas*. But why in the world is Santa hiding his red cheeks and gentle demeanour under that horrible mask?

Santa is telling about the many dangers of the trip. One has to be prepared for everything. The Big Ones are talking to him quite readily, but I am not daring to go near him. But Ritva has noticed something interesting, and is pushing next to Santa to investigate. Everyone gets their present, thanks are expressed to everybody and we sing farewell to Santa. The jingle bells are heard again, Santa is leaving the yard. We open our parcels and admire new mittens, scarves or socks, the same colour as our old woollen jumper. We continue singing, at least the songs: *'Mother has prepared the feast'*, *'When there is snow on the ground and ice in the lakes'*, *'Sparrow's Christmas'*, *'Let your everyday worries go'*, *'Silent night, Holy night'* and *'The Earth is so beautiful'* definitely belong to the Christmas Eve.

After the evening tea the Big Ones spend a while telling legends in front of the ambers. Amongst others about how baby Jesus blew at the clay birds made by the children, and how they flew. I am sure Vella is right here with us!

When we are finally lying side by side on our trundle beds on our new paper sheets, Little Sister declares:

“It was Tuitu!”

“Don't be daft!”

“It was so!”

“How do you know?”

“Tuitu was not in the living room when Santa was there!”

“You couldn't tell; it was so dark!”

“Oh yes, you could, if you knew to look! And that Santa had Tuitu's felt boots. I went right near and I even saw the patches.”

“Don't you believe in real Santa anymore? When did you start doubting? And you never said a word!”

“Ages ago!”

We girls giggled inside our covers so much that our bed squeaked. A head appeared at our door and commanded us to sleep, pronto.

We wake up in the dark on Christmas morning, as Kylli touches our arms and whispers for us to get up. The Christmas service is starting

in the radio. It is five o'clock and the stove has been lit already. When you open the stove door a bit, you can see to get up. Wrapped up in our blankets we tiptoe near the radio to listen to the message of Christmas. Gradually the relaxing heat from the stoves reaches us. We get drowsier and drowsier and drowsier and wake up just as we are about to fall off the chair. Singing the hymns with the others makes you wake up for a while.

We always follow the same plan of action on a Christmas day. We warm up the ready-made casseroles, we wash the dishes, and we walk outside for a while. Grown-ups drink ersatz, kids drink milk with Christmas goodies. Otherwise we stay quiet and sing carols. You can even try to read if you can see well enough in the glow of the stove.

On Boxing Day, which we call St Steven's day, we have visitors who ask if Steven is at home. When we say yes, they settle in. We can also go to the neighbours and try to entice the children out to play. Now we are allowed to laugh and even go on a bit of a rampage. Eagerly we make snow balls and build ramps. After dinner we sing again and play all together, even the Big Ones. It is so much fun that I can feel it right inside, the feeling of Christmas, the smell of Christmas, the warmth of Christmas in the middle of the cold outside. Soon the candle of this Christmas is extinguished.

The frost is getting fiercer the following week. At New Year it is freezing cold. Even the small birds look frozen; they hardly have strength to fly to their food. We ski downhill and it is full on. We get sweaty. We have to run home in a hurry so we won't catch a cold. Inside we plan magic for New Year. In the early hours of the night we intend to find out what the New Year is bringing with it. Objects are hidden under cups; with the help of a mirror and a candle we peek into the future and do other such New Year's magic. But of course it is only make-believe. Luckily we don't know yet what will really happen in this year of continuing war. The secret whisperings of the Big Ones with mother and father suggest that something is badly amiss. We, too, have understood that the front is yielding in East Karelia. What will it mean for Finland? What will it mean for us?

At Epiphany, Christmas is packed away. Everyday life is waiting behind the door.

37. Ox Weeks

The old people called the time after Christmas Ox weeks. People suffered as their food stores dwindled. They had a yoke on their back just like the oxen did. At the end of January, by Heikki's name day, you had to have half of your produce still intact if you wanted to live till the next harvest. Now, in the middle of the war, the teachings of the ancestors weighed heavily on the minds of mother and father. From them those teachings dribble down to us as well. You have to eat, but sparingly.

Frost is banging in the corners. Inside, too, it feels cool; your teeth are clattering even when you are washing your eyes. The star bright sky at night means it is good weather for flying. The bombers are flying over us more and more often. If Viipuri is the target, so are we. Dress up, and into the cellar quick march.

One day mother and father get a letter from the war hospital. At once mother cries out:

“Wounded! Which one is wounded? Or is it both of them? Quick, open it!”

“Tanu is in hospital. He has yellow fever.”

“Yellow fever! But it is very dangerous”, sister and I yell.

“It has spread everywhere in the army, and is spreading to the civilians, as well.”

“Does it kill you? Does it make you crippled, like polio?” we keep asking.

“Yellow fever can be cured, if you get into hospital. And Tanu is in hospital now. We can only pray that he will recover.”

“It also says here that he is getting better”, mother rejoices with tears streaming down. “Ever since Ahti was wounded I have been dreading about a pastor coming with a message. Now I have a feeling that we can recover from this sickness. If only they won't get killed.”

“He will come home to recover soon enough, let me tell you.” Father patted mother encouragingly on the shoulder. “Then you can prattle away days on end.”

And Tanu does come home to recover, from *Somewhere There*. His uniform is hanging from his shoulders like there was nothing in there, his cheeks are collapsed and his whole face is a peculiar colour. His eyes are gleaming yellow. Wonder if I dare to look into them. But the voice is the same old voice, just a bit more throaty. He doesn't come near, doesn't give anyone a hug. It might be infectious still. They sent him home so soon, as the hospitals are full. They have given him instructions what to do for it, and some medicine.

He is intending to spend a lot of time outdoors every day, as much as he is able to, and study for his exams. He is going to have another study period after his leave. He will need strength for that, too. While it was quiet at the front, the soldiers were given study leave generously, but as things are hotting up at the front leave is not so easy to get. Tanu has got to hurry with his exams, because they really need every doctor they can get as the war accelerates. Nobody has it easy in the war.

We have a peaceful and pleasant evening sipping our ersatz tea, nevertheless. Big brother has returned home! He is sitting right here, yellow and waxen, laughing and joking with us kids. Of course Väinni is not a kid any more. Steady old *Väinämöinen*, the *eternal seer*, is sitting there like a stone and staring at his brother swallowing every word. There can be no mention of the war, or of where he has been. We hear about the competitions to keep the tidiest dugout, about the craft they engage in, in their free time, about the church services on the front, and about lotta canteens with their *pulla* and ersatz.

Peculiar war, this! Is big brother pulling our leg? But they need war hospitals and flea saunas, anyway! Brother himself was working in a hospital, that's how he got infected. As soon as we are home from school we call out to Tanu. Mother says he has gone out. We pelt after him headlong. Coat buttons open, mittens hanging around our neck (attached to each other by a long piece of string), trying to pull on our reindeer hats as we are running, we rush out to look for him. There he is, by the river!

“Why did you go by yourself? We had agreed that we go together!”

“You might have fallen as you have no strength! You might have fallen into the river and got wet.”

“And you might have died then and there with your illness!”

“Calm down! I am not going to fall into the river that easily after I have survived at the front. Let’s go in. I have a heap to read yet today.”

“We will take your hand.”

And so we march along, arm in arm, the three of us, home along the wintry avenue. With great gestures we explain to mother how we saved brother from almost falling into the river. Mother looks at us petrified, but when Tanu bursts out laughing, she realises that there was no problem really. Ritva and I laugh as well, although we feel embarrassed.

Gradually our brother’s face changes colour, and his cheeks return to their normal fullness as he regains his strength. The day comes when he is ready to return to Helsinki to continue his studies. The day of examinations is getting nearer. Then we get an announcement of his passing the exam. Exam follows exam in a tight schedule, as the war is escalating in the front. When the going gets really tough, they recall the students as well.

One morning mother commands me to come to the window. She examines my face, tells me to turn this way and that. She thinks that I have been infected, my eyes are clearly yellow. Sister’s eyes have no trace of the illness. When the Viipuri scholars return home, father is there as well to check them over. It is only me who is sick.

Because there is so much of the illness around, they have published instructions in the radio and in the Karjala-newspaper. I get better with time, but I have to be careful for a long time in case of a secondary infection. When I finally get through the quarantine I am itching to get back to school. Studying by myself wasn’t half as fun as in a class. Let alone snowball fights and other adventures in the recess! I was part of the gang again. Sometimes I think they have isolated me for no good reason. After all, Ritva didn’t get sick although we were sleeping side by side before they discovered my illness. Just like it was when I had the diphtheria. But why always me?

38. Late Winter Sun and Dripping Gutters

What a dazzling morning! The sun rays have been flooding into the room through my closed lids already for a while. For a while in my stupor I wonder where the light comes from. Has somebody ignited the carbide lamp, is there fire in the stove, has a bomb gone off in the yard? Suddenly my eyes are wide open and I rush to the window. The whole white world is bathed in the sun. The snowfields are shining, and they are sparkling with gold. The trees and the bushes are bearing a white coat; even the tall stalks of grass are white with hoarfrost. It must be very cold. Wonder if it is time for the crust?

I shake sister to wake her. She just grunts and turns over. I shake her again and scream that the crust has arrived. Sister gets excited as well and runs to the window. Can it be true! We are in a hurry at breakfast. We want to go out right away to test the crust. Mother checks the thermometer and tells us to wait until it is a bit warmer. We grumble, of course.

Two hours later we are outside covered from head to toe in many layers. Felt boots into ski bindings, and we are off. We hurtle down to the river on the gentle slope. The snow crust is firm and the skis slide like a dream. Life is wonderful and we take it for granted. When we fall over and break the crust, it is fun! When the skis run away and choose their own way, and we wonder with excitement where they will end up, it is fun! We run after the skis, for they must not end up in the river. The river is running free, although the edges are icy. A tank barrier, a bolder at least a metre high – they are all over the yard and the riverside – stops the run-aways, sending them in different directions. We collect the skis and the poles safely at the beach. We get side-tracked to watch the play of the sun on the icicles. What a splendidly varied enchanted world we have!

Vänni has returned from his ski trail and we hear him behind us. He looks like old man Frost himself, combined labour of sweat and frost. Mother had commanded him to come searching for us. She had called to him across the yard when she saw him approaching. “Off to eat with you, quick march!” Vänni says to us and pushes on towards home. And we after him, of course! Anticipating the delights of hot soup has seldom been this intense.

After eating and doing the dishes we are ready for the crusty snow again. Grab some paper bags, and off to the top of the hill. The slope better be steep if one wants to fly down it. Luckily we have just such a small escarpment in the yard. We fall over, we climb up again; we fall over again and climb up again. There is snow everywhere, inside the scarf, in the mittens, in the felt boots that have lost their laces long ago; even our pant pockets are full of snow. And sweat is making rivulets down the red apples of our cheeks. Is there anything more blissful! And just then we are commanded to go in.

We stomp our boots to shake the worst of the snow off in the yard, and climb up to the veranda under the long icicles. We cannot but admire these crystal crowns under the gutter. They are getting longer every day. Soon we have to break them before they get to be a danger. "Not yet, mother!" we implore, miserable, when we see mother advancing waving a broom handle. She snorts and strikes down a few icicles to make a safe entrance for us. She looks at us and smiles. There are plenty of crystals left.

There is a warning in the news about the bright starry night. That's when the bombers fly from the east. They have been in a hurry lately. Every night they fly to Kotka, Helsinki, Viipuri, or other places in Finland. Right near us there is an important railroad station and a rail yard with its loading platforms. On the other side there is a railroad bridge and also a road bridge over the river. Other attractions for the bombers! We drink evening tea and eat bread and rusks. The family is sluggish and quiet. Another long night in the cellar! Quietly mother pours tea into bottles, and drops the bottles into woollen socks. Tellu wraps pastries in a paper dishcloth. Our basket is soon full. Add a candle and matches. And then we wait.

We try to talk, but the words stick in our throats. Father tries to give Ritva a ride on his leg '*Hoppity hoppity*', but Ritva slides down and cuddles her doll. Mother starts a beautiful evening song, and gradually others join in the singing. For a little while we forget why we are here, waiting. The screech of the bomb alert kills our song. We have to run to the cellar. Everybody has their outdoor clothing ready next to them. A few blankets as well to keep us warm. It is very cold in the earth cellar.

We squeeze into the narrow entrance way and on into the actual cellar. Around the walls there are rows and rows of juice bottles and jam jars on their shelves. The salted mushrooms are in a small wooden tub.

Down on the floor the potatoes, carrots, beetroots and swedes are in their big wooden bins. In the middle there is a narrow space, and in this space a wooden plank has been installed resting on blocks of wood. There we can take turns sitting. Rönty-livari is sometimes lifted onto a shelf, if there is room.

We always speak in whispers here. As if they could hear in the planes that we are here. That thought makes you want to laugh. But you can't even think of laughing, not here, not even accidentally. And really, it doesn't make you want to laugh, it makes you scared. Awfully scared! But you can't show it to Little Sister. She has to stay calm. She is sitting on the bench in father's lap. I sit down on the other side, next to mother, and lean on her. Vänni is standing next to me, very serious. Tellu is moving jam jars, back and forth. Now the planes are right above us, it is now that a bomb will strike, if it is going to! The rumble is horrendous, tens of planes, I think. Then we hear a mighty bang and a crunch. A new explosion immediately! Sister screams. We all press tightly into mother and father.

Mother starts to pray, and we join her: "Please, dear God, help us! Save us from being killed in this hole!" The voices go quiet.

"They went towards Viipuri. They are bombing Viipuri, those muffled thumps come from there", father croaks.

"They are coming back already. If they still have some bombs left they will try the rail yard and the bridges again."

And there they come with a deafening thunder. Again we grab each other. The heart jumps in the throat, it is difficult to swallow. We all share the dread. What is it like to die? I might know soon! Wonder how we will break? How long will it take to die? Every time there is a blast we scream with fright. When it is quiet we gasp, not being able to breathe.

When all is quiet, we sit still for a long time. We stretch our limbs, blow our noses and whisper to each other. As if we weren't raised from the dead. When the siren announces that the danger is over, we rush out into the cold. The moon is making the snow shimmer; snow-covered bushes create a play of shadows in the frosty night. But there is a smell of fire in the air. Something is burning. Somewhere they have reached their goal. But not here, not yet!

We empty the food basket onto the kitchen table. We had completely forgotten about it. The tea is poured back into the saucepan to be reheated. In spite of the woolly socks, it is regrettably lukewarm by now. The pastries, too, are reheated. We have to get something warm inside us right now. A pretty silent breakfast before going to bed! In bed we tremble with both cold and fright. Mother comes and lights a fire in the stove, sits by the bed for a while and strokes our head. The worries evaporate with sleep.

That late winter we have several sharp bright frosty nights; these are the times when the planes fly frequently. You never get inured to sitting in the cellar. It remains a place of extreme terror.

From Little Sister:

Although I have only a very vague memory of the bomb shelter, it left its mark on my psyche. I still react to sudden loud noises and confined spaces. Watching fireworks can be a painful experience to me, especially from close by.

39. Peculiar Changes

One day there is no more school in this schoolhouse. The army needs the building for its own use. The school committee has to find new rooms in the village in a hurry. It seems impossible, as there aren't big enough rooms anywhere. They go and investigate all possible and impossible rooms, but always come back disappointed. And the army is threatening to invade our school soon. Finally the committee accepts the offer of the stables of an estate. There aren't many horses left, as they have been taken to the front. What is left, they can house somewhere else.

The stables are washed down and school desks brought in. It is a warren of all kinds of arches and vaults, the big beams make the ceiling an exciting structure. The walls are made of thick red bricks. All the upper level kids are in the same room, just in different compartments. Unfortunately the new school is a few kilometres from the old one. We have to walk or ski there every morning. We are allowed to keep living in the old school building. The new situation in the stables is quite exciting. The teacher has to capture the attention of the students. Our eyes adventure into the enchanted maze of the roof beams. Or we wonder what kind of steed has lived in this spot, and where it might be now. They say there were tens of them before the winter war. Their smell is still strong with us. Some were famous runners. Our thoughts wandered far from the shape of tree leaves or arithmetic problems. Gradually the mouse families that had been banished with the clean-up, started to come back to their lairs. That caused panics, screams and running out from the classrooms. The wartime children are scared of mice!

Sister's lower school is now held in a different place. It is nearer home. The first part of her journey is the same as mine, but we seldom walk together, because her day generally starts later and finishes earlier. It is a scary trip, as the paratroopers are around again, at least in the talk of the scholars.

One day there is no sister coming home after school. We start getting worried. Maybe we should go to meet her. Maybe something has happened. School is over ages ago. We are about to go looking for the missing one. She is arriving just then, being led by others. She is standing, but leaning on her school friends.

What has happened? They don't know. They found Ritva lying on the slope of the hill. She wasn't able to move, although she was conscious. They didn't know what to do. Then, she lifted a hand feebly, then her leg, and finally she moved and asked them to lift her up from the snow. She has walked the rest of the way, with help from others. Sister is taken in and put to bed. Somebody is sitting by the bed all the time. The next morning she gets up herself! It is anybody's guess what happened to her. Can polio strike like this, it is going around. This gives us cause to ponder for a long time.

Uncertainty is growing in our lives. What will happen when soldiers begin to occupy the empty classrooms? Life is turned upside down once again in a way we can't understand. One day they arrive. They come marching along the birch lane, snow rustles under their boots. They are commanded with familiar instructions, and they obey. Just like it was in Haapamäki, where we marched along behind the training recruits, wooden poles over our shoulder! Everybody finds their place in a classroom, the bed reserved for him in the crowded room. That's where they settle, that's where we aren't allowed to go any more. But soon they are walking around the yard, smoking tobacco, talking. We follow them from behind the window glass. We have to stay inside. It would be embarrassing to push among strange soldiers and start playing.

After a few days the soldiers are already a fixture for us. They are still practising, their days are onerous. Some seem to lie down on their bed in their free time reading or snoring. Some are walking in the village, or messing about in the school yard, tobacco in mouth and snowball in hand. They are practising sharpshooting with a tree at the corner of the dunny.

We watch the goings-on of the soldiers through the window in the darkening gloom. Even Vänni is glued to the window. Now someone gets a ball smack in his face and attacks the thrower. Others interfere, and soon it is a full-blown riot. Oh dear, they are fighting in earnest now! What if the sergeant will see them! They might get retention and even lose their evening pass. Hope no officers come along. The snow flies, and everyone in turn is prostrate in the snow, jumps up on all fours and re-joins the melee. How come they got so angry with just getting their face washed? And then, suddenly, they are all upright, pull everyone up

from the snow and salute. We can imagine hearing their heels hit together. Ah, it is the captain! They obey him like he was God.

Soon they will leave for the front, and new recruits replace them. Just when you have got to know some a bit, know their name and their way of speaking, played at snow fight with them, this contingent is taken *Somewhere There*. To die is what the child of the war thinks inevitably. To save Finland, the child of the war adds with hope in her heart.

The moonshine flights occur more and more frequently. They go over us to anywhere in the country. When Viipuri is burning, we are in the cellar, for sure. When Kotka is burning, we see the flames against the horizon, and we wait for the returning planes in the cellar. When Helsinki is burning, we only hear the roar of the empty planes in the cellar, where the local siren has driven us at the last possible moment. When the family crawls out of their cellar, the soldiers are shaking snow from their uniforms at the edge of the thicket where they are hiding in camouflage. Peace descends again.

But news is bad from the front. The troops stationed with us change ever more rapidly. Just when you have learnt to recognize someone, he is already gone. There is no point in learning their names. If you ask a tired soldier where he is coming from, he will answer “from *Somewhere There*”. If you ask a new recruit where he is going, he will answer “*Somewhere There*”. The soldiers don’t talk about war, not to the children, anyway.

Although we don’t have much to do with the soldiers, some boys will become favourites. They are different from the others in their behaviour. They will recognise us and defer to us when we are in the yard. They make room for our play, and even play with us for a while. They even remember our names when we tell them. They tell us their names in return. We do know that we have to treat all soldiers the same. But some are easier to get on with than others; that is all there is to it, we can’t help it.

A motley bunch – even if they are all in battle grey – teems daily past our eyes and ears. Different dialects, which we had met already while we were evacuees, delight and sometimes puzzle our ear. Father, too, points out the many-hued Finnish language that we hear in the yard. There are a good many guises in our common Finnish language. And you can tell where everyone comes from. Our dialects are a great

treasure. You can find the soul of the nation in them, father assures us. It feels very solemn to go and look for the soul of the nation in the echoes of speech in the yard. Sometimes the soul can smell pretty bad, though!

Tellu's school in Viipuri is finished. She is now studying for exams. That is when you read all the schoolbooks once again and just go to school for the exams. Tellu is substituting for father on many days when father has to travel to speak in meetings. The class is so delighted that there doesn't seem to be any end to the uproar. But when Tellu finally slams the book on the desk and roars out with her mightiest voice, they believe her.

I must confess that going to school is now much more low-key. Tellu hasn't got the authority of a real teacher. But she has learnt to read the atmosphere of the class and tacks accordingly, even if from shoal to shoal. She is forgiven, as it brings variety to the so-called teaching. You can tell when she doesn't have a clue. Then I feel sorry for sister. I try to help by asking something that she can answer. That brings us to safe waters, and everybody forgets the problem. This can develop into an exciting discussion, albeit it might have nothing to do with the subject of the lesson. But that is no problem for the class. Quite the contrary, Tellu is liked.

Tellu starts her school-leaving exams. But the war situation has become so bad that the exams can't be taken in Viipuri because of the threat of bombings. They are moved to Juustila, which luckily is on the train route. But she has to leave awfully early in the morning. Mother gets up to make porridge for the traveller, who complains that she won't be able to eat anything. The poor girl is tense, say the rest of the family, who have woken up for the occasion. And they understand. It is years since Vella did the exams. As a lotta at the front Tuitu was given her cap without exams, and the big boys had already started their university studies before the war. We wish sister luck from the veranda. As she walks through the yard, soldiers stand in groups here and there. They wish her luck, too. Of course everybody knows where Tellu is going.

The exams go on for a couple of weeks. At least she will pass, that's all we know for certain until the final results come back from Helsinki. We have Tellu as our teacher again, and father can go on his speech circuit. There is one thing that is really embarrassing to me.

Father has been almost angry when he has been correcting the writing assignments of my class at home. When he has my book in front of him, he might invite me over to his desk and show me the pages covered in red. Once again! He asks what I am intending to do to correct the state of affairs. I mumble something. I have been trying to rectify my failings for years now, and I have even had some results.

When Tellu takes the essay writing class, I am full of confidence. Now I will weigh every word, force the letters to my will from beginning to end, down to the last squiggle. I read the sentence I have written over and over. It just has to be correct this time! I am the last in the class when I hand in my book. A heavy burden has fallen off my shoulders. I have performed an errorless task of writing!

When Tellu returns the essays, I see the red right away. Not in every word, but on every page at least. The subject is connected to the history of The Bible. I write about prophets, profits, porfits and prephots quite fluently. I am beaten! I can't do anything about this! I sink into my seat and don't even dare to look at sister. At home she comes and consoles me. Everything else is without blemish. It is a huge achievement for me. "But have you ever read that foreign word in earnest, from beginning to end? Have you just noted that here it is again, and jumped over the letters without really looking. You couldn't possibly know what you have to write if you don't pronounce those letters in your mind. Or even out loud, that is even better. Do you believe me?" she insists as she is leaving.

And sister is right, of course. I read far too quickly. In one instant I am halfway down the page, and in another at the end of it. My eyes see the words, and my brain interprets them, as usually they are familiar. But when the word is foreign, my brain still sees it only as a shape, a gestalt, not as individual letters. That's because I have never analysed them. I promised myself that from now on I will read every unknown word syllable by syllable, aloud, and really listen out for what letters it contains.

From Little Sister:

I started school in the autumn of 1943. The primary school was about two kilometres from home, and I usually walked there with some other kids. One day I remember running and banging my head into a tree. Later that day I woke up in my own bed, having no idea how I had got there. My sister had another take on the story.

Polio or concussion, I still feel cheated out of at least one day of my life!

I generally liked school. I had been reading since I was 3 years old, so school work was very easy. The only book I remember reading at school that first year was *Risto Roopen poika (Robinson Crusoe)*. My older siblings had a habit of doing their homework by teaching it to me, and Aili had used me as a home-work slave, by teaching me maths and ‘letting’ me do her homework. More the fool me, I fell for it – but I loved doing maths problems. I was a real precocious little prick!

Aili kept teaching me maths and languages all through the school at her level, 3 years above my classmates. I was a sponge and lapped it all up. Also my brother Ahti taught me some Latin, and the litany of pronouns that take the accusative case, as well as the first page of his Latin textbook which I could recite off by heart, served me in good stead later when I took a year of Latin in university myself. All this teaching by my older siblings probably kept me from getting bored, as I found learning very easy. Unfortunately I seem to have misplaced that capability somewhere along the line!

40. In the Bustle of a Metropolis

The class begins to organise a farewell present for Tellu. We negotiate and we negotiate. Several suggestions, from books to articles of clothing, are gone through and discarded. Finally we decide on a piece of jewellery. Who shall we accept to choose it and buy it? The jack-of-all-trades of the class declares herself willing, and she is chosen. She wants to have two other people with her. One is chosen by vote. Some suggest I be the third one, because they imagine that as Tellu's sister I would know what she likes. I protest that I wouldn't have a clue. My protests are countered by telling me to inquire discretely. Without exposing the purpose, of course!

I am not very eager to go to Viipuri. I don't know the city at all; I have only been there whilst in hospital, and travelling through with the family on our way to somewhere further away. I am scared of unknown environments where I don't know where to go. On the other hand a trip to the big city with only other girls, no parents, seems tempting. It has the air of an adventure. I promise to go, if my mother will let me. She has to know the purpose of the trip, though, and she has to swear that she will not tell. Mother promises, and gives me the money for the trip, and for my share of the present. I am also allowed to buy one ice cream stick. Father is not at home. He might have been harder to convince. We even have to ask leave from school for the last period. Tellu interrogates us closely, and we try not to spill the beans. We manage some credible explanation. Relieved, we catch the train.

It is bedlam at the Viipuri station. I have no idea where to look for the bauble, but the girls head resolutely cross the station plaza towards Karjala Street. I have my work cut out to stay with them. I am worried about losing them in this bustle. I try to watch around me, but I mostly have to stare at my feet to see where to step. We cross many streets, somewhere we find a jewellery shop, and the distinguished customers step in. There are many kinds of jewellery, from rings to broaches and necklaces. We had not even decided what kind of gewgaw we were looking for. Everybody finds their favourite, but we can't agree on a common preference. The shop assistant does her best, admires everybody's choice and tries to make us decide between them. It seems that she is getting a bit flustered. We whisper amongst each other and say thank you and goodbye. The shop assistant snorts after us.

We decide to ponder on the matter at a park bench and head towards Torkkeli Park. Even I remember that, but not where it is. So again I am racing after the others. The park is really beautiful. There are a lot of people walking under the big, ancient trees, and it is fun watching them. Our leader, however, is demanding that we concentrate completely on our quest, which is proving to be more and more difficult.

“Do tell us, would your sister rather have a ring, a broach, or a necklace.”

“How could I know?”

“Didn’t you find out, then?”

“I couldn’t ask her. That would have been the end of the secret!”

“You could have shown her such pieces and asked which she liked best.”

“Where would I have acquired them? Our girls only have the lotta pin, and mother has an iron wedding ring and the graduation broach for her best dress.”

“We’ll have to thrash out this dilemma ourselves, right now. A ring is a very useful piece of jewellery.”

“I think a broach is the prettiest.”

“But a necklace is nice, too, and easy to wear.”

“Looks like we have to buy all three!”

“We don’t have enough money for that. We are lucky to get one.”

“Let us go to another shop and buy what we can get there.”

“Let’s go via the castle bridge and along Watergate Street. I want to see the castle, it is so awesome.”

And that’s what we do. But we are in a hurry. We have no time to dream about a medieval knight with his pages on the castle bridge, or a procession of Blackfriars to the monastery church by the bell tower. The pictures move too fast as the feet run after a mere bauble. We end up on the Red Fountain Plaza. Market time is finished already; the last farmers are repacking their unsold goods into their carriage. I wonder if they are

happy with their day's earnings. At least there is a lot of laughter. We bypass the market in full gallop.

The shop we are looking for is found, after many errors, around another corner. We explain our dilemma to a friendly shop lady. She recommends a decorated wristband. I don't like it, it is too pretty. The others are muttering as they are looking for something suitable. The shopkeeper finally shows us a necklace with silver sheen. The necklace is made with rings about a centimetre across around a chain. There are no decorations, only tiny variations in the grey tone. It will be perfect with a simple woollen jumper. The price is suitable, too. It is wrapped up in a beautiful packet and the spokesperson takes it. We count the money on the desk, say thank you and start walking towards the station happily.

It is getting time to catch our train. Seems like people are finishing work. The streets are overcrowded. We see only hurried steps, skirt tails and trouser legs as we run along. How can there be so many people in the world, this is like an anthill. It seems the train is already waiting at the station! We were supposed to get ice-cream sticks by the Round Tower, there is a wagon there. One does the buying, the others wait, and straight into the train. It didn't leave before, even though it is already puffing. The ice-cream didn't melt either, now we lick it as fast as we can.

Soon the ice-cream is finished. The train is already arriving at the home station. We charge the spokesperson with the responsibility of taking care of the purchase until it is needed. At home they are crossexamining me about what we have done, what we have seen, and why we had to go to Viipuri suddenly, anyway. I can answer all questions truthfully, except the last one. Nobody seems to notice the omission. We have survived the acid test. Tellu is happy in a baffled sort of way about her necklace, when we hand it over to her as a farewell present and wish her luck for the graduation. Our schooling is over for this year as well.

When Suoma Tellervo, '*Daughter of Tapio, the Mighty Mistress of the Forest*', returns from Juustila on the graduation day, we have a party at home. Her cap is shining, snow white, in the middle of the table. We enjoy coffee with pulla. Really the drink is chicory, there is only a little bit of wheat in the *pulla*, and the children drink juice. In our house children under eighteen don't get served coffee or ersatz.

Everybody is happy about Tellu's success. Sometime, when the war is over, mother will get a new lyre for her broach.

41. Planting Cabbage

Spring has snuck in without us noticing in the last rush of school and waiting for Tellu's graduation. Everything is green with the optimistic radiance of young birch forests. There is no other time of year that you can see such colour. It invades our consciousness with full force as we leave for the fields in the morning. Now it is high time to sow, to help the growth to start.

Father points everybody to a job most urgent at the moment. Ränty-livari and I hoe one end of a strip that has been ploughed and harrowed to make a vegetable patch. We make regular beds, we make the furrows for seeds, and we water them, sow the seeds and cover them lightly. We don't need the big people's help any more in this task; we have been doing it for years. Ritva sows the seeds with care and covers them up gently. I make sure the beds are straight and the walkways neat and beautiful. The teamwork is successful, even though it is sometimes interrupted by tears of annoyance. Because the other does not comprehend, the other is a nitwit!

When the vegetable plot is done, we move onto the proper fields. The big task, of course, is planting potatoes. For that job everyone is needed. It happens quite quickly. Father ploughs the furrows. Vänni carries the sacks of potatoes and empties them into buckets. The womenfolk lay the potatoes in the furrows, evenly spaced. In one section of the strip we lay only potato peels, even they have grown real potatoes through the worst years of shortage. Finally mother gets up, shakes out an empty potato sack and walks towards the small cabin where we lived when we first returned to Karelia. Soon we hear the *cooe* to invite us for the ersatz. For the youngest ones that means bread and juice, and afterwards, a new order of the day. In the evening as we drive home our Russian neighbour's planes seem to accompany us, although they don't shoot towards us.

Today we plant cabbage. Not just a few seedlings for the family, but hundreds, maybe thousands! Father is trying to specialize as a cabbage grower. The harvest is plentiful, and he has enough daughters at home to do the weeding. We can already guess our own role in this new enterprise. There is a shortage of grain seed, and that makes it important to concentrate on some other crop. The seedlings have been fetched in a big cart from the grower and deposited at the edge of the

field. We break off a clump of soil with its seedlings into our pail or dish, and start the job from one end of a strip, all in a row, advancing along our own strip of seedlings. The seedlings are planted so far apart that big heads of cabbage can grow into a mighty harvest by autumn. And of course, it also helps that this harvest can be gathered late in the autumn, after other produce has been collected. There won't be a fire under our tails, even though school will demand our attention as well.

It is not quite as easy to plant cabbage as it seems. One person is quick, another cares nothing about rows being straight, third tries to stuff the roots into a hole that is not deep enough. Vänni loves commenting on the work done by the gals, and the gals object. When mother stands up to stretch her back and complain, the others also venture to stand up to stretch their aching limbs. And back down and into it! The beds seem unending. The row to be planted advances hopelessly slowly.

Even father has realised the enormity of the job. He gets two prisoners of war to help. We are a bit timid with them, but they are matter-of-fact about it and polite. The job makes headway, although we glance at them ever so often. War prisoners are brought to work in the fields when the farmers are overworked and in a hurry. A growing rumble makes everyone jump up.

“What a rumble! Is it thunder making that racket?”

“And it's getting louder and louder!”

“Thunder doesn't sound like that!”

“It is a plane!”

“Enemy plane! They are down low!”

“Everybody in the ditch, cover up with hay! Show the prisoners!”

We dash into the ditch helter skelter. We close our eyes and cover our ears, because we are petrified. Stiff, quiet, we lie in the moist ditch, a few bundles of hay for cover. One of the planes dips down very low above us. It shoots a few rounds onto the field and then veers after the others, towards Viipuri. Father commands us all into the cabin, away from the wind. The tension dissipates soon as we chew our bread. Father and Vänni go outside to listen to the sound of the bombs in Viipuri. It

has been quiet for a while already. Maybe they have taken another route to return.

We decide to continue our work for as long as we can. When the planes return, we rush into the cabin in time and hope that the log walls will shelter us. A bomb explodes near the ditch and makes a gaping hole. It makes the cabin shake as well. We can't help but scream. Bullets are flying here and there, a window pane falls on the floor, but nobody is wounded. The planes circle the field as if looking for victims. When they see no-one, they shoot a handful of bullets into the roof of the cabin and disappear. They used the remains of their load with us, we reckon in the cabin.

We wait a while longer to see if they will return. Father thinks that even they can't afford to flit here and there on a joyride just for us. We sneak back to work, our eyes and ears peeled. After a while we even start singing. Even the prisoners seem more serene. They are now planting seedlings in a fast tempo. They stretch their aching limbs just like us. They didn't try to escape in the melee, though we had been warned about such a possibility. We keep relying on their help on many a planting day. All the cabbages are in the ground within a week.

The heavy squatting is over. Slow weeding and thinning is about to stress our poor backs within a few weeks. But it is wartime! We don't know if we will have a tomorrow, let alone day after tomorrow! And as for what will happen about the dream of a farmer, the harvest, that is anybody's guess.

42. War Comes to Our Own Yard

The recruits that we have got to know have gone again, to the front. Now one unit after another arrives from the front. They stay only a few days to recover, and get transferred to different sections. The commander himself has erected his tent in our garden, between the beach and the avenue. There are several other tents as well. The classrooms are full already. The commander has discussions with father often. Father seems worried. One day the whole family is invited to the commander's tent. There are some other officers as well. The coffee smells like real coffee. For mother that was a big thing, although apparently there was only a small portion of the real thing. We children are given juice and a piece of chocolate. For us that is a big thing! Tellu gets special congratulations. Father and Vänni are thirsting for some information about the war, but that is not forthcoming. I feel that the officers are interested in the strength of the home front. They inquire and inquire. We leave with mother when we have finished the coffee, but father stays a long time after.

One day when I come home I am faced with a shocking sight. The yard is full of the wounded, lying on their stretchers. More and more are brought there, their agony is heard everywhere. The lottas run from stretcher to stretcher binding wounds, giving drinks, closing eyes. "Doctor" is shouted from every corner.

I am in the middle of this horror. Here, on our yard? No more *Somewhere There*, not to be seen, only heard about on the radio. Is this the result of a win or a defeat in a war! A battalion of broken soldiers in our own yard! My eyes closed, my ears blocked, I sway on a spot. Then, after an eternity, I get a grip of myself. I rush in one direction, turn in another. There are obstacles there, as well! I am like a blind person in a labyrinth! But where is my home, where the steps to get home? I have lost my compass. Finally I crawl in between the stretchers. Horror is printed in the faces of the family, too. Mother clutches her breast and asks for camphor. "Where is father, where is father?" she splutters. Of course, father is on the fields spreading manure.

A lotta peeps in and Tellu hurries to ask if she can be of any help in the classrooms or in the yard. She goes with the lotta; after all, she is one herself. We see her desperate mien through the door crack for a second. But I am a *lotta*, too, a *little lotta*. I have indeed been taught how

to dress a wound, but that doesn't seem to help with these wounds. I am rejected as a helper. I am just 11 years old. The children have to be kept inside, away from the yard. That is the command.

Later on, when the worst is over, I fetch and carry things from one place to another as required. I keep the dogs away so they won't lick the wounds. A dog brought as war loot by the soldiers, Suura by name, is especially quick jumping and hiding between and under the stretchers. Here, Suura! Away, Suura! This dirty-white ball of hair is just as confused as the rest of us about this horror. Our own light brown Finnish Spitz seems to suffer when we pay notice to Suura. She yaps non-stop. We have to get them to play together, and somewhere else than around the stretchers of the wounded. Some of the more able wounded seem to actually enjoy Suura, who has been the pet of the unit for a long time. She is war loot from East Karelia.

Late at night the yard empties. Army trucks take the soldiers to hospitals, I think. But the classrooms are still full. The doctors and the lottas watch over them all night. Soon a place has to be found somewhere else for them as well, for new wounded are streaming in every day. Here they can only be operated on as a last chance. The anguish is only a few days for us, an eternity for the soldiers. The front has retreated, the enemy is advancing. Our losses are horrendous. What will become of us? What will become of Finland?

It is night already when the family gathers around evening tea. We are shaking. Our teeth rattle against the rim of the hot cup. It is the fear and the horror. The blood that ran into the bushes! That foot that was dangling from a thin thread! That eye that wasn't there anymore! We don't talk about them; we just stare ahead and chew on our crust of bread. When we get up from the table, father puts his arms around the children for a while. Mother comes and strokes our hair when we go to bed. The evening prayer brings tears.

At night more cars arrive. Hasty voices, even yelling! Stretchers are lowered down again, beds in the classrooms are moved even closer to make room. Sister springs up, I follow. Hand in hand we witness the nightly drama behind the window.

The blood-drenched Finnish soldier becomes a familiar sight for even the littlest of us. Faces imprinted by agony rise up in dreams at night, in the distress of the day. We cannot get rid of the faces. We see

them in every figure that our eye finds in the wallpaper, in every knot of the ceiling boards. The same figure hides in every pile of clothing. We can see them even with our eyes closed. There is no grace or mercy any more. Only brutality and more brutality! The whole world is going to be destroyed! We are going to be destroyed! We sneak into the shelter of our bedcover. The trundle bed squeaks for a long time in the ashen spring twilight.

43. Baby Shower

We are aunties! All the sisters are aunties, the brothers are uncles, and mother and father are grandparents. A new generation has popped out in the middle of the war in Hämeenlinna hospital into Ahti and Marjatta's young family. Ahti has been granted leave and he takes his wife and child home to Lempäälä. In a few days he will have to go to the Eastern front. He is worried about how his young wife will cope with the baby and asks Tellu to help. The other big girls of course are busy with the Lottas.

Mother and father retire to their room. They talk quietly for a long time. Tellu races from room to room, nervous, and complains that she doesn't know a thing about looking after babies. And yet she would like to go! After another night in the cellar father has a talk with the commander and maybe gets some useful advice. Mother and the girls will go to Lempäälä! Mother is the only one who knows about looking after babies. Tellu is undecided, but agrees to go with us. Father and Vänni stay at home.

We lumber along in the train, the same way we came two summers ago. The train is overflowing; people are on the move again. Soldiers are traipsing along the corridors; some are almost asleep as they walk. It is very crowded, although we have actually scored seats. Of course we jump up at once if an old auntie or uncle needs a seat. Tellu is actually standing almost the whole time. Up on the rack we have what we need for two weeks. Baked goodies are protected by a cardboard box. Wherever did they manage to find one of them! Under the bench on the floor we have stuffed our own small suitcases. Ugh! Pretty dirty, although there are many white porcelain dishes with '*Do not spit on the floor*' and '*Spätta ej på gålvat!*' written on them with the VR (State Railway) blue. Or maybe it is black?

In Riihimäki we change trains again, and we have to wait there for ever. We have finished our picnic lunch already. Tellu tries to get us *Boat is loaded with...*, but she is not too eager herself. Our boat is loaded, indeed, but it keeps on vanishing under the bench. When we force our way into the new train, we get separated. In Tampere we get better seats with the help of a friendly conductor.

We distinguish Ahti from far away in the mass of greeters; he is a head taller than others. He points out places as we walk towards their

home. But all we want to hear about is the baby. Yes, she will eat; she is good, except she cries at night. Then Marjatta frets over what she should do. Mother reckons Marjatta is still a child herself.

We stomp in through the veranda of the old wooden house. Inside, the baby lies in its basket and gurgles happily. The baby smell greets us right away. Everybody wants to hold it right now. After a short round it is set back to its bed. Only then do we dash to hug Marjatta and congratulate her. The meal is waiting at the table. The talk is about the christening tomorrow. The ‘welcome baby’ goodies are spread out to be seen – not yet to be eaten – in all their glory. Or maybe we could have just a little bit with our evening tea, for a nightcap.

The christening is a simple but devout occasion with hymns, baptism and blessings. Marja Vellamo is given her name and is accepted as a member of the congregation. Tuitu and Tanu have promised to be godparents. A godparent has a lot to do in a godchild’s life. The minister is reciting all the duties and obligations. My goodness! I will never volunteer to be a godmother!

Ahti leaves for the front, we stay behind. We start to familiarise ourselves with the new place. Soon we are able to run errands all over the village. They won’t let us near the baby often; we can just watch her in the garden while she is asleep. But when there is laundry to be done, we all go to the canal. There they have a cauldron and a tub. Everything else we need, we carry along in the baby’s pram.

Ränty-Iivari and I dive into the water right away, and only after a swim do we start to rub the clothes. The others have warmed up the water and are now boiling the dirtiest items in the cauldron. They transfer the steaming articles into the tub and begin to rub them against the wash board. It is a corrugated iron square within a wooden frame. You rub and rub against those iron waves. The rinsing water is drawn from the canal and is taken far back into the bushes. We must not dirty the water in the canal.

Laundry trip is actually a lot of fun. And of course a picnic lunch is part of the proceedings. The baby is given only breast milk. She sleeps all the way home.

If it is raining a lot, the sides of the canal are full of little pools. The whole area consists of soft, boggy soil, which is kept from falling into the canal by big stone walls. When you walk along the canal after a

rain, you feel like the ground is swaying under you. Sometimes you can sink up to your knees in the mud. The shoreline is tempting to us, nevertheless, as the puddles are full of baby frogs with their tails, and it is very interesting to follow their wild careening. When you pick up a fistful of water, you can have a close look at the struggling balls in your palm. We become, indeed, special investigators into the development of frogs. And as a by-product we begin to tolerate the croaking.

Once again I scoop from the big puddle, and as I stretch out my hand, I fall in. My foot sinks frighteningly deep. As I struggle to lift it, the other foot disappears into the same hole. The more I struggle, the deeper I sink. I am by myself, I will be trapped. I panic. My mind returns to the ditch back home in Karelia. Then I managed to pull myself out of the clinging mud with help from roots and branches by the ditch. Maybe it also helped that I could imagine the rotting corpses in the ooze and that bolstered my determination. But here I have absolutely nothing to help me pull myself up. Help! Help! There is no use shouting, nobody will hear. Finally, I have something solid under me! I am totally covered in slime. A frog embryo has become squished in my palm. I get into the canal in my clothes and then run home dripping. Of course there is a big fuss – even your underpants are muddy – and lots of drinking hot juice. And there is no going to the canal on your own again!

Very bad news eclipses our commonplace adversities soon. The front is retreating after heavy combat. Our home village is sent packing again. Father and Vänni had time to send even some of our stuff by railroad to the evacuation hub in Satakunta. They themselves are amongst the last in the village to start driving towards the west with a horse and carriage. A heavy journey through Finland, which might not exist tomorrow! They are still fighting!

Father is stooping over. Is he becoming an old man already? The thought is scary for us. After resting for a few days he goes to inquire about settling in Satakunta. We travel again. Marjatta and Marja are waving at the station. We sit in many trains, stay overnight in an inn, continue on. Father has secured a room for us in a friendly farmhouse.

Our baby trip has ended in an unexpected way. Our home has been destroyed once again. Fate has thrown us into new surroundings again. The war continues; the battles get fiercer. It seems we have to find a new home in Suodenniemi. It doesn't seem as difficult as the previous time. We have experienced this all before! In the midst of our sorrow we begin

to notice how many everyday matters here are different from home. Very interesting! We spend the late summer 1944 in strange surroundings, but in the warmth of the sun, without fear of bombs. But we still have the sounds of war from home in our conscience.

44. These People of Satakunta are Weird

Our home is one sizable room in a corner of the building. It is light, as there are windows on two walls. From one we can see garden and fields, from the other the driveway and some farm buildings. We keep to ourselves. When they have a busy time we offer help. We spend some time weeding the vegetable patch, stomping hay, tying hay sheaves. The folk on the farm have no expectations from us. Of course we help our mother as before. The children of this household are disciplined. They work in all jobs as hard as the grown-ups. Often we join in. Father is eager to work if he is not travelling. Farming is in his blood. Vänni seems to have inherited this, too. He tries to look a proper worker.

In the evening the horses are taken to the nearby lake for a drink. The farmer's children jump on the horses and gallop away. We run after. Eventually we venture to jump on a horse as well. What a joy it is! We hang onto the mane and ride without a saddle. Even me, the timid one! Sometimes we take too long to water the horses. Either father or one of the other grown-ups comes to fetch us, visibly relieved to see us hale and hearty. This we want to do every evening! There is no end to our delight! With the steed running and myself on its back, the whole world is open for me. I sing with all my might "*I can ride, I can ride; my brisk steed is galloping!*" Of course it is not real horse riding, but it is enough for us. And the open world ends at the home yard.

The farmwife is organising a baking day. Mother hastens to ask if she could make pastries at the same time, as the oven is being heated anyway. The hostess wants to postpone our pastry making to another time. Mother is abashed. They are not heating up the big oven in the family room, but the enormous one in the old servants' hall. They make several tubs full of dough.

Women are invited from the neighbourhood to help. Making dough is hard work in even small amounts, let alone in this quantity. The old servants' hall is not used anymore to house people. It has been full of dust for months, and been thoroughly cleaned all through yesterday. The rye dough has been started yesterday and kept proving overnight. Two women take hold of a tub together, lift it up to the table and scoop the dough out onto the thoroughly washed tabletop. The dough has grown in the tub, and is now spreading on the table sending out a strong

aroma. The second tub gets the same treatment, and the third. Then they begin to form the loaves. Good heavens, such small loaves! The dough gets squashed into a flat disk, in the middle of which they cut a hole with an upside-down glass. When there are enough of these holey disks, the oven gets filled for the first time. This continues all day. What kind of a party needs this much rye bread! And then there are the holes, which fill the oven again. The whole enormous tabletop is full of these bread rings and their holes, spreading out their fresh aroma. We have never seen anything like this. We used to make thick loaves of rye bread every week. While we are exclaiming about it, the women take down long poles from the rafters. They have been hanging from braided loops. The poles are dusted while the bread is cooling. Then all the loaves are threaded onto the poles and the poles hung up from the rafters again. The hostess gives out ‘holes’ by the armful to all the helpers. Mother also gets a bread ring, as we have never seen them before. These dried bread rings are eaten for months. They say they have two baking days each year. Wheat bread and *pulla*, however, are made weekly.

On Saturdays we go to sauna. But what a sauna! They have been heating the sauna for hours, as there are a lot of bathers now. The children carry wood one load after another. The bundles of birch branches – here called *vihta*, whereas we had *vasta* – are fetched from a nearby birch forest. To tie the bundle – *vihta* – you need a real *vihta* master, who knows how to make a strong binder. The farm folk are still busy at their jobs and let us go in first.

This sauna downright frightens a Karelian sauna goer. The room is enormous and is still cold. It is not a ‘*savusauna*’, but there is a lot of smoke, nevertheless. There is a stone fireplace in a corner, but where are the benches? Ah, over there, far away, we can see a rickety structure and steps. We climb up, to the ceiling almost, with our water pail and a scoop. It actually is warm up there. But the long platform is only along the back wall. It is long and narrow, like a bench. This sauna is so different from saunas we are used to that we are dubious about its efficiency. It is not comfy, warm and small. But we can warm it up just as well; and soon everybody’s *vihta* is swinging with total satisfaction. If only we won’t freeze while washing ourselves down below! Don’t be silly, it is midsummer!

After sauna we sit around in the evening sun for a long time. We languidly enjoy the slowly cooling summer evening. No rumbling, no

explosions. Only the diffident start to a concert by night birds and the evening recital of the grasshoppers! There is not much talk. Even mother is not sighing about how we are fighting for our homes now, and our boys are there as well and how can we protect them! Of course we all are thinking the same way. Everybody crosses their fingers in prayer.

One day we get invited to the big house. At the agreed time we step through the solid gate into a garden that is full of flowers. Each one is more colourful than the next, some are big and some are little. And trees that reach to the heights, and bushes spreading along the ground for a shaggy carpet. In the midst of the abundance of colour there is a winding path to the house, raked in patterns. There are two verandas, we hesitate between them.

The host family is already coming to meet us at the steps. They lead us straight to the lounge via the veranda. My word! What a lounge room. It is huge! They have many settings of chic furniture, lots of white furniture. Palms and other inside plants are bathed in the light from the row of windows, which is accentuated by thin white summer curtains. We have never seen anything this beautiful anywhere. Or maybe just in Illilä, although not that time when we left from there to escape the war. Then we had grey winter weather, and horror!

I shake away the painful memory and examine every bit of this lounge room. It makes an indelible impression. I can hardly sit still with the rest of them for the time it takes to drink the juice and eat *pulla*.

When we are given permission, we get up to examine all the things in the room more closely. The grown-ups stay to continue their conversation, but sister and I walk around the room many times. The hosts of course notice our interest and offer to show us the old main building, where they have a museum of the old articles belonging to the house. Everybody joins us. We cross the courtyard and walk up the worn stairs. The master of the house opens the complaining door with a huge forged iron key. The afternoon sun is trying to get in through the small windows.

We have stepped right into last century, maybe even earlier in time. The old living space is beautifully peaceful, just like in the present house. There are just a few pieces of furniture, only what is needed. The worn dishes and tools are all in their own place, wooden spoons on the log wall like other tools. Father and mother are asking a lot of questions,

too. They recognise the purpose of many items, but are exclaiming about the difference to the usage of them on the Karelian Isthmus. Why do they have a scythe with a straight handle here, when ours is curved? Why are horse harnesses different from ours? Even dishes have different shapes! Let alone the names; but we had noticed that already when we arrived in this place.

We walk around again smelling the atmosphere and the objects, which have been used for centuries. You can see a bustling housewife, an energetic host and the whole household with their servant girls, farm hands, and children. See them hurrying out to the fields in the morning; towards the evening, taking advantage of the last light by the window knitting, weaving, spinning. The men are whittling sleigh runners, hay poles, or even shingles to set between the logs in the wall for the dark winter. The cats are stretching deliciously after catching a tasty mouse in the corner; the dogs are still yapping outside. All this you can see in the room when you concentrate and look. Just think! It is right here where the serving girl was standing stirring the porridge. It is this very bench where the farm hands sat down for their meal. Just at this side of the table were the children and the women. And of course the host himself at the end of the table, and his wife at the other end. They have smoothed down these mighty floor planks with their birch bark shoes into shiny silk as they have hurried from one task to another.

Up there, on the big platform over the oven they have often warmed up in the middle of the winter chill, when darkness had crept into the room and the oil lamp or the shingles had not yet been lit. They have slept their nights in those beautifully carved timber beds under heavy covers. It is so shadowy and peaceful here. I could easily stay here, in this world. Maybe I belong to the past.

We take another look at the rooms. One is left exactly as it was when occupied. The other has a collection of old items from this area. Different specimens of the same kind of item are in groups on the table and on shelves running along the walls, all in perfect order. That is a museum, not life as it is lived.

It is my firm belief that this visit, this day, makes an indelible impression in the mind of a young evacuee. The labour of forefathers, the toil of foremothers! Survival! They have survived. What about us? What will happen to us?

From Little Sister:

Those wonderful ring rye breads are just about the only thing I remember about Suodenniemi. It was like magic seeing them being baked and hung on the long poles. I also liked the taste of them immensely, and didn't mind the hardness of them at all. It took a long time to chew them, so they kept you from noticing how hungry you were.

45. Interim Peace Treaty between Finland and the USSR, Autumn 1944

The USSR has dictated the peace conditions, and Finland has accepted them. Fighting is ceased immediately. Ceding territory, leasing Porkkala, war reparations, surveillance commission, driving the Germans out of Lapland, and many other things are part of the agreement. We can't even wear the lotta-uniform any more. The whole Lotta organization has to be disbanded, same with the civil guard. In spite of valiant resistance after the last big battle in Tali-Ihantala, Finland agreed to the peace and thus saved the rest of the country. There were no resources left to continue the war. The final peace treaty was left to the aftermath of the World War Two.

We were to be evacuees for ever. Good bye, home, good buy, Karelia!

46. School Awaits in Haapamäki

Father has been informed that he has been given a position in Haapamäki, and that there is a dwelling waiting for us. We should be going right away, the schools will start soon. We pack the little belongings we have and start again. We pick up the furniture we managed to salvage from home, from the storage rented by father.

There is no big suspense in this move. We are going to a place we know, after all. We will live on the first floor of a high-rise brick building, which is the school building. In no time the furniture is in its place, paper rugs on the floor, paper curtains in the windows and colourful rowan twigs in a vase. Familiar neighbours come to welcome us. Mother is getting wet cheeks again. Others keep swallowing. Such is life!

They take me along to see the headmaster of the secondary school, same with Vänni. The headmaster had even invited us to his home. The house is in the middle of a pine forest very near the co-ed school. It is surrounded by very Middle-Finnish *'sigh of pines and willows of the shores'*. The headmaster doesn't seem too severe, and his wife is friendly and gentle. We drink chicory and juice, we listen to the grown-ups' discussion about the war reparations and the beginning of school. Vänni will be accepted to the third grade, but I have to pass entrance exams. They occupy my mind totally on the way home. Mother tries to console me and reminds me that I have done five grades of primary already, whereas the others will come from the fourth grade. But I am no older than they are; I only went to the lower school for one year, my worried mind keeps screeching at me.

When the exams start, I am as tense as I was starting the lower school. There are a lot of us trying, and only some will be chosen. With a trembling voice we try to answer the questions. My hand refuses to write beautifully. Mental arithmetic is almost unattainable. But I am in the group of those that succeeded when it is all over. A miracle has happened! Now they can congratulate me! Now I can boast to Little Sister that I am a big scholar!

Every weekday morning a gradually swelling number of schoolkids wanders along the highway, over the railroad bridge, the one where we had previously come to admire the rail yard with its many tracks and trains, turns off to a small gravel road to the shore of a tarn,

and finally emerges from the bushes at the school behind the station. It is a brownish, convoluted looking wooden building, full of atmosphere and spirit. It welcomes even the most timid of scholars. We go in, in double lines by class.

After primary school, the constant change of teachers feels odd. Each subject is taught by a new teacher, all of them different. At first it is confusing, and then you get used to it. Each and every one is a strong personality, however. Just as a teacher ought to be! The books and everything else you need you have to get yourself; the secondary school doesn't give anything away for nothing. Luckily some books of the Big Ones have been salvaged.

We also have to acquire a gym outfit, with baggy shorts. It is not noted for its beauty! Gym shoes also have to be of a certain type. Sports sessions have their requirements as well. In the winter you need skis and skates. Ski trails there are aplenty. Even I become an avid skier at last!

Skating is a problem and stays a problem. Vänni has to get hockey skates. They look for used ones all over the village. Finally he finds big skates, size 42. Vänni fastens them with a leather strap. When I arrive at the rink, the only skates in the family hanging over my shoulder, I am greeted with an incredulous burst of laughter. I try to keep calm as I am binding them with at least two straps around my feet. Lurching on these skates I acquire a satisfactory skill of skating, sufficient to fulfil the role of the buffoon that I find myself in. Luckily ball games and general sports are easy for me.

The tuition fee, which is far above what our evacuee family can afford, constitutes another ordeal. Of course I get a sibling allowance, but my family pleads for total exemption from the fee. Several of my classmates are also trying for the exemption. When the school has decided, the names of the students given the exemption from fees are declared publicly, and almost solemnly. And so I hear my name and my brother's name from the lectern after the morning service. It is no shame! Finland is a poor, broken country after the war. But you can feel the glances from some, and you look down. I don't swagger around that day, anyway. Tomorrow everything might be forgotten, maybe.

At home they are glad about the free tuition, of course. Mother actually hugs us, and father looks as pleased as Punch. But at night, in bed, I whisper to sister how I really felt at school. I tell her how low I

was feeling when we came back to the classroom after the morning service. I lay bare my miserable sense of self-worth and all my bad thoughts that were churning inside me through that school day. I tell her in order to get rid of them myself, but also to warn my Little Sister, who will have the same experience in her turn. I sigh, deep and long. Home is gone forever. I have to fit into this new life. Somehow we have to survive. We as a family and we as the whole country. *‘Bless and shelter us, oh Mightiest, with your hand. Guide our nation, give us strength...’*

47. Challenges of Everyday Living

The end of combat does not translate to the end of lack of food and other everyday things. Ration coupons regulate our lives for a long time to come.

A rumour spreads around the village that you can buy milk at the railroad station straight from the ox wagons into your own pail. It is now quite legal. They have to pour good milk into the ditch, if nobody turns up to buy.

This situation arose when they started to evacuate the areas newly lost through the peace treaty. Again people are being transported into the rest of the country with their animals and their goods. The railroad junction in Haapamäki is handy for stopping to milk the cows. Extra milk is sold or otherwise distributed to the people waiting at the station. When the word gets around about an expected evacuee train, people prepare to fetch milk.

Mother has gone on a few days and been given milk. Now she commands me to go, and pushes a milk pail in my hand. I am terrified. The rail yard is as big as anything, track after track. How will I ever find the wagons where they sell milk? How can I ask these strangers about it, I have no idea how they regard this necessity they are faced with. I don't want to see their suffering. I have no strength anymore to see that! But I have to go. Sister comes with me. Now I have to watch her, as well, as we jump from one track to another searching for the needle in the hay stack. Trains come and go; the engines are going back and forth all the time.

At last we see a group of people at the farthest part of the railyard. We fly there as fast as we can. There is a long queue and we wait for our turn at the tail end of it. When we get near the wagon, I send sister to listen to what others are saying as they present their pail. Sister runs back very soon. Apparently you only have to say what you want, and how much. Some ask how they are, some commiserate with their loss. When it is my turn I whisper my errand and stare at the tired face of the woman. We are given three litres of the precious milk. Then we have to watch out for spilling any on the rails. Slowly and with dignity we step over the tracks. The exhausted figures of the women occupy our minds as we drag the heavy pail home together. Mother is over the moon.

Next time round, the job is much easier. But the transportation of evacuees through Haapamäki station comes to an end eventually. And that is the end of our family's extravagance with milk as well.

The last evacuations and delivery of milk is a strong reminder that Karelia doesn't exist anymore. We will not get it back now. We have to be satisfied with strange places. At least we are in our home country. We remember father's words: "Don't forget your own dialect, it is the only thing left for us!"

For the people of Lapland their trials are only just beginning, and the same for the Porkkala people. We have to rent out Porkkala for 50 years. All of Petsamo is lost, also most of Salla according to the peace treaty. People are evacuated from there, as well. We also have to drive out the German soldiers from Lapland. They refuse to go voluntarily, as the world is still in the middle of war. In the war of Lapland they burn everything they can, as they are withdrawing their troops. Folk are evacuated south and especially to Sweden, away from the fighting. Every day we hear news about settlements burnt to cinders. But we do not lose Lapland. The folk can return and rebuild their houses when the war is over. Tuitu and Tellu, too, are taking part in the rebuilding at an international Quaker camp.

Entire Finland is in a grip of clearing new ground and rebuilding. There are many widows and orphans. There are invalids who are not capable of working any more. There are returned soldiers and lottas, who have grown up during the five war years. They are young people without a trade. There are all the evacuees. All have to be given some chance to make a living. Everybody works like fury with the small rations. Finland has to rise! And it does! The huge war reparations alone demand extreme productiveness.

Every young schoolkid knows the spirit of the time and the pace of working. It is not time to laze about yet. There is distress still. But there is no danger of being bombed now. There is no hunkering down in the potato cellar now. Now we can embrace even children's work. And that is doing your homework, helping at home, and playing! Playing peacefully, with no fear! Now we can even afford to quarrel! As for the meagre pickings, we were so used to that in the war years that we don't suffer much from the continuing deprivation. We don't know anything better.

The brothers return from the front. Ahti is a teacher and moves to his first permanent job with his family. Tanu is continuing his studies. Kylli gets a job as a teacher of weaving. She had finished her studies already before the war. Tuitu and Tellu begin their studies. The family scatters, only a nucleus remains. Christmas brings us all together again. Christmas of Peace! The Christmas hymns and songs are sung with gratitude in our hearts now. In spite of everything!

In Europe the critical stage of the war is still ahead.

From Little Sister:

The most memorable happening of my second year of school in Haapamäki was that I broke my leg in a school yard melee. For weeks I dragged this heavy cast around on my crutches. It got very itchy as I got some infection on my skin under the cast. The doctors hadn't told my parents to make me exercise the leg, so I kept off it for some six weeks, and ended up with a useless leg for a long time after the cast came off. I had to learn to walk again!

The places referred to in Aili's story are the other areas that Finland had to give to Russia. Petsamo and Salla are in Lapland, in the North-East, and Finnish people were still living there at the time of the peace treaty. Porkkala is an island in the Gulf of Finland.

48. Exhilaration of Speed

Winter brings a world full of snow. The snowdrifts grow into gigantic embankments. Alternately a thaw makes them wet, and a subsequent freeze-up hardens them. Thus the ridges freeze into ski jumps, where we practise for big slopes. This winter is going to be the dream of a skier. I am learning to ski in earnest now. Stride by stride, slide by slide, I feel the joy of skiing growing in me. Sister and I ski shorter trips. We fall down headlong in the snow when the downhill is too meandering and our skis won't obey us. But we get up, fetch our runaway skis and fix them to our boots again with a strong rubber band, and continue our journey.

It is an ill happening if a ski has got stuck in an exposed branch and broken. Then we hobble home, unhappy. It means the end of skiing for that winter. Wonder if father could patch the ski? It has been seen to happen. Father really repairs the ski with a small bit of tin plate and using really tiny nails. The problem with this is that snow will easily get between the tin plate and the ski and sliding is more difficult. But it does function, at least for a while.

The sun is beating down from ice-blue sky as I walk towards home with the other students. Although my bag is heavy, I walk in leaps and bounds. Soon I will be on the ski trail! You can't let this kind of weather go without skiing. Sister is sitting in the corner of a sofa and wants to come, too. I intend to ski the five-kilometre trail. Mother thinks it is too much for Ritva. Mother cajoles her into baking with her. I rush out. I ski through the yard, and I am already in the forest. The trail is in a splendid condition. I climb the first hill, slide down to the valley, and up another hill. On top of the hill I pull with long, even thrust of my ski-poles. I enjoy the power that is driving me on. I enjoy the rhythm of my skiing. I enjoy the glide of the skis and the sinewy strike of the poles in the snow. Everything works just like it is meant to.

The sunlight sifting through to the forest is glinting, making dazzling patches in the snow that otherwise is dark with the tree shadows. Confusing shadows! The shadows of the secrets of the forest! I know several bombs landed here. Snow covers the traces mercifully. But there is another kind of shimmer in the forest. Just here is a really gloomy place. The trail follows a tunnel of branches. I get through it OK! Nothing bad will happen. The forest troll doesn't capture me. I don't

really fear that troll any more, but it is fun to bring here in my imagination all the ancient spirit beings which our ancestors have believed in. And really, how can we know for sure! There is some impressive power in the forest.

As I am climbing the next hill, the trees are thinner and the hill higher. My skis begin to slip backwards. I spread the tips out and take short climbing steps to get up the last steep bank. My hands are strained, so are the poles. I spend a while on the top panting. In spite of the cold I am sweating. I loosen my scarf and let the air cool down my damp neck.

One of my favourite poems, *Child Fantasies* by Uno Kailas, is in my mind again. It is the time for it now!

*'And I laugh at the sun.
It laughs, too.
It is silly to laugh at the sun.
Father and mother and aunt and uncle never laugh at it.
For they are big people. And big people are wise.
And the wise never see anything.
The wise never understand anything.
The wise don't know the sun at all.
But I am stupid and I laugh at the sun.
I think, sun, that you are stupid, too.
We laugh at the wise ones, sun.'*

After a while of laughing at the sun I slide down with my skis. The trail makes a few more bends, but returns to the familiar yard. The tired but happy skier gets to enjoy a meal almost straight away. After eating I feel very drowsy. But homework needs doing, too. In my dreams, I do it very quickly.

Tomorrow I will go again! And the day after tomorrow.

Shrove Tuesday is an important day here. At sports period we go to the nearest slope in force. Some have brought a wooden sleigh with them. Most are carrying a thick piece of cardboard from home. There is room for a few downhillers in the sleigh. It speeds with ever increasing pace along the ever icier slope. Guiding it is an exacting job. If the sleigh hits a tree or a stone, there could be hell to pay. The piece of paper feels safer. It doesn't slide too well; you can control it with your feet and even arms. When you make a long line of sliders, one after another in close contact, sometimes we keep together all the way down.



Often, however, the line breaks or scatters completely. Although we fall, most times it is just fun play. Sweaty and wet from the snow we return to school. The fun continues on the following Sunday, of course. Even grown-ups take part then. We compete at going downhill in earnest. But the grown-ups, too, laugh and enjoy themselves. It feels awesome after so many sad years.

PS: Vänni goes to the skating rink so often that I can hardly ever use his hockey skates. I don't really mind. I don't miss the hilarity I engender in the other skaters with my staggering.

49. Card Sharks

The *halepralla* cards have broken down or just got lost ages ago in our many moves. We have Black Peter cards. It is rather unexciting to play with just the two of us, but it is difficult to make Vänni take part. Maybe we have been badgering him too much.

We are given new cards and we are happy. These cards have 52 different plants common to the fields and forests of home. As well as a clear picture, there is of course a name, both in Finnish and in Latin. We enter into studying them in earnest.

We start using the Latin names while playing. We had already learnt some of this magnificent sounding language by listening to the Big Ones. “*Ante, apud, ad, adversus, circum, circa ...*” It is a long sequence of prepositions requiring the accusative case that the Big Ones recited aloud. We know it from beginning to end. To be sure, a couple of the words have been lost in the middle of it, but we add words with the same rhythm and say “*sarkaa, verkaa*”. We haven’t noticed any admiring listeners looking perturbed at that spot, so we have continued calmly to the very end. It has gone down without a hitch!

So now we continue studying the language. To ease the memorising of the names we invent Finnish equivalents for the plant names. When *Lathyrus odoratus* becomes ‘*Lättyjen odotus*’ (waiting for pancakes) in Finnish, we are sure to remember sweet pea. Or when *Anemone nemorosa* becomes ‘*Aneitten numerot*’ (numbers of indulgences), of course we see in front of our eyes anemone groves. What about harebells! *Campanula batula* gets corrupted into ‘*Patukka tappelu*’ (fight with cudgels). Not all names are as easy to translate. We have to resort to brutal violence sometimes. We go through the pack of cards often and test each other on the real Latin or Finnish names. We really know those names. In our dreams we already see the times in the future when we will be hogging the limelight at a Latin lesson, or in botany or zoology class.

Because the plant cards are already almost wrecked, we start badgering for bird cards. They are selling them now also. Soon the European nightjar, or *Caprimulgus europaeus*, has transformed into ‘*Katri muljotti Eurooppaa*’ (Katri ogled Europe), the Eurasian eagleowl, *Bubo bubo* into ‘*Puupo*’, although in the midst of the game shortened to just Katri and Puupo. We hear noises from the kitchen.

“What are the kids talking about?”

“They are playing in languages, reputedly.”

The splat of cards continues for a long time. It loses its fun when the plants and animals get too familiar. We don't wonder enthusiastically any more.

“You remembered even dandelion! (*Taraxacum officinale*) “Mind you, I remember even parasiitti.” (*Stercorarius parasiticus*, Arctic skua)

And then the whole shebang makes us laugh. We throw the cards to the back of the shelf. Once in a while we still check our memory. What we have learnt must not be forgotten. Repetition is the mother of learning!

I have a private interest in cards, too. It began by a happenstance. I had told a young and beautiful woman living in our neighbourhood about our card games. One day I met her in the yard. She asked if I knew the proper cards, with kings and queens. The only thing I know about them is that I must not touch them! I have never even seen them. I just shook my head, confused. She then asked if I had ever played Black Peter. I nodded with enthusiasm. I had an invitation to come to her place. I promised to come, if mother and father would let me.

At the appointed time I arrive at her house. It is beautifully furnished, and extremely tidy. There is a deck of cards at the table. It is only then that I realise there is a strange man, an officer, in the room. The lady introduces him and says that it is not easy to play cards just with two people. You need at least three. That's why she has asked another visitor to play with us. We play Black Peter for a long time.

The man asks the lady what it was that needed repairing. The lady is startled and says she had almost forgotten that the lamp in the kitchen wasn't working. They go to the kitchen together and leave me to examine the bookshelves. I have a long time to look around them. I am a bit surprised at how long it takes to change a lamp bulb. But they seemed to have a real problem to sort out. We continue the game. The lady is so happy and friendly. When I am leaving she asks if I will come again, maybe next week. Of course I promise to go. I hasten home. Mother asks how it went. I tell her about it all.

Next few times the lady has many articles waiting to be repaired in her kitchen. I am enjoying myself at the bookshelves again. The books are actually quite peculiar. We also have time to play cards. At home I won't tell them too much about these visits. I just say that we played and repaired her things. Father and mother decided that I shouldn't go there anymore. I tell the lady when she asks me again. I had felt so flattered when a little girl was invited to take part in grownups' games. I am astonished when I realise that I don't mind at all not going there again. Even Rönty-Iivari is good enough for my playmate now.

My notoriety as a well-known gambler is greeted with a resounding guffaw by the Big Ones when they come home for holidays. I am vexed. What is there to laugh about?

50. The Family Circle

Brother Ahti has secured a position in a mid-Finnish municipality. The teachers of course have a dwelling at the school. We travel to see the family and their new home. The train journey is short. The school looks like any old wooden school. The dwelling is only partly furnished as yet.

Angel-haired Marja Vellamo is practicing her walking, but frequently is prone on the floor. She doesn't seem to be scared of falling, just gets up and goes on. We gals lie next to her on the floor and tickle her mercilessly. Everybody is laughing. In between we eat, of course, and explore the village. It is in a beautiful area! As we sit around in the evening we hear peculiar snaps ever so often. Finally somebody asks about them. The reason is explained.

“There are a lot of cockroaches here.”

“Oh my goodness!”

“What are they?”

“We have tried everything possible and even impossible, but they say you can't do anything about them.”

“I clean all the time, but everything seems useless.”

“Don't you worry! Just find some small box! It has to have a lid as well.”

“What do we need that for?”

“I was thinking of a magic trick. Thanks! This is just right.”

Ahti goes to the kitchen with his box, and the rest of us after him. That's where the snaps seemed to come from. Solemnly he opens the lid and sets the open cardboard box in the middle of the floor. He puts a few copper coins inside the box. We stand around earnestly. Then we follow brother back into the living room. We look at each other, stunned. We demand an explanation. Ahti begins to sing Estonian songs that he has learned from Estonian volunteers in the war. We try to study the language and we already know a few verses. Marjatta hastens to make our beds and shoos us to bed.

In the morning we gather for breakfast. Suddenly we hear screams from the kitchen. We rush in. Ritva has remembered to peek into the sacrificial box, hence the loud yelling. The bottom of the box is crawling with unknown brown bugs. They are bigger than the bedbugs that had become all too familiar to us during the war. Brother explains.

“I complained about these cockroaches in the village, as I didn’t know them either. Their advice was to put copper coins in a box on the floor. It will be full in no time, they said. Apparently cockroaches like copper coins!”

We started laughing. The laughter travelled in bursts from one to another. So greed is not limited to people only!

“You can destroy the contents of the box yourself” brother’s wife demands with loathing in her voice.

“It is worth listening to the advice of the villagers.”

“Remember that about the school affairs, too! It saves futile squabbling, as you are new here!” father confirms.

We return home satisfied. Little Marja Vellamo is the apple of everybody’s eye. The first grandchild for mother and father! I am its auntie, just like my sisters are. Big brother’s life seems to be heading in the right direction, cockroaches notwithstanding. It is not easy to return to civilian life after many war years.

The daughters who had worked as lottas are no worry. Kylli is back in her own profession, and is teaching weaving. Tuitu, emotionally fragile and considered timid, ended up in Jyväskylä studying to be a teacher. Tellu applied to The College of Sociology in Helsinki. It was difficult to secure somewhere to live for her, as we still live under heavy regulations. A scouting friend of Vella’s offered a room in her home for a small rent. Tellu is now living there under strict scrutiny. Tellu complains in her short letters, but mother and father don’t seem to worry. They just pacify her. They whisper to each other that it will do her some good. So everything is shipshape!

But Tanu gives us a real surprise! He was appointed to his first position as an industrial doctor in a timber town. He comes home on the weekend to introduce his girlfriend. She looks young and very pretty. Her blond hair is blowing freely around her face. She talks a lot, but her stories are interesting and colourful. She must have the gift of the gab.

She is working as the editor of the factory newspaper. We are a bit diffident about her, as she seems to be such a city girl, even a Helsinki girl. As if we girls would even know what that means. We scrutinise her speech and her tone of voice, her gestures and her expressions. When she leaves the room we go with her. After such a thorough, although timid, examination we accept her! We just marvel that even Tanu has a girlfriend! Will the whole family scatter if even the girls start introducing their friends! Where will it all lead to!

“And what about Vänni?”

“He is only a snotty little boy!”

“Vänni married? Never!”

“Whoever marries our Vänni is going to be flattened under a roller!”

“But Vänni is hard-working and gets things done.”

“But he is also fond of ordering people about!”

“What do you think will happen to us?”

“I want to have many children, anyway!”

“So do I!”

We get carried away with the image of our future, which is getting spookier and spookier, but we don't want to give up the game yet. Only after we both have given birth to a full dozen, do we go to sleep before the thirteenth, convinced that a big family means a lot of happiness! ‘*Cheaper by the dozen*’ will remain our maxim. That is one thing I and Ränty-livari actually agree on.

Back in the everyday world our small nuclear family goes on with its arduous, happy, miserable, busy, lazy life. In our free time we do sports. Vänni organises competitions for us, and of course wins them himself! Mostly we sit with our noses in a book. All library books are accepted!

Sometimes we go visiting, sometimes we have visitors. The parents of one of my classmates invite the whole family for a cup of coffee. They live in a beautiful house in the midst of fields. The children are quiet, of course, and don't interfere with the grown-up discussion

except if asked something. We munch on pulla and slurp juice. The so-called coffee is still ersatz, but even that makes you talk. We are listening with impatience and send mother pleading looks. Even the hostess notices and invites us to leave the table.

Finally, we can play! It is wonderful to play together, with so much room and various buildings. We examine every nook as we play hide and seek. In the yard we throw snowballs. That is interrupted when father and mother tell us to come in to say goodbye. It takes a long time to clean off the snow. The folk come to the veranda to farewell us. We make as beautiful a curtsy as we know how. The classmate becomes a real friend. Later I can go there by myself, or with Rönty-Iivari.

We make some longer journeys, too. Mother has some distant relatives a train journey away in the direction of Toijala. I only know them by name. There we meet a friendly host family, and lots of yummy food. Mother and father are glad to see them. We talk about everything that has happened to our families during the war years. We talk through our evacuation experiences. All friends and acquaintances in common are mentioned, and their stories told if known. We haven't even met other relatives yet after this second flight. They are scattered all over the country. We have received some letters, though. Travelling is expensive and very difficult.

From this trip I have a strong and distressing impression of a boy with a cleft palate, who speaks with a nasal twang. He is so joyous and high-spirited in spite of his problem. I decide to ask Tanu if it can be corrected with an operation. It stays troubling my mind.

The spring is already well advanced. For several weeks we have been digging channels for the meltwater, and snow has disappeared from the yard. When the first sand patches appear, we are already drawing hopscotch grids. Just like every spring. Next to a wall the soil also dries early. That's the beginning of wall ball. And then the summer birds arrive!

Now it is Mayday. A peacetime Mayday! We can hear the hubbub of a big festival from the village. People march past the school with flags aflutter. There are a huge number of people, both young and old, even children amongst them. They are singing with gusto *'March on, you strong folk, not a bunch of cheap slaves'* (the rallying cry of the Communist Party). I want to join the march, as the neighbour's girl has

done. Father forbids it. I sulk. I sneak to the end of the line and stay a bit separated from it. I arrive at the festival ground. Music, singing, speeches and more speeches! I get restless. My mind is churning. Why are they speaking like that? I am behind the throng; I turn away and creep away stealthily, unseen. A cry escapes my throat and I am shaking. I walk home. I wait outside until I have calmed down and sneak back to my books. Sister follows me and insists to know where I have been. "Just around" I answer. I am ashamed to confess my transgression. But sometime I will have to do it. Maybe tonight!

The school finishes with a spring celebration again. The hymn of summer is carried on our voices to the wide world again. My report card is in my hand! It says I can move on to the second class. Now I have not another worry about tomorrow! Summer, the long summer, is ahead.

In the beginning of the summer we have a surprise waiting for us. Tanu is going to get married to that city girl he brought home. They will have a wedding in the bride's home in Rekola, which is nearly in Helsinki. We take a train to the wedding.

Elina's home is a big stone building, amazing in its size. Besides the nice stepmother and the hefty father, the house is full of sisters and brothers and other relatives. We are totally confused with all the introductions. We will never be able to tell one from another! Where in the world can we find a bed when there are so many people around?

When the time comes, we are spread between adjacent rooms in the second story, Ritva and me in the same room. Our own room amongst such a multitude is a miracle indeed. This house is so big we are sure to get lost. There are corridors everywhere, it feels like a labyrinth. Luckily there are enough advice-givers, too. We manage to find the right place for our evening tea. We even find our own room again after a bit of guidance.

The wedding ceremony is held in a big living room. It is full of people. Mother and father are directed to sit on chairs at the front, but the rest of us stand further back. The wedding march is played, and the father leads his daughter to stand in front of the pastor, where Tauno Ilmari is waiting. Soon they are congratulating the husband and the wife. Seppo Ilmarinen, '*a very skilful smith*', has forged a wife for himself. When we gather for a wedding feast, one speaker after another stands up to convey his good wishes to the couple. The celebration goes on forever.

In the morning the young folk of the house go for a swim with the hostess. She says she always starts the day with a swim. At the edge of the garden, there is a small river with its swimming cove. There is a length of shallow beach for the children, deep river for the bigger ones. The water is already much warmer than in the spring. With glee we splash about and have a water fight. This river with its verdant banks is a real experience to store in our memories.

The tired travellers return home satisfied. There are many lovely memories to remember, some also to wonder about. Especially the size of that house! And the fact that Elina has so many sisters and brothers! Are there actually more than in our family? Wonder what kind of a herd they will have!

From Little Sister:

The only thing I remember about Tauno's wedding is that I ate too much of the scrumptious home-made ice-cream and made myself thoroughly sick. In fact it was so thoroughly that I couldn't even think about eating ice-cream again until ten years later.

51. 'Where Leads the Road of the Wind in the Air'

Father has received an appointment to a permanent position near Kouvola. He travels to find out about conditions there. It is apparently in a small village in Valkeala municipality, about ten kilometres from Kouvola. The school is in a beautiful spot under a hill in a fertile valley.

Packing starts. We have accumulated far too many things. But by now we are adept at packing, we have moved so many times during the war years. We take moving in our stride. Just a few dishes break when they fall. A luggage carriage is almost full. We travel in a passenger coach ourselves. It is again bursting with folk.

It is painfully hot. Wonder if there is thunder in the air! If there is rumbling, it has to be thunder, not bombers any more. We have to change trains in Riihimäki. We have far too much stuff to carry with us. We are sitting in the station building again waiting for the train to the east with our mountain of stuff. In Kouvola we have to change to a local train, which will stop 'at every milk platform'. From the station we still have two kilometres to walk. We leave our things in a cubicle. They will be fetched with the neighbour's horse.

It is exciting to come down the sandy hill shaded by trees to the school. The yard is small for a schoolyard. There is no playing baseball there! At the top of the hill right next to the road there is a club house and a big sandy sportsground. Our ballgames have thus been resurrected!

Now we open the door and tumble in with great excitement. Our inquiring glances roam around the rooms, we are happy enough with what we see. We make ersatz and juice and devour our picnic lunch. A neighbour's wife is already coming to welcome us. Her husband is bringing our cases from the train stop. The goods carriage will come the next day. It takes many men and horses to fetch our belongings to this house. Then the building of a home begins in these new rooms. Everything needed is in its place in record time. So much for the holidays!

Midsummer is nigh. The day before, we clean and decorate the home. New paper tablecloths are spread on the tables. A vase full of lilacs does wonders. The men fetch the young birch trees we have been promised from the edge of the meadow to adorn our steps. Fresh birch

bunches are waiting for the evening sauna. The vegie garden is thriving. There is no more hurry. The big girls have arrived for a holiday. And home feels like home! We indulge in the mellow heat of midsummer sauna heat. The magic night of Midsummer!

Kylli is on holidays and she promises to weave a new rug for the living room. It is going to be so big that she needs an extra-broad loom and two weavers. Mother of course has no time, and the big girls are returning to their studies. Who is left to weave with Kylli? All look at me. I don't want to and I don't know how to! Besides, I have to study German. I have decided to try and jump over the second class, straight to the third, in Kouvola girls' school. It is a nine year school. I would be an ancient graduand if I couldn't jump over the second class over summer. I can go to exams on the days people go to do their catch-up exams. We have already spoken to the headmistress and she has agreed. Other subjects I can read about, but German is a completely new language for me. I can't even pronounce it, let alone understand the grammar. That is quite enough of work for my summer.

But we also need the rug, to make the room look like home. I promise with the proviso that Kylli will teach me German as we work. She studied German in middle-school over ten years ago, but she is no language scholar. As we bang the loom (the moving part, which makes the weaving tight) I learn at least one sentence. It is repeated in the beginning of every sentence. '*Wie sagst du?*' (German for 'How do you say?'), which I hear as '*Viisaaks tuu*' (Finnish for 'become wise'). But it doesn't happen just by repeating the request!

The weaving of the rug is not very simple either. The warp is some mixture of artificial cotton and linen. But the weave is paper tape, a centimetre broad. It is bought in the shop. There are several different colours available. We have light red and brown. Before weaving the strips are soaked in water so they won't break too often. Water is dripping when we weave. The weave is wrapped around the spindle wet, and you begin to weave. We have to have towels on our knees to manage it. But it is summer, which will dry you. '*Viisaaks tuu*'! We are having fun, anyway! Just some cheeky critics are too ready with their opinions sometimes. Occasionally I also wonder if this process of becoming wise will actually help me pass the looming language test.

The rug is accepted with an approving hum when we spread it out on the living room floor. When we remove the temporary bits of rug we

see how it brings together the whole big room. And because it has just a right number of stripes, you can jump back and forth on it without stepping on a stripe. Everybody seems satisfied. But that task sure took its time.

The test time is getting near, too. Kylli comes with me to Kouvola. As we are waiting our turn in the school corridor, Kylli's former teacher from Viipuri comes and asks her what exam she is going to. Kylli points to me and purses her teacher lips. I take the test and I am accepted in the third year class. Vänni and I start to traipse the long journey from home to the train stop to catch the local train to school, and back again at night. Sometimes we have to catch the bus which is three kilometres from home.

We still have a few days of summer left. Vänni is a dedicated sportsman. We run, we do high jump, long jump and triple jump, as well as pole vaulting, and we play baseball on the big field with the villagers. Ränty-Iivari can't keep up with us, as she is so small. But she is accepted for the maintenance crew. We begin to get to know some of the girls and boys of the village.

From Little Sister:

I liked my primary school generally. It was a very small country school in the small village of Aitomäki, and all four classes were in the same room, with just one teacher. The two lower classes did art or writing, while the upper classes had history or geography, and I used to listen to their class, as it was far more interesting than ours. My teacher at that time was my father.

I remember we had scientific equipment in a glass cupboard: things like prisms, a model of the solar system, and a sextant. I used to sneak into the classroom to play with these, especially the prism, which held me mesmerised for hours. There was also a globe with the entire world drawn on it, what a delight! And there was the library, not a huge one, but I got to read Finnish translations of ‘*Alice in Wonderland*’, ‘*Christopher Robinson*’ and other classics at an early age. At home, father had huge volumes of things like ‘*Iliad and Odyssey*’, and a big encyclopaedia with names of the volumes I still remember: ‘*A-Isonzo*’, ‘*Isopurje-Maskotti*’, ‘*Masku-Sanomalehti*’, ‘*San Remo-Öölanti*’. I actually used to read them like a novel! I read “*Iliad and Odyssey*” before I was ten, and I loved the cadence of the words.

A new thing at that time was the children who returned to Finland after having been given temporary homes in Sweden. I had at least two of them in my class. They looked different from the rest of us. They were better dressed, and they had something hesitant in their manner, as if they didn’t quite feel that they belonged to this place. And of course they spoke Swedish fluently. We got over these differences very quickly and soon they were accepted as part of the mob. The two girls entered secondary school at the same time as I did, and we became very good friends.

52. Into the New School

Nobody comes with us any more when Vänni and I leave home for our journey to school. Brother goes to the boys' school, I to the girls' school. It is a school that was moved from Karelia to here. Many teachers are from Karelia, too. There is a rumour going around that the headmistress is a very strict disciplinarian.

I have to venture into a strange company alone again. The classes are big. In the third grade there are three separate classes: A, B and C. My class comes to school in trains and buses. There are a few city children amongst us, too. They have to suit our timetable to the trains and busses. It isn't always possible. Some mornings we can be late, as there is no train to get us to school in time. The school doesn't have its own building yet, but it functions in the rooms of the upper classes of the elementary school. As you can expect, space is at a premium everywhere. We all are waiting eagerly for the new building. I start to see the new classmates as individuals.

I soon make friends with the people in our train from Kaipainen, and some even from as far as Luumäki. We make a noisy crowd in the Kouvola station women's room, where we often wait for the train. Other women turn away at the door when they hear our giggling. Some orderly comes to warn us. If we are so noisy, they won't allow us in here anymore. What a nuisance, we were having such fun! With disheartened whispering we do our homework if we can bear it.

Now it is our train arriving at the station. We rush out. The train travellers drop off at the stops each in turn. In the morning we get on again to straighten out the hardest knots in our homework. We ask Vuokko, and she tells us how she has thought about the matter. The others correct their books accordingly. My train journey is short and therefore I am in a desperate hurry to copy from the others. Because the train is late, we gallop the whole way to school with the stack of books under our arms. It is bound together with a thick leather strap. It is difficult to protect it from the rain.

Our home group teacher teaches religious studies, she is strict, but friendly. The headmistress teaches history. She is a well-regarded woman. Kylli's old German teacher is my teacher, too. She is very old and very nice. All the teachers are good enough for me. Therefore I will not start analysing them. They all have their ways.

Some lessons gallop by too fast, others don't ever seem to finish. I suppose it always has been and it always will be thus. One can't have the same enthusiasm for all subjects. Nothing happens that would be special and worth remembering. I am still timid and ignorant. But at gym and sports periods I run, jump and leap, as well as play baseball, with all my might.

Before Christmas there are two communal celebrations at school. First is the heart-achingly serious Independence Day celebration. The choir has been practising for a long time, and they sing gloriously. We listen devoutly to headmistress's speech and join in the national anthem. Everyone must be going through their war experiences in their mind. If only it would never repeat again! One doesn't dare to bring that time in one's thoughts. How did we ever survive it? Such a small nation! We must have been in the hand of The Highest!

Next on the horizon is the Christmas celebration. The big fir tree stands decorated, but without candles, in front of the auditorium. The program has the Christmas story as a tableau, poems and singing, pixie games, and Santa Claus, as authentic as he can be. The big sack of presents thuds on the floor from his shoulder. Everyone gets a brown paper bag, with a small pulla and an apple in it. The war is indeed over! What a joy! Will you even have the heart to eat them? Finally we dance some children's circle dances. Many have their treasured gift bag in their hand marking rhythm as they dance.

The next morning we receive our report cards. I have nothing to be proud of. I have behaved like a little mouse, hiding behind the backs of others. I have a low grade in German. I have been expecting that. But I am no good in anything else, either, except in sports. Thanks to my slavedriver brother for that! I was a bit worried about that grade, too. The autumn was warm, and snow didn't come till late. I couldn't cart my awkward skis in the train. I had to walk with other ski-less ones. What grade do I get for walking? Luckily the teacher has looked at my results in the athletics.

The family consoles the dishonoured one. Maybe by spring I will have caught up with the others. It is not all that easy to jump grades, they say. I am happy at school, and I don't experience great existential angst. Now I have ahead of me a long, carefree Christmas holiday. Therefore, to the skis! Rönty-livari is by now quite a respectable skier.

She is small, but tenacious. But Vänni is disappearing into his own pursuits in a hurry.

At Christmas we follow the usual pattern for Christmas. Big sisters come for the holidays; they are just the same as before. We clean together, we cook together. Rationing is still going on. There is lack of everything, just like before. Together we listen to the Christmas service on the radio and sing the carols. But there is no Santa any more. At least he has dropped a sack of presents in the entrance. I receive hockey skates. They are old but they fit me perfectly, like they were made for me. Now I can learn to skate without the leather straps. I have in my sights becoming a real ice princess! But they say that princesses have to have figure skates!

53. The American Parcel

There is a parcel coming to us from America. We children couldn't wait. What wonders would be in it; objects from the big world, for sure. But who would be sending them to us? And why? Father and mother discuss the issue between themselves, sometimes in fervent overtones. Well, we do know that father would never accept any aid packages for us from the state aid organization during the war. And now some stranger from overseas is sending a parcel addressed to us. How does he know that we even exist?

Because there is still a scarcity of everything, mother is pleased with the gift. Because there is still a scarcity of everything, father doesn't want to accept preferential treatment that others won't be getting. Of course we open the parcel right away. There is dried fruit, tins of preserves, coffee, and pieces of material and readymade clothes.

"Aaah" I exhale when a two piece woollen suit is unravelled. I can see that it is just my size, right away. "Mother, mother", I shout jumping higher and higher and stretch my arms towards the article of clothing. Like a wind I go to my room to put it on, even though it lacks a blouse. However, I find something in the wardrobe that will make do. I feel I am the most elegant girl in the world as I join the others. You may say whatever, but this has been sent specially for me! Mother agrees with me. It is too long, but we turn the hem up. The bolero, or whatever you call the top part, is a bit big, but it will suffice. It is the material that makes the outfit beautiful. It is plaid, with reddish tones, and of soft wool. It is too difficult to let go of it even for the night. But mother doesn't let me sleep in it even for the first night. I wear it to school the very next day.

"It is so beautiful!"

"Let me feel it. Oh, how soft!"

"Feels lovely. It is real wool, too!"

"But where did you get this?"

"From America. It came in the mail."

“All the way from America! Who do you know there?” “I don’t know anything about that”, I mumble, embarrassed, shrugging my shoulders.

The lesson begins, and all the curious kids have to be patient. During morning recess they are still around me, but in the afternoon they leave me and my suit in peace.

At home I ask about it. Who is this David, who is identified as the sender of the parcel? All gather around to hear the story about a part of the family we young ones didn’t even know about. We have had so many other things to ponder.

Mother’s family lived in Jääski. Grandpa had bought a small farm there. We called the house *Salomummola*. Grandpa Abel was apparently a real jack-of-all-trades. He often acted as the interpreter when there were dealings with the Swedes or the Russians. Pietari (St Petersburg) was an important trading post for the isthmus farmers, but there were few that knew the language.

In his older days grandpa longed to settle down, and became a farmer. He had three daughters and three sons. Uncle Sylvester died young in the war of independence. He was a very important friend of father’s. One of the daughters also died young with some illness. She used to whittle handsome animals out of wood. Auntie Siiri founded a family with Uncle Armas, who was a sergeant-major. They moved to Oulu. Uncle Aati and Auntie Lyyti lived in Enso, uncle as a carpenter, and Uncle Uuno continued on the farm with his Olga. Our mother, Aino Maria, met school teacher Tuomas and they got married. And thus was our family started; this family that is the real core of my story.

But back to *Salomummola*! Granny Albertina’s sister lived for long periods in Albertina’s home. Granny could be a stern and irascible grouch, grandpa was an ever- laughing joker, at least that was Kylli’s story. Granny’s sister was warm and cooperative. Anyway, this sister also had a son. This son went to America when he grew up. He kept writing to his kin. During the lean years the connection broke, but has now been re-established. Of course we send a thank-you letter.

It seems that it is still a delicate subject for mother, though she is hugely thankful for the package. So am I for my dress. With it I have become almost grown-up! When the next parcel arrives, I don’t expect

anything anymore. I have received enough. Now it is Ritva's turn to expect and to receive.

Sister and I keep whispering in bed for a long time. Mother comes in wondering why we aren't asleep. But we are developing all kinds of adventures for our American half-uncle in that far corner of the globe. He is alternating between having a huge farm with enormous buildings and gardens, and traipsing the length and breadth of America with his tatty old rucksack on his back and dragging his small daughter along. And he is sending us parcels with the last of his money! After a while we forget about him. There are so many other things to think about. The joys and sorrows of winter are still to come!

54. Personal Shoals

At some stage my schoolwork starts to go downhill rapidly. I can cope with other subjects, no problem, but mathematics gives me grief. I don't seem to get to grips with equations and the letters associated with them. We agonise with long mathematics problems. There are all kinds of solutions with their different amounts of substances. One has to plus and minus, multiply and divide, with the help of the equation made with letters. Those tasks are sheer Hebrew for me.

I had to confess at home that I had failed the test. I sit night after night staring at the problems in front of me and most probably crying. Father is known never to help his children in their school work, but now he makes an exception. He starts to explain the problem, but he leaves it up to me to find the solution. That doesn't help either. The next night I am still struggling with the same problems. Carefully I read aloud the problem and try to understand what it is actually about. That's what father advised me to do.

Ritva runs to me and says that she knows how to do that. She works on similar problems, just without the letters. Then she takes over. What are we looking for? What parts are given, and how much of each, etc. Everything possible is written down. The whole task is taken apart and put together again in a different way. Finally I understand what the question is. It is only a common mixture; there is nothing mysterious and extraordinary about it! And from then on, this girl starts to do all right in the exams. I start getting straight tens (the highest mark)! I grin to express my thanks to sister. After this I feel that you can learn anything, as long as you understand the question.

The other problem is in geometry. The teacher sends a student to the blackboard to demonstrate the solution to a problem. It is easy to draw it on the board with the help of compass and ruler. But then you have to prove that the argument put forward in the assignment is true. Even that I have done many times in my book already. But when I am standing at the blackboard, the whole chain of proof evaporates from my head. The only thing I can remember is MOT. (*Mikä Oli Todistettava/Quad Erat Demonstrandum*). There you stand stammering rubbish. How embarrassing! Embarrassing plus! This will be the last time I make a mess with triangles. At home at night I rush into the empty classroom, draw a triangle, and draw my problem in that. I point at every relevant

point with my pointer as I talk without hesitation and finish with a resounding MOT. In the morning I do it again before catching the train, just to be on the safe side. Of course I am sent to the blackboard. I do very well.

The singing lessons are usually quite relaxing, although we have a lot of theory. The terms used are in Latin, like *largo*, *allegro*, *moderato* etc. We also practise singing from the sheet music. The hard place only comes when we have to exhibit our singing to the class. Even I, who have always known that I can't sing, had to do this. Even I, who was told in the first grade choir to just open and shut my mouth, with no sound, had to do this. I twist my hankie in my fist. It will be my turn soon. My breath catches, my legs won't support me, but I have to do it. My throat only lets out squeals and squeaks.

The teacher sings with me to encourage me. I continue to the end of the verse alone. It is an agonisingly long verse. I run back to my place and shrink back in my desk to hide. I am mortified! Why, oh why does this have to be done in front of everybody? I wouldn't mind singing for the teacher. She is a professional and knows that not everybody can sing. She also knows that it is not for lack of practising in our family, but because I have that ear of a dead calf!

Today I have dragged my skis along to school. We have sports and the teacher has requested that we bring skis. We have to demonstrate our proficiency in skiing and down-hilling. The teacher explains which trail we will take. She will then meet us under the ski jump. Many girls already have the new steel 'rat-trap' bindings in their skis and some kind of ski boots. Others have to make do with the old leather bindings and felt boots. I wonder if this equipment is of any use at all!

Behind the school a thicket begins, which soon spreads out as a real forest with its fresh ski trails. I am skiing somewhere in the middle of the crowd and I am well able to keep up. It is snowing so slowly that the snowflakes don't even want to land on the ground. They just drift in the air. A woodpecker is pecking somewhere, a train whistles. The rhythmic swish of the poles and the glide of the skis give spice to the journey. Again I can sense the flexibility and the power of my body. Sweaty and panting, we arrive below the hill, where the teacher is already waiting. We wait for the last ones. The teacher invites us all to look at the down-slope of the old ski-jump and evaluate if we can ski down that slope. You can climb just halfway up if that is all you think

you can do. Impossible! That is horribly steep! I haven't seen a slope this big before! Now I am supposed to come down it!

We start climbing diagonally towards the heights. It is hard work. Slipping and panting, we struggle upwards. One after another the girls turn back and slide down in a jiffy. Somebody's ski breaks as they fall. There are only a few of us at the top. We look down. Although the hill looks smaller now, it is still too big.

Somebody takes her skis under her arm and walks down leaning on a pole. She checks the slope again and walks a bit further down. She fixes her skis back on, turns them downward and glides down. Should I do the same? That would be the wise thing to do, for sure. Now others are going down! I don't dare, I will fall to pieces if I ski down!

I am already skiing! There is no time to notice how your legs shake, nor how the bumps make you jump, nor how you fall down on your tummy on even ground and slide on another ten metres, scraping the snow on your way. For a while you don't even realize that you are alive. You just lie there. The skis have luckily let go of the bindings and flown to safety in time.

The others gather around. Are your arms broken, are your legs broken, is your back sore? Head, does your head hurt? I struggle slowly to sitting, I stretch my limbs, turn to kneeling. When I push up, I lurch. The nearest people take hold of me and help me stand up. The teacher asks if anything hurts. No, no hurting, I just ache!

We turn to go back. Others collect my skis and poles from where they landed. They whisper about taking me to a doctor. I take few tentative steps and assure that no bones seem to be broken. I have another glance at the slope. It is immensely high. And I have skied down it! Horror, wonder and joy jostle for place in my mind. I bind my skis on, grab the poles and start skiing. I am aching!

55. The European War Is Over

First the Lapp war ends. We manage to drive away the Germans after some quite fierce skirmishes. Only smoking villages are left. But the inhabitants return from their temporary homes. In Lapland, too, reconstruction begins.

Germany falls in the beginning of May. The Western Allies push from the West, the USSR from the East, towards Berlin, where Hitler suicides in his bunker. Stalin's troops are first to reach the overthrown capital, and they advance as far to the West as they can. The Germans capitulate first to the Western powers and then to the allied powers in the East. The Allies start long and difficult negotiations about the destiny of Germany.

We listen to the news day after day, our ears burning. Is there going to be a new war right away, although all of Europe is ruined? And Japan is still going on! They are still fighting in the Pacific. Only the atomic bomb in late summer will put an end to it. Unheard of destruction in Japan! The whole world has stepped onto a new road of unknowable destruction. The threat of a nuclear war has entered into the everyday of peace-loving nations. Every day the radio and the newspapers tell about the fate of Hiroshima. Future, what is that?

The relations between the Allied Nations are fraying. We are scared. Germany is divided into occupied zones according to how far the Allies have penetrated. Berlin presents a problem. That pile of rabble is in the middle of the USSR zone, but its future is decided separately. Berlin, too, is divided into East and West zones. There is only one way from West Berlin to West Germany. The boundaries are strict. Problems are anticipated. And overriding everything is distress, deprivation, and refugees all around Europe. Shiploads of them try to get to America.

We walk on our own school road and we feel we are safe, although there is a scarcity of everything, still. We have lost Karelia, the war victims have been buried, the war wounded, the widows, the orphans and the evacuees need support, and huge war reparations have to be paid. On top of that they have war crimes trials even in Finland. That is something a small victim of war cannot understand! Doesn't even want to understand. Now there is a Russian-British control commission which is monitoring Finland. All the terms of peace that were dictated in the autumn have to be fulfilled.

The final peace will only be ratified in conjunction with the general peace in the coming years. We begin to hope that we might get our harsh peace terms relaxed in that connection. We imagine that the Western Allies would help us in the negotiations. With that illusion one can keep struggling while the war reparation trains are puffing towards the East, past Kouvola.

The world situation and the state of the fatherland do not have a great impact on the everyday existence of a student. But the tense atmosphere is felt everywhere. The USSR has gained an enormous influence in Finnish politics, and our economy is forced to be channelled to paying off the reparations. Positivity and fear are dancing a brisk polka, the steps of which are gobbledygook for a small person.

There is one thing that makes us laugh, anyway. According to the conditions of the peace treaty there cannot be anything presented in Finland which would go against the grain of the Soviet Union. We have to use old books in the school. We get told that everything that would denigrate the USSR in any way has to be purged from the books. The next few lessons are spent gluing sticky paper over the dangerous paragraphs. Short bits of 'false information' we can also cover up with black colour. Of course, we make sure that we will remember for ever the bits we are thus purging.

56. The Summer You Cannot Forget

The hymn of summer is heard all over the country. Freedom is ahead for us. As far as we are concerned, it is freedom to do housework, till the garden, chop wood, and do special jobs that father and mother keep churning out. They are very worried about us youngsters. Apparently we are in grave danger of becoming lazy. The Big Ones whip up these beliefs telling us about their own tasks on the family farm. Now our farm has alien masters. We look after a mere half a hectare of land, which comes with the job in a country school. We sow a part of it with vegetables; another part has berry bushes, fruit trees etc. But the greatest part is sown for flax. We give out a sigh of relief. We will be fine with a small vegetable patch. There will be plenty of time for us to do sports, read, sing and dance, even if we had to shake the bedclothes and wash the dishes every day.

But our summer is not going to be quite as pleasing as that. One beautiful morning, when we lie on a blanket on the grass with our books after the morning clean-up, father appears on the veranda.

“Girls, come here!”

“Why?”

“Father wants to talk to you.”

“It’s bound to be work!” (A resigned whisper)

“We needs get up when the law lords deem it so!”

“The flax needs weeding. Now is a good time to start it. It is quite a slow job. Gather the weeds in a pile and take them to the compost. It can take weeks if you only do a few hours a day. And wear a scarf! It is not good to be in the sun without a scarf for too long!”

Two slightly grumbling girls look for their scarves and rakes and march to the field. The job doesn’t appeal, it is too hot! We were in such an exciting place in the book. We slip into the kitchen to drink water, hoping that mother would take pity on us. She ignores our pleading looks. Just asks us to come back for the meal in good time to set the table. Depressed, we return to our rake. We try to lift out spirits by singing.

‘Flax grows for other people’s shirts, I just weed it,

I rejoice for other people's joy, but for myself I cry.'

We start several songs, but only manage some inane whining. It is no good! We sink into apathy, we sulk. After a long and sweltering hour we are ready for an open rebellion. We start inventing new words for an old song. Soon an energetic song echoes all the way to the neighbours.

*'We cry and we rage,
As we weed our field of flax'*

There is real feeling in this song. We repeat this laboriously worded song time and time again. It draws the neighbours out to their yards, curious. And wonder of wonders, mother is yelling at us from the steps to come and set the table, and just this minute! We didn't need a second command! Of course we get punished for inappropriate behaviour.

In the hot summer nights we are also needed at the milking. Flies are buzzing around the cow, and the cow kicks to get rid of them. The milkmaid, i.e. mother is afraid that the milk pail will get kicked over. Even the milker might get thrown over when the cow is really bothered by the beasties. Night after night we stand, each on our side of the cow, holding a huge whisk and chasing away the bloodthirsty bugs. It is an extremely boring occupation. Sometimes mother sings while milk is squirting into the pail. We join in the singing. But we have also made up our own words.

*'Playing in the summer breeze the flies are with us now,
The paddocks full of echoes of singing.
It is hot and the flies are troubling our cow.
They are eating our brow,
It is our job now
To keep the cow well away from their stinging,
To keep the cow well away from their stinging.'*

Our Mansikki enjoys our singing every evening through that whole hot summer. I wonder if she will give us any milk at all in the autumn in the cow byre, as we won't be singing to her then!

When we have weeded all of the flax once, father's voice calls us to a new task. We had almost had a holiday for a few days, as father was away on his customary meeting and speaking trips. Of course we still

had mother getting us to attend to the ordinary home duties. But now it will be a whole different ballgame.

“Listen, girls! How have you decided to keep that cow going through next winter, as we have no hay growing? Have you got any ideas?”

“We can buy from the neighbours.”

“We can, sure. But it is going to be very expensive. What if we will make bundles of fresh twigs to help the feeding? The neighbour has promised that we can thin the bushes by their fields. It is a good time to do this now, before they start haymaking.”

There is no help for it. Machete in hand we march out to make bundles. Even mother joins us. Vänni works like a Trojan. “That ‘a boy’” father says seeing the pile Vänni has collected. “Make the tie a bit firmer” he says to his girls. We sacrifice several good reading days for this task. But when we see the amount of feed collected on the shed rafters, we feel satisfied as well. *‘Home help, best help!’*

When the storeroom is full of feed bundles, we can finally dive into our books. There is a big library in the school. We can borrow a book at a time from there. We spend hours trying to decide what book to take, as they all look so interesting. Just when one has entered into an adventure in the *‘War of Earls’*, father comes and interrupts us behind the bush where we have settled with our reading. He commands me to come with him. Ränty-Iivari wants to come as well, but father tells her to go and help mother.

My task is to fetch Mansikki from where she is tied by the garden. She gets excited about her freedom at first, but I manage to direct her to father who is waiting in the yard. “She is coming well”, father comments. He goes up the hill to the village road that bypasses the sports field. I begin to suspect the worst and freeze on the spot with my cow. Father gesticulates for me to follow. Mother brings a lunch bag, and I slip *‘The Earl’* in as well. My destination is the near-by forest, where father has secured permission for Mansikki to graze. And I am to be the herdsman! I, for whom a forest by itself is too exciting a place with all its fairies and sprites, let alone with a cow!

Father seems to be teaching me how to examine tree branches and anthills in order to find my way. They have been explained before as

well. But I have a dilemma. If Mansikki wants to go to the swamp, how am I to prevent her? What if she gets lost in the thicket and I can't find her? What if a snake will bite her? Old stories about the problems of village herders fill my mind. There is one good thing, though. We don't have enough beasts of prey left to worry about. In the olden times they used to hunt for the animals of the herders all the time.

Even without the beasts I feel that I can't manage this job. I have no authority over the cow. She will just go where-ever she wants to. And I have to go after her! Father seems to be giving his last advice and leaves. He shouts from a way away: "Come home when the sun is almost setting behind the trees! The cow needs to be milked in time!"

I sit on a bolder and try to calm down. I assure myself that all is well. The warmth of the sun spreads from the rock. The cow munches away on the grass, and moves slowly from place to place. No intention of bolting!

Gradually I begin to realise what a frolic the birds are engaging in above us. Their songs soar, and their wings carry them this way and that. They seem to be in a hurry. Feeding their younglings, for sure! A squirrel drops fir cones in my lap. I shout my thanks. The life of the forest seems to keep going in its own rhythm, and Mansikki becomes part of it. I can dig out my book. First I dig out from the rucksack a sandwich, which many seem to desire. I break off a small bit and crumble it as a sacrifice for the forest folk, but most of it I eat myself. Only the squirrel demanded it all for himself. He didn't succeed, as I was firm! I check the whereabouts of Mansikki and dive into my book. Time goes by unnoticed by me.

When I remember my cow, she is nowhere to be seen. I yell for Mansikki and I make mooing noises, but I don't hear any answer. I run here and there in my desperation. I have no idea where I am any more. The forest looks quite different from just a while ago. My heart is pounding like fury. Which direction to the road home? How was it that the branches of the trees grow? Where is South and where North? Where is Mansikki? Dear God, help me! Then I howl out "moo" once more.

Please, be quiet now, you birds, so I can hear when Mansikki answers me! Of course the birds shut up. And I can hear a distant "moo"! And another one still! I run towards the sound as fast as I can through all

the stones and tree stumps. I come to a grove where the ground is moist and the grass is long and succulent. There are a lot of deciduous trees, and even more of bushes. Here and there are sunny areas. Somewhere behind that thicket I can see the movement of a white, tasselled tail. Mansikki regards her panting herdsman with astonishment. The herdsman can see that her muzzle is bloodied all over. I stroke the bloodied nose gently, and the blood disappears. It's not blood, after all! What have you been eating? For an answer Mansikki mouths a juicy tuft of grass aside, and reveals the big red strawberries underneath. I start looking for more of them. It is not difficult, as the whole thicket seems full of them.

I pick a few handfuls into the lunch paper to show them at home. But I have no idea where home is! When I found Mansikki and had a fistful of strawberries, I was so happy that I forgot I was completely lost. After a while of shilly-shallying I decide to ask for help. "Mansikki, home!" I command as firmly as I know how and give her a push. "Go, go!" And Mansikki goes. Just one longing glance towards the tufts of grass, and an about-face in some direction. I walk behind conscientiously and hope for the best. After half an hour we are at home. I hand over the strawberries and assure them that there are lots of them.

The next day we go to the strawberry field in force. We pick a bucketful. For several days we drag strawberry pails from the forest. Even mother and father had never seen such a crop. Our cow accompanies us every time to her pasture. I still act as a herdsman, weeks after the strawberries are gone. I get used to it gradually, and so does Mansikki. She doesn't stray from me again; we walk around together in a large area. We find our way home together. But if we meet a carbon monoxide car on the way home and it is belching out its thick soot, I have my job cut out containing Mansikki. Luckily she generally gallops straight home in her panic.

In the evening we have flapjacks with strawberries.

57. Visiting Relatives

The morning sun wakes us into a happy day. Today we will visit uncle Uuno in Värälä. The parents have been organising feeding and milking the cow, watering the vegetable patch and other necessary daily activities. Everything is taken care of. We can't wait to get going. Paper sheets and meagre gifts in a bag we run the two kilometres to the train stop.

In Kouvola we change into a bus towards Koria. Only ten minutes and we are at the river. The Kymi-river is really majestic! The water is flowing strongly, it seems to whirl and splash around some bolder and continue onwards. How do we dare to join that journey? Cousins Tapio and Tapani row over to fetch us to the other bank. That's where their new home is. The boat is sometimes drawn in the wrong direction by the stream. It must be quite a job to turn it around. Tapio, of course, is almost a grown-up.

We watch the boat coming nearer like it was an exciting action play. We step into the boat on shaky legs. We landlubbers almost overturn the boat in our clumsiness. "Don't try to move anywhere else" father roars at Ritva, who doesn't seem to be able to find a good place to sit down. I am sitting in the prow squeezed between the cousin who is paddling and the edge of the boat, and my hands are clutching the edge of the seat firmly. I won't jump around in a boat! At least not on this river! Vänni seems to be enjoying the waves and the eddies that take us along. Mother shrieks occasionally. But father is asking the cousins about prospects for the harvest this summer and about the volume of milk the cows produce. And the cousins answer calmly, although the boat has turned around wildly again.

Now we are at the beach, drifting amongst the waterlilies towards the boat ramp. My goodness, what a stream! Oh, what a lovely calm waterlily beach!

Cousin Salme has come to greet us at the shore. She is almost the same age as me, and we have a lot to talk about. I am looking forward to our time together to share our secrets. Hand in hand we arrive at the yard behind the others. The first thing we see is the big cow barn. My eye roams over the ramp and the loft. There we can romp about in the hay! The family house is on the other side of the large yard. It looks modest compared to the cow barn.

Auntie Olga is already at the steps to greet us. Uncle and cousin Toivo will return from the fields very soon. Later in the evening we walk through an area with several small houses. In every one of them lives a family from former Jääski. From many houses people greet us or ask us to drop in. Uncle explains that the whole area used to belong to a former country estate. The manor house itself is mostly unoccupied, the owners live somewhere else and only come here for holidays. The big cow barn is the old cow barn of the manor house. The houses used to belong to the former farm workers, and the evacuees have bought them together with the fields. Each family is repairing their house and is sowing, ploughing and harvesting their fields. The cow barn is shared between several families. The houses are being repaired, though materials are still under rationing. The fields had been sown in the spring. Now they are looking forward to a decent harvest and their own bread.

At night we go to the sauna, which is right by the river. It takes a long time to heat it up. The boys run in frequently to add more logs and make a fresh bath bundle for everybody. Of course the women take the first turn in sauna. This sauna is small and homelike. Ten times in the river and ten times back in the heat is the standard in this sauna, the hosts joke. We don't quite make it, though Salme is eagerly showing example.

The water is frigid! Nevertheless we look for waterlilies, study their growth setting, and marvel at the muddy river bottom in the vicinity of the riverbank. It is crowded with all sorts of plants! Clattering with cold we rush back to the sauna bench to warm up. Time and time again! Mother and Auntie Olga are worried already; especially mother, always worried about us catching our death of cold! We get chased to go and get dressed. It is time to change shift. As we are walking back along the riverbank we can hear the boys making a racket in the river. What fun they seem to be having!

During the evening tea they get serious. The family news is thrashed out in detail. What is happening with uncle Aati's family, and cousin Elvi? Where have our relatives been settled, what are the prospects of them all for living in their new area? We have questions to ask and tales to tell both ways. But of course the talk also turns to Germany's surrender and prosecution of the war criminals. The aftermath of the bloodbath in Europe is horrendous. Refugees are trying to get to America, the ships are overflowing. Faces in the press are

shouting hunger. Finally uncle starts the evening hymn. Soon we are asleep, tired but happy.

Morning-swim breaks the bright mirror of the water. Shards change shape and order with dizzying speed. But when we get out of the water the mirror is back, and dazzling! We jump around on the bank to warm up. Breakfast is waiting for the greedy swimmers. Afterwards, Salme takes us to all her favourite spots in the farmyard and the outbuildings. We will certainly be coming here again! Now we have to go in, as the church service is beginning on the radio. The morning sun is streaming in through the white curtains and is making windowshaped blotches on the floor. We all sit still and sing along with the radio in deep sincerity. We feel happy. Hope the sermon won't be too exhausting! The memory of the peace of this Sunday morning will live with us a long time. Towards the autumn we also visit father's relatives in Asikkala. To get there, we have to take a bus from Kouvola and travel for at least two hours. Right by the village road, a long white building is calling us. It is old, but Auntie Hilja's family has renovated it for their home. They also own the fields around the house. There are lots of rooms in the house, so we can easily stay the night. It is our intention to also visit Uncle Juho. We talk about it as we are dining. They promise to take us in a carriage, although the trip over the fields is only a kilometre. Auntie Hilja expects Auntie Aini to offer us ersatz and goodies, so she doesn't offer us any.

The horse is already harnessed, and cousin Seppo, who is the same age as Vänni is going to be our coachman. First we drive along a winding village road for a couple of hundred metres. The old houses are right by the road, and their gardens are sure to drop their harvest on the road as well. The trees are lush and the houses hide in their shade. We turn left next, and drive through the open fields. Uncle's house looks new; they must have built it themselves at the edge of their fields. It is not as big as Auntie Hilja's old house. It is still difficult to obtain building materials. There is room enough for them, though, even for Auntie Aini, who was the mistress of the old Pekkola, granfather's abode. They only have one daughter, Terttu, and one son, Tuovi. Terttu has been in the war as a medical lotta; Tuovi is working somewhere else after the war. Terttu's place of employment is near, and she helps at the farm as much as she can. Terttu is a very straightforward and capable young woman; that's the impression she gives.

Of course we walk around the yard and along the edge of the fields as well. The garden is only in its infancy, but it will take shape eventually. We sit in the swing in the yard as Auntie Aini tells us about their journey of evacuation. Everywhere we hear a similar story, only differing in details. There is no more Pekkola, although this place is called New-Pekkola. There aren't even any sisal rugs here!

Terttu is calling us for ersatz from the veranda steps. They have an enormous lot of baked treats for these times of scarcity. "You've always got to have something for visitors", Terttu throws in as she brings the coffeepot to the beautifully set table. Even we children are allowed to taste 'every sort' with our juice. And then to the yard and swing! The grown-ups will continue to share their sorrows and triumphs for a long while yet. Of course we know what they are talking about: about the war trials and the fate of peoples. Finnish ministers as war criminals? So it was us who started the war! Fancy, we didn't realise that! They talk about the atomic bomb of Hiroshima and about the fall of Japan. We sure are living in a different world now than we were before the war. Europe is in ruins, too, and a new weapon of mass destruction is already in use. There is no knowing when the final peace treaty will be ratified. And yet, there is a feeble hope. What if the Western leaders will negotiate Karelia back for us! Now the people come out to the steps, and we have to go up to say our farewells. Father and mother seem somewhat emotional.

We walk in silence along the narrow wagon-trail back to auntie's house. We have pondered on many things. There is so much to ponder about.

They have already been missing us at Auntie-Hilja's house.

"Finally, there you are!"

"Well, here we are"

"We were about to ring for you. The meal is getting cold. Did you actually get lost on the way?"

"Time just flew when we started to talk."

"But of course. We see each other almost every day, and still we talk about everything in the world. Did they have anything especially on their mind?"

“Everything was special, as we hadn’t seen them for so long. Even the house was new to us. It must have been a job and a half in this day and age.”

“They are hard workers. Just like you.”

“And you! Here you have a meal ready at the table, and we just come and eat. It even smells so delicious.”

We eat in silence as is the custom. We thank our Heavenly Father for the food.

The grown-ups retire into the living room to further chat on the affairs of the kin and of the world. They go through the same topics of horror, the same fragile hope about help from the West, though nobody really believes in it. The nuclear bomb is a new unimaginably terrifying thing. Sister and I sneak into cousin Salme’s chamber. She has grown up, but in the bookshelves we find books from her earlier years. We snuggle into the corners of the sofa to read. It doesn’t take long to read Anni Swan’s *Sara and Sarri*, especially as you remember it so well from before. There are many books and we break reading records in these two days we stay here. We are sure to be embarrassed later. Or maybe mother and father will be pleased that we have behaved so well and not disturbed anybody. That’s not something to be embarrassed about, is it!

A successful trip to relatives in this veil of tears lifts everyone’s spirit. We have another ripple in our thoughts. We are sure to pay the war reparations one day. Finland will be rebuilt. Europe, too, will rise again. The nuclear bombs will be destroyed when they see the harvest they yield! Or will we? Tomorrow must be full of hope.

From Little Sister:

We often spent days at Värälä at my Uncle Uuno's farm in summer holidays. I remember they had a big traditional swing, built of poles and planks. You stood on a plank, which was hanging supported by two poles which could swing completely around vertically. It was very scary, as you had to pump your legs to build up the momentum, until you achieved a swing that took you around the full circle, and you were hanging upside down in mid-air clutching onto your supporting pole with all your might, before you came down like a bullet. No safety belts!

Another scary thing for me in Värälä was swimming in the river. The flow was quite strong, and when I tried to swim to the other side, I always ended up way downstream, as I was not a strong swimmer. Amazingly, I never got any stronger, in spite of all the trying.

58. From Autumn to Christmas

School has started again. Our meagre garden produce has been collected into the cellar and the woodshed is full. Even the lingon-berry tub is full in the porch. The road to school is beckoning, but not always enticing. It is raining, it is cold. Another kilometre to go and then the train! My coat is dripping on the hook, although I gave it a cautious shake in the entrance. In Kouvola I have to pull it on again. The books have to go under my armpit under the coat. We run straight to the Lyceum, the boys' school. We have a few lessons a week here, as all classes can't fit into the old upper school building. There is time enough to get from one school to the other during recess. The stretch of street between the schools has become the promenade of the studious youth. The scholars from the Lyceum walk towards our school, and we towards theirs. Along the way we eye each other and give a greeting if you know the passerby at all. I have not yet learnt to understand the bliss of these meetings, but for some of my classmates it is the high point of the day. I wonder if this is an attempt to bring to Kouvola the rituals of Viipuri scholars in Torkkelinkatu. The girls have an awful lot to whisper in the beginning of each lesson. I am the youngest and least mature member of the class. I have no part in these whisperings.

The sports periods are my forte. I run quite well, but I am not the best, at least not in sprinting. I do high jump. I throw ball differently from most other girls, and therefore I can throw a long distance. Sometimes I even throw javelin. I have broad shoulders and my lever arm is steady. Baseball is the game for me! I can bat, I can throw, and I can catch. According to the teacher's ready reckoner (age, performance level, grade) I should receive the grade of 15/10. It might seem that I am boasting, but really it is Vänni as a relentless trainer that is behind my skills. On the other hand, I am a clumsy clot in gymnastics.

The trees are starting to lose their leaves. The world is getting grey. The fog is sometimes thick. It is lovely to curl up in a sofa. With a book, of course! We continue to play battleships and cruisers, hangman, and making new words out of a word. You can only use the letters that exist in the root word. Whoever makes most new words is the winner. It is really extraordinary how many new words one can form. We also keep playing with the bird cards and the plant cards. But better than any games is always reading. I don't know how many times we have been through the school library, or our own library at home.

As we are big now and we have to do all kinds of handcraft more and more, our free time is rationed. We unravel woollen garments, wash the wool in skeins and wind it into balls when it is dry. You can read a book while knitting simple patterns. Sometimes you have to stop to find a dropped stitch and pick it up again. It is never a fatal mistake; we are getting into a good routine. Indeed, this is beginning to look like a knitted top. It is beautifully colourful, made up from many an old garment.

Sometimes father commands us out to get some exercise. We even dive into a heavy rain, if we have rain garments. Generally they are the oldest outside garments that the Big Ones have discarded and left at home. What can we do in these goblin garments? They are not usable for sports. The hems flap around in the wind and upturned trouser legs fall down.

The window is open and the radio is blazing out dance music. We get into a dancing frenzy. We have our own gestures, steps and movements, born out of the music. We try to keep the rhythm. Rääntylivari manages very well; she is much more musical than I am. I, too, whirl and float, twirl and push according to my instinct. My whole body is filled with the joy of dancing. Sometimes we dance together, twirling and sweeping side by side as the music directs us, sometimes we dance separately to come back together. We invent serious, devout dances, joyful, tricky patterns, or go completely bananas. We try to be clowns. And indeed, we are very good at it, as long as nobody is sizing us up. We dance in the yard, we dance at home if nobody is watching us (mother is allowed to watch, and she sighs “are you at it again”) and we dance in the classrooms. There we have room to romp about, especially in the long corridor, when all the coats and hats have gone home. There is no radio in the class, but we make do with humming. In other words sister will hum and I will grunt. This is something we never get tired of! Why didn’t we discover dancing before? There probably was no dance music on the radio during the war. Dancing was indeed totally forbidden, at least in my family!

Christmas glides by peacefully, although the preparations are hurried again. The crowd has thinned, only Kylli and Tellu have come home. Tuitu is far away in Kainuu, Ahti with his family, and Tanu probably at his wife’s home. It is that big stone building, where we went to the wedding, and almost got lost on the way to the dining room.

Kylli has gone to Luumäki after the war to teach at a travelling school for cottage industry. After Christmas I go with her. We travel in the familiar train for about an hour, from our stop to Uro stop. We ski through the snowy countryside, climb up and glide down one knoll after another, and finally we arrive at Kivimäki, a real old-time rundown villa. In the middle of it Kylli has a room and a kitchen in liveable order.

We warm up the kitchen and make soup for dinner. We don't have time for much else, as it is '*Rehvana*' day in Luumäki today. A *Rehvana*-night is held at the youth club. This day is our fourth day of Christmas. In memory of olden times the youngsters walk around in whacky attire amongst the houses and making a lot of noise. Especially during the night! We get a lift in a sleigh. The youth club is crowded. There is singing, reciting poems; we watch a play that they have been practising for the whole autumn. And in the end they dance. Even Kylli gets to dance. There seems no end to the dancing, so we spend quite a long time watching out for a lift home. The moon is shining and jingle bells jingle. It is so peaceful and beautiful. At night we wake up with the racket! The revellers clink and clank about so much that we are worried our rickety house will fall apart.

Every morning Kylli goes to conduct weaving courses in a farmhouse called Väkästi. I will not stay alone in this den of phantoms but go with her. We arrive there sweaty and frosty. In the big work room there are weaving looms in many rows, both wide ones and narrow ones. I assume they have started already. Sister goes from one weaver to another and inspects their work. I hear her praising them. We also visit the visitors' room. I stay there and read a book I found in the cupboard. There are many daughters in this house, and some of them are still at home. One of the daughters is even weaving in the class. There is also a son, Väinö, who survived the war and is not at home today. Their other son died in the war.

Twilight is already descending over the white fields as we climb on our skis back up the steep slope of Kivimäki. Quickly we light the fire, and warmth begins to spread. We heat up yesterday's left-over soup and gulp it down with gusto with a hefty piece of bread. Väkästi bread, sister says as if it meant something. Or maybe I am just imagining it.

In the morning we drop in at another house. Sister already has acquaintances in the village. On a flat top of a hill there is a white, long house, where there are a lot of daughters. Kylli often does things with

them. There seems to be plenty to talk about, but we are in a hurry. Luckily you can glide downhill a long way from there. We cross the village road, and glide almost half-way up the next hill. We ski by an old farm building and climb up the last little uphill to Väkästi yard. Skis are set upright, leaning on the wall, and we hasten in. We are in time! In a twinkling my impatient big sister turns into a placid and precise teacher. It is fun watching how she acts as she is walking between the looms advising the weavers.

My holiday is coming to an end; I travel home, and back to school the following day. The constant slogging to the train and school is wearisome after a holiday. On the other hand it is nice to see the classmates and hear their news.

From Little Sister:

I still remember with affection one very successful winter game. We were living in Aitomäki, so I was somewhere between 8 and 11 years old. My brother Väinö had the idea of hollowing out a huge pile of snow that always piled up in the corner between two sloping roofs. He made it the shape of a coffee pot. It even had a spout, and it was hollowed out and big enough for us to slide down it into the belly of the pot. He put a ladder against the wall so we could climb out easily. I remember sliding and climbing on that coffee pot every minute I was allowed out. A great success!

59. Goodbye, Karelia, My Home

The feeling is like in a funeral. Mother is crying openly, father wipes his eyes in his sleeve. Once, twice, several times! Finally he pulls a handkerchief from his pocket. Vänni is sitting wordless, staring ahead. His hand is making a fist. Not even Ränty-livari is chirping happily, or me. We all are numb, crestfallen, and hopeless.

“We did know what would happen, we just hoped against hope for a miracle”, mother finally huffs.

“Was it against hope, or was it for a safety net? Maybe having that hope gave us strength to go on. But our hope had a very flimsy base. We doubted it all the time!”

“But we didn’t want to give in to our doubts. You, too, planned all sorts of things for when we go back.”

“Well, the world has given its verdict. We have to put up with that. We will go on here; at least it is still Finland”

“That’s true. At least we didn’t get sent to Siberia. Our children have a future here, Vänni and these girls.”

Mother grabs Little Sister in her lap, and some tears sail down her cheek. I sit for a while on father’s lap, although I am a big girl. Father takes Vänni by the hand.

The peace of Paris has been made. World War Two has ended. There was no relaxation in the peace clause. All requirements of USSR have to be fulfilled. Not a metre of the boundary drawn by the winner can be changed. And we had set our hopes on the magnanimity of the Western Allies in the peace process. Sense did restrain our hopes from rising too high, but even then!

All we have now is memories. Father and mother have memories from both their home villages, and from their home together near Viipuri, memories of their original families, and their own family, of us all.

But what are the memories of Little Sister? The memories of the three-year old might begin with the journey of evacuation with its bombings, when snow was over our head. Returning to black sooty chimneys and a broken forest. A small cabin in the middle of

neverending strips of field. Home in the big building, the only one left standing from the many buildings of the former corrective institution. Maybe the heat of the summer and the flight of swallows. Maybe Christmas times. Beginning of school. I cannot fathom her internal memories. I am three years older myself. It is up to me to remember more. Even from the old home, before the war.

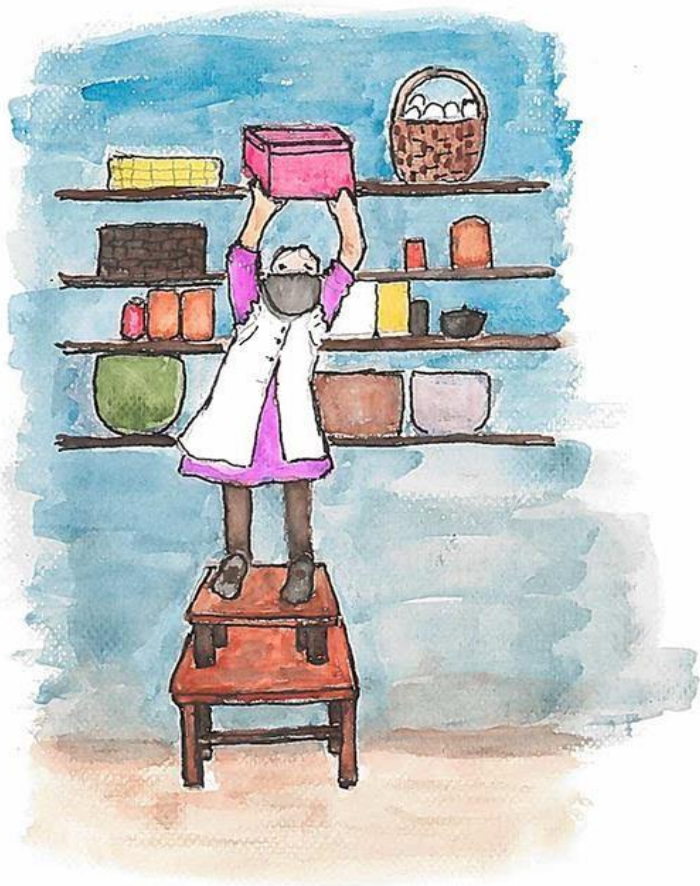
I remember the ring of the telephone on the wall and how you lifted the receiver from its cradle and shouted halloo, halloo. I couldn't reach the telephone, but I yelled at the others that it was ringing now. Somebody ran to answer it. Often the call was for father, and then he would leave. He held meetings and gave speeches about temperance. According to mother he had five jobs and six hungers. And he was forever in a hurry to catch the train. Telephone was still a rare contraption; people often came to our house to make important phone calls. Often a tall man with erect bearing, wearing riding boots, but in threadbare clothing, came to use the phone. He had a riding whip in his hand. When he stopped to talk for a while after his phone call, he lifted one foot on the brace of the kitchen chair and hit his boot with his whip in the rhythm of his speaking. I wondered who he really was. A rich and powerful man, who has lost his position and his property, mother answered.

I remember going to a scout camp, when an acquaintance of Vella came to inspect it all the way from Helsinki. This woman was the director of the whole organisation. Even Vella was tense. Our family attended the campfire in Valaniemi, if I remember the name correctly. There we sang and played and roasted sausages at the end of a stick. The woman was talking about life and the significance of the scout movement. Father was invited to speak as well, and of course he talked about abstinence from drink. The campers came up with all kinds of programs. Occasionally we sat still listening to the birds. I learnt lovely songs, too, like *'jonkkiina, jonokiina, jonk, jonk, kiina, kiina...'*

I remember the ranks of swallows on the telephone line and their hurried flight into the nests and out again feeding their chicks. I remember the triumphant song of the nightingale that we heard in the dusk by the lake. And of course I remember the cuckooing of the cuckoo. The golden cuckoo of Karelia always predicted a long life!

I remember the softness of the summer nights, as the sun slowly sank toward the horizon. The relentless heat of the days that demanded

we jump into the lake. I remember the delightful games in the water with the Big Ones. I remember the berry picking expeditions with the picnic lunches. I remember Polle, Musti, and Mirri and the other cats, the chickens clucking in the yard. Leading the cows to the pasture. The full milk pails banging on the bicycle handlebars as the big sisters returned from milking. The warm milk in my mug, just about to touch my lips. Our home helper Helli, who gave me the milk and was always ready to help.



I remember the berry bushes, amongst which we ran around in the soft earth and jumped from one bush to another. I remember the stab when I fell over in the bushes and landed on a glass bottle, and the bottle broke into shards. I had a wound in my foot that didn't want to get better

at all. For a long time I could neither walk nor run. The wound did not get better easily; the white gauze bandage was tied around my foot week after week.

I also remember a great shame. Mother had hidden the Christmas cookies on the top shelf to wait for Christmas. I kept looking at the tin with longing. Of course I knew that I shouldn't take them. But I wanted them so much! How could I reach them? It wasn't enough to climb on a chair. I lifted a smaller chair on top of a bigger one. It was so difficult to climb up as the small stool kept slipping from under me. But I pressed on valiantly to grab myself a fistful of cookies! As well as a great shame! The theft was noticed right away. Father gave me a serious talking to. When you start helping yourself to something small without permission, you get inured to it. The next time it is easier, and ever easier. And your needs get bigger. Is that what I want from life?

What I remember about winter is the sinking softness of the white snow cover. I remember the *granny's slippers* as they hover behind the window, more and more of them; the sparkling snowflakes in the frost; the wet sleet on your face driven by the gusts. I remember the delightful potential of wet snow for making snowballs; the snow castles and snow fights; the snowman which was not going to melt, ever; the sparkling ice on the lake, where the wind had swept the snow into high banks. Skating in felt boots on the icy mirror, zooming along on the kick sleigh, the intoxication of shear speed. I remember the scream when I tore my tongue off the icy lock. One had to experiment with it although mother had forbidden it. What about the sleigh rides and the jingling of the bells. That was when we wore our new white bunny furs and had a muff hanging around our neck. Our hands kept warm in that. I remember the starry sky at night, and the moon. How often we jumped into our snow gear and dashed out when a Big One lured us out to watch the stars and make angels in the snow! We would lie on our backs in the snow and move our arms along our sides gradually all the way to above our head, thus giving wings to our angel lying on the snow. We would ask the Big Ones about the stars and make them tell us everything they knew. We imagined what it would be like to travel from star to star in the Big Dipper and end up in the Pole Star, of course. The Pleiades seemed very exciting; they had such a funny name, too. Orion is steady and safe, a place of comfort, like the Big Dipper. We wonder on which of them Vella lives now?

Every time I start remembering, I remember new things. It is peculiar. Normally I have no idea of any of it! Remembering is like winding up a ball of yarn with no end. But maybe the ball is not endless, after all. The yarn is sure to be unravelled from an old jumper and it breaks, and one day it comes to an end. Maybe that's what happens to the memories, too.

From Little Sister:

What do I remember about Karelia? I remember going to a remote paddock to take lunch to father and the big girls working there. I don't think I could ride a bicycle yet. I learned that skill later with brother Väinö's big men's bicycle, so I must have walked all the way. I also remember that sometimes we had to walk along the railroad, and it was scary, especially going over a river bridge and having nowhere to escape if a train or a handcar (*resiina*) happened along.

I remember lying in bed with Aili, watching the tree branches outside our window, and telling stories. Tarzan starred in our stories quite often, but the movement of the branches was quite hypnotic and led us into all kinds of wondrous worlds where fairies and gnomes ruled supreme.

I remember a game we played, where one would tap out the rhythm of a song, and the other had to guess what song it was. My sense of rhythm was greatly enhanced by this game.

I remember the leafy bower in the garden. It was a wonderful place to slip in, to rest our weary bones in between our labours in the garden.

I remember the cuckoo in the spring. Summer started when you heard your first cuckoo. It was a shock to learn about their habit of leaving their eggs for some other bird to hatch and feed.

I remember the games. One very popular game was called *sirkka* (grasshopper). It involved one person in the middle with a long and a short stick – no such thing as play equipment bought from a shop – and others scattered around in all directions. The 'in' player had to balance his short stick, the *sirkka*, at one end of the longer stick and flick it so that he actually hit the *sirkka* with the other end of his long stick. The

out-players tried to catch the *sirkka* as it flew. If one succeeded, he would then become the 'in' player. If the *sirkka* landed on the ground uncaught, its position would be marked in the dirt, and in the end, the winner was he whose *sirkka* had flown the farthest without being caught.

And of course I remember the 'Viipuri blast', although a different version

60. Trip to the Cabin

Everybody is talking about the final peace treaty at school. They all seem to feel sorry for us evacuees. But these sorrows subside in time. What is left is rejoicing that there is peace, albeit severe. We are living a normal everyday life of a school girl again with its good and bad events.

In the class we are already planning for next holidays. It would be exciting to go all together to some remote forest area to ski and toboggan. We could stay a few days!

“Doesn’t anybody know of an empty cabin near their home?” All shake their head trying to remember. No results! Can’t we find one little cabin in the promised land of cabins! The teacher arrives and the agitated assembly of girls has to disband against their will. We have to get back to work. Thoughts are wandering away from German verb forms to an abandoned cabin in the middle of a forest. What is everybody looking at? I wasn’t asked a question, was I? What did she ask? What a relief, it is Elli that has to answer! The bell rings and frees the dreamers to dream on. As we go our separate ways, everybody is adjured to inquire about a possible cabin. Time goes by. The skiing holiday is getting near.

“I think I know a possible cabin!” Kati from Somerharju belts out first thing in the morning.

“What!”

“Where, what is it like?”

“It has been unoccupied for a long time. The loggers use it as a resting place. It is in the middle of a forest. And there is a big hill nearby! I have been there sliding downhill many times.”

“But can you warm it up? I am not going to go and freeze.” “There is a stove, and even a fireplace. They are said to be quite all right. Mother said that the loggers make ersatz on the stove, and the fireplace has been used quite recently.”

“Do you know who we can ask about it?”

“I do know, as the owner is a relative of ours! I will go and ask tonight, if you agree.”

“We do, we do!” the girls belt out.

The whole day we buzz about the trip, although there is no certainty about the cabin yet. Impatiently we wait for the end of the school day. In the train we still adjure Kati to do her best. She is to convince the owners that we know what to do in a cabin. To praise us as conscientious girls!

With great expectations, but also fears, we arrive at school the next morning. Kati was not in the train! What has happened? The lesson begins; we slouch in our desks miserable. Only a few are able to participate actively. Our thoughts do the rounds of ‘where is Kati? Where is Kati?’ The recess is full of anxious babble. The bell goes and we move into the classroom. The clamour is considerable. Suddenly a bright girly voice is heard from the door, louder than others.

“We got it! We got the cabin! Did everybody hear?”

Now the noise really starts. We are high on sheer joy when the class teacher arrives at her desk. I almost stop mid-air, as I am hopping on two feet clapping my hands. The teacher enquires as to the cause of the rejoicing. But that we cannot divulge. Somebody concocts a reason to be that Kati came to school although she wasn’t in the train in the morning. The teacher is being sympathetic for a change and asks Kati why she only arrived just now. Kati explains about missing the train and catching a ride to Kouvola in the truck of an acquaintance. “Oh yes, you come from so far away, all the way from Luumäki. Maybe we’ll let this go just for once. But remember to be more punctual from now on.”

Thankful, we concentrate on our schoolwork in spite of the tumult in our minds. Right after the lesson is over we rush to the schoolyard to form a huddle and talk about the trip. Suggestions are made and immediately discarded. But before the school day is over, we have a committee ready, half of the jobs distributed, and collecting our own equipment planned. Now we rush home to ask for permission to go. I have no idea what my chances are with that. I get permission after long discussions. It helps my cause that I had stayed in Kati’s house overnight, and she in mine. And Kylli lives in that area as well. She gives her own advice on the phone. Enveloped in happiness I go to school in the morning. The class is restless all day. It appears that many did not get permission. Somebody actually cries in her misery. Others reject the

whole idea, although yesterday they were all for going. So we weren't trusted in some homes.

A couple of weeks fly by. On the morning of the day I board the familiar train, now towards Luumäki again. The students coming from Kouvola have occupied most of the carriage. At every stop more classmates climb in, several from Kaipiainen. When Somerharju is announced, we jump up like we were on springs and crowd into the entrance with our baggage.

Kati is at the station to meet us and waves as soon as she sees us. Now onto our skis and into the forest! We ski for a long while keeping up a fair pace. We begin to get hot, as mothers have forced woollen jumpers on us. "We can see the cabin, we can see the cabin!" the front troops scream. It is small and grey, but it stands firmly on its foundation! Snow has been swept away in front of the door and the steps.

We release our skis and stand them up against the wall. Kati opens the door with her key, and we step in into the warm shadows. Kati explains that the owner has come over on a couple of days to light the fire in the fireplace so it wouldn't be too cold. Everyone finds a place for her backpack and sleeping bag. We either have a rest or go out to see the surroundings.

The catering group wakes up to their duties, and soon we are eating pea soup made at home and diluted here with water. The most enthusiastic girls want to go and ski right away, but others want to have a bit of a rest. After rest we ski, earnestly and for a long time. Utterly exhausted, we make ourselves at home in the cabin reading, playing games or just chatting as we are having our evening tea. Gradually all gather by the fire. Soon an even purr is heard from the sleeping bags all over the floor. Good night, everybody!

The larks are already out when the last girls are waking up. After breakfast we will go skiing again. The trees are bending under their snow cover and dropping their load onto the skiers. This winter there is a lot of snow. The deep snow cover makes for good skiing, and makes the world look softer. You can feel the fresh forest air streaming into your lungs and leaving as steam in the frost. We have made a long trek and we are hungry. We head towards the cabin to assuage our hunger.

In the middle of our washing up, we hear clatter from the porch. Here they come! Kati has explained to us that we might get visitors at

the cabin. They are loggers, and they have permission to eat and have a rest in the cabin in the middle of their long workday. Two men step in, one tall and the other shorter and clearly younger. They explain their business and we invite them to come in, to the table. They eat their packed lunches, we make ersatz also for them. We ask questions both ways.

One is the householder of Väkästi and the other his nephew from around Luumäki church. They came to check that everything is OK with us. I had inkling that Kylli had something to do with this matter. I try to stay in the background without attracting attention, but every time I look their way I notice I am under scrutiny by the older man. He quite clearly knows who I am, and will tell sister everything he sees here. I am disconcerted and withdraw totally behind the rest. And yet I have to be polite and answer their questions. Painful! Luckily the men are already preparing to go.

I wonder if the others have noticed my discomfort. Apparently not, as they are hustling already to go downhill skiing! We have to get acquainted with the slope before the midnight moon slide. My confusion gets forgotten in this bustle. We declare the slope excellent in all ways after having glided down it both on skis and on pieces of cardboard. Happily, we hurry back to the warm cabin to wait for the moon to rise. Some try to sleep, others play games, but conversation is also lively. What will the evening be like!

The moon is shining right onto the slope. Snow is a silvery blanket all around. It is a dazzling sight. One is staring at it, enchanted, until a busy passer-by shatters the picture. Onwards, and onto the slopes! And we do. Down on the skis and up again carrying the skis over your shoulder. Some have a piece of cardboard; some even have a small sleigh. Laughing down and panting up, time after time. Sliding down requires a long scream of joy, and falling down requires a resounding guffaw. Back to the start with all limbs still attached and unbroken. The noise is so loud that the young men of the village have decided to join us and appear at the top of the slope. They scoop us up in their toboggans and slide down with speed. Now we are really living it up!

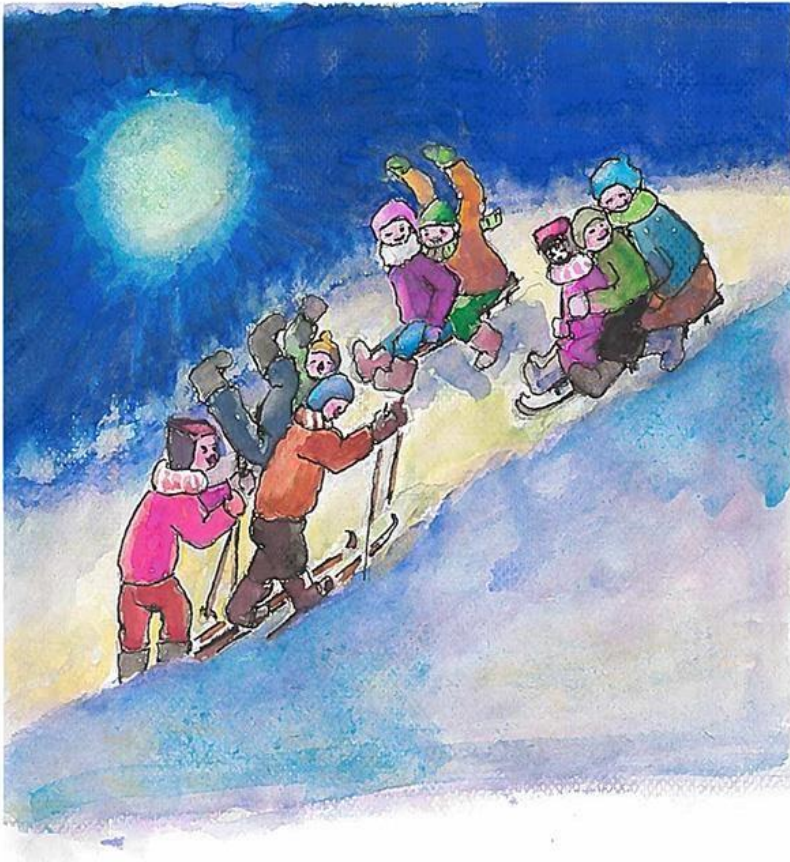
This great jubilation cannot last long. Some are already withdrawing into the cabin to have a spell and dry themselves and their clothes. We serve tea and bread to all comers. One after another crawls exhausted to the corner to bathe in the warmth of the fire. Even the boys

are allowed to come in for tea. Discussion springs up; we get to know each other a bit. When everyone is yawning their heads off towards the morning, we ask the boys to go. We need a bit of pretend enforcement. Half asleep we look for our own sleeping bag, ready to sleep. Someone is still whispering about that heavenly Pera, another grunts in answer. There is a demand for quiet from the corner. Soon just the sound of a common sleep is heard singing its monotonous melody.

Yawning, we crawl out of bed. The most alert prepare to go for a ski even before their morning cup of tea. The tired ones are satisfied with a short ski around the cabin. We make tea, we finish our provisions. The talk is all about the fellows, of course. Somebody has already made a date for the following Sunday in Kouvola. The others are bursting with curiosity. But we can't linger now. We have to catch the train. Kati lays down the law for the whole troop. "Stop talking, pack your packs, clean up the cabin, and we are off to the station. We ski slowly, as we don't want to get into the train all sweaty. We have time to pool our impressions of the successful ski trip amongst the deep snowbanks in the bright light of the moon. The happy troop sends their thanks to the owner of the cabin via Kati.

At home they already know amazing details about our trip, including the moonlight down hilling. I guess that Kylli had asked her own sources about it, and had rung home to possibly reassure them. Well, that meant that I didn't have to tell anything, and really, there was nothing to tell.

Ski break is over. But at school it goes on and on. My classmates have a lot to whisper about. How was Liisa's Sunday date? Who has received a card, who has written one herself? Someone is letting her friends get a glimpse of a beautiful card. We others, who have no cards to show, delight about the down hilling, skiing and the feeling of togetherness in the cabin. We all have resounding fun, especially remembering our tumbles.



Gradually we wake up to the world around us. The news is full of serious events, and we follow what is happening with trepidation. The president and a group of ministers have already been declared war criminals and sentenced. It feels so wrong! In prison! It arouses fevered discussion in the class. What can still happen? The whole future of Finland is still unsure. The news is witnessing deep political divide day by day. There are a lot of strikes. We are still living on rations.

Although we are mere girlies, so it is said, we – maybe due to the situation - follow the daily news on the radio and in the press. We know the situation all right, although we may not understand it. In early spring we get information about the war criminal hearings in Nurnberg. Not all Nazi leaders are punishable anymore; several have suicided in their cells. Some have managed to escape to South America. In Europe, chaos reigns even now. Hordes of hungry refugees are searching for an asylum.

And in East-Europe the countries conquered by USSR are transformed into communist People's Democracies.

The final schoolwork squeeze forces the turmoil of the world into the background. With the last exams we have a chance to push our grades into the acceptable range. Out with the books! It also pays to raise your hand often! The neglectful scholars are now busying themselves with their entire youthful vigour to assure themselves a carefree summer – no failures to catch up on. Not everybody is successful in this pursuit. If you cop a four for a grade, you have to have an auxiliary exam. That means you have to study through the entire material from the semester in that subject and get a pass in the exam. Nobody wishes that, but many are worried.

Finally, it is time to sing the '*Summer Hymn*' again. Once again, its melody brings peace to our mind. Melodious spring is resounding in all the schools in Finland. And then, out into freedom, auxiliary exams or not!

61. A Different Summer

For us, the freedom of summer means freedom from school books. They get stuffed into a corner cupboard. We are again fully occupied with work in the garden, chopping wood, various home duties as mother's helper, and berries. We also belong to many clubs and hold meetings at the school. We visit the fellow club members and play ball with the grown-ups at the sports field. Vänni is in charge of keeping general athletics going. A few small camps are in the pipeline, too. We rush to read as soon as there is any spare time; or to dance even right in the middle of the yard. We only have a fleeting moment to sacrifice to the sorrow of the world when summer heat burns our skin dark brown.

Today some builders are coming to discuss starting a project. The school committee had decided to repair our rooms during the summer break. We will move into the classroom for the duration. We have a few days to empty our home and move everything to the school. The workmen help us move the heaviest furniture. But first we have to find a spot for them all.

We make suggestions for bedrooms, living room, dining room, and of course kitchen in our new home. We manage to fit everything in. But we also need some protection from spying eyes. That, too, is arranged. Father has planned it all. The men and Vänni help in the execution. We watch from the sidelines as long bits of string are suspended from wall to wall in a crisscross at the height of the stretched hands of the men. That forms a grid, on which you can hang extra blankets or big sheets like on a clothes line in suitable locations. Now we have many separate rooms with their visual cover. Now it is easy to crouch down with your book in a corner sheltered from prying eyes!

We are satisfied with these arrangements. And besides, it is exciting! But how in the world will mother cook and make evening tea? Mother has been lent a newfangled appliance, which operates on electricity. It is a hotplate, and you can cook water and even food on it in a pot. And it is hot and you must not touch it or you get burns. To be sure, mother sighs because preparing food with it is so slow. Only one pot or one frying pan at the time! There is no way to feed visitors, anyway! But evening tea is ready at the right time, and as they are sipping it and munching a piece of bread, sleep overcomes the drudges.

In the morning we find it difficult to understand where we are. Gradually our perception clears and we remember the quick switching of homes. Up and away, to explore the potentials of this new life! I run to the kitchen steps to see if anything has been done yet. I curtsy Good Morning to the builders, but stop at the threshold. I ask what colour the walls are going to be. I am very interested in that. What about wallpaper? The men show me their paints, this one for the ceiling, this for doors, this for window frames, and this for the lower part of the kitchen wall. On the top part they will use wallpaper, but they haven't got this yet. Mother has noticed me hanging around at the door and shouts at me to come away.

“You must not disturb their work! Come, come, right now! Go and thin the vegetables after eating! You can wash your eyes in the entrance to sauna.”

Thinning is not one of my favourite jobs, or Ritva's, but that is our job. Carrot seedlings are in clumps of tens, and the whole row so thick that you can't decide where to start. Because it is the most difficult task, that's where we have to start. Ritva starts at one end of the row, I at the other. We advance row by row. We try to tell stories, or sing and in between stretch our stiff back, but working feels sticky. It gets easier when we tackle the beetroots. Only a few seedlings in each spot and you always choose the strongest to keep growing. Nevertheless, a sigh escapes us when we contemplate the whole task. Before all the different vegetables are thinned...!

We do have time to play hide and seek amongst the numerous curtains of the new home, anyway. It is particularly fun if we can entice the neighbourhood children to join in. Some curtain walls fall down, of course, and some things get transported to wrong rooms. We get punished, of course. Best we go outside with the ball! There is so much to do. Mother is calling to us to come and set the table. You have to obey her instantly, not on the fifteenth day! The soup is cooked on the hot plate and the dishes are done in the sauna. From there, we can finally rush off to our own corner and read. Towards the evening we dance a long while in the school corridor to music from the radio. When mother shuts the radio, the weary dancers stagger to the sauna for a wash and off to bed.

There is an old harmonium in the classroom. Rönty-Iivari and I are motivated to play and sing. Our playing ability is restricted to

recognising key signatures and the notes with their accidentals. With one hand, of course, and almost with just one finger! But it does sound like a real melody. I play and sister sings looking up the words for songs we don't know. We do know a lot, as the big sisters have always sung so much. We go through the books from cover to cover. But whenever somebody else comes in, we have to stop. They cover their ears looking miserable. One book we haven't touched yet. Wonder where it has got to. We commence looking for it with such vigour that you would think we had lost a treasure. We just have to find it so we can sing through it, too! Only then will we have fulfilled our expectations for this great operation of sing and play. We look through all the cupboards, we even open all the desks that have been shoved into the neighbouring classroom, but no luck. Finally we get up on a desk and take a peek on top of it. And there it is! The Chorales! It is so big and heavy that I have great trouble dragging it as far as the edge of the top of the cupboard. Then I can get hold of it and staggering under this weight I bend down to rest it on sister's reedy arms. She struggles to get it onto the desk.

We return to the harmonium and begin the task. The hymn markings are even more complicated than the songs. Omigosh! One, two, three, four, five sharps right in the start, and all along the pages flats and others.

“They might be too difficult!”

“Why don't you try anyway? The melody might be really familiar.”

“There is no way I can keep in my head that many changes!”
“Well, let's start with something easier. Let me see! See, this one only has a couple of accidentals! And this is very familiar. Just start playing and I will sing.”

We decide to start with the hymns we know. We had had no idea that even they had those wretched beasties. But again, our efforts are rewarded. Gradually the accidentals get easier to handle, and they don't feel like a useless nuisance any more. Hymn after hymn we advance into the depths of the Chorales book. We already know the words for the most familiar hymns. We don't have to look at them; we can give all our attention to the notes. Sometimes Rönty-Iivari claims that I have played a wrong note. “Listen, it should go like this (sings) and you played like this. (sings)”

“Is there supposed to be a difference?”

“Do you really not hear it, or are you kidding me?”

I had no answer for that. Sister just doesn't understand somebody without a musical ear. We plough on. Almost every day we spend some time with the harmonium. But whenever others are away, the hymn singing goes on and on, without a disturbance. Finally Ritva takes out her recorder to assist the harmonium. But that won't do at all. That means I would have to sing by myself! Better we go and dance! We will continue tomorrow.

After the renovations we show the others where we got in the Chorales book. With great pride we showed them how there is only a little bit we didn't get to. There is a lot of amazement. We do confess that we skipped over the hymns with too many markings. But even then! Something about the hymns is fascinating to us. Is it the peace, un-hurriedness, beauty, sorrow and joy, the feeling of Sacred?

While the renovations go on we often go to check how the work is going and what kind of wallpaper is used. They seem to be very light, as we discover when we inspect them every night. In the living room the pattern is clearer than in the other rooms. The painted lower part of the kitchen walls is creating a zone of green coolness. I am glad of that colour. I wish it would all be finished. The autumn is getting closer, and the school!

Finally the day comes when we move back to the home resplendent in its newness. Everything is brought back to the clean and newly papered shelves in the cupboards. Mother is the undisputed boss. Heavy furniture is brought back to its place with help from neighbours. There is no reason to change anything; everything was in its best possible position before. When we have the rugs, curtains and tablecloths in their place, and the beds made ready, we can look around us, satisfied. Only flowers are still missing! The inside plants are brought back from the classroom and wild flowers are brought in from the meadow to fill the vases. We sit down to admire the results of our labours. But soon we will be in a hurry, for school is going to begin.

And in a couple of weeks Kylli is going to be married to Väänö, the owner of Väkästi, whom I had met in the cabin on our skiing holiday.

When Kylli got engaged, they started planning the wedding dress. There was no material to be had, anywhere. Mother had heard about some shop in Helsinki, which would sell you material in exchange for butter. But father would never accept such a trade. Mother and Kylli were desperate and decided to commit the crime without telling father. They travelled to Helsinki. The suitcase was lifted on the shelf, which got more and more crowded as the travellers increased. You could almost see the glare of the packet of butter on their guilty faces when the inspectors came. They tried to stay calm, deep in their books, and were full of trepidation. The inspector made people take their bags and suitcases down one after another. There was some coffee in one. It was confiscated, of course, and the perpetrator was given her punishment. She started ranting about the system of rationing and let the inspector know her opinion on the whole stupid thing.

We are sure to be caught, too! Whatever will father say; he will be furious, for sure! These thoughts were going round and round in their brain as their terror mounted. But their bag was lying in the bottom of the net shelf underneath everything else, and in the heat of the verbal onslaught it was forgotten there by the inspectors as well. They had had a narrow escape from a deep humiliation. They didn't dare to thank the recent troublemaker, though they felt like doing it. With the dress material, but of course without the butter, they returned from their hunting trip oddly silent.

We only hear about this trip after the wedding, just in case!

62. The Wedding

There is enough to do. The dress is already with the seamstress, but other preparations are only starting. The main party hostess is in a meeting with mother and Kylli, and the rest of us, including Tuitu and Tellu, are cleaning and airing everything we can lay our hands on. Luckily we hadn't had time to make much of a mess since the renovations. We have to accommodate overnight guests, and the classroom is in use again, so is the shed. Father and Vänni are carting chairs on loan from neighbours, or tidying up the garden. Even the swing gets painted in the midst of all other activity; it might not even have time to dry, if it keeps on raining. All the time we are on tenterhooks about the weather. The wedding ceremony is intended to be performed in the garden, so an appeal has been made to those upstairs. Whether they have heard our appeal is questionable. September weather is capricious.

The day before the wedding visitors arrive in trains and in buses through the afternoon, both from Kouvola and from Lappeenranta direction. There is plenty to talk about; there is also plenty of heartfelt laughter after a long and difficult time. Almost the whole family is here, Ahti even with his children. In Tanu's family a sister or brother is expected for Matti any day now. Relatives living far away had to arrive today as transport is infrequent. The Asikkala family have arrived already, families of Uncle Aati and Uncle Uno will arrive in the morning. We have a long *sisters' bed* already made with paper sheets. After evening tea you can wash in sauna and go to bed if you feel like it. Gradually all the folk find their abode for the night. Family makes a last minute assessment that everything is OK for tomorrow. If only we will have fine weather!

What a relief when the morning sun is blinding our eyes. The Big Ones have already started on their wedding tasks. But I have to be there, too! I shake Ritva to wake her up, and run to volunteer my help. Sister comes right behind me. We carry plates to the table; we count knives and forks, carry glasses with great care. Fresh summer flowers are brought to the vases, and all kinds of small jobs keep us busy. We have no business to enter the kitchen; there we would just be in the way.

Tuitu and Tellu are edgy with the hurry. They are supposed to practice a song for the wedding ceremony at some stage. They might have to sneak out into the classroom from this hullabaloo. And

immediately there is mother: “Where are the big girls? Where in the world have they disappeared? Go find them, this minute! The Luumäki folk are coming right now!” We start winding our way the long way towards the classroom, where we hear singing. It is a pity to interrupt it, but we gesture to them to stop, and yell out that the groom is coming with his people. The girls go on with their singing more quietly till the end of the song and come with us. It is weird to shake hands with Kylli’s fiancé, having met him in a totally different situation. I also had met some of his sisters at Christmas holidays in Väkästi. Besides the sisters there are other village folk from Uro.

A wedding rug is placed in the garden on a low bench. It stretches far in front of the bench. Behind it is a beautiful tree, and bushes and autumn flowers all around. Wedding guests gather around in the yard, the bride is being helped into her wedding dress. Now the door opens, and father walks his oldest daughter towards the pastor. There the groom is already waiting. Mother is wiping her tears. The pastor makes a beautiful speech and declares them a married couple.

Father, too, speaks beautifully, and the Big Ones sing in two parts *‘Thank you, my gracious Lord’*. It sounds lovely in the clear air of the late summer and in the warmth of the happiness of the married couple. That is, until we come to the verse where they thank the Lord for the gift of singing, which is sadly lacking in Kylli’s case. That’s what she says herself, anyway. The singers start to get the giggles. They glance at each other, and burst out laughing. The song is interrupted. It is so embarrassing! A new try isn’t any more successful, but the third time round they get through to the end of the verse. The last verse sounds beautiful again. Nobody is complaining, only mother a bit. Others tease that they are envious of sister.

As the women are admiring Kylli’s dress, someone happens to take a closer look at the figures that are woven in the same colour into the material. Where the material background is mat, the figures stand out as glossy. But only now do they realise what the figures are about. There is a young girl next to a goat. This observation raises hilarity in the wedding guests. Even the black market buyers had not noticed what a fitting material they had exchanged for their butter. The surname of Kylli’s new husband just happens to be *Pukki*, the Finnish word for goat.



It feels peculiar that Kylli is now married. Ritva and I cogitate on this business of marriage at night in our wide communal bed. It must be terrible to live with a strange man suddenly. And to move into his home to be a matron in his house, how can Kylli do that? And have children, maybe! Well, of course they are fun to play with; after all we have our own dreams about a full dozen each. What a joy would reverberate all around, and the horselaughter would be heard all the way to the neighbouring villages. And pillows would fly as the kids would fight! It was a big enough job to mind Marja and Martti today, although there are only two of them. Wonder if a full dozen would be a bit much, after all! The future with its riddles is beckoning to us ever more bizarre until we slip into blissful oblivion.

Our sister Kylli has now sunk her roots in the soil of the fatherland as a mistress of a farmhouse, like they did since time immemorial. She

now has a permanent home in South Karelia, quite near the new border. Much nearer than that one cannot get! *Kyllikki the Gadabout*, she will grow her roots into the new soil.

But *Tuulikki, Daughter of Wind*, is about to become a missionary!

From Little Sister:

Funny thing, but I could have sworn that *Kyllikki's* wedding occurred in Väkästi.

63. The Last Glimpse

Two years have gone by. We have travelled with mother to see Tanu's family in Mänttä, where he is working as a medical doctor. Father will follow us when he can. We make a fun trip to the forest. We pick lingon-berries and mushrooms. Happy explorers, we run from one tussock to another. We breathe our lungs full of the resinous smell of pine forest again and again. I get a piece of twig in my eye. It stings and hurts every time I open and close my eye. Tanu tries to remove the splinter but can't do it without his equipment. The splinter has hit such a bad spot. We have to rush home. I feel miserable. I sit on a stool in the middle of the kitchen and Tanu is struggling with my eye. He says he has to turn the eyeball over. Of course I am horrified! But just at that moment of horror the splinter comes out.

The phone rings. Tanu is asked to the phone. He takes quite a while before he comes back. He looks very serious and he asks mother to sit down. Something odd is happening here.

Father is no more! Father is dead! Mother shrieks, covers her face and bursts out crying. Stunned, the rest of us ask where, when, and how, and rush some camphor to mother. Ahti, who had moved to Helsinki with his family, had had a phone call from the hospital. Father had fallen down and hit his head on the street. Some young messenger lad had run into him on his bicycle. Father had been running over the street to catch the train. Father was always in a hurry. Ahti is doing everything necessary there with the hospital and the police. Is this what my splinter in the eye foretold? What about the dream that I haven't told anybody. In my dream father was lying still in a wheelbarrow and some strangers were pushing it.

The sad family travels home. Kyllikki starts to organise the funeral in Väkästi. Mother gives instructions on the phone for a gathering, to which all the family and friends are invited. Official visitors are also coming, representing father's numerous organisations and the municipality. The young messenger lad also wants to take part with his parents. We don't have to think long about where to bury father; Kylli is the only one with a permanent home. She would also have continuity in Luumäki, as a representative of the next generation is expected to be born any moment.

Father is gone. The mighty oak tree has fallen. The respected, fair, safe father, whose advice we all would have still needed, is not there to support us anymore. Here we stand, mother and all eight children, around an open grave on a nippy autumn day in the new section of Luumäki burial ground. Here, in the lowest row of graves, edged by slim birch trees. The slope goes on into an open field. There the young calves are gambolling enthusiastically.

Maija Helena was born soon after the funeral.

From Little Sister:

I remember the shock of the news. I couldn't take it in. It just wasn't possible!

I remember standing by the open grave, throwing soil onto the coffin like it was my sole responsibility to cover it up. Later somebody teased me about it. All my numb mind could think about was how unfair it was that I had lost my father before I had got to know him. I was aware that the other siblings had quite a different understanding of him than I did. I had hoped that as I grew older, I, too, would gain a father I could relate to.

More From Little Sister

My father's family were independent landowners with centuries of land ownership behind them. They were happy and secure in their knowledge of their place in the world. Father's father had died early, and his mother got remarried – to her brother-in-law. Father was given an education on the understanding that he had no further claim to the family land. He was quiet and thoughtful, loved reading and learning new things. I remember he was studying Esperanto when I was little.

To me my father was a very stern character, and I was always quite scared of him. Kyllikki couldn't believe that that was how I saw him, as for her he was always a very loving and fair father. I think it didn't help that he was my teacher in primary school. Trying not to show any favouritism towards his own, he was unnecessarily strict with me. My perception was that I got picked on. Whenever there was any trouble in the class, guess who got sent into the shaming corner! Most of the time it was probably justified, but sometimes I was definitely innocent, and muttering deep curses in my corner.

On the other hand, I have to admit that father was also very fair. Once I came into the house and found my father bouncing a ball in the living room. Now that was a no-no, there was no playing with balls inside, and somehow I found the courage in my total indignation to confront him. To give him his due, he immediately put the ball away and put himself into the shaming corner. I couldn't ask for more fair than that!

My father was quite absentminded at the best of times, and several times a week he sent me home (which was in the same building) to fetch his glasses. The usual scenario saw me going home to ask mother about the glasses, looking around for a while and returning to the classroom to see the glasses perched on his forehead. He never learnt!

This reminds me about an incident on our first evacuation. Father was the evacuation overseer in our village, so he got to watch that nobody took unfair amount of space in the carriages. You had so much space per person, and that was that. Mother had packed some kitchen utensils and was overjoyed when the package arrived at our destination. But alas, father had a different idea of what was important, and instead of pots and pans, mother unpacked books by the dozen, and amongst the books she found father's spectacles. I wouldn't be surprised if she

muttered some curses and maybe even felt gleefully that it served him right. His sight was not the best without his glasses, so it must have caused him some concern.

To be fair, I have to say that my older siblings had quite a different view of our father. I think that the wartime, being evacuated, and the constant worry of those times had taken its toll on him.

My mother was 43 when I was born, and I was her 13th pregnancy. She was careworn, impatient and did not come across as very loving. If I did something to help, I felt it was never enough. On the other hand, she had wonderful healthy peasant humour, and she could always laugh and see the funny side of things afterwards. Her humour could be quite coarse sometimes. The farmers were up to their necks in shit – sometimes literally – and not inclined to skirt around any issue. She came from a peasant stock, although in the distant past they had been learned gentlemen, but the family had become impoverished.

My mother had a sister who had died early with some unnamed mental affliction – not a thing to be talked about. Mental illnesses were the prerogative of the educated; the peasants didn't go in for them! Mother had managed to go to school and became a handcrafts teacher. That was a great asset to her in the wartime, when you had to make do with home-made. She hadn't actually worked as a teacher for very long before she got married and started her family.

Mother was a genius for inventing games for us. Nothing was available in the shops; everything had to be made at home. She made packs of cards out of sugar packets, which were cardboard. She would draw pictures and figures on them, and when they got too scuffed, there was always a new sugar packet. These cards were called *Halepralla* which I am sure was totally my mother's invention, as I have never come across another *Halepralla* pack. (Neither has Mr Google!) Unfortunately I can't remember how we played with them.

Mother's ingeniousness was also evident in her cooking. With the meagre war time rations she managed to produce quite remarkable meals for us, and we must have driven her crazy with our demands. She would not tolerate us kids in her kitchen at meal preparation times, and apart from Christmas time I never got to help her. Even today, the only reasonably successful meal I can produce is a Finnish Christmas meal, as my children can testify.

Mother was exuberantly larger than life! She laughed, she cried, and she could tell you off so you remembered it. In my memory she was always very big, but she wasn't tall, only wide. She weighed close to 100 kilograms. When I was little, it was my ambition to become as fat as she was! Thank goodness some childhood ambitions are never (yet, anyway) realised!

I was fiercely protective of my mother if anybody else criticised her. I remember being in high dudgeon with Suoma and one of my cousins when I heard them badmouthing something my mother had done. It was all right for me to criticise her, but not for anybody else!

While we were living in Aitomäki there was a lady teacher living above us in the school building, and she was the antithesis of my mother. Where my mother was all soft and round, she was thin and angular. Where my mother was embarrassingly exuberant, she was quiet and dignified. I liked to visit her at suppertime, as I was fascinated by her pancakes. They were uniformly round, evenly cooked, perfect, whereas my mother produced rambling, patchily cooked objects that were nearly raw on one side, burnt on the other side, but – I must say – absolutely delicious. I had a theory that you could tell a person's character just by looking at their pancakes.

I have only vague memories of my older siblings during the war. Kyllikki and Tuulikki were old enough to work in the women's auxiliary troops, the *lottas*, and both big brothers, Ahti and Tauno, were fighting at the front. So that left Suoma, Väinö, Aili and me at home. Väinö must have started high school while we were living in the little farming village of Repola during the interval between the Winter War and the Continuation War, but I only started first grade of primary school in our second year there. At some stage Suoma was sent to Oulu in the North of Finland to continue her schooling at mother's sister's place. I don't remember much about her in that period.

I am afraid Aili and I did not make a good team. I ganged up with Väinö against Aili most of the time. Väinö and I were buddies, in spite of the 6 year gap between us, maybe because of the gap. Aili was pretty good natured, though, and she kept teaching me everything she had to study. I for my part defended her against the bully boys in the neighbourhood. I wasn't afraid to use my fists when diplomacy didn't help, whereas Aili was more inclined to run home.

Ahti was more of a vague presence in my scene. He was fighting the war, and he had a fiancée, Marjatta, whom he brought home on his leave. I remember more about Marjatta than about my brother at that time. I don't think Ahti was good with little children, being a fairly serious character.

I was totally in love with my brother Tauno. What he liked, I naturally liked, too. I loved black currants, entirely because he did! He was studying medicine in the University when he was not on the front, and his medical magazines used to come to our place. I read them and demanded that the whole family attend the lectures I gave. I was seriously going to become a medical doctor myself, but in the end I got cold feet about facing the responsibility for other people's lives.

When I was 9, I had to sit an exam to be accepted into the high school. It was all very exciting, but I can't remember what the exam questions were like. I expect they were testing our general numeracy and literacy levels. Anyway, I sailed through with flying colours, and started on my high school career.

My high school was in Kouvola, a small city about 10 km from Aitomäki. I had to walk to the railway station, or occasionally to the bus station, to catch the train early in the morning. It was about one kilometre to the train, and twice as far to the bus, and the trip with walk from home to the station and from the station to the school plus the train trip took about an hour, so it was an early morning for someone who has never *done* mornings! My mother had no end of trouble trying to wake me up. I would dream that I would get up and have breakfast, when Mother came and shook me again. I thought I was walking to school, when she came and shook me yet again. My dreams were so vivid I was convinced that I was actually on my way.

One autumn, a wolf had been seen around the forest I had to walk through, and the kids were afraid to walk alone. The parents in the village took turns in accompanying the children to the station and back again, carrying an axe. I don't know if that kept the wolf at bay, or if it had moved to another area, in any case I never saw one.

In those days we had school 6 days a week, generally from 8 am to 4 pm, and the train home left at around 5 pm, so by the time I got home, it was nearly 6 o'clock. On Saturdays, though, we were set free earlier, maybe 1 or 2 pm.

When I started high school in the autumn of 1945, the war was only just over, everything was still either very expensive, or just not there, and if you had one good dress to go to school in, you were lucky. Overcoats and warm long woollen socks were a must in those latitudes. Temperatures were frequently below -25°C for two or three months of the winter. We were rather poor, so I never had any clothes bought specifically for me as I had all those sisters to pass things down to me. I had some friends who came from a much more affluent background, but it never was an issue, I guess because most people were in the same boat, so there was nobody to envy. Anyway, I found out usually that these wealthier friends had other difficulties in their lives, and I would not have changed places with any of them.

One thing made me sad, though, and that was that I couldn't take part in the school play. The reason was that I lived out of town, and all rehearsals were after school time. There was only one possible train and bus for a young kid to take at the end of the day, and of course nobody's parents had a car. So that was that. In spite of my disastrous early attempts at play acting, I really wanted to do it.

I attended an all girls' school, as did Aili. Väinö went to an all boys' school in the same town, but he left high school after 5th class and went to an agricultural college somewhere else, so he left a big hole in my life. By this time all my siblings apart from Aili had left home: Kyllikki was a working woman teaching hand crafts, Ahti and Tuulikki were teaching primary school, Tauno was working as a GP, having also married, and Suoma studied at the University in Helsinki. It was odd being in such a small family suddenly.

I was still scared of my father, and it was quite traumatic for me to have to ask him for money for school fees, textbooks, or heaven help, clothes for myself. I also had a terror of telephones, and whenever the phone rang, if I was at home alone, I would run up the road to avoid answering it. I have no idea why I was scared!

I was an exemplary pupil! I had an almost photographic memory, so only had to read my lessons once through, and I could 'read' it again in my mind in class. I got teased mercilessly by the other kids for being a swat, which I thought was very unfair, as I wasn't, really. I just couldn't help it that I had an excellent memory! My conscience wouldn't allow me to *not* do my homework, even to escape the teasing.

Consequently I was generally at the top of the class in all subjects but one. It will be no surprise to anybody which class that was!

I was terrified of the home economics teacher, and never even learnt to make a cup of tea. I remember one lesson when we made something that I just couldn't even think of eating. I don't remember what it was, probably something with tomatoes, but I pretended that I had bad indigestion and couldn't eat anything. The teacher then told me to make a cup of tea for myself – and I didn't have a clue how to do that! I don't remember if my ruse was discovered then!

There was another subject where I didn't do too well. I was generally the last person to be chosen for a baseball side. I couldn't run, I couldn't throw a ball, or long jump, or high jump. I was a midget sized weakling, though full of grit.

The academic subjects I handled with aplomb. I became cynical about history early on. The peace treaty with the Soviet Union had left Finland in a position where we had to do everything the Big Brother demanded to keep our independence. One of the things we had to do was to rewrite our history. We had to actually glue strips of paper over some pages and replace them with a sanitised version of events. We of course made sure that we knew what the books said before this doctoring went on, but in the next reprint of the books it was all lost, so the next generation of school kids only learnt the 'corrected' version. How could I ever trust any histories after that lesson of history truly being written by the conquerors!

I had a quirky streak to my character, and all the way through my middle school my nickname was *Pelle* - circus clown in Finnish. Especially when I couldn't cope with life, I turned to clowning. It worked wonders as a strategy and helped me cope with difficulties. I laughed and played up in order not to cry.

I had a bunch of friends who liked doing the things I liked. In the middle of the day we usually had a whole hour for lunch, and my friends and I spent the hour in the nearby forest, either pretending we were mountain climbers, or racing around with home-made bows and arrows, being Cowboys and Indians. We brought lengths of rope from home to assist in our climbing ventures. A lot of time was also spent trying to teleport ourselves to Africa. We would sit on a big rock, close our eyes tightly and wish ourselves in Africa. For some reason we never managed

the teleportation, and I was left feeling terribly guilty because it was my fault. I didn't really believe that it would work, so it was clearly my fault that it didn't. If only I had had faith in the procedure, surely we would have woken up in Africa!

In the winter and in bad weather it wasn't always feasible to go outside, so we played inside. One year we all imagined our grown up lives, and made ourselves books of our life with clippings from magazines and newspapers. I remember I was going to marry a medical doctor and be one myself. We would have three children, from memory two girls and a boy. I had pictures of the whole imaginary family as the children were growing up, of our house, animals, birthday parties, everything I could imagine, really. It was a lot of fun, and we would talk about our imaginary lives in all seriousness. I had given up on my big family of 12 or 13 by then, obviously.

In my third year our school moved to a new school building which was still being built. That provided us with new adventures. Once we got into a real pickle. In our explorations of the building we discovered there were all sorts of storage rooms in the cellar. We adopted one of them for our headquarters. We had passwords to keep out any strangers. One day we were sitting in this room and there was a knock on the door. Our demand for a password produced an angry demand that we open the door immediately – in the voice of the school principal! A very downcast group of girls marched out of the room in front of the principal. We got a thorough chastising, but at least we weren't expelled from school.

At around the same time we had discovered that we could crawl through the pipes in the basement. That provided a lot of adventure, until again we were discovered emerging from a narrow pipe, all dusty and dishevelled. This time we were threatened with consequences and got a lecture on the dangers of what we were doing. Looking back to it now from hindsight I can indeed see how foolish we were. We could easily have been stuck somewhere. Our guardian angels must have been working overtime!

After my father died, when I was 13, I stayed another 2 years in the school in Kouvola to finish the 'middle school'. I then moved to live with my sister Suoma to attend the higher grades. In my old school our first foreign language after Swedish was German, whereas in my new school they had been studying English for three years, and no German.

Well, I just had to buckle up and do three years' worth of English study during the summer break of three months.

Generally I got on well with Suoma, but we had one great fight. In the Finnish winter we had to wear woollen underwear to survive. In my case this apparel was homespun and home knitted, known affectionately as *pässin pökkimät*, or *ram-butted*, and was big, grey, and ugly. Other girls had shop-bought colourful, thin woollen pants. So on a day we had to undress for gym, there was I in my *pässin pökkimät*, being laughed at by the city slickers. The following week I refused to wear the offending article, and no amount of appealing to my common sense by Suoma could budge me. She finally realised I was in earnest when I grabbed a kitchen knife and threatened to kill myself rather than wearing my home-spun glory to school.

I believe any teenage girl would side with me there. I rest my case!

The concentrated studying of English language served me well, as after only one year in that school, I moved again, this time to Helsinki to live with Ahti and Marjatta, and during the following school year my English teacher asked me if I would like to apply for a scholarship as an exchange student to USA. I had a wonderful year in the USA, and that again led to me eventually emigrating to Australia.



Aili's memoir tells of her family's time during World War II in Finland. Her story is told from her childhood memories, as if she were living them now.

It begins with the arrival at home of Little Sister, three years younger than her, and ends with the death of her father. They experienced the traumas of war first hand, and were twice exiled from their home in Karelia to become refugees in their home land. Aili gives us a glimpse into a rich family life of singing and storytelling, of hard and shared work, and an at times subsistence life style under very difficult conditions. Her childhood is a dramatic contrast to that of modern day children in Scandinavia.

The translation is by Little Sister, who has added comments on her, sometimes different, memories of the same events.