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ARMFELT:
A Drama of the Great Northern War

by

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a novelized documentary

120,000 words

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ARMFELT

FRONTAL MATTER

Dedicated to

The late **BENGT OCKLIND**, at Ocke, in Jämtland, whose gift of a book inspired me to write this, and whose continuing interest returned me to it again and again.

Acknowledgments

Above all, I want to acknowledge Bengt's inspiration, patience, and the repeated gifts of source material over three decades. (During most of that period the project lay dormant. The research and writing were done during periods of opportunity during otherwise very busy years.)

My thanks also to **Siv Ocklind**, Bengt's wife and my hostess, for making me feel so welcome in their home, and hosting me during part of my 1992 travels to visit campaign and other story-related sites in Scandinavia.

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In Finland to **Ben Roimola**, who met me at that dock, fed me breakfast, and got me successfully on the train to Helsinki. In Finland, in 1992, I had some difficulty finding

English speakers when I needed one, so I really appreciated Ben's help and his excellent English. (I understand that finding English speakers in Finland today is no problem.)

To **Jan-Eric Nyström**, in Helsinki, for his guidance. Among other assistance, he tracked down a biography, in Swedish, of General Karl Gustaf Armfelt. It proved to be a "biography" of his army, as well, and the history of Finland's defense and loss, with many insights into other prominent characters. It helped me make Armfelt, his army, their character and times more real.

And my thanks to librarians, beginning at the community library in rural Liljendal, in Finland, who pulled and photocopied an extremely helpful book on the campaign for only the cost of the paper. And for encouraging this in-over-his-head American novelist in an unlikely project. It was one of them who first suggested that this novel would find an interested audience in Scandinavia.

(It was at Armfelt's farm at Liljendal that the general spent his final, more peaceful years. The farm, the site of a memorial, is just up the road a hundred meters or so from the library. I stood on the foundation of the farmhouse and looked out over a landscape which had not, I suspect, greatly changed over the intervening 260 years—a view he must have looked at innumerable times. What a marvelous and inspiring privilege!)

In Norway to an administrator in the Oslo library, whose name and exact professional position I have unforgivably forgotten. We met and talked on the train from Stjørdal to Trondheim, and her interest and encouragement were very welcome. She too suggested—without prompting!—that this book would find a Scandinavian audience, readers interested in what an American author might do with this harrowing piece of Scandinavian history.

(And who knows better than librarians what interests readers?)

Also in the beautiful Norwegian backcountry, to the Tydalen librarian (located at the middle school). Her English was very good. I asked if she had a Norwegian novel that might expand my sense of the Armfelt campaign. Yes, she said, she did.

"May I photocopy it?"

"You could, except our copier isn't working, and won't be fixed till Tuesday. Why don't I sign it out to you? You can get it copied in America and mail it back." Can you imagine? I accepted the offer eagerly, and of course I did mail the book back; I'd have fought to the death to protect it. She also asked me to send a copy of my novel. I hope it doesn't disappoint her.

And to the hostess-caretaker at the rustic timberline lodge at Nordaune. An older lady, she spoke no English, and I almost no Norwegian, but she understood my clumsy halting Swedish, and spoke slowly and carefully herself, keeping it simple and repeating as necessary, so that I could follow her Norwegian. She also loaned me her personal copy of the local history, so I could read its chapter on the activities of Armfelt's army in that locale.

And finally, I want to acknowledge those who, at different stages, reviewed the manuscript in part or in whole. You know who you are.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1600s, the map of Europe was very different from today's. Germany was a center of political and religious ferment, and consisted of some three hundred (300!) independent states. Foreign relations centered on military power (including how many foreign mercenary regiments you could afford), and on constantly shifting political, military, and trade alliances. Rule was by monarchs. Diplomacy featured connivery, treachery, the trading of other people's territories, and the intermarriage of royal families. Wars were frequent, threats of war continuous, and wrongs clamoring to be redressed innumerable. Treaties often lasted just long enough for new armies to be trained or arranged for, and for new alliances to be secretly forged.

In fact, the road to hell was paved not with good intentions, but with broken pledges, which were much more abundant.

What an era!

In the north, where our story takes place, Denmark had ruled Norway for more than three centuries—since 1397. Finland had become part of Sweden more or less gradually, beginning in the mid-1100s. A landmark date was 1216, when the pope confirmed the claim of the Swedish king at the expense of the Danish king, who had claimed Finland after establishing bases on the south coast. There had never been a Finnish state. Much of what is now Finland was wilderness thinly peopled by Lapp reindeer hunters and Finnish traders, trappers and salmon fishers. What would become known as Finland took shape over the following several centuries, through gradual settlement and by fighting that pitted Finns and Swedes against Russians and territorials.

In 1618, the complex pattern of German dynastic rivalries and religious conflicts erupted into the Thirty Years War. Sweden's military intervention prevented the threatened collapse of Protestantism in central Europe, but in the process, Sweden and

Finland, poor to begin with, were further impoverished. They also suffered a shocking loss of young men. But when the war was over, Sweden held much of the land along the southern and eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, land taken from Danish, German, and Russian rulers.

In 1697, the headstrong 15-year-old Karl XII became King of Sweden and Finland. (The English, of course, called him Charles XII.) To the neighboring royalty, this seemed a good time to strip Sweden of her eastern and southern Baltic possessions, plus that part of (now) southern Sweden that had been Danish until 1658. Thus a "secret" pact was made by neighboring monarchs, who had no reason to imagine that Sweden's teen-aged king would prove to be a military genius. In February 1700, Augustus, ruler of Saxony and Poland, marched an army into Swedish Livonia (mainly present-day Latvia). A month later, Frederick of Denmark attacked his southern neighbor, Holstein-Gottorp, an ally and client state of Sweden defended in part by a Swedish garrison. And that autumn, Russia's Peter the Great, newly freed of war with the Turks, attacked the Swedish-ruled, Finnish-speaking provinces of western Karelia, Ingria, and Estonia.

The result was the 21-year Great Northern War. For several years the Swedish-Finnish army prevailed. At one point it occupied the pride of Saxony, its beautiful capital city, Dresden.

Eventually the invading Swedish army got bogged down in the vastness of Russia (actually today's Belarus and Ukraine), and was virtually wiped out in the Battle of Poltava. The sorely wounded King Karl escaped with several hundred men into Moldavia, at that time part of the Turkish empire, eventually returning to Sweden, where he at once began to raise a new army.

Karl's original enemies had been joined in 1709 by Prussia, and in 1715 by Hanover. Both were more eager to share in the spoils than in the fighting, however, for if Sweden's power had been sorely weakened, her king's military genius was now abundantly well-recognized and feared. (Hanover's German monarch was also the newly crowned George I, King of Great Britain and Ireland, but in Britain he had a parliament to deal with, thus Britain's role in the conflict was small and selective.)

Meanwhile, in 1714, a Russian army had overrun Finland. The hard-bitten remains of the Finnish army, commanded by General Karl Gustaf Armfelt, escaped west across the Torne River into northern Sweden.

This story is about that Finnish army, its general, and some unblooded units of Swedish conscripts, in the bitter, final land campaign of the Great Northern War.

PROLOG

It was a manor house in the Finnish style—of logs neatly squared and fitted; five rooms in a row, well furnished and well swept, each with a fireplace, a fur rug, and overhead a loft. In this remote northern land, it was a home fit for a general and aristocrat. Sitting on the brow of a low rise, it overlooked a broad bog and lake, with on the far side, dark forest of pine and spruce. A foot-path ran down to the water, where a skiff had been drawn onto the bank.

From one room of the house, a door opened onto a back stoop. There a tall, raw-boned elderly man with a scarred face—scarred not by blade but by frost—sat gazing across the lake, smoking his pipe and digesting his lunch. It was golden September—golden sunlight, golden birches and aspens—and the mosquitoes, gnats, deerflies and bullflies had frozen down.

His wife stepped onto the stoop. Her homespun linen dress and apron were of excellent quality, colorfully embroidered. "Herr General," she said. Said it in German, the gentry speech of their home province, Ingria, now swallowed by the Russians. A German flavored by the hired Ingrian peasant girls who'd tended them as children, and later the farmhands, all of whose mother tongue was Finnish. "Hans-Petter is here from Pernå," she told him, "with a letter for you." She handed her husband an envelope. "When he has finished eating, I will send him out to you."

She left. After peering at the address and the waxed seal, the elderly general fished a penknife from a pocket, slit the envelope and removed the letter. Then, squinting at arm's length, he began to read.

12 juli 1735 anno domini

To Herr General Baron Karl Gustav Armfelt, from Anders Henrik Ramsay, in 1718 your obedient pistol bearer, now a lieutenant in the Royal Swedish Regiment of the Army of His Majesty Louis XV of France.

My Dear General,

You are no doubt surprised to hear from me. In a recent letter, my father told me of the latest, well-deserved honors conferred on you by His Majesty Frederick,¹ and this has moved me to write. Few men have served king and country so honorably as you, or through such cruel times. I am proud to have served you.

You may have heard from my father that after our return to Finland, I volunteered in the Nylands-Tavastehus Regiment of Cavalry. However, because of the peace, and a consequent lack of opportunities for advancement, I did not attain the rank of corporal until age 18, or sergeant until age 24. But because of the recent troubles in Poland, in which His French Majesty is involved through his royal Polish father-in-law, there are opportunities here of which I have availed myself....

The old general read on to the end, alternately smiling and shaking his head. Then he lay the letter on his lap and sat looking back to the war years, something he did from time to time. Those years had scarred his soul more severely than his face. In 1718, Anders Henrik Ramsay had been eleven years old. A hardened eleven. Only seven when the Russians had driven them from Finland—the chewed-up shards of the Finnish army and its following of refugees, hungry, exhausted and despairing, their homes and relatives in the hands of Russians, or worse, of Cossacks or Tartars.

It seemed to the general that his greatest accomplishment had been keeping his troops disciplined and effective. His troops.

A terrible time, with a very different king....

¹ Frederick I of Sweden, not Frederick of Denmark

PART ONE
PREPARING TO INVADE

Chapter 1

King Karl XII

The term "atmospheric inversion" was unknown in 1717, but reality did not quibble. The still air was pungent with smoke issuing reluctantly from the chimneys of Lund. It slid down the roofs—some tiled, some thatched—to form a mostly invisible layer in the streets and among the buildings.

It was March, and in Sweden's southernmost tip, winter had been much less cold than Lieutenant General Karl Gustaf Gustafsson Armfelt was used to. But yesterday, clear skies and iron frost had moved in from the northeast, and beneath his horse's hooves, the street was a chaos of frozen ruts. An improvement, he told himself, though hard on horses. February had been four weeks of drizzles, rain and sleet storms, with little honest snow. Miserable weather for a miserable business: the court martial of General Georg Lybecker, to which he'd been called for his knowledge of relevant events. During their service in Finland, Armfelt had not thought well of Lybecker, though they'd gotten along well enough. He'd disliked the way the man had schemed, libeled and slandered his way into command, and disliked most of his decisions as well. But none of it qualified as cowardice, and as for malfeasance? Arrogance and incompetence were nearer the mark. Lybecker had deserved his disgrace and dismissal, but execution would be unjust.

Still, the man had abundantly earned his enemies, and could hardly complain if they wanted vengeance. Justice they called it, which was not quite the same thing.

The day before, at the end of the afternoon session, Armfelt had been given a note by an orderly: report to His Majesty's headquarters tomorrow morning at six. Karl XII was a notoriously early riser. In winter, regardless of the weather, he was in the saddle when the only light was starlight, and at his desk well before gray dawn. Today, with the equinox at hand, the sun had not quite risen, and what little traffic the general

encountered was military. The sky was a clear morning blue, but when buildings did not intervene, he could see the Dog Star still shining brightly in the south, reluctant to disappear.

Shortly he turned onto Södergatan (South Street), and saw His Majesty's military headquarters close ahead, two-storied, of white-washed brick. Its guards, wearing the familiar blue and yellow, held muskets at "order arms," bayonets fixed. Pulling up before it, he swung from the saddle. His orderly, who'd ridden close behind him, took the general's reins and started for the stable with their horses. On the stoop, the guards came to a rigid "present arms" as the general approached. Though their buttons and bayonets gleamed with polishing, their woolen uniforms were threadbare, and their shoes coming apart.

Even here at His Majesty's headquarters, Armfelt thought.

Sweden's men were in the army, those not dead in Russia, Poland, the Ukraine, Livonia, Courland, Lithuania, Germany. Thus its women labored in the fields to stave off starvation, and had little time for their spinning wheels and looms. The peasants patched what they had, wore shoes from wood, or moccasins woven from birchbark strips, and pulverized the dried inner bark of trees to stretch their flour and feed their children. Famine bread! The treasury was virtually bankrupt, so for uniforms, the King had turned to the lowest bidding foreign merchants, who provided cheap and shoddy goods.

Better, Armfelt reminded himself dryly, than being ruled by Russians and occupied by Cossacks, as Finland is.

Inside, the building smelled more strongly of smoke than the street had. Near Lund there was little forest; unusual for Sweden. Firewood was expensive—had to be hauled a long distance—thus coal was much used, when it could be had. And on mornings like this, the fireplaces drew poorly. He strode through the vestibule into the waiting room. There would be a wait, said the lieutenant in charge. The King was with someone else. Someone exceedingly important, Armfelt decided, judging from the young man's expression.

After some minutes, an extremely tall civilian came down the hall from the King's office, and left the building, his face grim. Their glances had met in passing, and

Armfelt had been momentarily startled by the man's right eye, which seemed made of porcelain. It was the eye that affirmed for him who the man was—a German named von Görtz, the King's principal foreign adviser and negotiator.

The lieutenant went to the King's office and returned almost at once, to escort Armfelt to His Majesty. The general wondered which Karl awaited him. The intense King, who talked animatedly in his listener's face while his strong fingers twisted buttons off their jacket? The affable father figure, 16 years younger than himself? Or the disapproving monarch, cold and hard, with absolute power. Reputedly the latter was infrequent. Karl was a soldier's king.

The lieutenant held the door for the general, then closed it behind him, leaving Armfelt alone with His Majesty. Karl XII of Sweden got to his feet and shook hands, a favorable beginning. He stood nearly as tall as the tall general, who in his boots measured 184 cm. The king had never worn a periwig, and his receding blond hairline exposed a high domed forehead, browned like his face from years of riding hatless. His eyes were dark blue, almost violet, and beneath their cool dominance gleamed a quizzical shrewdness.

"Good morning, Herr General," he said before sitting again. "I suppose you have had your fill of the proceedings." He gestured in the direction of the nearby building where the court martial was being held. "But that is not why I called you here this morning. Tell me about your army."

The question surprised Armfelt. The King knew its history and received regular reports, which he no doubt read meticulously. "It is seriously shorthanded," Armfelt replied. "Short enough that I post them no farther north than Umeå. North of that, the armed peasants must suffice, and they don't. Björksten's are the best drilled and led. They know well their forests and swamps, and the uses of *förhuggningar*² and ambush. And of course they have skis. But even so, they are limited and undependable.

"The Cossack raids are bad enough, with their burning and plundering and murder. But there are also great hardships, much hunger and death. Especially the old die. And

² A *förhuggning* (plural *förhuggningar*) is a barrier of trees felled with their tops toward the enemy. In colonial America the French word *abatis* was used, but is little known today, and absent from most American dictionaries. Therefore I've used the Swedish word here.

the children; many will not live to become soldiers. Nor is it good to be a woman or girl when the Cossacks ride in.

"Every time a Cossack dies, Hell's population increases."

The King did not nod, and his reply was slow, deliberate. "I am well aware that this war is hard on my people, general," he answered mildly. "But our cause is just, and those who die are with God. Meanwhile," he added pointedly, "it was your army I asked about."

"My apologies, Your Majesty. At two-thirds strength, the Österbotten Regiment is the strongest—900 officers and men. It was the last formed, but its men fought like Lions at Storkyro. The Viborg Infantry Regiment musters only 100. It fought in every major action, from the beginning." His gaze intensified, became almost challenging. "My troops are the best fighting men in Europe." He paused, then added: "They grumble, of course. They have had not been paid for months, nor have most of my officers. But they are loyal to their King, they know how to fight, and abundantly willing. Fighting is all they have to live for now; that and the day the Russians leave Finland."

Karl seemed unperturbed at the criticism implied in the comment about pay. "What is your total strength?"

"Fifty-six hundred. Most are combat veterans; the rest are volunteers from among the refugees—boys grown to youth since we were driven from Finland. All of them are tough, well-disciplined, well-drilled, and used to hardships. I have posted them in forces as small as companies, from Umeå all the way south to Nyköping; 730 km of coast. The Russians have the advantage of us. Their galley fleets can land raiders anywhere, and we must respond."

"Well," said the king, "we shall give the armed peasants more responsibilities, and muster your people together in one place. With the Jämtland and Hälsingland regiments as reinforcements."

He paused, eyes alert to the general's reaction, and found primarily a sharpened interest. Armfelt was wondering what the King had in mind. The Swedish army being trained by the king was already large, but he had other plans for it than protection of the east coast. For that he depended on the Finns, and the ongoing negotiations with Tsar Peter.

Instead of elaborating, the king changed the subject. "Meanwhile you are worried about Finland, and how we will rid it of Russians. You know of course that the Tsar has an embassy on Åland, negotiating with von Görtz. Peter has troubles at home; there are conspiracies to overthrow him. And of course, he has always the Turkish problem. Now his rebellious son has disappeared, in league with conspirators. Presumably Alexis is sheltered by some foreign ruler who will throw in with the rebels when the time comes: Prussia's Frederick perhaps, or the Emperor in Vienna. It is difficult to know.

"At any rate, Peter would like peace with us." The King chuckled. "But we disagree on terms. I insist on the return of Finland, the Karelian Isthmus, Ingria and Estonia. And there are other considerations." He shrugged. "At present, Peter is reluctant. So we will capture Norway—free it from his Danish ally—and force Frederick to withdraw from the war, strengthening my bargaining position."

The king paused for a moment. "But to control Norway," he added, "we must capture more than Christiania.³ In early times, the country was ruled from Trondheim, which was also its long-time archbishopric, so we must capture it too. And in doing so, distract the Danes. They will have to keep an army in the north."

Abruptly he stood, and on a table unrolled a linen map. Then he beckoned the general to his side. "That will be your job, yours and your army's," he said, then elaborated, his finger moving about on the map. Armfelt knew little about Norwegian geography. Christiania, in the south, was the Danish administrative capital of Norway. Karl would capture it. Trondheim was a harbor well up the long Norwegian coast.

"To reach it," the king went on, "you must pass through mountains, a wild and difficult region. Your first task will be to reconnoiter, decide the best invasion route."

He discussed the problems as he knew them—supplies, transport, fortifications. "The route through Skalstugan seems most promising." The King pointed to a dot, with the name in tiniest letters. "There is also a road from Härjedalen to Röros. And a crossing from Dalarna, which seems less promising, but worth looking at."

He eyed the general intently. "Do you have any further questions? Any comments?"

"Not at present, your Majesty."

³ Christiania, in the south, was the Danish administrative capital of Norway. After Norwegian independence, it eventually was renamed Oslo.

"Very well then, Herr General, return to Gävle. Von Schwerin has no further need of you here. Begin your reconnaissance as soon as warm weather makes the country accessible, and keep me informed of your progress. You are dismissed."

The general saluted. "As you order, Your Majesty. My troops will be glad to have the initiative again." Then he about-faced sharply and left the room.

As Armfelt rode back to his lodging, his mind reviewed. Take Trondheim because Norway was ruled from there in the time of Olaf? he thought, and was its long-time archbishopric? Not likely; not for those reasons alone. It would hold Norwegian units in the north, of course, but even so...

His Majesty had always been secretive. What was not said could not be repeated.

Chapter 2

Sunday Morning at Solslätte

The settlement of Solslätte spread broad and open and green in the late May sun.⁴ Which had been up since half-past two (it hadn't been truly night since April). A perfect morning to cut hay, after the dew dried. But it was Sunday; the hay would have to wait.

Solslätte was typical of Swedish byar, "villages"—not a pattern of streets and homes surrounded by countryside, but a neighborhood of farms and fields, interrupted and surrounded by forest of pine and spruce. Of cropland rich in stone piles, hay meadows, rail fences, and scattered steadings built mostly of logs.

A stream bisected it, with a gristmill and sawmill, and nearby a church. A large church, for every parishioner was expected to attend every Sunday. They didn't, of course—not *every* parishioner *every* Sunday—but truancy was the exception, for the truant might be visited by the constable. At any rate, piety was deeply ingrained into the country folk. As was attendance at church, even though some of Solslätte's parishioners had an 8 km walk to get there.

On this late-May Sunday, almost all of them wore the usual homespun woollens in the prescribed black. Though the black, in many cases, had developed a greenish tinge with age, and skirts and trouser legs were more or less paled by road dust. The priest, though, was dressed truly in black. Black linen. Both wool and flax were local products, the material cleaned and spun, woven and sewn and dyed, in Solslätte's farm cabins, by the farm wives, grandmothers, and daughters. Those same cabins had been built of local pines, cut and squared and set in place by local farmers, and roofed by them, using bundles of marsh hay, or shakes they'd split themselves (of course).

⁴ This story takes place when the Julian calendar was still the calendar of Sweden, and the dates used here are Julian dates. (It would hardly do to depict the famous Christmas mass of 1718 as being celebrated on January 5th.) Thus what is called late May here, was really early June, and in the province of Värmland the hay was ready for its first cutting.

A land of small stony farms and self-contained economies. Along the coast, young men might go to sea, to harvest herring instead of hay, grain, and turnips...or sail with fuelwood, charcoal, barrels of pine tar and turpentine, to Germany, Spain, Britain. Might sail even to the Indies, for sugar, tobacco, and spices. But in the hinterlands, few ever left their province—some not even their parish—unless called to war.

There'd been a lot of calls to war these past eighteen years. The army had come early, and taken the district quota, leaving enough men behind to do the heavier farm work. Then had come again, and again. Now Pastor Sundberg looked from his pulpit at a congregation of women, old men, and children. And a few youths of eighteen or twenty years.

And of course Blind Peter and Ole Humpback, who'd been born afflicted. And Per Algotsson, who'd left an arm in Poland, but lived to come home. And Stor Axel, Big Axel, who'd stumped home from the Battle of Hälsingborg on crutches and a wooden leg. After half a year of forbearance, Pastor Sundberg had gone to admonish him for not attending church. The heavy-shouldered veteran had been drunk, and raged at the priest; had he been wearing his leg at the time, he might have sent the churchman fleeing down the road. Or killed him, had he gotten those big hands on him.

As it was, the pastor had ridden back to his rectory in grief for Big Axel. To lose a leg, and now be so near to losing salvation...He shuddered. Yet he could not bring himself to send the constable. Instead he'd included this ravaged lamb in private prayer at each day's end.

Now, standing in his pulpit, Sundberg felt like a goat tethered out to call the bear to the hunters. For in this time of great need for soldiers, recruiters might visit a parish without sending word in advance, and go from farm to farm, looking for youths who'd come of age since the last taking. Sometimes word arrived before the recruiters themselves, and some youths might disappear into the forest, returning home when it seemed safe. Because already, on most farms, only women, children, and grandfathers with bent backs ruined by a lifetime of heavy toil, were left to work the fields, and cut the great piles of firewood needed. A healthy sixteen-year-old son was a boon from God—for a few short years.

With so many men gone to war, even children were fewer, and some so hungry,

they grew poorly, or died. Sometimes the army came for horses, too, leaving only the cows and bullocks. And a cow used to plow and haul was little good for milking.

And sometimes they came for the cows and bullocks, because armies had to eat.

But mainly they came for men and horses, both of which the war chewed up in great numbers, and spat out broken.

A goat, thought Pastor Sundberg. I'm a goat tethered out at summer pasture, as bait for the bear.

"Why?" he'd asked. "Why?" This time querying not God but the lieutenant, who'd lost the tips of all his fingers to the Russian winter; they'd turned black and fallen off. Sometimes he had to look to be sure, because gone or not, they hurt.

Their conversation had been the night before. The lieutenant had arrived when it was about as dark as it got in that season: twilight, with the sun riding a little below the horizon, marked by a smear of dusky red in the gray northern sky. Arrived without warning, because after a long hard day, the peasantry had been asleep. With his men, he'd ridden quietly into the rectory yard, dismounted, and walked alone to the door (walked limping; he'd lost toes, too, and a heel, to frost and a battalion barber-surgeon). There he'd banged on the door till a servant came, had been admitted, and the pastor brought.

"Why?" The lieutenant had echoed the pastor's question. "Why? Because the king needs soldiers, all he can get."

"I believe God himself is displeased with this war," the pastor had countered. "He has visited on us two poor crop years in a row, the last one the worst. The people eat famine bread, made with bark, heather buds, and chaff from the threshing. Some even eat acorns, which bind them so they can scarcely relieve their bowels. Who knows what He will inflict upon us next?"

The lieutenant answered without heat. "Who knows indeed? But this *I* know. If we do not defend ourselves, you will have Cossacks quartered among you, and it won't be your sons they'll carry off. Then you will truly understand what the Bible means by the 'wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Ask the Finns. Or better yet, don't ask them. When they think about it, they become dangerous. They are the king's staunchest men."



That had been the night before. Now, this morning, the lieutenant entered the church during the opening hymn, with everyone in their place. And at the agreed-upon time, spoke briefly to the congregation, telling them plainly and matter-of-factly what was needed. He was no aristocrat or gentry, but the son of a small freeholder. Had earned his rank the usual way, the hard way, by outliving his officers, and by steadiness and competence in battle. He understood these people—what to say, and how. And he understood war.

After the final hymn—"A Mighty Fortress"—the congregation filed out to the waiting soldiers, at the table they'd set up under the big spruce tree in front of the church. At Solslätte, for the sparse "Bold Swedish Lads," there would be no slipping off to the forest to hide.



The lieutenant, that Sunday, conscripted seven older youths as soldiers. They were to go to Strömstad, where the king was training an army to march into Norway and drive out the Danes: "to free Norway's people from more than three centuries of Danish tyranny." But the lieutenant also had his eye on the younger boys. He needed, he said, to take at least two of them as laborers; drovers to begin with. If none volunteered, he'd choose two. "Drovers are important," he said. "The soldiers must have meat. Otherwise they can't fight."

Fifteen-year-old Matts Karlsson i Stentorp⁵ wanted to go, but as a soldier, not a laborer. He wanted to wear a uniform, and carry a sword and musket. The lieutenant called Matts to stand before him, looked the boy over carefully, squeezed a skinny shoulder. Then after a moment's frowning, said that if Matts did well enough as a laborer—a herdboyc and perhaps a baggage handler—the general would probably sign him as a soldier, with uniform and musket. The lieutenant couldn't promise that, officially, but considering how manly and obviously capable Matts already was, it seemed to him it would almost surely happen. He said.

Matts' mother wept, of course, but Matts insisted she could get along without him.

⁵ In English, Matts Karlsson of Stentorp. (Sten = stone; torp = a small farm, perhaps a squatter's or sharecropper's farm.) There were so many Matts and Karls, with so many "sons," that the name of the family farm was often used as a surname, to further sort them out.

"Mikkel is almost fourteen," he said, "and strong for his age, and grampa is still strong, even though he gets tired sooner than he used to."

So Matts Karlsson was one of the volunteers. Then Pål Eriksson said he would go, too. He'd always complained that his father was a slave driver, and didn't really need him anyway; the old man was still in his prime, strong and healthy, except for the occasional fit that caused him to fall to the ground and flail around, biting his tongue and cheeks bloody. And Pål had two brothers big enough to tend set lines and cut firewood, and grub out boulders if they weren't too big.



The next morning, the lieutenant and his small recruiting team climbed into their saddles, all but the wagon driver. His seven military conscripts got into the wagon bed, and started south, to join the king at Strömstad. The ride would take four or five days; Solslätte had been the end of the lieutenant's sweep. During the past month, he had sent nearly forty new recruits to Strömstad.

His two new cattle drovers would also take four days to reach their duty destination. But it wasn't Strömstad, and they would not ride there in a wagon. The lieutenant felt a small twinge of conscience at having misled them, but their services too were needed, and with any luck at all, the fighting would end without their being shot at. And the experience would be good for them.

Chapter 3

Cattle Drive

A brindle bullock, a yearling, tried to mount the cow in front of him, but she was bigger than he was. Turning, she threw him off balance, then swung her horned head at him. The bullock recovered himself, and dodging left the road. Matts Karlsson and Stentorp darted to cut him off, and rapped him sharply on the snout with his five-foot birch rod. The bullock stopped abruptly, almost squatting on his haunches before regaining himself. For a long moment he stood with front feet spread, swinging his head back and forth in pain. "Bla-a-a-a-a!" he bawled, "bla-a-a-a!", then turned and scrambled back into the flow of the herd.

Dumskull, thought Matts, what good would that do you? At Blombacka, when the cattle had been gathered, there'd been some young bulls in the herd, and Ensign Hasselbeck had had them castrated. Bulls were a nuisance on a drive. But a few of the more mature hadn't yet outgrown the old impulses.

North of Filipstad, most of the traffic had been travelers on horseback; they'd encountered one or more almost daily. Often these were soldiers; messengers the sergeant said. They didn't stop to talk with the ensign. Usually they passed at a trot, a remount in tow. Matts wondered what sort of messages they carried. It seemed to him he'd like to be a messenger, riding on horseback, carrying messages that would help the king win the war.

When the herd was near a settlement, local travelers on foot often passed. These always looked either impressed or troubled at the sight of a large herd being driven through their district under the command of soldiers. Perhaps wondering whose cattle these had been, not so long ago, and whether they'd sold them willingly.

The herd wasn't moving rapidly—perhaps 5 km per hour when actually on the road. That was all the speed it could maintain, given the terrain and the sparse forage. The herdboys' job was to keep them on the road and moving north, not allowing them

to disperse into the forest, hunting something to eat, perhaps following the smell of clover. And to return them to the road, after the occasional grazing break at some meadow along the way. They found the work easy enough. They were all Värmländer farmers' sons too young to serve as soldiers; Matts Karlsson had turned fifteen that spring. They were accustomed to physical labor, and to the minds and vagaries of cattle, though not to handling some three hundred of them in a herd.

Totally new to the herdboys, and less agreeable, was setting up camp at day's end, breaking it down again in the morning, and doing the camp chores.

The soldiers who supervised them—Ensign Hasselbeck in command, Sergeant Björkebom, and three common soldiers—all were on horseback, of course. All but the ensign and sergeant had been invalidated out of combat units. Another, Corporal Liljeryd, rode ahead. Corporal Lindskog, who'd lost most of an ear at Narva and the frozen toes of his right foot in Livonia, doled out rations, kept records, supervised the string of pack horses, and called on the herdboys to load and unload them. Loading pack horses was a skill. The load needed to be properly balanced, and ride securely. If one came apart on the road, woe to the boy who'd packed it! Pål Eriksson had learned that the hard way, the very first day out of Blombacka. The rest had taken Pål's caning seriously.

Matts wished he could be on horseback. Best of all would be to ride ahead, alone, like Corporal Persson, scouting for meadows where the herd could graze and rest. But Matts enjoyed the actual herding, even if he was on foot. Sergeant Björkebom had posted him on the right flank near the front. That was an important place. The front boys had to keep the herd moving steadily, but not so fast as to wear it out. For the pace was controlled less by the hindmost pushing, than by the foremost drawing the others after. Sergeant Björkebom let the lead boys know if they were going too fast or too slow; he'd herded army cattle before, in other lands, though Matts didn't know that. It was common for an army to take their meat supply with them on its own hooves.

Matts was rather tall for newly-turned fifteen, and still boy-slim, but sinewy. His tough young legs strode easily through the dwarf shrubs that grew beneath the roadside pines. Nor did he hesitate to trot or dart, when the situation called for it, as with the foolish bullock. Meanwhile he was alert, eyes spotting whatever there was to see, ears sorting sounds, identifying, evaluating.

So far he'd seen no sign of bear, but wolves were another matter. They often traveled on backwoods "roads" (mostly little more than trails), which tended to follow the easier terrain. Thus, positioned as he was on the flank near the front, Matts had several times seen wolf turds along the roadside. Had pointed one out to Sergeant Björkebom, who was riding close by at the time. The sergeant had merely grunted; he didn't expect trouble from wolves. Too much commotion; too many horns and hooves, and mounted men with guns. Wolves could smell guns a long way; everyone knew that.

Matts knew it too. But it would be exciting to see one. Or a bear! See one at night, he thought, with the cattle quietly grazing, or bedded down chewing their cud. If he was lucky, maybe he would.



To Matts and Pål, on that memorable recruitment Sunday not so long before, driving cows had sounded easy. For three years, in the spring, they'd helped drive milk cows from Solslätte up to the dairy camp high in the hills, and in autumn back to the valley again. Driving a herd of army cows wouldn't be hard.

A memorable Sunday, the end of their childhood. The next day, escorted by a taciturn thirtyish soldier, they'd begun a leg-wearying four-day hike to Blombacka, stopping to pick up youths who'd volunteered from other parishes. Behind the soldier's back, Pål had mocked, his limp. The man had caught him at it, and knocked him down, bloodying his mouth.

Along the way they'd been fed by farmers, who were required to feed them when asked. Mostly it had been turnips and famine bread, though twice they'd gotten buttermilk as well. Being boys, they'd arrived hungry at the little settlement called Blombacka, where they'd been introduced to army food. The bread was real—dark pungent rye bread not extended with bark flour. It was also there they'd met Ensign Hasselbeck and Sergeant Björkebom. The sergeant showed them how big the herd was—some three hundred!—and told them how far they had to drive it: 750 km! Neither Matts nor Pål could conceive of such a distance. Surely it must be in a foreign land! But the sergeant assured them it was in Sweden.

Having learned what the job entailed, Pål had murmured through split and swollen lips that he and Matts should sneak away. Not back to Solslätte—his father was still

there—but somewhere else. Karlstad maybe. They could change their names and get jobs there.

Matts had frowned. "I thought you wanted to be a soldier."

"Yes, but I don't want to drive hundreds of cattle thousands of kilometers. Think of it, how many days—months!—it will take."

"Not thousands. We'll be there before the end of summer. Then we'll get to be soldiers." He'd looked Pål over. "But you go to Karlstad if you want. I'll tell them I don't know where you went. Of course, they may find you anyway. After Solslätte, it's probably the first place they'd look. And you would be a deserter."

Matts stopped there. Everyone had heard of deserters being hung. It was even said that some had had their heads cut off. He'd go to heaven headless! How to explain that?

Then the army fed them supper, this time with actual meat—salt pork—and porridge with peas, and rye bread and butter, and Pål had decided that driving cows might not be so bad after all. Even if they didn't get to wear a uniform till afterward.



That had been two weeks earlier. Matts knew, because two Sundays had passed, and they were most of the way to a third. It was easy to recognize Sundays, even without a church or church bell. On other days Ensign Hasselbeck would lead them in prayer before they broke camp in the morning, but on Sundays he also read to them from the Bible.

The last two days, the country had been almost all forest, and the road very rocky. There hadn't been much for the cattle to eat. One of the differences between Matts and Pål was, Matts tended to look further ahead, beyond immediate consequences to the secondary effects. And side-effects.

Thus he worried more about the army than about the cattle. If the cattle arrived too thin—or worse, if they starved to death along the way—what would the soldiers eat? Would the army be sent home then? If it was, he'd have a long way to go, back to Solslätte. He'd asked Sergeant Björkebom how far they still had to go. The sergeant said they weren't halfway yet. It was 750 km from Blombacka, where they'd started, to

where the army was camped, at a fort called Duved.⁶ So it would be 750 km back. And four days more to walk home from Blombacka.

If he had to walk home, what would he eat in this god-forsaken wilderness? Sometimes they went a whole day without seeing a farm. He'd have to set snares, catch hares. He'd often caught them at home—his grandfather had taught him how—but it would be a poor and uncertain way of feeding himself. Ensign Hasselbeck did the best he could to keep the herd on schedule. He'd said at the outset that time was short, given the distance. When they came to a meadow, they stopped for a while to let the herd graze. But meadows were few along the road, and mostly small. Corporal Persson, on horseback, was constantly looking for the next one, especially one where they might spend the night, the herd resting and feeding. A bog meadow, if he could find one near the road. Bog grass, mostly sedges, was coarse but abundant. Any day now the mosquitoes would be out; any pools were full of wigglers, almost grown. But maybe not too bad; the weather had been dry as hardtack since they'd left home.



The road took them into a shallow draw where a brook crossed it. There, Corporal Persson led the herd away from the road, upstream, the soldiers on their horses shouting, waving their tricorn hats, the herdboys ranging around on foot with their sharpened rods, prodding and whacking to get the herd moving in the right direction. A bullock tried to break past Matts, but he darted in its way, rapping its face with his prod. It reacted in the right direction. Inside a minute, all of them were on their way.

The breeze is from the wrong direction, Matts told himself. Otherwise they'd smell the meadow, and go without prodding. Now the lead cows realized what the diversion meant, and briefly trotted; he trotted along after them. Within two hundred meters they reached the lower end of a bog meadow, perhaps a hundred meters long and two-thirds as wide, spotted thickly with white heads of cottongrass.⁷ *Enough for one night, he thought, and that's all that matters.*

⁶ The word was *skans*, a small fort. Except at Trondheim and Frederiksten, all the forts in this story are *skanser* of logs and earth, somewhat like forts on the American frontier, but with earthen banks to withstand light artillery.

⁷ Myrulla



The herdboys had the chore of gathering branchwood for fires, setting up the tents, and digging the latrine. It was the soldiers, however, who pulled guard detail at night, watching and listening for bears and wolves. Matts had volunteered to pull guard duty—the guards carried muskets—but Sergeant Björkebom had called him "idiot," and told him only soldiers were allowed to use a gun. That had made no sense to Matts—he'd often used his father's fowling piece—but he didn't say so. The sergeant would only call him "idiot" again, and maybe cuff him. He'd cuffed Åron at least once, and Pål twice, though that had been for not paying attention to the cattle.

This evening he'd drawn wood detail, and when he was done, supper wasn't cooked yet, so he found a birch of suitable size. With his belt knife he cut two rectangles of bark, and began to peel them loose.

"Stentorp!"

Usually Ensign Hasselbeck left it to the sergeant or corporal, or a private, to shout at the herdboys, but this time it was the ensign himself whose voice snapped Matts to attention. The officer strolled over.

"What are you doing?" he asked. His voice was compelling, but no longer particularly loud.

"I am peeling off two pieces of birchbark, sir."

"That I can see. But why are you peeling birchbark? The fires are already lit. Have you no further duties?"

"Sir, my shoes are wearing out, sir."

The ensign frowned. He was a town man from Lidköping, the son of a prosperous tanner and leather merchant, and had no idea what Matts was talking about. "What has that to do with peeling birchbark?"

"Why sir, I will make shoes with it."

Shoes. He knew, of course, that peasants sometimes wore birchbark moccasins. What he'd overlooked was that someone must first make those moccasins.

Matts raised a shod foot for the officer's inspection. "Mine are old; my father's, made of leather. He is dead now, in Russia, so my mother gave them to me. But the sewing is pulling out of the leather, so now I must make new ones."

The young officer peered a moment at the shoe, its leather rotting, pulling apart. "Have you ever worn birchbark shoes before?"

"Yessir." Matts pointed at his feet. "These are the only leather shoes I've ever had. When I was little, I wore shoes carved from wood. Grandfather made them. Of linden, because it carves easily, and I would soon outgrow them. Then, when I got bigger, he showed me how to make birchbark shoes."

"And what will you sew them with?"

"I'll cut them into strips and weave them, sir, and fasten them with spruce roots. Spruce roots are good for tying things."

"Umm...Very well, Stentorp. Continue." The young officer turned and walked thoughtfully away.

Later, while they ate, the ensign mentioned the boy to Sergeant Björkebom. "What do you think of him, sergeant?"

"Sir, he is the best of the lot. He acts without being told, and usually does the right thing." He grinned. "He also asks a hundred questions."

An eyebrow rose. "I've heard you call him 'idiot.'"

"Some of his questions are idiotic, sir. You expect it of these squatters' sons. When it comes to the world and the army, they're as ignorant as a block of wood. It's my duty to let them know that. And to correct it, especially the better ones."

For a long moment the ensign considered the sergeant's reasoning. "Then teach him, Björkebom," he said at last. "He shows the makings of a good soldier." Again he cocked an eyebrow. "Maybe eventually a sergeant."

"As you say, sir." It might, Björkebom thought, be interesting. He had no sons, that he knew of, but if ever he did, this could be useful experience.

Chapter 4 Night Stalker

Matts Karlsson i Stentorp measured time by the sun: sun-up, sun-down, and some broad evaluation of in-betweenness. Also by authority: get up, eat, go to work, stop work, go to sleep...all ordered by someone else. Clocks were expensive and impractical to carry. Watches were more or less the size and shape of a doorknob, a small turnip, and seriously inaccurate. Not even most captains owned one.

Matts wasn't aware that watches existed. He simply slipped into the forest edge as soon as possible after the herd moved into the meadow for the night.

Soldiers were provided with thread and needles to repair their clothing. Herdboys weren't. So Sergeant Björkebom had given Matts some of his thread, because snares were better than deadfalls for catching hares. And rations were small, and hares numerous this year, their runways everywhere there was undergrowth. Matts would set out half a dozen carefully located snares, each baited with a small bit of turnip. Come morning, more often than not, he had a hare in one of them; sometimes in two. There'd have been more, if it weren't for owls, foxes and ferrets drawn by the struggles.

Matts would wake up as soon as the night-long dusk brightened enough to find his way in the shadowed forest, and slip off to his trapline as surely as if it were marked somewhere other than in his subconscious. So far as possible he'd retrieve his snare nooses, gut and skin any prey he found (which took him only a minute or so), then share his take with the sergeant. Each roasted his half (scorched was the better word) in the squad's morning cookfire. There wasn't time to roast them properly. Or to stretch and scrape and dry the skins, as he would have at home.

The soldiers and the other herdboys quickly knew what was going on. The ensign asked Björkebom about it, and of course the sergeant told him. It was irregular, but Hasselbeck knew of no regulation against it—perhaps because nothing like it had been

foreseen—so he let it continue. Two or three other herdboys knew how to set snares, and took up the practice, but away from Matts' trapping ground, which had Sergeant Björkebom's implicit protection.

The sergeant further earned his half of the hares by assigning Matts those chores that allowed time for his trapline. But Hasselbeck's squad and drovers were a team, and Björkebom was too wise a sergeant to show favoritism and give fair cause for resentment. Thus he assigned Matts as Corporal Lindskog's primary assistant in the heavy and hurried work of loading the pack horses after breakfast. And after supper he scoured the cook pots for the soldiers and drovers, using sand, creek or bog water, and wads of feather moss.

But in the evening, the snares came first. Matts had no duties till twilight thickened.

He'd begun his trapping after the layover near Orsa Lake, where a lot of things had changed. Hasselbeck had arrived with his herd to find some five hundred other army cattle that had been grazing there for three days. The larger herd, he learned, had been driven up the Falun road from the fertile farmlands around Lake Hjälmarén, by drovers with neither a military escort nor military supervision.

The problem was that the herd had initially numbered some seven hundred; somewhere along the way, two hundred had been lost, or (much likelier) siphoned off. One of General Armfelt's adjutants was at Orsa, waiting; a Finn of course. He'd ridden there from Gävle with a squad of Finnish cavalry. Perhaps a rumor had reached Armfelt; the adjutant wasn't saying. He'd simply had the herd counted, then sent a courier hurrying the 250 km east to Gävle, to report to the general. When Hasselbeck's herd arrived, the adjutant had it pastured in a different meadow, segregated from the plundered herd, in case the general wanted a recount.

Then a courier came galloping from Gävle, his horse lathered with sweat. He told the adjutant that the general was sending a cavalry platoon to escort the two herds the last 450 km to Duved.



The Finnish troopers arrived late the next day—a short platoon of course, given the casualties in Finland and the shortage of replacements. On the day after that, the now combined herd of more than eight hundred started north again, under the command of

Lieutenant Hjalmar Fågelsund.⁸ Rations had already been reduced; Corporal Lindskog's arithmetic had been faulty. Then the layover, plus the addition of twenty-three cavalrymen, put further strain on rations, and the lieutenant was unwilling to butcher a bullock. That surprised Björkebom. It didn't seem Finnish. Finns did what seemed needful, regulations or not. He wondered if the general had forbidden it.

The sergeant was glad, though, that the Finns would be part of the campaign. Everyone the Finns fought was afraid of them, had been for a hundred years, it was said. Since Gustaf Adolf was king, and had taken his army of Swedish and Finnish regiments to Germany, to fight the Catholics and save Christianity. The Swedes had earned a reputation for unbreakable discipline in attacking under heavy fire; no Catholic commander wanted to face them. But the Finns? The Finns fought with a cold relentlessness, on occasion breaking into unpredictable fury, grim and terrible, caring nothing for their lives or anyone else's. At times their officers couldn't get them to retreat. Everyone, even Matts, knew their reputation.



A dozen days had passed since the combined herd had left the farms and meadows along Orsa Lake. A dozen days of forest and rough ground, mostly wild and with sparse forage. Herd losses now were to hunger and exhaustion, not theft, and the horses had forgotten what grain tasted like. Recognizing the problems, the Finnish lieutenant balanced predictable losses against the urgency for quick delivery, and allowed more time for the herd to rest and graze. Now several men rode out ahead to find the infrequent meadows, and at times the animals were driven a kilometer or more from the road to use one.

On the twelfth evening north of Orsa they stopped at one of these, later than usual. Even in the open, dusk had begun to settle, the low-riding sun screened by ridges. Beneath the forest roof it was half dark, too dark for setting snares. As they entered the meadow, three moose lifted their broad flexible snouts from the cottongrass more than a half kilometer ahead, and trotted westward into the forest. They were the first moose

⁸ The names of my Finnish soldiers require explanation; they all have Swedish names, given them in the army if they didn't already have them. Among themselves however, they presumably called each other by their baptismal names: Toivo, Onni, and Sulo for example.

the party had seen for days.



The herdboys generally lay down to sleep as early as they could. They spent their days not in a saddle, but on foot, walking somewhat farther than the cattle, ranging up and down, often trotting or darting to keep wayward animals on the road. Nor did their workdays end when they reached the meadow. Not only was there wood to gather and water to carry. Latrines had to be dug, though only a foot deep. They'd be filled and abandoned in the morning. And now, despite dry weather, mosquitoes flourished in the wet meadows, making sleep restless despite being hardened to them.

The soldiers, on the other hand, would sit up for a while at the forest edge—the Swedes around their fires, the Finns around theirs—smoking their pipes, perhaps carving, quietly chatting and occasionally laughing. The smoke of resinous wood and cheap foul tobacco discouraged the mosquitoes.

The sounds of the conversations were distinctive, the Finnish almost staccato, the Swedish lilting. Matts found Finnish intriguing to hear. On this evening his attention was drawn to the nearest group, and he wondered if, from close up, he could understand them. Quietly, slowly, he slipped through darkening forest, circling around so the Finns wouldn't see or hear him. He crept the last 20 meters, senses tuned high, taking advantage of cover, feeling his way, avoiding fallen twigs and the crisp foliage of occasional dwarf shrubs. At last he settled down about 15 meters from the fire, thinly screened by frail, knee-high spruce seedlings.

From there he could hear words, none of them familiar, but their sound held him. The westerly breeze was imperceptible beneath the trees. Mosquitoes hummed; he ignored them. Firelight flickered on strong tanned faces, some in repose, others more or less animated.

One of the Finns seemed to look at him, and for a moment the breath froze in Matts' lungs. But the glance barely paused before returning to the fire, and there'd been no break in the conversation. After a minute the lieutenant got to his feet—and now, clearly, his gaze was fixed on Matts.

"You, boy!" he called quietly in Swedish. "Come here!"

It seemed unreal, dreamlike. Slowly Matts got to his feet—not really afraid, but

ready to flee if necessary—and slowly walked toward the fire. The whole squad was grinning at him, as if they'd all known he was there. Matts wondered if they'd been talking about him. He stopped a few meters away.

"What's your name, boy?"

"I am called Matts."

"What were you doing out there?"

"I wanted to listen. To Finnish being spoken. To see if I could understand it."

The lieutenant's eyebrows rose at that. "And did you?"

Matts shook his head. "No. But I liked the sound."

"The sound. Hmm. Until you came, we'd been talking about the moose. Did you see them?"

"Yessir. My place is now at the front of the herd. They ran off west, to where the meadow ends."

"We were talking about shooting one. I have a rifled carbine I took from a Saxon officer. He didn't need it anymore. Do you know what rifled means?"

Matts shook his head. "No sir."

"It means I can kill things farther away than others can. Would you like to go with me? To kill a moose?"

Matts stared, unbelieving, his answer forming slowly. "Yessir."

"Good. You can gut him for me. You know how, don't you?"

"I have gutted sheep and pigs. And many hares."

"Are you the boy we've heard of, who catches hares to keep his belly happy?"

"Yessir."

"You'll do nicely. Have you ever fired a gun?"

"My father's fowling piece. It is mine now; my inheritance. He died in Russia."

"Ah. Heaven is full of men who died in Russia. All right." The lieutenant turned to the others. "Pekka," he said, still in Swedish, "let him use your carbine. And show him how to fire it; he's probably used to a wheel-lock."

Big-eyed and hesitant, Matts stepped forward and received the weapon from the trooper, who looked less than happy about letting him take it.

"I will get only one shot," the lieutenant told Matts, "and it is too dark for good

shooting, so when he goes down, you will run hard toward him, and shoot him again so he can't get up. Shoot him in the head. If he gets away, my men will laugh at me, and I'll be angry. And Pekka will be angry with you for making his gun miss. It has never missed before, and he doesn't want it to get the habit. Do you understand?"

Matts nodded, excited, but also vaguely alarmed. The soldiers were chuckling. He wondered how this could be happening to him.

"Good. Come."

The lieutenant led off, his steps quick but quiet, despite the cavalry boots, the fronts of which reached above his knees. It took several minutes to reach the end of the meadow, where a well-used game trail entered it from the west. There the lieutenant knelt, peering first at the ground, then ahead into the gloom of pine forest. After a moment, the lieutenant moved slowly and quietly up the game trail, with Matts following. Once among the trees he seemed to guide more on the forest and terrain than on the ground itself, as if picking his way where the trail ought to be.

They hadn't gone a hundred meters before the Finn paused again, peering intently ahead. The boy wondered what the man saw, if anything. Heard him sniff, as if... Then Matts smelled it too. And now, perhaps another 30 meters ahead, he could see something tall. A moose? A troll perhaps! A chill washed over him.

Carefully the lieutenant raised his carbine, then more quickly than Matts expected, fired, the boom loud, seemingly compressed by the forest.

The result shocked Matts—a bestial roar unlike any moose he could imagine. Bear! He knew without ever having heard one before. Every hair on the boy's neck stood rigid, and quickly he stepped past the lieutenant, Pekka's smooth-bore carbine half raised. Then realized the bear was charging! Raising the carbine's butt to his shoulder, Matts squeezed the trigger. The pan flashed; flame stabbed from the muzzle. He jumped to one side behind a pine, heard the beast hit the ground sliding—and peered again through the forest gloom. The furred bulk lay 4 meters from him, unmoving.

He heard a chuckle, and the lieutenant stepped up beside him. "Boy," the Finn said, "you have made your reputation."

Matts simply stared, realizing now what he'd smelled: the smell of butchering; of guts and blood, and the fragrance of grass in the moose's opened rumen. The bear had

followed the moose toward the meadow, and when the big beasts left it, had waylaid one of them and begun to feed.

"Well, boy, get out your knife and open him up. There's nothing wrong with eating bear meat, and the pelt will be useful."

Matts looked at him, realizing for the first time that he was as tall as the Finn, or very nearly. "Yessir," he said, and drawing his knife, knelt by the bear. His ball had struck it in an eye and scrambled its brain.

Chapter 5

Peter Longström

Some seventy uniformed men rode out of the spruce forest into open meadow. Rode stoically but not glumly, their formation casual. For three days a cold and ceaseless rain had fallen, streaming from their horses' flanks. The men's blue cloaks were dulled by water and slate-colored sky.

These troops were legend, hand-picked by their commander, Peter Longström. The originals had begun as reckless youths raiding behind Russian lines, and were still young in body, if old in experience; those accepted later, as replacements, were basically the same sort of men. They were not an organic part of any regiment. Their unorthodox king, long delighted by their exploits, had named them a "free company," attached to army command as a commando force. And being Finns, he'd assigned them to the Finnish army, now the army of Lieutenant General Karl Gustaf Armfelt. An army now being reinforced by Swedish units, for the invasion of Norwegian Trøndelag, and the capture of Trondheim, capital of the old Viking Norway.

Among the bundles their pack horses carried were farmer clothes.

The land through which they rode was new to them—the upper valley of Sweden's Indal River, which flowed cold as ice from the great mountain bogs and late-lying snows along the Norwegian border. A flow swollen now by the rain, which was almost as cold as the snow-melt.

For many kilometers, the forested valley bottom had been interrupted here and there by openings, mostly small, each with its farm or farms, each steadying a cluster of log buildings—a dwelling or dwellings, barn, stable, sheds—a landscape much like Finland, except for the mountains, hidden now by clouds.

Captain Longström's gaze took in the meadow they'd entered, and the cattle grazing it. The herd, he judged, numbered more than a hundred, more than a dozen

back-country farmers would own; more than the long slender meadow could sustain for more than a few weeks. So, army cattle. The last several meadows they'd come to had been similarly stocked. This meadow stretched more than a kilometer, to where he could see the lower fort, on a point jutting into the river, embattled by the swollen current. The upper fort was still screened by the woods, but it was, he knew, on a knoll close by. Nearer he could make out a tent camp, no doubt belonging to the Swedes he'd been told were already there. Their officers were battle-hardened, but most of the soldiers had never heard a shot fired in anger.

They'll season quickly, he told himself. Some gunpowder, ball and canister, blood... He turned and spoke to his first sergeant, using his baptismal instead of his army name. "Erkki, you and I will find General Horn." Then to his deputy, "Paavo, find whoever's in charge of billeting, and arrange for quarters."

As few and scattered as the farms were, most or all would be full. But Paavo would take care of it. With a touch of their spurs, Longström and his first sergeant urged their horses to a brisk trot, headed for the fort.



The rampart of Duved's upper fort was a stockade, with blockhouses providing bastioned corners. Enclosed by the palisade were low buildings of square-hewn logs—a headquarters building, barracks, hospital, supply storage, commissary, guard house...And dug in and heavily banked with earth, the powder magazine for the guns that commanded the valley and the deeply rutted road.

For years this small fort and its nearby partner had had no garrison at all. True Denmark, and thus Norway, was at war with Sweden—half of Europe was, it seemed—but both Denmark and Sweden had been too involved elsewhere to contend for this wild and remote border region. Ordinarily, when manned, Duved's two small forts would have been commanded by a major, but now a major general, Reinhold Henrik Horn, commanded there, and his responsibility was far greater than the two forts. This was the assembly area of Lieutenant General Karl Gustaf Armfelt's invasion army, and until Armfelt arrived, Horn was in charge of preparing the area as the army's base.

And improving the road to the border.

His aide stepped into Horn's office. "Herr general," he said, "Captain Peter

Longström is here to see you." He made the announcement in a subdued, almost unbelieving voice. Horn heard it with a frown not of disbelief but of "what?" Both knew of Longström by reputation, but General Armfelt's almost daily messages, couriered from Gävle, hadn't mentioned Longström at all.

It occurred to Horn that if he was Armfelt, planning to use Longström's company, he'd keep it quiet too. And Longström's arrival might explain Armfelt's order to have several dependable, able-bodied guides available. If possible, men who spoke the Trøndelag dialect like a native. "Bring him in, Månsson," Horn said.

A minute later the aide ushered in two Finns. The man who wore a captain's collar was of ordinary height and casual bearing. The other, wearing a 1st sergeant's collar, was tall and rawboned, his demeanor hardbitten but otherwise not notably military. Both Finns saluted. "General Horn," Longström said, "General Armfelt sent me. Here are my orders." He handed Horn a sealed envelope.

Longström's Swedish was not the "singing" dialect of the age-old Swedish settlements in Finland's Österbotten. Rather, it was the palatal, atonal dialect typical of Swedish-speaking families of Finnish origin. In fact it *sounded* rather Finnish, though the words and grammar were Swedish. Horn knew it well; as a young officer he'd served in the Finnish army, in the Karelian and Ingrian campaigns.

Opening his pen knife, he slit the envelope, then drew out and read the contents. Swedish was Armfelt's third language, and he wrote it idiosyncratically; Baltic German and Finnish were what he grew up with. (French, learned as a mercenary, was Armfelt's fourth.) But the orders were clear. The Norwegians knew an invasion was imminent, even if they didn't know the details. His Majesty was painting it as the liberation of Norway from three and a quarter centuries of Danish rule and "oppression." Meanwhile, across the border in Trøndelag, two Norwegian opinion leaders were portraying the Swedes and Finns as monsters, and playing up the horrors of a foreign army marching through the Norwegian countryside.

Longström was to abduct the two and bring them to Sweden, where they'd be locked up till the conquest was complete. He was also to provide reconnaissance services. Horn, in turn, was to support the captain as necessary.

Horn laid the document on his desk and looked at the captain. The scheme was

audacious, and success seemed questionable, but perhaps not for Longström. "I have four guides for you," Horn said. "One of them is not a soldier, but I have had him brought here. When would you like to take command of them?"

"Tomorrow. Today I must learn what sort of men they are. Where can I find them?"

"It would be easier to send them to you."

"I will talk to them singly, in a place they know. I'll learn more about them where they feel at ease."

Horn frowned, then nodded, and ordered his aide to have someone show the captain where to go. When his two visitors had left, the major general felt relieved. He was a firm, self-confident, battle-seasoned man, but Longström...was strange. Famously strange. And as for his first sergeant, that ugly scar on his face had come from neither saber nor bullet, he felt sure. A broken bottle was more like it.



Longström approved all four of Horn's candidate guides. Afterward he found his men. With the reluctant authorization of Colonel Glansberg, Paavo—whose army name was Poul Björnsjö—had arranged billeting for the company on a farm some distance east. "From there," Paavo said, "we can come and go without anyone noticing." The officers would stay in the farmhouse, the sergeants in the farm's combination drying-house and brewery, and the ranks in hayshed and stable, all greatly preferable to the tents most of the army's troops made do with.

While the farmer, his wife and children bedded down in the loft overhead, Longström ate a late supper, then talked with his junior officers and ranking sergeants. They'd already been briefed on their missions; now he would tell them about their guides. Two would guide parties reconnoitering the high country—locating enemy positions, possible ambushes, shortcuts.... The other two, the two who'd most impressed him, would guide the abduction parties.

"All four of them will report to the supply sergeant at the upper fort right after morning prayers. Each will have his personal gear with him, dressed like a farmer, and we will be there when they arrive. See that your guide draws the supplies he needs, and a *good* horse. You will leave with your patrol and guide no later than midday. That will give you time to ask whatever questions you find necessary."

He looked the six men over, making brief eye contact with each. "Our success depends on our guides, so it is well to know something about them in advance." He looked at the lieutenant. "Paavo, your guide is a soldier in Jämtland's Regiment, a farmer's son from Ånn, west of here near the border. His name is Lars Olofsson Skoogh. At fifteen he left home—an eldest son—crossed the mountains to Trondheim, and went to sea on a dutchman. Among his shipmates were two Norwegians, one from Trondheim, one from near there.

"Three years later he found himself back at Trondheim, and more than ready to live ashore again. So he went with one of the Norwegians to a place called Selbu, near Trondheim. There he worked for two years for his shipmate's father, cutting and skidding timber for the English timber trade, and helping on the farm. He claims to speak the local dialect there well enough that no one will know he's not Norwegian. *And*—he paused, grinning—"he knows something of the troublemaker you're to capture: a freeholder named Hendrik Kittelsøn Øks, who has a large farm near a place called Stuefoss. Your guide has a serious grudge against him."

Leave it to the captain, Erkki thought. The 1st sergeant considered himself a taciturn man, but the first time they'd ever talked, Longström had learned more about him in an hour than most would in twenty years.

Longström handed the lieutenant a map, brought from Armfelt's headquarters at Gävle. "It is on this."

He turned to the two sergeants who would lead reconnaissance patrols. Their guides were local farmers whose knowledge of the country grew out of herding and hunting, and from shortcuts to Norwegian locales where jobs could sometimes be found in the mines and cutting timber. And from visiting relatives, for Jämtlanders had long intermarried across the border. "Even if they don't always get along," the captain added laughing. "Olofsson said that. You could say the same about Swedes getting along with Swedes, of course, or Finns with Finns, but it's truer across borders. These people have histories; the general told me something of that."

When Longström said "the general," he meant one man, Karl Gustaf Gustafsson Armfelt, and the others knew it. Only the king himself ranked higher in their esteem.



After the others had retired, Longström and Erkki sat by the fire to enjoy a final pipe. After a minute, Erkki spoke for the first time that evening. "And what of *our* guide? You may know him, but I don't."

"Our guide" because the 1st sergeant would go with his captain on the other abduction. Ensign Roström, with two squads, would remain at Duved in case need arose for their particular talents.

"Ah. Ifwar Matzon i Jerpe is a local farmer, not a soldier. Like Olofsson, he has a history. As all men do, but for this war and this mission, his is especially interesting. He doesn't look like much; my height but scrawny. His mother was Norwegian, his father a Jämtlander who was killed felling a tree. So his mother took Ifwar, a small boy then, and returned to Norway, to her family's farm in Snåsa parish. He says he speaks the dialect there better than he does Jämtish. But his mother's family had it in for Swedes, including the boy. They felt their sister could have married much better, and apparently she thought so too.

"When Ifwar's grandfather died, an uncle inherited the farm, and Ifwar was treated worse than ever—like a slave, he says. He was sixteen then, so one night he put on his skis and came back to Jämtland, a long hungry trek through wild country, sleeping under the sky.

"He told me he hates the pastor in Snåsa, because the man spoke ill of Swedes even then, making Matzon's life harder than it might have been. And..." Longström paused, grinning. "That pastor is Nils Muus, the priest we are to take prisoner and bring back with us!" He chuckled. "Olofsson and Matzon, each with his personal interest in our success." He grinned. "It is surprising how God sometimes provides for us."

Erkki didn't believe in God, and wasn't at all sure his captain did. In cases like this, he preferred coincidence as an explanation. "About Olofsson—" he said, "if he has never met Kittelsøn, what is his grudge?"

Longström exhaled a perfect smoke ring and watched it rise toward the timbered ceiling. "A woman, Erkki, his shipmate's sister. He wanted to marry her, and she wanted to marry him, but a prosperous farmer and miller named Kittelsøn wanted her too, so her father ran the Swede off.

"Olofsson is a hardhead in his way. You'd like him, Erkki. It's uncommon for an

eldest son to run off when he stands to inherit the farm." Longström paused to dig the dottle from his soapstone pipe, then put the pipe in his pouch. He too was ready for a night's sleep. "Some of this," he went on, "I learned from his regimental sergeant major, who is also from Ånn and knew Olofsson as a child. Olofsson is frowned upon by some of his neighbors as a heathen. After he returned from Norway, he no longer attended church, and when his pastor finally bit the stob and upbraided him for it, he left again. He'd already earned a reputation as someone who preferred fur hunting to 'honest labor.' This time he strapped on his skis and went into the mountains to live with the heathen Lapps; that's what the neighbors said. They claim he took one of them to wife." The captain eyed Erkki, chuckled, and repeated himself. "You'd like him, Erkki." He grinned shrewdly. "He's another one who doesn't care for priests."

The 1st sergeant simply grunted.

Chapter 6

Mission on the Nea

It was raining, not hard but steadily, and Lars Olofsson Skoogh wore the oilskin raincoat he'd brought home with him from Norway. From Trondheim, actually. He was walking, feigning weariness and a limp, as if he'd hiked all day uphill with a blistered left heel. His horse, gun, saber, and a squad of Finns waited in the forest a couple of hundred meters back. He was not, however, entirely unarmed. One hand held a five-foot birch staff, which in the hands of a well-drilled bayonetist was a serious weapon. And concealed in a pocket was a small pistol, loaded and primed. A burly farm dog hurtled raging down the road toward him, and Lars brandished his stick. The dog knew his duty, the drill, clubs, perhaps even the possibility of a gun. Turning, he trotted parallel to Lars and a little ahead, pausing every few seconds to loose a loud burst of barking: "Stranger! Stranger! Stranger!" It intensified when Lars left the road to approach the farmhouse.

The house was typical—a ground floor and loft—of squared and fitted logs. The doorposts were stout and the door thick, absorbing the sound of his stick, dulling it to a muffled knocking. The dog stood not far behind him now, growling, warning him to behave himself. A tall rawboned man opened the door, red cheeks high-lighting a sunbrowned face. Glowering, suspicious, he examined the big-shouldered stranger for a long moment. "What do you want?" he gruffed at last.

"My name is Olav Fredericksøn. I have come from Klæbu, looking for Hendrick Kittelsøn Øks."

The reply and local dialect relaxed the farmer's distrust a little. "He does not live here."

"I heard he might be hiring."

"Thaat was last year. He has been called up with his militia company; he is its

captain. They are at Trondheim now."

"Damn! And I walked all the way from Klæbu! Who could I ask about work?"

"His uncle, Sveirre Eriksøn, is taking care of things for him."

The farmer began to close the door, but Lars had gotten a foot and knee in the way. The dog growled again. Lars tried meekness. "How can I find his farm?"

The initial response was a scowl, but the farmer answered, gesturing with his head. "Up the road a kilometer. There is a mill."

"Ah. Thank you." Lars removed his foot, and the door closed in his face. Turning, he left the stoop. The dog, feeling properly magisterial, escorted him away, barking again, warning him never to come back. At the road, Lars turned east up the narrow valley, in case the farmer was watching, which seemed likely. The lieutenant would be watching from the forest to the west; would bring the squad around to meet him in the forest on the other side.

Rightly, Lars knew, they should leave now—either down the valley to Trondheim or more probably back over the high fjeld to Duved. To abduct an officer from a fortified enemy town, from the midst of its garrison, seemed impossible. And the lieutenant's orders, which came from the general, had been explicit: they were not to kill Kittelsøn.

But he'd come this far, gotten this close, he'd go a ways farther. The lieutenant didn't need to know his true motive—to see Signe.



Kittelsøn's grist mill stood with its back against a scarp on the south side of the bankful Nea River, accessed by a sturdy timbered bridge on stone buttresses. Above the mill, a brook, a waterfall, issued from a cleft, to be captured as it fell, by a sluice that disappeared into the mill. A wagon was parked there, hitched to a team of bullocks, and Lars could hear the millstone turning, rumbling like distant thunder. Sveirre Eriksøn had a customer.

Unlike the mill, the farmstead was on the north side of the river and road. Lars was still afoot, not waiting for the squad to work its way around the first farm and catch up. He preferred not to answer questions yet. Now he started toward Eriksøn's house, his feigned limp more pronounced than before. Another officious dog, less alert than the first, trotted out barking. He was larger, but older and less aggressive. Lars called to him

cheerfully, but the dog barked on, its voice deep and hoarse.

This was a larger farmstead—larger house, more and larger outbuildings. Stepping onto the front stoop, Lars knocked. After a minute the latch rattled, the door opened—and there she stood.

Even knowing who lived there, seeing Signe Andersdatter took Lars somehow by surprise. She paled, her fingers clutching the door's edge; for a moment he thought she might faint.

"Good day," he said. "I am Olav Fredericksøn, from Klæbu. I have come to see Hendrick Kittelsøn Øks, on business."

"I...he has been called into military service in Trondheim. You need to talk to his Uncle Sveirre, at the mill."

"Do you expect Herr Kittelsøn back soon?"

"Not so long as war hangs over us." She looked back over her shoulder. A woman in her forties had come into the entryway; now she crowded Signe aside.

"What do you want?" the woman demanded.

"I am looking for work. I was told in Klæbu that Herr Øks might be hiring timber cutters."

She frowned. "How is it you weren't called up with the militia?"

"They didn't want me. A few years ago I broke my leg, and it didn't heal right, so I can't run or ski. But I am strong, also very good with the ax."

She looked him over appraisingly. "Come back next year. Herr Øks may have use of you then."

He thanked her and left, walking toward the road, remembering to limp. Signe was as pretty as ever! And she cared for him, otherwise she wouldn't have paled at seeing him. He hoped she hadn't believed what he'd said about being lame now. He should have thought of that sooner; should have come up with some other excuse. Had there been a note of resentment in her voice, about the war? Toward Swedes? It seemed to him there hadn't. If they could talk again the way they had before... Did she have children now? What if one of them was his? But Kittelsøn would hardly have married her if she'd been pregnant by someone else. Or would he? She was very pretty, also tall and strong, and capable in the house and about the farm.

He'd thought before about returning and finding her, asking her to run away with him. He'd had it in mind when he'd left home again, after the trouble with Pastor Ljungblom, but been afflicted with second thoughts. What if she'd discovered she liked being Fru Øks?

Then he'd met Anta and his sons, had holed up with them through a three-day storm. When it was over, he'd helped them find and round up their reindeer, had stayed with them till April, then gone home again while the ice was still safe to travel on. They'd invited him to marry Aimi—she'd been more than willing—but...

"Olofsson! What the devil's wrong with you?"

The challenge jerked his attention. The house and mill were out of sight now, cut off by forest. Back among the trees the Finns sat their horses; he'd almost walked past them. Embarrassed, he went to them. Lieutenant Björnsjö himself had led Lars's horse, and handed him its reins. Lars swung up into the saddle.

"You looked like you were walking in your sleep! What did you learn back there? You should have waited for us. We didn't know whether you'd turned in or gone on."

"Kittelsøn is in Trondheim. He's been called up with his company."

"Who did you talk to?"

"His aunt. His uncle is looking after the place while he's gone."

"Not Kittelsøn's wife then?" The lieutenant's gaze was shrewd.

"Her too. I just had time to give her my cover name, then the older woman was there and took charge."

"Ah." The lieutenant rode easily, walking his horse. When he spoke again, it was without looking at Lars. "We left wives and sweethearts behind too. Some in Gävle, others in Finland, Heaven help them." After a long moment he continued. "At least the whore's son is in Trondheim, not out inflaming the countryside. Now take us back to Duved."



They bypassed the first farm Lars had stopped at, and backtracked up the trail they'd ridden down on from the fjeld. They camped just below timberline that evening, on a bit of shelf. It was sheltered from the worst of the wind by scrub woodland of mountain birch and ragged spruce. The ground was boggy, and there was no dry wood.

So they ate hardtack and dried beef, then slept fitfully on the ground, wrapped in blanket and cloak. At least the cold kept the mosquitoes down.

The next morning they started early. Sleeping hadn't gone well, for Lars at least, but the rain had stopped. There were breaks in the clouds, and the wind had picked up. It seemed to Lars that before the day was over it would rain again, but just now the sun shone through a gap. They were glad to see it.

When they topped a ridge, the lieutenant called a halt and surveyed the view. He already had a sense of the landscape. The fjeld was a vast tundra plateau, with mountains shouldering out of it here and there. Major, well-separated valleys, like the Nea, segmented it. Between the valleys, ravines carved the fjeld's humpy surface. The officer took a linen map from its well-oiled leather case, called his men around him, and unfolded it.. They knelt, sheltering it from the wind..

"All right, Olofsson," the lieutenant said, "show us where we are. I know the landmarks going west. Show me some for going east."

"We are here," Lars said, putting a finger on the place, then stood and gestured toward a high mountain. "That peak is Fongen. It's the big one we skirted coming in, the highest around here. When we pass it, I'll show you others. We'll go back the same way we came, drop down to the River En, and follow it to where it joins the Handöl."

The lieutenant nodded, refolded the map and put it away. The Handöl. There was a settlement just above where the two rivers joined. Olofsson had called it Handöl too—three or four small farms clustered on the edge of nowhere. "The mountains are better in winter," Lars was saying, "when the bogs and rivers are frozen. You can travel everywhere on skis, and there are no gnats or mosquitoes. Give it a warm sunny day, this time of year, and they can get very bad. The gnats are the worst; they get in the horses' nostrils and ears and drive them crazy. That's when you pray for wind."

"What about snowstorms and wind?"

"In stormy weather you go down in the forest, or find a dairy camp, and hole up till it blows over."

We'll be in Trondheim by winter, thought the lieutenant, billeted on some Norwegian family. Then the king will get Finland back from the Russians, and we can go home again. He looked at the thought and shook his head. Dreams like that help keep you going, but it's

best not to think much about them. They can make you crazy.

He wondered if Liisa was still alive.

Chapter 7

Visiting the Parson

As a child and youth, Nils Muus had been small, and to make up for it had developed belligerence, quick fists, and a never-quit attitude. Larger boys, which meant most of them, could readily whip him, but that never cowed Nils, and made the bullies look bad. Beating him wasn't worth the trouble. In fact, Nils had become respected, and in conflicts intimidating.

As an adult, he hadn't needed belligerence to avoid being bullied, for he'd become a priest, and to attack a priest was unthinkable. It would bring the constable, and possibly a sentence to *dårekisten*, the madhouse. But by that time his belligerence had become as much a part of him as his skin—his bones. Normally it was on "idle," manifesting as a sort of affable overbearingness best left untested. You could sense the fire beneath.

It reached its zenith when he was a young assistant pastor in Stjørdal, walking with his senior pastor on the street by the docks. An arrogant ship's mate—from Bergen by his speech—had failed to doff his hat to them, and Assistant Pastor Muus had loosed his scathing tongue; an astonishing performance. The mate, a large powerful man, had broken beneath it, apologizing, belatedly twisting the offending cap in his large hands and begging forgiveness.

Afterward Muus had glowed, transcendent, full of himself. Until, back at the rectory, the pastor had led him into his study, and gently, privately, had recited scripture to him, about love, kindness, forgiveness—and temptation. And especially the sin of pride.

"Nils," the pastor had finished, "you have been gifted by God with a great fire of the spirit, a beautiful gift you can use for good or evil. With it you can glorify God—or glorify Nils Muus. If you choose the latter, it will destroy your soul. And the way you

used it today with that benighted fellow on the dock—did not glorify God."

That moment in the pastor's study was the second transcendent experience in Nils Muus's life—both in one single day. Chills had coursed over him, and he'd wept in gratitude.



He'd already loved that pastor—had considered him as nearly Christ-like as a man could hope to be, even though a bit soft. But this experience had given him a new perspective on softness, and he would cherish the pastor's gentle admonition as a lesson sent by God. Without fully grasping that lesson, he had been changed by it. Not transformed, but *modified*, manifesting as reduced belligerence, a new fervor in the pulpit, and when it seemed appropriate, kindness.

There was more to Pastor Muus, of course, than "a great fire of the spirit." He was intelligent, an intelligence not deep but agile, and well stocked with holy writ. And over the years, the combination—fire, mental agility and holy writ—had, over the succeeding years, served him rather well. Already in seminary that agile intelligence had moderated his never-quit attitude. He'd learned to compromise with authority—when he deemed it useful to God, accepting if not embracing, what he could not change—if it didn't seem extreme. Though he seldom actually changed his mind.

He even gained the ability to feel a—*selective* compassion for sinners who felt remorse, and who at least tried to live as the Church would have them live. Or as Nils Muus put it, "as *God* would have them live."

He was not, however, an altogether gentle shepherd; on occasion the fire still manifested as belligerence. Thus his parishioners feared his tongue, though they seldom felt its lash, for culturally they feared not only God, but his ordained representatives on Earth. And in times of serious difficulty, they knew Pastor Muus would help, if help was possible. Thus he'd earned a degree of gratitude and respect. Even prudent love.

His peers, of course, were in a position to challenge him on issues, and thus were likelier to see and feel his fire than his parishioners were. But they never felt it the way that ship's mate from Bergen had.

Even bishops preferred not to contend with him, and this had made "God's fire" less

than an unmitigated blessing. Because neither the bishops, nor in far-off Christiania the archbishop, wanted him elevated to a bishopric. Thus despite his charisma, long service, and respect, he'd risen only to dean—the senior pastor over a set of rural churches. By then his small-boned frame had grown portly, adding dignity to his bearing and softening his edge. He'd come to see his fate as God's will, and was content to be a mostly benign but occasionally fierce bullfrog in a small ecclesiastical pond.

He did, however, dislike Norway's large neighbor across the mountains.



After so many years and so very many Sundays, Nils Muus could deliver a resounding sermon with little preparation. After deciding the effect wanted, and a strategy, key points, and supporting scripture, he could stand in his pulpit and let the words flow on their own, the fire at work in him. At its best it was a glowing, molten flow.

On this cold wet evening in late July, he was visiting an estate called Hyllen, with his wife and orphaned granddaughter, both of whom had gone to bed. His host at Hyllen was Herr Steinaas, a friend of many years who'd been widowed a few years past. Herr Steinaas enjoyed having the priest and his little family as house guests. The two old men had stayed up late over mulled wine, discussing the Swedish menace. Now, feeling the heat of inspiration, Muus sat at the small table in the guest room, in a warm robe and furry slippers, with a fire in the fireplace, a bedcap on his bald head, and a mug by his hand. He didn't notice the wind-driven rain beating on his window; on Norway's coast, rain often beats on the windows. And after seventy-six years, he heard nothing as well as when he was young.

But as much as anything else, he didn't notice because he was concentrating on his next sermon. The liturgical calendar required that the theme of the service be Faith in God, but after more than fifty years as a priest, he could fit almost any message into almost any theme. He'd already decided on the first two readings: First Kings, Chapter 20, in which King Hadad of Aram invaded Israel, where his army was destroyed by a much smaller army of Israelites under Ahab. And Mark, Chapter 9, verses 14-27, on the power of belief in God.

For Nils Muus remembered, he and others remembered, the deliberate destruction

carried out in Trøndelag by the Swedes forty years earlier. But those too young to remember, which was most of them, needed reminding. Thus several times, in recent months, he'd waved word pictures in their faces, ending with his exhortation that when next the Swedes invaded, the people should cast them back "with blade and ball." It was not acceptable to say the Swedes would be no worse than the Danes. General Sparre had long since been burning in hell, but Sweden would always produce new Sparres, and new armies they could use to destroy and oppress in Trøndelag. That would not change while Sweden existed. They were insane there.

In the guest room in a back corner of the house, Muus could not hear the knocking at the front door, much less the shocked gasp of the servant who answered it. Frozen by the pistol pointed at his face, a gasp was the most he could muster. Standing by the gunman—a farmer by his clothes—was another farmer, who in the local dialect warned the servant to be quiet or die. But it was neither the threat, nor the pistol, nor being in his nightgown that paralyzed the servant's will. It was the gunman's eyes: hard, deadly, absolutely sure.

"Where is the pastor?" asked Matzon, while other men, half a dozen or more, slipped past them into the house. "It is important that we speak with him, a matter of life and death."

Again it was the gunman who inspired the servant, gesturing silently with the pistol's long heavy barrel. The servant moved like a man in a spell, out of the entryway into a parlor, then down a hall, accompanied now by three intruders. They stopped outside the guest room, the servant still unable to speak.

Ifwar Matzon had no problem speaking, in an undertone now, gesturing. "He's in there?"

A nod.

With the pistol, Longström gestured them both out of the way, turned the knob, flung the door back and strode inside. This did get the pastor's attention, and he half turned.

"Are you Pastor Muus?" Longström demanded, pointing the pistol. His cold voice was foreign but the words understandable. Wide-eyed, Muus nodded, for once in his life struck dumb. He'd never seen an unholstered pistol before, let alone one pointed in

his face, and for the first time he could remember, he was deeply afraid.



"Captain." The 1st sergeant's voice was quiet, but Longström awoke instantly, his eyes opening to dull gray twilight. At 64°15' north latitude, there still was no true night, even in late July. The rain had passed, and the drip from the sparse tree cover had stopped, but clouds still ruled the sky.

Stiff and cold, the captain crawled from his bed roll, thinking of the featherbed he'd enjoyed at Gävle. Here he'd cut a bed of spruce boughs to keep him off the cold and soggy ground, but boughs were not goose down. And his blankets were damp of course; worse than damp. Perhaps today the sun would come out.

Don't have expectations, Peter, he told himself; they'll bring more rain. He holstered his heavy cavalry pistol, which with his carbine and saber had spent the night with him in his blankets. Then he rolled up his bedroll, assembled the rest of his gear, and laid them on and around his saddle, which sat on a nearby rock outcrop. He topped them off with the carbine before covering them with his cloak. Around him his troopers moved about in the gray dawn, preparing to leave. He could have assigned one of them to prepare and assemble *his* gear, but seldom did; he would not make thralls of men like these. It was enough that he did not himself gather firewood, carry water, or cook.

This morning—the morning after the abduction—there'd be no cooking, or even a fire. He'd decided that before leaving Duved. They'd eat in the saddle—dried beef and hardtack. Because this morning at Hyllen the bond boys would rise from their strawsacks in the cowshed and discover the house empty. Then they'd run and fetch the constable.

Who hopefully would not suspect raiders from Sweden. But someone on the fjeld might have seen them—twenty men on horseback, more than you'd expect, with remounts and packhorses. And feeling concern, might have ridden or sent someone down to Snåsa to report. And when the bond boys added that the pastor was also missing, the constable or militia might put two and two together and take action. The question was how quickly and in what direction. Men could cross the border in many places, but some places, for practical reasons, were much more likely. Meanwhile he had a head start; he would not squander it.

It took only a minute to check on his prisoners. Pastors and their wives were seldom physically active, and this pair was elderly. The trek would be hard on them, especially if the rainy weather persisted. As for the rest of the captives—none looked well suited to riding all day. Even last night's ride would have left them sore.

He found the pastor hobbling in a small circle, swinging his arms in an effort to waken and warm his old body. "Good day pastor," Longström said. "Were you able to sleep last night?"

Nils Muus stopped to peer at the man, who showed no indication of mocking him with his courteous greeting. He'd heard the others call the man captain. "I slept when my exhaustion exceeded my discomfort," he answered, then paused. "You speak Swedish, but not like a Swede. Are you a soldier of fortune?"

"No, I'm a Finn, and my country is at war. This is my life; how I live. Must live, since the Russians occupied Finland. The Russians and Cossacks and Tartars. Are you used to riding?"

A Finn. Muus had suspected as much. He'd heard them talk among themselves in some unintelligible language. Muus usually understood Swedish—it was much like Norwegian—had learned to read German and speak it haltingly, and had heard French, a graceful tongue. But the language of these soldiers was barbaric. Probably some of them did not even know Swedish.

"My hindside and legs are a little sore from last night's ride," he answered, "but with a mild and gentle horse I will survive it." Again Muus paused. "Why have you committed such an abomination on a man of God?"

A man of God? thought Longström. *It is easy to claim.* "Because my general ordered it," he said, "to end your rousing the Norwegian people against us.

"Ah! And why do you suppose I rouse them against you?"

Longström eyed him calmly. It might be interesting to spar with this man, but priests were slippery, and there'd be no profit in it. Still he found himself answering: "I suppose your Danish king ordered it through your bishop."

The statement stung Muus. "I do not do the bidding of any earthly king, only of God and his son." He did not pause for a reply. "Why did you take my wife? My granddaughter? My hosts and their house servants? They'd done no harm."

The captain let it pass. The priest was stalling, killing time. "We will leave in a few minutes, and eat in the saddle," he said. "If things go well, we will rest at midday." Abruptly he left to get his horse. It seemed to him the old man was doing pretty well, everything considered.



As he watched the captain leave, Nils Muus wondered at his initial fear of these soldiers. This morning they did not seem nearly so frightening. *It was*, he told himself, *because I'd never had the muzzle of a pistol aimed at my face before.* He also wondered at his lack of outrage, then realized: they were not Swedes. Only ruled by Swedes. Perhaps he could make use of that.

Meanwhile I am somewhat used to them now. They do not like me, but neither is this a matter of hatred. They are soldiers following orders. Finns, at that. They know no better. As a Trønder—a man of Trøndelag—he'd grown up supposing that Finns were magicians, sorcerers, at odds with God's Law. But that belief, it occurred to him, had come down from centuries long past, when even Norwegians had been pagan. Meanwhile he must ride all day on the fjeld. And if this was God's will, as it seemed, he'd simply have to stand it.

The very tall man who'd wakened him approached him again. "We will leave soon," he said, in the same accented Swedish the captain spoke. He carried a canteen on one shoulder, and took it off now, unstoppering it. "This is yours," he said. "The captain himself filled it. Drink!"

Muus looked uncertainly at it, then took it and drank cautiously; it had been dosed with Whiskey. "It will lessen your discomfort while you ride," the man added. "I will take you to relieve yourself now. We won't stop again soon."

They walked 30 meters to a place somewhat screened by a thicket of small spruces; seemingly Finns understood modesty. The latrine was a long groove dug through the moss, and a few centimeters into the peaty soil. It had been visited enough, that night, to look and smell bad. At the moment two soldiers squatted astraddle of it. Grimacing, the pastor joined them, feeling seriously put upon. They didn't even glance at him. The tall man bent, pulled up two large handfuls of sphagnum moss, and dropped them by Muus's right foot before leaving.

The pastor was unable to produce anything till the two soldiers had also left. Then, after a few minutes, he too was done. He raised himself painfully and with effort, his thighs burning with exhaustion from squatting. Then he used the moss as intended, and pulled up his trousers. He was fastening them when the tall man returned.

"Is there soap for washing here?" Muus asked.

The soldier's face showed no response beyond the movement of his mouth. "At Fort Duved," he said. "Come with me.

They slogged through sodden sedges and moss, each step finding water. Muus had a rough idea of where Duved was: not close at all. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Erkki. I am the 1st sergeant."

Muus knew what a 1st sergeant was. But this was no dragoon company or cavalry troop. A detachment then, but led by the company commander and 1st sergeant. Ahead, another soldier waited for them, holding the reins of three horses. Muus thought he recognized the mare he'd ridden the night before. "1st sergeant," he said, "I wish to ride with my wife, my granddaughter, and servant. That we may keep company with one another."

"They cannot talk. They are gagged."

"Gagged? Up here?"

"We will pass near a dairy camp."⁹

"Then why am *I* not gagged?"

"You will be, after you've had a chance to eat. They have eaten already. The captain may let you talk with them later, when we rest the horses. Or not." The tall Finn gestured. "Into the saddle now," he said, and made a step with his hands, a sort of low stirrup. After a moment's hesitation, Muus put his left foot in it, and with sure strength, Erkki hoisted him into the saddle. "Toivo will lead your horse," he added, then swung easily into his own saddle and rode away.

Toivo; a heathen name. The soldier too had mounted, and bending, took the pastor's

⁹ Dairy camps (Norwegian *sætrar*, Swedish *fäbodlar*) were built in the high-country and occupied only in summer. The cattle were driven there when snowmelt made them accessible. A few girls and women spent the summer tending the grazing cows, milking them, and making butter and cheese. A *sæter* might consist of one or two small log cabins for the women and their butter and cheese-making, another for occasional occupation by a haying crew, and cowsheds, haysheds, and other outbuildings.

hanging reins again. "Toivo," Muus asked him, "does your name have a meaning?"

"Hope," the man answered wryly. "In Finnish, Toivo means hope."



Loading the pack horses took only a few minutes. The men worked swiftly, from much repetition, and some of the loads had not been disassembled during the night. A corporal the others called Onni had brought the pastor a small packsack with his saddle rations: hardtack and salt meat. Muus ate little and quickly. The salt meat made him thirsty, and he took another swig of the whiskeyed water, swishing it around in his mouth before swallowing.

Longström spoke an order in Finnish, and it was passed down the file, then the horses set off at a walk. The trail was peaty, spongy with water. Soon they passed above the forest line, but for a while there still were scattered scrubby birches. The dusk had gradually lightened. Now Muus could see his wife and granddaughter well behind him in the somewhat strung-out file, with Herr Steinaas and his wife. The Finns had brought their side-saddles! Now there was a blessing! Clearly God was watching out for them.

The 1st sergeant dropped back and fell in close beside him. From a pocket he brought out a kerchief. "Lean toward me," he said.

Muus looked distastefully at the square of dingy linen. At home it wouldn't have been used to clean with. "Is it necessary?"

Erkki said simply, "I will take it out later. Open!"

Muus grimaced, then opened, and the Finn gagged him, not tightly enough to cause pain. Muus knew without trying that any shout he could manage would not be heard 30 yards, and as for articulating words...

"Do not cause problems," the 1st sergeant added, "or I will tie your hands." He paused. "Do you understand that you cannot get away from us?"

Muus nodded, beginning to feel angry.

"Do not try to take the cloth out yourself, or I will silence you with this." Erkki raised a knobby fist. The pastor wondered if the Finn would actually strike a priest. Perhaps, he thought grimly, he'd test the man's forbearance before the day was over.



A number of kilometers farther, where the trail paralleled a creek, they spied a dairy camp some distance off on the other side, but saw no activity. Some three kilometers farther, they passed one only about a hundred meters from the trail. There Longström could see two women leaving their cabin, carrying what appeared to be buckets, heading toward the cowshed. They stopped to watch the mounted men, and he lifted his wide-brimmed farmer hat, waving at them. Some of his men saw him, and waved theirs too, all without slowing. The women waved back, tentatively, perhaps uncertain at so large a band, then went on to the cowshed.

Soon afterward the party came to a narrower, less used trail that forked off southeastward. They stayed on the main trail, and before long passed into open tundra meadow. According to Longström's map, and the details Matzon had added from memory, they wouldn't pass another dairy camp till afternoon. Now Erkki rode down the line removing gags, after warning the prisoners that a shout or cry from anyone would result in all of them being gagged again, and military justice.



For Nils Muus it was a grueling day despite the whiskeyed water. To the south, rugged mountains flanked the undulating plateau. The cloud cover had broken, providing intervals of sunshine that sparkled on wind-riffled tundra ponds, and highlighted the pink of sphagnum amongst the heads of cottongrass bobbing in the breeze. Longström had left Corporal Pekka Roshage where the trail crossed a rise; left him with a swift horse and his captain's spyglass. From there the small wiry corporal could see their backtrail for several kilometers. If he saw pursuers, he was to fire his carbine as a signal, then catch up with the rest. If no pursuit appeared (and if clouds permitted), when the sun aligned itself with a certain mountain, he was to follow the others anyway.

Two and a half kilometers southeast of Pekka's outlook, the party stopped. The chill breeze had suppressed the gnats and mosquitoes. The soldiers picketed the horses, removed the bits from their mouths, then spread blankets and cloaks to dry on banks of low shrubs. While the soldiers were doing that, the prisoners gathered together, asking each other how they felt. The 1st sergeant started over, and Muus wondered if he was going to disperse them, but all he said was, "How are you doing, Pastor?"

"I will survive, Sergeant," Muus answered, then changed the subject. "I find Finnish names interesting. One of your men told me his name is Onni. What does Onni mean in your language?"

Erkki turned unexpressive eyes to him. "Onni—means good fortune," he said.



Everyone lay in the sun for a long break, their saddles serving as pillows. They'd been there less than an hour when Pekka's carbine sounded in the distance. Pastor Muus's old ears didn't hear it, but he saw the Finns jump to their feet, and his heart leaped! Rescue was coming! The 1st sergeant roused the captives from their rest. Still damp bedrolls were hastily packed, mounts saddled, pack horses loaded, all more quickly than seemed possible. Troopers swung into their saddles, checked carbines and pistols. Pekka rode up at a trot. He estimated the pursuers' number at forty or fifty; they were five or six kilometers behind, and it was doubtful they'd seen him. Other troopers rode up, leading the captives' mounts.

Toivo gripped the old priest hard by an arm, then made a stirrup of his hands. "Into the saddle! Now!" Muus could no more resist than fly. He mounted nearly weeping, frustrated at his weakness. And it was Toivo, not himself, who held his reins, as the whole party, troopers and captives, trotted southeastward down the trail again.

Now the moisture that threatened to spill from Muus's eyes was from pain; trotting was much worse than the horse's rolling walk had been. He began silently to pray, not for delivery from his pain, but that his wife and granddaughter might come through this alive, and that none might fall from their horses and be trampled.



Soon Longström slowed again. Their horses hadn't tasted grain for weeks, had begun the day worn out. For days he'd known the country only by map and his guide; only the road from Duved to Åre had been familiar. From Åre they'd ridden two long rain-drenched days northward and westward on forest trails to the upper end of Karl's Lake, then crossed the rugged massif called Skäckerfjällen in a single terrible day on slippery slopes. Even today's trail, east from Snåsa, was different than the one they'd ridden west on. But now—now he came to something he knew; a stack of three rocks; a cairn he'd raised with his own hands to mark the trail they'd ridden north on from

Skäckerfjällen.

From here his plan had been to take the same route back, circumstances permitting. But burdened as he was with captives, and pursued, it was time for guile instead of stamina. He'd intended all along to abandon most of his captives. Even the pastor's wife and granddaughter could be left behind if necessary, but it seemed to Longström the old man would be more manageable with them along.

For a little while now the trail was familiar. It took them angling gradually downward along a slope sparsely wooded with birch, with here and there spruce. Downhill to the south, near a brawling creek, he could see another dairy camp. Thin smoke rose from its chimney to disperse on the breeze.

He ordered a halt. "Erkki!" he barked—in Swedish so the Norwegians would hear and know—"send the captives down to the dairy camp! All but the priest and his womenfolk!"

"Send my wife and granddaughter, too!" Muus called out, almost desperately. The 1st sergeant ignored the old man. Pointing, he barked orders in Swedish, and the farm folk dismounted. "God save you, Pastor Muus," Steinaas called. Muus looked back at him, but too emotional to trust his voice, only raised a hand in blessing. Then the captain ordered the party on, at the trot again, while the released Norwegians watched them ride away.

Longström, with Matzon by his side, soon slowed to a walk again. Here the trail curved northward, and would soon swing northwest, looping back to Snåsa. Ifwar soon abandoned it for a lesser trail that led briefly eastward along a wooded sideslope. They heard cowbells clanking to the south, but saw neither cows nor herd girl. They were, Longström knew, out of Norway now, or very nearly, but the boundary would mean little to their pursuers, and he was still far closer to Snåsa than to Duved. After a bit they slanted down through sodden spruce forest, then along the side of a draw in whose bottom a brook picked its noisy way. Occasionally a horse slipped in the mud, and someone cursed in Finnish. At length they came out at the westernmost tip of a large lake, Torrön¹⁰, an odd name for a lake. Longström knew it from his map. And

¹⁰ In Swedish, *Torrön* means "the dry island."

where the creek flowed into the lake, the map also showed a fishing camp, but Matzon didn't know whether it was still used. The two buildings seemed in decent repair. Longström called in Finnish: "Dismount the captives. Tie their wrists, including the granddaughter's but not the older woman's. Then sit them down. I don't want any of them running into the forest. We have no time for such nonsense. Meanwhile listen.

"Sulo, you and Timo examine the boathouse and cabin. See if the boats are fit to use. Quickly!" Then he began to brief the rest of his troopers on what he wanted them to do.



Fifteen minutes later, most of the Finns had ridden their horses into the icy lake, and were picking their way along the south shore in belly deep water. Erkki was in the lead, with Ifwar Matzon at his side, and with them went all the horses. Where trees had fallen into the water, they'd have to bypass them, and if that meant swimming... Hopefully not, though, for swimming would require cutting loose the pack saddles. That was all they had time for. Somewhere far enough down the shore that Norwegian pursuers wouldn't see their tracks, the 1st sergeant was to lead them out of the water and into the dense forest. From there they'd find their way up the north slope of Skäckerfjällen, down the far side to Anjala Lake, and thence by known trails to Duved.

This left eight Finns at the fishing camp, plus the pastor, his wife, and the granddaughter, who might be fourteen years old. And two fishing boats. Sulo and Timo had grown up in families who made much of their living fishing for salmon. They'd lived with boats, and agreed these were sound. They'd dried out enough, in the boat shed, that put in the water, they'd leak a bit, but the boards would quickly swell, and soon be tight again.

Now they boarded. With everyone in place, both boats rode low in the water, the pastor in one, his wife and granddaughter in the other, and four Finns in each. Longström pushed off from the crude dock, and one of the others shoved with an oar before seating it between thole pins. The other boat followed suit, Sulo in charge, and they pulled away from the shore, each rowed by two Finns.

By then the Finns on horseback had waded 200 meters along the shore, and Erkki was just riding out of the water into the forest, the others following.

As Sulo and Timo had predicted, the two boats leaked, but not seriously. The oarsmen pulled strongly, continuing for some 400 meters. By then the last of Erkki's packstring had emerged from the icy water and disappeared into dense forest. *Good*, Longström thought. *They should be all right.*

"Far enough for now," he called in Finnish, and both sets of oarsmen stopped. When their pursuers reached the camp, they'd be able to see the boats but not examine their occupants. Muus, not understanding what was said, or Longström's intentions, wondered if he and his family were to die there, but didn't ask. Meanwhile the fair northwest breeze tended to push them slowly on, while Longström peered toward the dock. The aft oarsmen dipped their oars repeatedly, to more or less hold position. After five or ten more minutes, Longström spoke, pointing. "Row now. I see the first of them. They must see us, too."

Pastor Muus peered in that direction, but his astigmatic eyes couldn't find his would-be rescuers. The oarsmen bent their backs to the job, and deeply though the boats rode, the boathouse was soon out of sight.

Chapter 8

Conversation on a Quiet Lake

Out of sight of their pursuers, the oarsmen eased off. Their palms, arms and backs were long unused to rowing, and Torrön was 25 km long. The Finns had donned their cavalry gloves, to protect their palms from blistering, and from time to time they changed off at the oars, the captain taking his turns like the others.

The boats stayed close enough together that Pastor Muus could easily call to his wife and granddaughter, but he did so only once, early on: "Take heart, *jente mi!*" he called. "You too, *søte lille!* We are in God's loving care."

Fru Muus had looked up from her thoughts, her answer a wan smile, a weak wave. She was utterly exhausted, and grateful, so grateful, to be off a horse. Anne Marie's smile had been tentative but not so tired. It was she who called back to him: "We'll be all right, grandfather."

After an hour, Longström called a break, where a wave-smoothed ledge of dark rock shelved down to the lake's north edge. There they made a fire and cooked porridge: beef and peas, thickened with hardtack. But they did not make camp. Longström doubted their pursuers were following, for he'd seen no sign of a trail along either shore. But still he took no chance. It would be disastrous if they were caught on the portages shown on the map, for passage to Juvuln Lake.

Before the break, Longström had sat in the bow, when not at the forward oars. But when they set out again, he rode in the stern, with the pastor. Behind them, to the northwest, the evening sun rode low above the plateau.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"I'm all right," Muus said. "My sitter is sore, but not as bad as it was, and it was good to have warm food." He peered at the captain's face. "You have treated us decently, under circumstances dangerous to you."

"We are not savages, pastor. Only soldiers."

"Are you out of harm's way now?"

"That depends on our pursuers. I suspect they have given up, but I will not depend on it."

"What of your men we left behind?"

"We must wait and see." Longström left it at that. If the Norwegians did indeed catch him at the portages, it wouldn't do to have his misdirection explained to them by Muus.

For a while then, neither man spoke. It was the pastor who broke the silence.

"What if they haven't given up? Your pursuers. What if they catch us somewhere? Will you kill us then?"

Longström looked at the old-man face, meeting the eyes calmly. "General Armfelt would be unhappy with me if we did. If there is shooting, my men have orders to let you be. You should then lie down behind trees or rocks, and wait till the shooting stops." His gaze became more serious. "But when men shoot at each other, bystanders may be hit unintentionally."

The way the captain phrased "unintentionally" didn't at once connect for Muus, but after a moment he realized what was meant, and nodded. These indeed were not savages. "Is your general a Finn then?"

"An Ingrian Finn, but of Swedish lineage, I've heard. Sometimes, though, he speaks with me in good country Finnish. Near the end of things in Finland, he commanded the defense there. He took part in person in some of the more dangerous fighting; early as a battalion officer in Ingria and Karelia, and later in command of the army. Especially at Isokyrjö," he added, using the Finnish name. "He is known for his personal bravery, and his—concern for his men."

Muus nodded, indicating he'd heard, but for a while said nothing more. Ahead on their left, a moose came down to the lake, saw the boats and for a long moment stood watching, then abruptly turned and disappeared into the forest. The pastor had never seen one alive before.

"Did you see it, Grampa?" Anne Marie called. "Did you see it?"

"I saw it," he called back.

"Wasn't it beautiful?"

He wasn't sure if beautiful was the word. "Yes it was," he answered. "It is one of God's creatures."

The girl's bright voice stilled then, her eyes roaming the shores, leaving silence in charge until Longström spoke.

"Have you ever eaten moose meat, pastor?"

"Oh yes. Parishioners sometimes pay their tithes with wild meat." It seemed to Muus these Finns would know the flavor well. They didn't seem the sort of men who spent their lives in study and contemplation. "How did you become an officer in the Swedish army?"

Longström smiled wryly. "The *Finnish* army. When I was eighteen, Russia and Saxony and Poland and Denmark all attacked Sweden. Russian armies were at our doorstep. So with many others, I left the university and joined the army, and in due time became an officer."

Muus stared. The university! He wondered what "in due time" encompassed. "So you are of good family."

"We think so. I am a Savolainen. We had a good farm; also a flour mill and sawmill."

"What is a 'Savo...' what you said?"

"A Savolainen is someone from Savo. A province, like Trøndelag."

Muus decided he'd asked the wrong question; that one led nowhere. "But you were a student, or you'd begun to be."

Longström's smile returned, wider than before. "I have always been curious, pastor. And in winter, if the weather was too poor for hunting, I fed my curiosity with my father's books; he had more than twenty of them, some Swedish, some Finnish. Then, when I was seventeen, I got in trouble with a girl, and my father sent me to Turku, to the university. At home my father spoke Swedish to the children so we would know it, and get ahead in the world. But it was at Turku I became proficient with the language. It was required.

"Ah!" It seemed to Muus he was getting somewhere now. "So the Swedes require that Finns become Swedes to prosper."

Longström didn't answer directly. "The Church was Finnish," he said, "except where the people were Swedish, and the children taught to read their mother tongue. In Finland, to marry, you must first be able to read, whichever language. The court sessions are in Finnish, if that's what you know. But to be a merchant, or an official, it is best to know both languages, and to be an army officer, Swedish is required. Was required. So some families took up the Swedish language in self-interest."

Muus thought of Sergeant Erkki then; his Swedish seemed good enough. "What about your 1st sergeant?"

"We were students together. He is a year younger than me."

"Then he is of good family too." The thought surprised Muus.

"Good family? His father was a small farmer, but one of his uncles was a gunsmith in Turku."

Muus shifted the conversation. He didn't deal well with anomalies. "One of your men is named Toivo. He said it means 'hope' in Finnish. And another is Onni: 'good fortune.' What is yours?"

"Peter."

The pastor knew where that one came from. "And Timo?"

"Like Peter, it is from the Bible."

"What of Sulo?"

Longström laughed, a surprisingly light sound. "Sulo means sweetheart," he said, "but babies are often called Sulo, too."

Muus found that somehow reassuring, but it didn't fit his need. He decided to be more direct. "What do the Finns think of Swedish rule?"

It was Longström's turn to frown. "Swedish rule?"

"Yes. Wouldn't you like to be free of it?"

The captain's frown was gone. His gaze was direct now, and cold. He could have mentioned the Finnish famine of 1696-7, and the failure of Karl XI to make even a symbolic gesture to ease it, but he saw what the priest was after, and he knew the answer. "All men have kings, Pastor Muus." His voice was hard. "Yours is a Dane. Wouldn't you like to be free of him? Ours *was* a Swede. Now Finland is free of our Swedish king. In his place we have Russians and Cossacks and Tartars living among

us, taking whatever they will, including wives and daughters. And the Czar of the Russians is the friend and ally of your Danish king, Frederick IV, may they both burn in Hell. They plotted and started this war. And our king could end it today by accepting Peter's terms, but it would mean leaving Finland in Russian hands.¹¹

Peter Longström's voice had held no fire, only ice, but it had shaken the old pastor profoundly. "I am sorry for Finland and her people," Muus said quietly. "May God have mercy on them."

And having said it, realized how weak and shallow it must sound, though he'd said it from the heart.



Longström called for an early change in oarsmen then, and leaving the pastor, took a rower's seat. Gradually the steady rhythmic muscle play soothed the sour heat in his belly.

As for the pastor, his pain was in the heart. Not a cardiac malfunction, but a trauma of the spirit. He'd just undergone another experience that would change him, more profoundly than the one of fifty years earlier. Inspired not by a Christian pastor's gentle admonition, but the cold hard truth of another man's, and another people's, living experience.

That it had weakened his own zealous prejudice was partly the result of Peter Longström's strength, perceptiveness, and honesty, but equally from the pastor's spiritual potential. Combined they had wrought a minor miracle.

¹¹ Longström's words as presented here, were a rational speculation, but as it turned out, Tsar Peter returned Finland largely to its previous status, withholding only—*only!* Finnish Karelia, Viborg, and the Åland archipelago.

Chapter 9

The General Arrives

Driven by a west wind—a wind out of Norway—the fine, steady, ice-cold rain had numbed Armfelt's face, making it difficult to speak. It had long-since soaked his felt tricorne, and found its way through small openings in his cloak to chill torso and legs.

It had not, however, frozen his eyes, which scanned his surroundings: forest mostly, but also pastures and grainfields where even on this 29th of July, the rye and barley stood scarcely a palm's breadth high! Horses and trailworn cattle foraged the pastures, more of them than the pastures could long support (though too few yet to launch the invasion with). Occasional rain-beaten steadings hunkered gray and sullen. One of them crouched just ahead, a dwelling and out-buildings, all of logs, girded by rail fence in the Scandinavian style. And of course the usual hops patch, marked by tall poles with vines growing on them. Firewood poles had been stacked on end, teepee-like. All obscured by rain, and dulled by leaden sky. Everything was gray, even the rye, even the birches.

The road was a pudding of mud too soft for the ruts to hold their shape. The horse's plodding splashed it onto their bellies, and onto their riders' stirrups and boots. Turning to his aide, the general spoke, gesturing with soaked leather gloves at the farmhouse. "We will stop there, briefly," he said. "I want to see how things go with them."

"Yes, general."

The group of horsemen turned from the road into the yard. A wagon had preceded them, in, then out, for here, off the road, the ruts had held their shape, telling the general that army foragers had indeed visited. The riders stopped before the house. Armfelt's aide de camp dismounted, stepped to the door and knocked. It opened, and a face peered out, gaunt, with russet cheeks, and topped by reddish hair, thin and

disheveled. The dulled features showed worry at this visitation.

"My good man," the aide said, "General Armfelt would like to come inside and speak with you. Where can the others take shelter while they wait?"

The farmer gestured. "There is room in the hay shed for them; the army took most of the hay. And the stable; they took both horses. But be careful; soldiers live there now. Finns."

Armfelt swung down his long right leg, dismounting. "Thank you," he said, with no trace of irony. "My adjutant and I will come in out of the rain." He looked back then at his executive officer. "The rest of you retire to the stable with your horses. And be careful there. Disturb nothing. I will be brief."

The two officers went inside. A low fire burned in the fireplace; given the weather, the chimney wasn't drawing well, and the tang of woodsmoke was strong. The room had a planed plank floor; the rugs, if any, had been put away somewhere till the rain should stop, and the mud dry. There was also a table, a few stools and simple but well-made chairs, and two benches, each padded with a bear pelt. All made during long winter nights by the farmer himself, Armfelt thought. He'd no doubt killed the bears, too.

The farmer gestured at a bench. Rather hopelessly, Armfelt thought. "We will stand," the general said, "and drip on the floor instead of on the furniture." He paused. "What is your name, my good man?"

"Oluf Algotsson Indal."

"I am Lieutenant General Karl Gustaf Armfelt. I have come into your home to ask questions. And to Jämtland to command the army." To get them out of your homes and sheds, he added silently. May God solace you, and spare you more such trials. "You have already answered some of my questions. The army has requisitioned your horses and much of your hay. You were paid of course."

"Yes, general," the man said, shrugging as he spoke. Armfelt understood the shrug, too. The kingdom was bankrupt, the money paid for goods and livestock a pittance. Nor would money plow the fields or haul up firewood. Or the grain, if the weather permitted a harvest.

"Do soldiers also live in your house?" he asked. "Or just in your outbuildings?"

"A captain, a lieutenant, and an ensign live in the house. When they're here. Their men live in the stable and sheds, those who are here."

A whole company then, in so little space! Armfelt realized what company that must be, for none of the Finnish regiments would have arrived yet. Longström's small force had taken lodging here. "Do they behave well?"

Again the man shrugged. "The Finns have not stolen or destroyed anything. But the army? It could at least have left us one horse, and hay enough to feed it through the winter."

There'd been no chance of that, the general knew. The army needed every horse it could lay hands on, for the supply train, and this farmer hadn't hidden his. "Herr Indal," he said, "thank you for your courtesy. When your troubles are at their worst, think how much worse they could yet become, if this war is lost. Your Finnish guests can tell you about that."

He did not mention Ingria, where he and Lovisa had been born and spent their separate childhoods. In his wildest dreams he could not imagine Ingria freed now from Russian rule. Finland possibly. After a moment's pause he added: "What of your cattle?"

"They left me two cows and a bullock, and hay enough to take them through the winter. If we feed them sparingly, and if it is not too long."

"Ah. Do you have paper? And pen and ink?"

The man shook his head. "I have only bible and prayer book."

"Um. Well. If anyone comes to take the animals you have left, or the hay, tell them General Armfelt told you personally they are not to be taken. Should anyone take them, they will answer to me. And tell Captain Longström what I have said." He paused, reading the farmer's reaction to the name. "He and his men, if they are here, will support your words, and the captain has my ear. I will instruct him when I see him."

Then he nodded in courtesy, and with his aide departed into the rain.



When they'd gone, Oluf Algotsson Indal stared at the puddles they'd left on his floor, and wondered if, just possibly, things might actually get no worse.



When visiting the fort the previous spring, Armfelt had stayed in the largest nearby farmhouse, and arranged to lodge there with his staff, when and if he returned. That had been in April, when he and Commissary General Frisenheim had been reexamining the route into Norway. The snow had been deep enough, farmers had dug out their windows to let in daylight. The snow-buried road would have been impassable to horses, had the farmers not kept it open hauling firewood home on sleighs.

That had been fifteen weeks past. He found it very different now. General Horn had arrived a month before, with the Jämtland and Hälsingland regiments. He'd put the troops to work widening and improving the road (it had been little more than a trail), bridging streams, building ferries, and renovating the two small forts. But the winter's exceptional snows had been followed by a cold spring, and the thaw had extended into July. The first three weeks in July had been sunny and warm, but not enough to dry the road to any depth. Since then almost unbroken rains had made it difficult even for men on foot, and saddle horses. Thus some units were bivouacked not near the forts, but near the roadwork.

Armfelt arrived near midday. After eating, he and Horn had ridden together a few kilometers west up the road, to inspect the work in progress. Previously Horn had kept his commander informed via couriered reports; seen first-hand it was worse than he'd imagined. Crews of axmen labored in the rain, felling trees along the south side of the road, and cutting them into short logs for corduroying the road's worse stretches.¹² Other crews made bundles of the branches, for fill on which the corduroys could be laid. Still others, mud to the knees and elbows, lay the bundles in the slop and trod them down, or manhandled the logs into place. Armfelt had seen few roads as bad, anywhere. East of the forts it was good by comparison.



Finally they inspected the bivouac of a Jämtish infantry company at work there. The troops lived in four-man tents, their blankets spread over straw, but at that hour no

¹² To corduroy a road is to pave it with small logs, cut in lengths equal to the desired width of the traffic-bearing surface, then laying them side by side. If the average diameter of the logs is 30 cm, it would take more than 3,000 of them to pave one kilometer of road. And in those days, cutting was with the ax.

The Swedish word for a corduroy road is *kavelbro*.

one was there. In a career that had spanned eleven years of mercenary service in Burgundy, Savoy, the Piedmont, Lombardy, Catalunya and Brabant, and seventeen in the defense of Finland, his Ingrian homeland, and Sweden's Bothnian coast, Armfelt had seen, and at times lived in such bivouacs, cold, dank and cheerless. What was different here was the wetness. Nothing was dry; nothing at all. Nothing could be.

They returned to Horn's headquarters for a late supper, and afterward, casual conversation over pipes and watered whiskey. His last official act of the day was to inspect the sickhouse, filled with wheezing, coughing men. It smelled of burnt gunpowder, lit to "clean the air." From the general's experience, it wasn't bad.



His five-man staff had spent their time with their counterparts on Horn's staff, seeing what they needed to see, discussing what they needed to talk about. By the time Armfelt led them to the stable, the rain had thinned to a light drizzle. They knew by his manner he was not ready to receive their observations and thoughts. He was deep within his own.

Riding to the farmhouse where they were billeted, it seemed to Armfelt that Horn had done a creditable job here. The problems were many and severe, but the man had made progress on those within his power to amend.

And now they are my problems, Armfelt told himself. They had been all along, of course. He'd been the army's commander in absentia, and Horn had been his proxy. The major problem was the road. Higher up, along the border, last winter's heavy snows hadn't melted till assaulted by the rains, which had hardly paused for two weeks. And he could not avoid the thought that until they ceased, the army would be locked in here.

But that was not allowable, for the king had ordered him to capture Trondheim by the end of October.

The road work had been based on the reasonable assumption that the weather would break, and the road begin to dry. Dry out enough to bear wagons and artillery. But so far the weather hadn't broken, and despite the work, the road was getting worse. *We will,* he told himself, *have to corduroy more of it.*

Besides the weather, there was the problem of morale, growing out of short rations,

hard labor with too little to show for it, and the wretched weather. And poor discipline in the Hälsingland Regiment, the sort of thing that could spread, and destroy an army. The Hälsingland regiment was the scrapings from an emptied barrel. It had been conscripted to replace the earlier Hälsingland regiment, whose survivors had been taken prisoner at Tönningen, in Germany. And because there was a shortage of good farmfolk left to conscript, they'd taken more than they'd liked of drifters and ne'er-dowells from coastal and market towns, often not from Hälsingland at all. On the march to Duved, the soldiers' depredations on farms along the way had been so severe, Horn had ordered their colonel to determine the instigators and make them run the gantlet multiple times, as an example to the rest. While announcing that deserters would be hunted down and hanged.



The drizzle had nearly stopped, but in his preoccupation Armfelt hadn't noticed. Had guided his horse without noticing. Rations, he told himself, were a key; he was as sure of that as he was of God's love. The men here were half starved. In Finland, in 1711, the supply problem had threatened to destroy the army; the troops had been starved, barefoot, and half-naked. The king had been in Turkey then, and the government in Stockholm unwilling to face up to the emergency. The Russians had already captured Viborg, and threatened to take the rest of Finland. Then Johan Frisius had stepped up, and personally provided the credit needed for rations, shaming Stockholm into a brief semblance of responsibility. And his Finns had resurged!

I almost won at Pälkäne, he thought. I almost won at Storkyro. My Finns fought like lions, and always against larger, better-equipped forces.

"Almost" won. Always "almost." The word offended Armfelt even while he took solace in it.

Finally he'd led the shards of the Finnish army across the Torne River into Sweden, fleeing their homeland. They'd done all they could. Their only remaining hope was the king.

That had been in 1714. Months later, Carl had returned from Turkey, and knighted the deserving Frisius, giving him the noble name Frisenheim. Now Frisenheim, who had fed the army—on occasion even *paid* it out of his own credit—once again had the

job of supplying the Finnish army. Which now, with its Swedish reinforcements, was called the Army of Jämtland. But here Frisenheim was backed by the royal authority, and he'd arrive in Duved in a week, God willing. Meanwhile his requisition parties were out in force, throughout the provinces known collectively as Norrland—the northern two-thirds of Sweden. Commandeering everything from herring to cheeses, from flour to lard and butter. And most especially, horses and hay and wagons, because barrels of salmon in a warehouse in Sundsvall were of no use to an army at Duved. They had first to be hauled the intervening 420 km.

At least, Armfelt told himself, the road from Sundsvall is passable to wagons.



Only when he got down from his horse did he realize the drizzle had stopped. Entirely. Looking westward, he saw a gap in the clouds, showing Venus shining brightly in the twilight. *Perhaps the rain is finally over*, he thought. *Perhaps.* He didn't really expect it would be, but he could hope. The weather was determined by God, working in unknowable ways for his own unknowable purposes. So when, in his bed that night, the general was wakened by thunder, wind, and driving rain, his disappointment was not extreme. But it did seem a hard blow to an army already sufficiently afflicted.

Chapter 10

Lice from Heaven

Matts Karlsson i Stentorp was more pleased than ever to work the front of the herd. They no longer followed shaded forest trails, and the dust cloud raised by hooves was much worse toward the rear—dust which mixed with the sweat on herdboy faces to form mud. Over all the long miles and weeks since leaving Blombacka, it had rained just twice, neither time enough to matter. When he thought about it, it seemed to Matts the crops back home must be poor indeed.

But he thought of it seldom. All his life, before that summer, the outside world had been a vague concept, less than real. That had changed. In his new life, Matts was a creature of the present, which, since they'd reached the village of Brunflo, was more interesting than ever. At Brunflo they'd reconnected to the world outside the forest: they'd met, and now followed a real road, where wagons rolled, drawn by bullocks yoked in pairs. They passed them, or encountered them, rather often now. According to Sergeant Björkebom, this was the road from Sundsvall to Fort Duved, Sundsvall being a town on the Bothnian coast. Matts wondered how the sergeant knew. Perhaps the ensign had told him.

Matts liked it when the sergeant took time to tell him things, mainly how things were done in the army—and sometimes even why! (Matts didn't realize how exceptional *that* was.) It seemed to him that when the time came—when the general made him a soldier and gave him a uniform and gun and shoes—he'd be ready.

Meanwhile his friendship with Pål Eriksson had deteriorated, though they'd been friends at home. Pål talked as if he didn't like Matts now. "Why?" Matts had asked.

"Because you eat with Sergeant Björkebom. You talk with him more than you do with us."

That wasn't true, Matts knew; all the herdboys ate breakfast and lunch together. Cooked together and ate together, talking all the while. And slept together like spokes of a wheel, their feet to the fire, talking till they drifted off to sleep.

"Ever since you shot the bear," Pål went on, "you talk with Ensign Hasselbeck and Lieutenant Fågelsund more than with me. You're stuck up now, that's what you are."

Matts rejected that out of hand. Ensign Hasselbeck almost never spoke to him, even in passing, and of course Matts would never speak first to someone so elevated. Lieutenant Fågelsund sometimes greeted him, calling him *poika*,¹³ and grinning, but scarcely more than that. The main change was in the sergeant, who was almost like an uncle now. He still called him "idiot" sometimes, but not scornfully as he once had. And that change had begun before the bear, after he'd started sharing his hares with the sergeant.

"Well, think what you want to," Matts told Pål, "but I'd like still to be your friend. We've known each other since we were little." *And you always wanted to be the boss, and mostly I let you*, Matts realized. He wondered if Pål had been turning the others against him. The thought didn't stick though. There was little chance to talk while they worked; they were too busy, and too well separated. And in camp it was mainly him with whom Pål talked. They were from neighboring farms. Their families traded work, and they walked to church together.

But that had been then. In the army they could have different friends, find people they liked better. Matts realized he hadn't really liked Pål Eriksson that much; Pål complained a lot, and he was selfish.

But he would, Matts told himself, still talk to him, and with that, dismissed it from his thoughts.



North of Brunflo, much of the road was lined with farms. As the great trail-worn herd passed gaunt and bawling in a pall of dust, farmfolk watched ill at ease, or looked away scowling, as if some of their own cattle had been taken, or soon might be.

Here there were no wild meadows, only hay meadows and pastures used by local farmers. There were few cattle left in them, but earlier there'd been more, for they'd been grazed and tramped down, and because of the drought, weren't recovering. From time to time, Ensign Hasselbeck ordered the herd driven onto one of them—they had to graze somewhere or die on the road—and the farmers were in no position to complain.

¹³ *Poika* is Finnish for boy. It has been borrowed into Swedish as *pojke* and *pojka*.

Two days later they passed a large lake, with a town on an island. Sergeant Björkebom said the island was called Frösön, and that Fort Duved was not many days farther. This excited Matts and made his stomach uneasy. It was already hungry, of course; he hadn't been able to set snares the past three evenings.

Soon the farms became irregular again, the settlements separated by stretches of forest. Matts still felt guilty about driving the army's herd into the pastures, but he knew the reasons for it: the king needed the army, and the army needed the cattle so it could eat. If it didn't, the soldiers would be weak, and if they lost the war, the Russians would come. And the cossacks, who would take the girls and women, kill everyone else, and burn all the farms. That's what people said.



On the third day past Big Lake, it began to rain, hard and cold, and kept on all day. As a farmboy, Matts was glad, even though he was quickly soaked through and shivering. The parched and stunted grain might make a crop yet, and the meadows could recover. That night they set up tents to sleep in—set them up in the rain—and there were no campfires for drying clothes. They slept cold.

The rain continued for a second day, and a third. By the time they reached Järpen, the gladness had long been soaked and rain-whipped out of them. Matts' lips were blue when he told Sergeant Björkebom, "I want only to reach the fort and be under a roof again."

The sergeant's shrubby brows lifted. "A roof?" he said. "Your roof there will be the same one you've got now: your tent."

Matts gawped, dismayed, and the sergeant shook his head. "Idiot! A *skans* [small fort] is far too small to house an army. The officers may sleep under a roof—certainly some of them will—but not me, and especially not you. On campaign in Poland, we slept in tents, or under the sky, winter and summer." He eyed the boy quizzically. "You'll get used to it, *poj kjävul*. Soldiers can get used to anything." The sergeant paused as if examining his own words. "They'd better be able to," he finished, as if to himself.

Used to anything. The words reminded Matts of something his grandfather had told him once when the crops had been poor, a year when he was small, and cried because he was hungry. "Stop crying," the old man had ordered. "You'll have to get used to it."

And he had gotten used to it, more or less, but he greatly preferred a full belly.



From time to time the rain stopped for an hour or a few, but never long enough to dry out. Once the clouds even opened briefly, and the sun made the meadows steam. It was then Matts got to see a large mountain close up, towering above them on the north. But a cloud lay on its top like a cap, so he got hardly a notion of what it looked like up there. Meanwhile he was always cold; he ached with it. Corporal Lindskog told the herdboys to wear a blanket like a cloak, that he would issue them other blankets for sleeping. The cloak blankets were quickly wet through, and though they helped, all the herdboys got sick, every one of them—coughing and wheezing—but they had to work anyway. There was no ambulance wagon—no wagon at all—and running around keeping the herd moving also warmed them a bit. Several times Pål, coughing and gagging, dropped to his knees and puked up slime, then lay gasping on the sodden ground until helped to his feet.

Twice they stopped near a farmstead for the night. Then Ensign Hasselbeck had the sergeant take the herdboys to the farmhouse, with orders to the farmer to keep them in a heated room that night. At the second such farm, the farmer and his wife did even better. The farmer built a fire in the smoke house/brewery for the boys to sleep in, while his wife heated porridge for them, and gave them cheese and buttermilk, and flatbread with butter. Matts was impressed, because these people had little for themselves; he recognized famine bread when he ate it. But eat they did, though Pål, and Jakob Nilsson from Forshaga, ate only a little. When they'd been fed and warmed, the farm wife spooned some vile but hot potion into each of them, then put a poultice of cow manure on their bony chests, much as their mothers might have. The rest of the night they spent on straw ticks under dry blankets, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, despite their coughing and wheezing, and the smell of the poultices.

In the growing light before sunrise, the sergeant returned and roused them from sleep. Their blanket cloaks had warmed, and given off most of their water to the heat from the fireplace. Sergeant Björkebom told them the rain had stopped. The farm wife gave them barkbread again, and porridge, even slivers of cheese, and watching from her stoop as they left, sent silent prayers after them.

Unfortunately the clouds paid little attention to prayers. By the time the herd was moving, it was raining again, not hard, but enough that the herdboys soon were wet through.



Pål arrived at the lower fort on Sergeant Björkebom's horse, slumped in front of the saddle. Jakob Nilsson, who seemed as sick as Pål, rode in front of Ensign Hasselbeck. All the boys were put in the sickhouse, which was already full of coughing, wheezing soldiers. After one night there, Matts declared himself cured, but the surgeon in charge knew better. By then Matts' clothes were dry, and during the next two days he intermittently helped, taking medicines to soldiers, tending the fires in the fireplaces, removing dry clothes from the racks and replacing them with wet, feeding men too sick to feed themselves, and in general being useful.

Several soldiers died that day—and two herdboys. Pål was the first person Matts knew, of his own age, to die, and briefly it shook him. Whether or not that had anything to do with it, over the next sixteen hours, Matts' coughing, and the congestion in his chest, eased greatly.



The next day dawned to a change of weather; the rain had stopped. There was intermittent sunshine, and only brief scattered sprinkles. The sergeant major of Jämtland's Regiment sent a corporal to the sickhouse, with a list of names of men to check on. And a list of the herdboys who'd come from Blombacka under Ensign Hasselbeck; they'd been assigned to the regiment as civilian labor.

With the surgeon's permission, the corporal got the herdboys out of bed, all but the sickest one, and sized them up, his eyes stopping on each. One was distinctly huskier, stronger-looking than the others; *good for roadwork*, the corporal decided. "You," he said pointing, "stand over there." The boy did as he was told, looking worried. Two were slighter than the rest; *let them tend cattle*, the corporal decided. "You and you," he told them, his forefinger identifying, directing, "over there." Physically the rest had little to distinguish them; they were lanky verging on scrawny. Underfed, he told himself, but in a year like this, they'd be no better off at home, and probably worse. And they were used to hard labor, though for strength they fell well short of grown men.

He turned to the surgeon. "Which are fit for duty now?"

The surgeon pointed at the husky one. "He can go." He looked at Matts then, and almost spoke, but thought better of it; he'd see if he could keep him, as an orderly. "The others," he went on, "should rest another day. They were all very sick when they arrived. Now that they're doing a little better, it would be a shame if they got worse again." He paused; his expression turning sour. "We buried two of them yesterday."

"I can go, corporal," Matts said. "I'm well enough to work."

The offer took the corporal by surprise. "Well enough to chop down trees, and carry corduroys?"

"Yes, corporal."

The corporal looked questioningly at the surgeon, who shrugged. "If he wants to go."

Damn fool kid, the corporal thought. "Good," he said. "Stand by him." He pointed to the huskier boy, then turning to the others, added, "I'll come for you another time. The surgeon will be watching you—he can tell if you're faking it—and he'll tell me. Then it will *really* go hard for you."

He gave his attention to the two he'd take with him. "What is your name?" he asked the husky one.

"Axel Jonsson i Övergård."

The corporal glanced at his list, found the name and marked it. Then he looked up at Matts. "And yours?"

"Matts Karlsson i Stentorp."

The corporal marked again. "Do you know where your things are kept?"

"Yessir," said Axel. "Yes corporal," said Matts, feeling proud for knowing the proper address.

"Good. Get them, then report to me at the surgeon's office. He will sign you over to me."

He turned away, and with the surgeon left the room. The two boys looked at each other, Matts with respect for Axel's size and obvious strength, Axel with respect for Matts' having killed the bear, and for gaining the respect of the Finns.

"I think we'd better do it," Matts said.

"Yes, I guess so."



It was past noon when they reached the work site, 10 km on foot upstream of the fort. So far as they could, they walked in the forest's edge, instead of on the road, which was a churned morass, laborious even to walk in. Trees had been cut along its south side, widening it to some six meters, and making room for ditches. The stumps had been cut waist high and the side roots chopped through, so horses could pull them over. Their trunks were gone, cut into corduroys and laid in the road's worse stretches.

The boys were turned over to a sergeant, who turned them over to a private, who showed the two where they would sleep. The road crews camped near the job, to save the time and energy of walking so far. The two boys were separated now, attached to different squads.

They put their bedrolls in the tents they'd sleep in. Then the private led them back to the road, where he dropped Axel off with another soldier, a hulking powerful man, muddy to the thighs. Matts he led down a well-worn sledge trail through spruce forest, to a meadow that fringed the swollen river, just below where a creek flowed into it. There, eight or ten soldiers worked with spades, digging gravel and throwing it onto stoneboats fitted with low plank sides.¹⁴ A yoke of bullocks stood hitched to each stoneboat, placidly chewing their cuds while they waited. Matts' guide turned him over to still another soldier, a tall young man with big shoulders, who straightened, a spade in his hands. He examined Matts. "I am Private Skoogh," he said. "You will work with me. There are spades over by that fallen tree." He gestured. "Get one and come right back."

Matts did. They worked for some hours, during which only a few spatters of rain fell. Finally their sergeant told them to end off. They walked to the river, washed mud from their spades, then piled them on an empty stoneboat and hiked up through the forest to their tents. One man had been sent up early, to cook for the entire squad. Using tinder, gun powder, birch bark, flint and steel, he'd built a fire of dead spruce

¹⁴ *Stoneboats* are flat sleds without runners, used especially for hauling rocks. They do not readily sink in the mud, and large stones can be rolled or pried onto them without lifting.

limbs stored in a tent. Built a fire, then burned it to a bed of coals. Now the squad's iron pot sat on the fire stones and coals, the cook squatting beside it, stirring the contents occasionally. He watched as the squad arrived, his eyes stopping on Matts. He scowled.

Matts didn't notice. He was salivating, his belly eager with hunger. Going to his tent, he went to his pack and took out the tin plate, large wooden mug, and knife, fork and spoon he'd brought from home. Then he returned to the fire, to the end of the short line of soldiers, and watched the cook serve. When his turn came, the portion was small—perhaps half what the others had been getting.

A voice spoke sharply. "Ekblad! Give him a fair share!" It was the squad leader, a sergeant, who'd spoken.

"That is a fair share. A child's share. He's not a soldier."

"Do as you're ordered! If you talk back to me once more, I'll report you to the provost!"

The man filled Matts' bowl so it overflowed, scalding the boy's thumb. Matts said nothing; barely flinched. The squad sat around eating and talking, in a loose circle on short sections of log. Matts, feeling himself an outsider, would have found a place on the fringe, but Private Skoogh called to him. There was room on his log.

"Sit," he said, and Matts sat. "You're not a Jämtlander," Skoogh commented. "That's plain from your speech."

"I am a Värmlander."

"Ah. Most of us are from here in Jämtland." He lowered his voice then, and gestured toward the cook. "He is a sailor who got drunk and missed his ship at Sundsvall, where a conscription party picked him up. Just now he hates the world, including you and me and the rest of us, and he's looking for trouble. The sergeant says leave him alone, and I'm willing. Most of us are; in a fight, we suspect he would use his knife." He dipped a piece of hardtack in his soup, and took a bite. "You must have been with the beef herd that arrived a few days ago."

"Yes. I was a herdboy"

"I hear it had an escort of Finns."

"Under Lieutenant Fågelsund, yes. They joined us at Orsa Lake."

"How were they? The Finns."

"All right. We all worried a bit at first. They felt dangerous. But they were all right." Matts thought of telling Skoogh about Lieutenant Fågelsund taking him moose hunting, and about killing the bear, but decided not to. It might seem boastful.

Some of the other soldiers had been more or less listening. One of them laughed. "This army will have more Finns than Swedes, when all the regiments get here. Twice as many, I've heard." He laughed again, then lowered his voice. "Ekblad better not pour hot soup on a Finn." He made a gesture, like cutting someone's throat. "Ekblad's knife wouldn't worry one of them. A Finn would open him up like a herring, and think nothing of it. They are good with knives."

Grinning, he turned to Matts. "Show me your hands."

Puzzled, Matts held one out, the one nearest the soldier, who reached, took it, and felt the palm with his thumb. "All callus," the man said. "I knew it. You shoveled like a man and never winced, so I knew you weren't getting blisters. You've swung a scythe, an ax, a pitchfork, all of them. You'll do all right here, boy. You'll get along." He lowered his voice again. "But be careful around Ekblad. I think he is ripe for the madhouse."

Inwardly Matts flinched at that, and peered around for the cook, who was sitting apart now, muttering to himself and not looking at the others. Then the boy heard someone say that lemmings had been falling from the sky lately. That he'd seen some.

"What is a lemming?" Matts asked. Cautiously; his grandfather sometimes told him wild stories to fool him.

"They're a small rat, about the size of a fist. Round like a guinea pig, with tails shorter than their feet. And they don't eat the ducks, or anything else that moves, only grass, and the grain in the fields."

"Lemmings," someone else said, "are what they have in heaven instead of lice. When the angels comb their hair, lemmings fall out. They fall to earth in swarms."

Another soldier got to his feet. "I'll believe that when I see them falling," he said. "But now I'm going to bed. Maybe I'll dream about them."

The man who'd brought up the subject laughed. "I suppose you don't believe in the sun," he called after him, "because you haven't seen it lately."

They all laughed then, including the man who was leaving. All but the cook, and Matts, who didn't feel sure of himself yet with these grown men. Three others got up and went to their blankets, too. The rest stoked their pipes from their tobacco ration—pipes made of horn, or baked clay, or carved from soapstone. The sergeant, who sat a bit off on the fringe, had listened without speaking. Matts watched him get up and come to the fire now, to poke a long splinter in among the embers. When it flamed, he lit his pipe with it; the pipe bowl looked to be carved from some dark wood. Then he went to his seat again, seeming to look into the distance as he smoked.

"The sergeant doesn't say much," Matts murmured.

"With some people," Skoogh murmured back, "the more they see, the less they talk. The sergeant was in the fighting from Narva to Lesnaya. The Russians took him prisoner, but he escaped, and walked all the way to Finland. Or so I've heard. The old hands say so, so it's probably true."

Matts shook his head. "I never heard of those places you said. Have you been there?"

Skoogh smiled. "No, I'm glad to say. I've never been in the war, only heard about it. But I've been to Trondheim."

Matts had never heard of it, either. "Trondheim?"

Skoogh seemed surprised at the boy's reaction. "The place we're going to capture," he said. "It's an important town in Norway. With luck, you'll see it in two or three months."

"Norway?"

"That's right. Trondheim's not so far from here. In winter I could ski there in less than four days. I did once, when I left home. I wasn't sixteen yet. But in summer? With cannon and wagons and all this rain?" He shook his head, then added in a whisper. "We'll do good to get to Skalstugan, and that's this side of the border. It would be better to wait till the mud and rivers freeze and the snow comes, then ski in."

Matts lowered his voice too, to match the young soldier's. "Why don't we then? Wait till the mud freezes."

Skoogh shrugged, his face hard now. "Because the king wants it captured before then."

Matts looked at that and decided he knew too little even to think about it. "Are there really lemmings?" he asked.

Skoogh smiled. "Yes, there are lemmings, but they don't fall from the skies. They come down from the fjelds by the thousands of thousands, in furry streams. I've seen them. I grew up on a farm at Ånn, not so many miles from here, near the edge of the fjelds.¹⁶ Yes, I've seen lemmings all right."

"Why did you go to Trondheim?"

"To become a sailor. It's the closest seaport to Ånn."

Matts' eyes brightened. "You were a sailor?"

"For three years."

"Did you visit other countries then?"

Skoogh's smile widened. "Oh yes. Every ship I sailed on was from another country—the Netherlands, England, Norway—and we went to many countries besides those."

Matts considered that. When he was small, he'd assumed everybody in the world spoke the same language. Then, at church, he'd heard about the Tower of Babel, where God had made the different peoples speak different languages. But that had never been real to him till he'd heard the Finns.

"Do they speak different languages in the countries you went to?"

"Oh yes."

"How do they know what each other says? How do they know the words, so they can say them?"

"They learn it from their parents."

"Is it hard?"

"For us Swedes? Learning Dutch and English isn't so hard, unless you want to sound like an actual Englishman or Dutchman. Now that's really hard. But to just get by, they're not hard. They have a lot of words that are like Swedish. In France and Portugal though, and the Indies and Egypt, I never understood anything they said. Not a word."

¹⁶ Lars said *fjällviderna*, the vast, high, and often boggy tundra of the plateau that extends 1,100 km along the border of Norway and Sweden. Mountains rise from it, and here and there it is cut by deep forested canyons.

"What about Norway? Will we understand them there?"

"Usually, especially when you get used to it. If you were there today, you'd understand most of what they said, and mostly they'd understand you."

"Say something in Norwegian. Can you?"

"Sure. I lived there for two years, and I have a talent for languages." He recited the Lord's Prayer then, as said in Trøndelag. "Did you understand that?"

"Sure. It's the Lord's Prayer. They just say it a little differently."

"How about this?" Lars said a pair of sentences phrased to use words different from Swedish.

Matts frowned. "It's about something killing sheep I think, and coming down the chimney."

"That's pretty good."

"Say it in Swedish."

That too had an expression Matts didn't know. "It's Jämtish," Skoogh explained. "There are different languages, but there are also different dialects—ways people talk in different parts of a country. In Jämtland or Värmland for instance. If it wasn't for the church," he added, "Sweden would have twenty different languages, and Norway a hundred. But every Swede hears the same sermons and learns the same catechism, and reads the same prayer book and hymn book as they do in every other part of the country. So we all know Swedish, even if we say things a little differently."

Matts looked thoughtfully into the fading embers, thinking of how the Finns talked Swedish, when they did. "Have you ever known Finns?" he asked.

"Yes. I went to a place in Norway with a squad of Finnish soldiers, dressed like farmers so people wouldn't know what we were. I was their guide, and their spy, because I speak Norwegian like a Norwegian, and I know the paths over the fjelds. I could talk, and the Norwegians would think I was one of them."

"Why did the Finns want to go there?"

"I'm forbidden to talk about that."

Matts frowned thoughtfully, then changed the subject. "I would like to learn another language. Would you teach me?"

"It would take time; more than we'll have."

"Norwegian then. That shouldn't take so long."

Skoogh's brow wrinkled thoughtfully. "I need to think about it. We'll see." He got to his feet. "Now it's time to sleep. I'll see you in the morning."

As it happened, he saw him sooner than that. They'd been assigned to the same tent.

Chapter 11

Frisenheim and Sunshine

Johan Henrik Frisenheim, the commissariat general assigned by the king to the Army of Jämtland, was as glad as anyone to waken to sunshine. He raised himself on an elbow, sensing the early morning household stirrings of summer on a large farm. In this case a priest farm,¹⁷ much better able than most to provide hospitality to an important official and his party. Throwing back his blankets, Frisenheim swung his legs out of bed, and in his nightshirt stepped barefoot to the window. The sky was blue, and within his limited view, utterly cloudless! He rubbed his hands together as if at a smörgåsbord. It seemed to him the change was not a blink—an ephemeral regency between two dynasties of rain. This time the sun would stay awhile.

The fire in his fireplace had burnt down to faded rose beneath pale gray wood ashes. His clothing had been dried and laid out. He had a personal servant, Corporal Väinö Ridala. Tireless and phantom-like, Ridala had looked after him since before they'd been driven from Nyen, in what then was Finnish Karelia. Moving with new energy, the commissariat general pulled on his drawers, removed his nightshirt with a sweep that left it on his bed, pulled on his undershirt and deerskin kneepants, and called to Ridala to bring his boots. Then he sat down on a stool and pulled on his yellow woolen army-issue hose. Ridala was there with the boots before the second stocking was on the general's thick left calf. The boots had been cleaned the night before and set to dry, then freshly oiled in the morning's smaller hours—all by Ridala. Truly tireless was Ridala!

Frisenheim skipped shaving. He was eager to be on the road, eager to reach Duved, and his new duties. His good friend Armfelt would not be offended if he arrived with a

¹⁷ Each rural parish had a large priest farm, worked by tenant farmers and laborers, to support the parish church and its priest or priests.

day's growth on jaw and cheeks. And the king was some 600 miles away in Strömsund.

Ridala adjusted the general's periwig. "Thank you, my friend," said Frisenheim, then left the room. Captain Ösund and Lieutenant Staszic were waiting in the corridor. "Major Algren will be along shortly," Ösund said. Together the three of them walked to the dining room. A serving girl straightened from laying out their places, and disappeared into the kitchen.

A moment later their host, Pastor Andersson entered. Unlike the officers, he wore a beard, spade-shaped. "Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "I trust you slept well."

Each answered for himself, the replies overlapping. All but their host spoke Swedish with a distinctive East Baltic sound. The pastor had greeted them briefly the evening before, his nightshirt stuffed into his trouser-waist, but had not sat down with them. They'd been expected, but arrived hours late, and he'd gone to bed. Now they sat down together. The serving girl came in with their breakfast: roast beef, barley porridge, slices of strong dark limpa with butter, and to top it all off, a soft-boiled duck egg for each man. Then the pastor offered a lengthy prayer, thanking God for the food, and praying for a good harvest, that the entire kingdom might eat well. At the same time describing the famine and suffering as if the all-seeing deity hadn't noticed.

It was, Frisenheim thought drily, less a prayer than a sermon to the commissariat general, the man responsible for supplying the Army of Jämtland. A needless sermon, because Frisenheim knew at least as well as the pastor how bad conditions were. He himself had urged His Majesty to postpone the invasions of Norway, both in the south and the north, until a good harvest had been gathered. Governor Hamilton, the head of civil government in Norrland, had gone so far as to risk the royal displeasure by sending His Majesty a sample of what the peasants were living on: famine bread, made more of the ground inner bark of pine or aspen, of heather buds, threshing chaff and the rest, than of flour. And the story was, his Majesty had eaten it—sampled it at least—but he had not changed his orders.

His Majesty was not a man who explained himself, but it seemed to Frisenheim he knew the king's reasons. The royal envoy, Von Görtz, was on Åland, negotiating peace terms with Andrew Osterman, the Tsar's advisor on foreign affairs. And Karl's negotiating position would be strengthened by a conquest of Norway, and a

consequent, Swedish-dictated peace treaty with the Danes. Thus a year's delay was unacceptable to him. And his people had survived famines in the past; most would survive another.

When Pastor Andersson finally intoned his "amen," Major Algren, who hadn't wanted to interrupt, came into the dining room apologizing for being late.

"Is Major Algren able to ride today?" the pastor asked, phrasing it formally in the third person. "Or will he stay the day with us, to recover?"

Algren had suffered a severe flux the day before—the reason for the party's lateness. He'd spent considerable time in the woods or behind roadside thickets, in the rain with his trousers pulled down around his boots, suffering miserably. Dressed as he was now, in traveling clothes, the pastor's question had been more a courtesy than a serious invitation. "I seem largely to have recovered, pastor," the major replied calmly, "and there is much work awaiting us at Duved."

"Indeed," Frisenheim said meaningfully, and began to eat. The meal took less time than the pastor's prayer. Or so it seemed, for the one was pleasure, the other tedium. Within the hour, Frisenheim's party was on horseback, riding west up the road toward Duved. He'd dispatched a corporal ahead on their fastest mount, to let Armfelt know he expected to arrive the next day.

Chapter 12

His Majesty's Clock Keeps Ticking

The commander's room was the largest in the farm house—he'd displaced the farmer and his wife—but with ten senior officers and benches to seat them, plus their lit pipes, it was both crowded, and pungent. The officers attending included not only his general staff, his adjutant, and the senior chaplain, but two generals besides himself, with a third expected momentarily, each a senior regimental commander. Considering their interpersonal histories, which included several rivalries and two or three grudges, plus waiting for an eleventh man, the mood was remarkably genial. The tobacco helped, and a day largely sunny.

The eleventh arrived, Lieutenant General Reinhold Johan de la Barre. The tallest of them all, and the lintel was perhaps 185 cm high. He didn't duck low enough, and struck his slightly lowered cranium on the lintel, knocking off his tricorn, displacing his periwig, and very nearly dropping him to his knees.

"Welcome, General de la Barre," Armfelt said. "Are you all right?"

De la Barre's fingers went to the sparsely haired point of impact, exploring. His periwig and felt tricorn had padded it against the worst of the blow, but still it had been hard enough to produce a moment's blackout, and a metallic taste in his mouth. "I am a Finn," he answered, "despite my paternal grandfather's French origin. A blow on the head is of little matter."

Chuckles rippled through the room. While he rearranged his periwig, someone asked "How is the lintel?" De la Barre knew the voice, and answered without showing irritation; he wouldn't give the man the satisfaction. "I will spare it my retaliation—this once," he added, then bending, picked up his hat.

Armfelt had taken in the exchange, implied as well as spoken. "Well then," he said, and looked at Senior Chaplain Falck. "Your Grace, would you pray for us, and for our noble purpose?"

Falck bent his wigless gray head, then waited, giving the others a few seconds to

bend their necks. "Almighty God," he intoned, "we are gathered here on the eve of a crusade against the King of Denmark—a faithless man whose oath, sworn on Your Book, means no more to him than that of a parrot that knows not what it says. A king who has allied himself with the lecherous, faithless Augustus, and the drunken, pagan barbarian Peter, in their honorless...."

Blessed Lord, Armfelt beseeched, let him not ramble on as long as sometimes.

In fact Falck rambled for only eight minutes, though it seemed longer; except for his own, the sole "amen" when he finished was Armfelt's. Falck straightened his shoulders and neck, then spoke to the commander. "With the Herr General's permission, I will go to my quarters now."

"As you wish, Herr Prosten," Armfelt said, bowing slightly. Ten pairs of eyes followed Falck's departure; a rude and ill-tempered man, he was not liked by the army's senior officers. When the door had closed behind him, de la Barre spoke: "The man has a sour tongue and a sourer disposition. Is it not possible to leave him behind?"

"If he requests it, I'll approve it. In fact I suggested it to him before we left Gävle, but he would not hear of it. Watch him as he goes up and down stairs; clearly his back gives him much pain. To sit in the saddle costs him dearly, and as for standing? I have it from a reliable source that his feet are as painful as his back. I'm grateful I do not suffer as he does."

That explains more than his disposition, de la Barre thought. More than once, on the road, he'd smelled whiskey strongly on Falck's breath. *But it gives him no license to inflict his disposition on others, and the old mule is too stubborn to follow his commander's good advice. As for pain while riding...* De la Barre suspected hemorrhoids, and was not inclined to sympathy for someone he disliked. *If I were commander, I'd leave him behind, like it or not. Karl has too much respect for the old man's rank.*

He didn't fault his commander for it though; Armfelt stood by his officers in their times of trouble, and de la Barre, at least as much as any, had reason for both respect and gratitude.

Meanwhile, Armfelt went on to other matters. "As you know, gentlemen, His Majesty would have us already on the way. You know also why we aren't. We are seriously short both of pack horses and saddle mounts. Governor Hamilton has had

parties scouring the countryside all the way to the coast, commandeering any horses that seem serviceable, not even sparing the clergy's stables." His gaze moved to Horn. "The second matter has been the road over the mountains. For you newcomers, suffice it to say it's a chain of bottomless mud holes connected by more mud, worse than you've heard. But it's what we have."

He stroked his long jaw. "It will be some time before we can expect all the horses needed. After services on Sunday, Jämtland's Regiment will break camp under General Horn." He nodded at the man. "With them will go Captain Möller's artillery. The road is a serious problem for anything on wheels, but if we are to take Trondheim, we will need artillery. The other regiments will leave as horses are available."

Meanwhile, de la Barre thought wryly, His Majesty's clock continues to tick.

"Major Palmstruch reports that between the border and Sul, the Norwegians have felled numerous förhuggningar, and Captain Longström has patrols scouting alternative routes. As far as Skals Lake,¹⁸ our route is set, but from there? We shall see. Longström's people have made their presence known from Snåsa in the north to Meråker in the south, creating uncertainty in the enemy's mind. They have identified half a dozen possibilities. But the most suitable is through Sul and Steine Skans.

"General Budde knows that as well as we do. He is a seasoned old war dog, and knows his terrain. As for his army...we do not know how large it is at present. But few of his soldiers are battle seasoned; many are only mobilized militia. As warriors, they do not approach our Finns."

He looked his senior officers over, both staff and commanders. "General Horn knows what I expect of him. He earned his command with his bravery, his blood, and his good judgement in battle. As most of you know, we served together, he and I, in Ingria and Karelia under General Cronhiort in the war's first years. Also, some of his men know the country we will travel through—know it well—so his regiment is the natural choice to lead the march." He paused. "Any comments?"

It was Major General Otto Reinhold Yxkull who responded. "Sixty years ago, these Jämtlanders were Norwegians, and their allegiance was to the King of Denmark. Can we trust them?"

¹⁸ Skalsvattnet

Armfelt turned to Horn. "General Horn, I will let you answer that."

Horn got to his feet. "Two years ago I might have asked the same question, but now...I have cultivated my company commanders because they are either Jämtlanders or have served with the regiment for some time. The Jämtlanders have always been Jämtlanders, and loyal to whichever king ruled them. But in Viking times, or so they believe, their forefathers came here from Norway to get away from the hard-handed Eiriks. True they travel back and forth—and intermarry with their neighbors on the other side—but they had rather be Swedes than Norwegians."

He looked around at the other senior officers. "As soldiers they are obedient, and apply themselves honestly. They are not so fierce as our Finns, and of course not battle-hardened, but they are upright and self-reliant. I will not hesitate to lead them into battle."



Horn sat down then. Other questions were asked and other matters discussed. Then, an hour later, the regimental commanders left for their own billets, and the general's staff found their beds. Leaving behind the two senior generals, to smoke a final pipe together, and talk. "What are you thinking?" de la Barre asked.

"We have a hard task, my friend."

"But far the better army."

"Better now, yes. But better when we stand before Trondheim? We have to get there, first. And you know what the country is like, between here and there. And the supply problems."

"Supply problems? You're used enough to them, you and our Finns. And they know you. When Lybecker was called back to Sweden, and you replaced him, deserters came back! Hungry, unpaid for months, but they came back! At Pälkäne and Isokyrjö, the only orders they refused were orders to retreat!" De la Barre grunted a laugh. "Most commanders would envy their loyalty to you."

He'd let his pipe die. Now he knocked the dottle from its bowl, and got to his feet, Armfelt following suit. "You called Budde an old war dog," de la Barre finished, "but *you* are the old war dog, my friend, and your army knows it. They are as loyal to you as you are to them." They shook hands then, and de la Barre left, Armfelt watching the

door close behind him.



Armfelt lay awake awhile, thinking not of Jämtish loyalty—or of his Finn's—but of mud, horses, artillery—and somehow of His Majesty's clock inexorably ticking, as if de la Barre had mentioned it aloud. After a while he slept, and dreamt of them all.



The next morning Frisenheim arrived, and a few hours later, Governor Hugo Hamilton rode into the fort with his party. The two talked at length with Armfelt and his staff, about the logistical problems in general, and most especially the shortage of horses. They were about to adjourn when an aide entered, followed by another officer. "General Armfelt," the aide said, "Major Hård is here to see you." Then more softly, "from Strömsund."

From Strömsund. The room fell still. The aide left, closing the door behind him. Armfelt recognized Hård; he'd been on His Majesty's staff at Lund during Lybecker's court martial. Now he was unshaven and red-eyed, his boots and breeches, even the skirt of his tunic mud-spattered. Clearly he'd traveled hard and fast. Strömsund was—how far? A thousand kilometers away.

Hård saluted sharply. "Herr General!" he said, then held out an envelope with the king's seal. "From His Majesty!"

Gravely Armfelt took the envelope, slit it with his pen knife, removed the sheets it held, and began to read. To de la Barre it seemed his commander paled just a bit, but when he'd finished, his voice sounded much as usual. "Gentlemen," he said, "His Majesty's letter explains why Major Hård found it necessary to ride so hard. We are ordered to begin our march no later than tomorrow."

Once more the room was silent, till Armfelt spoke again, his voice grave. "Major, it is impossible for the army to leave tomorrow." He said it matter-of-factly, but with clear regret. "We are still seriously short of pack horses. More have been procured, but haven't arrived yet, and others have yet to be acquired."

He turned, gesturing toward the other men. "I presume you know Commissariat General Frisenheim and Governor Hamilton. They arrived yesterday. And this is Major General Horn. We've been discussing the situation."

Hård interrupted; he was His Majesty's voice here. "Discussion is not the solution. Horses are not the solution. Will is the solution. Will, and obedience to orders."

"Thank you, major. Our discussion was of when the horses in hand will arrive, and what must be done to acquire the rest. But we are slowed by more than lack of horses. Some of my regiments are not here yet. Their progress has been impeded by the heavy rains, swollen streams, and the state of the roads between here and the Bothnian coast. I'll begin sending regiments up the road as I can, those with the necessary horses. Meanwhile," he added, "we have stopped graining horses, in order to have bread for the men."

Hård would not be put off. He turned to Hamilton. "Governor," he said, "acquisition is your responsibility. Acquisition of horses, cattle, foodstuffs, forage..."

The old Scot reddened, but he spoke quietly. "It is God, not I, who has not seen fit to comply with His Majesty's wishes."

Now it was Hård who reddened, but the governor gave him no chance to retort. "Otherwise the horses and all the rest would be here now. As for foodstuffs, if you order me to take the farmers' seed grain, I will see to its collection. The women and old men are little able to hide or defend it. They are too weak from hunger. Then there will be no crop at all next summer, regardless of God's weather. Perhaps you will blame me for that, too. And if I utterly strip the farmers of livestock..."

Armfelt cleared his throat, cutting off the governor before he could say anything more dangerous than he had. "Major," the general said, "perhaps you'd like to see the road to the west. You can evaluate for yourself why so many horses are needed. It is unclear how useful wagons will be, though we'll start out with them, because to depend on pack horses requires many more animals."



Tired as Hård was, and Hamilton as well, Armfelt took both of them, along with Frisenheim, Horn and de la Barre, riding westward up the miserable quagmire of a road as far as Shed Lake (Bodsjön), a round trip of 20 km. As they rode, Horn described the work done or in progress, and the problems. "This is just the beginning," he finished. "It gets worse ahead. With your agreement, tomorrow you and I can ride to Medstugan, about twice as far. Or all the way to Skalstugan if you'd like. We can stay the night

there if need be. The cabin's been repaired. You will be the king's eyes."

The road impressed, even dismayed Hård, as no argument or explanations could have. He was thinking in particular of the difficulties in bringing even the lightest siege guns over this road. But said nothing of that. His was the king's voice here, and His Majesty considered difficulties irrelevant.



They returned to the fort to a late supper. The major would spend the night there, in the room held for the king. Afterward he and Armfelt shook hands in the privacy of the night outside. "You must harden your will, Herr General," Hård said.

At that, Armfelt's long strong face turned morose. Without speaking, he nodded acknowledgement and rode off to his billet, shaking as if with an ague. He fought it, willed it to stop. *I have been hard for many years, he thought; I can manage for as many more as necessary for the king to free Finland of Russians.*

Meanwhile, he reminded himself, the sun had shone on him and his army for three days in a row now, and seemed to offer more to come. He might hope.

PART TWO
ON THE MARCH

Chapter 13

Mud

After several sunny days, good weather seemed normal. Immediately after morning prayers, the Jämtland Regiment began its march west with wagons and pack horses. But not yet its cattle. So Matts Karlsson, who'd been returned to droving, had little to do besides watch the regiment march past and the regimental herd graze. And to brush at the tiny biting gnats—black flies—that formed a cloud around his head. Brushing had little effect, but he hadn't given up on it.

The next morning, he and the other drovers had the herd on the road at 5 o'clock, somewhat before the Hälsingland Regiment began its trek. Some time after they'd gotten the herd moving, Sergeant Björkebom had ridden up to Matts. "Get on behind me," he said, patting the horse's rump. "You're assigned elsewhere."

"Elsewhere?"

"Get on! Now!"

The sergeant had already rearranged his gear, so the boy grabbed hold and pulled himself up behind the saddle. Then Björkebom nudged the horse's ribs with a heel, and they started off at a walk. Any small drying of the road's surface had been churned into the underlying slop by hooves and wheels, and the road remained a mire. From time to time the horse snorted, trying to dislodge the gnats blood-feeding in its nostrils.

"What of my bedroll?" Matts asked.

"It's taken care of."

"Is it all right to ask where we're going?"

"You are going to the artillery. Temporarily."

"The artillery! Really? The artillery?"

"When your sergeant tells you something, do not question it. I'm taking you temporarily to the artillery."

Actually Matts hadn't been questioning. He'd been expressing boyish amazement.

To be an artilleryist! Wow! How can this be happening to me?

Not that he expected anyone to tell him. He was used to not knowing. Being a squatter's son, and in the army ranking well below the lowest private, he took not knowing for granted. In his world it was as pervasive as the black flies, and didn't bite. At least it hadn't.

Mostly they rode through spruce forest. The right of way had been widened on the south—their left—to a total width of six or seven meters. Not wide enough for the sun to reach the road, except briefly early and late. After half an hour they crossed the Indal River on a new pontoon bridge, the horse's shod hooves clopping dully on thick planks. At the far end, another horse and rider rode onto the bridge, headed east, trailed by a horse with an empty pack saddle. The rider, Matts realized, was Corporal Persson. The two riders hardly slowed as they approached.

"Did you deliver him all right?" called Björkebom. "With the bedrolls and rations?"

"Yes, sergeant."

Then they were past.

An hour or so later, the sergeant and Matts caught up to some artillery: two howitzers—6-pounders¹⁹—each being pulled laboriously through the mud by six horses. Following alongside were men muddy from feet to thighs, from fingers to shoulders. And faces, for they brushed at the gnats with muddy hands. Each man carried a stout birch pry-pole. Matts realized their muddy feet were bare, and guessed the reason: their army shoes had pulled off in the mud, so they'd stowed them in their packs.

An officer rode ahead of the guns, while to the rear, a sergeant had stopped his horse to wait. It was he, scowling, who spoke as they approached.

"Is that it? Just one? He's not even a man. He doesn't weigh 50 kg."

At least 50, Björkebom thought. But all he said was, "He's a herd boy. What did you expect?"

"The other is 20 kg heavier."

"You asked for help; now you've got it. If it was up to me, I'd have kept them both; I was already short-handed, and these two were my best." He turned to Matts. "This is

¹⁹ Six pounds (2.7 kg) was the weight of the cannonballs used.

the artillery, boy," he said gruffly. "Get down."

Matts slid from the horse and stood, not knowing what to do next. Sergeant Björkebom had said "these two"; where was the other? Meanwhile this new sergeant looked him over. "What's your name, boy?"

"Matts Karlsson i Stentorp, sergeant."

The wide mouth grimaced. "Run ahead to the tool wagon and tell the corporal to give you a pry pole." He brushed at the gnats; those waiting for a place dispersed for perhaps half a second; those already feeding did not disengage. "Then report to Corporal Kråkmo." The sergeant pointed. "That man there. He'll tell you what to do."

"Yes sergeant."

While the sergeant glowered, Matts paused a moment to take off his birchbark mocassins, then holding them in his hand, ran off barefoot. There's hope for the boy, the sergeant thought. He's smart enough to take his shoes off, and to wait till he's well away from me before stopping to put them in his knapsack.



Minutes later they hit a stretch of deeper than average mud that hadn't been corduroyed. Presumably, until cut up by wagons, it hadn't appeared to need it. The soldiers, along with Matts and the husky Axel Jonsson, put their shoulders to the pry poles and heaved, repeatedly while the horses struggled, till they reached better ground. Whenever the horses could no longer move one of the heavy guns, they repeated the action. From time to time, the lieutenant ordered the little battery to stop, to rest the horses, usually where hay had been piled beside the road.

Once when they stopped, the sergeant had the teamsters strap nosebags on the animals. It was the first time Matts had seen grain fed to army horses, but these were superior animals, chosen for size and strength, and the load they pulled was both critical, and at (if not beyond) the margin of possibility. They needed all the energy and heart they could muster. It was then the men took off their knapsacks and ate their lunches—hardtack, butter, and salt beef, washed down with water. Meanwhile the swarming gnats fed continually on both horses and men; especially they crowded on and into the horses' ears, which twitched constantly. As did their hides, for they were also afflicted with bullflies, slow but large, with painful bites. Matts was glad bullflies

preferred horse blood to human blood. When the lieutenant decided the horses had rested long enough, the nosebags were put away, and they moved on as before.



It was late afternoon when they met three men—a captain, a lance corporal, and a private—waiting beside the road with their saddle horses and a burdened pack horse. The lieutenant halted his little battery of howitzers and went to speak with the captain. Matts recognized the private: his ex-tent mate, Lars Olofsson Skoogh.

After a moment, the sergeant called his crew to him. "Men," he said, "a trail starts in from here, for driving cattle. We will take the guns on it. But first we will rest, and grain the horses again."

The men seized the chance. Matts lay down by Lars. "This is harder work than shoveling gravel," he said.

"It sure is," Lars agreed. "I spent part of yesterday morning pushing and prying wagons. Then Captain Sjömelius sent me to Captain Möller, the artillery commander, to help find a way around for the howitzers."

"What are howitzers?" Matts asked.

"What you've been prying on," Lars said, indicating the 6-pounders. "Those. The road gets worse farther west, and they're convinced they can't get them through that way. So I told them about this trail. The farmers at Bodsjön use it to drive cattle to a summer dairy camp up on Bunneflåtan. And to a fishing camp on Hägg Lake."

"Why does the army want to take cannons up to a dairy camp?"

Lars frowned, puzzled, then realized. "We're not taking them up on the mountain. We'll go around it. But this cattle driveway is how we go the first 15 km or so. From there I blazed a trail to another driveway, off west, that will take us to the road again, up by Medstugan."

"And we can get them through that way?"

"I told them *maybe* we could. There are soft places, but they haven't been cut up by wagons. So Captain Möller decided to see for himself, and took me with him as his guide. He decided this way was better than the road." He shook his head. "But those howitzers are heavy, and it's wetter in here than I'd remembered."

Lars was clearly worried, but to Matts it didn't make much difference. It would be

interesting to try. To see what happened.



Their break was brief. Then they left the road and started down the trail, Möller in the lead. (He'd sent the lieutenant on up the road to the three-pounders.) Lars and Möller's aide rode a length behind the captain, followed in turn by the draft horses, howitzers, and men on foot. The sergeant brought up the rear.

It went much better than it had on the road. The ground had a thick layer of tough, intergrown tree roots that spread just below the surface. Matts knew about that; he'd helped his grandfather clear land. It was the roots that made the difference here; the roots and the absence of rutting. Another crew had gone in at sunup, to cut and remove any trees that had fallen across the trail since cattle had last been driven in. In a few wetter places, they'd also cut and laid—and staked!—corduroy, the roots helping to support the logs.

They took the guns about two and a half km before the first mishap: the lead howitzer's heavily-loaded main wheels broke through.²⁰ Captain Möller ordered the horses unhitched and led aside to rest, while most of the men began felling and sectioning trees for corduroys. Matts, Jon, and Lars cut a detour. When the detour was done, one of the teamsters hitched his six-horse team to the other howitzer and bypassed the mired gun, then pulled back onto the trail some 30 meters ahead, all without miring it.

Once the corduroy had been laid, all twelve draft horses were hitched to the mired howitzer via a towline. Meanwhile shovels had been wielded beneath the main axle, and short sections of log slid in as pry points. By then, dusk was settling beneath the forest roof. As many men as could, stood with pry poles in place or ready. The whip cracked above the horses; men heaved, and with a sucking sound the gun lurched forward, the lead wheels rearing onto the corduroy. Then, with poles busy and horses surging, the gun rolled ahead. After two meters the main wheels hit the corduroy, the howitzer bucking at the impact. But harnesses and towline held, and the entire

²⁰ The guns were pulled backward, so what I'm calling the "lead" wheels are those at the rear of the guns; they go first. By "main" wheels I mean the pair of large wheels under the barrel, which bear the greatest weight.

howitzer was on the corduroy. The horses moved it five meters farther, the men cheering, the corduroy firm beneath its weight. Then Möller called a halt.

"Enough, boys!" he said. "Good work, all of you! For tonight we'll leave it where it is. Teamsters groom your horses. When you've done that, there's a small fen to eastward; picket them there to graze." He scanned his crew, still gray with road mud. "There's a small brook running into the fen. Wash your faces and hands there before you make camp. Sergeant Nederby, prepare a guard roster to watch the horses tonight."



Matts' and Jon's gear was on the pack horses, and men and boys were all old hands at setting up camp. Before long, cookpots were heating on the several fires. The three men on loan from the Jämtland regiment had theirs a little apart from the artillerists, with Matts as cook. Captain Möller came over, and the three of them got up to stand at attention.

Private Skoogh," the captain said, "with your guidance we did very well today. I don't know yet how this will turn out, but I will commend you to Captain Sjömelius." He turned his gaze to Matts and Axel. "You are still boys, but you've worked like men. I will commend you also."

Then he turned and left.



After they'd eaten, and cleaned their dishes in the brook, the three ducked into their tent. When he'd folded his blanket over himself, Matts looked at the figure beside him in the darkness. "Lars," he asked, "what do you think now? Are we going to make it?"

For several seconds Lars lay silent. "I don't know," he said at last. "This way is better than the road, but there are bad places ahead, one in particular. And the general will need the howitzers at Trondheim. There are real forts there, built of stone. I've seen them. The howitzers would help."

On the other side of Lars, Axel yawned audibly.

"Can you teach me Norwegian again tonight?" Matts asked, more softly now.

"Some other time," Lars answered. "We need to sleep now. Tomorrow will be another hard day."

Matts fell asleep wondering if Captain Möller's commendation would help him be

made a soldier. He really did want shoes. They'd be much better, it seemed to him, than his birchbark mocassins.



Generals Armfelt and de la Barre rode with their aides along the road's right-hand edge, where it was least churned by traffic and the disturbances of widening. They would, Armfelt thought, soon catch up with the Hälsingland Regiment. The Österbotten regiment should be following some kilometers behind.

It was time, he'd decided, to leave Duved in Frisenheim's hands. The last of the Finnish units had arrived at the fort in decent shape and morale, needing mainly a day's rest after their long trek from the Bothnian coast. Horn and Yxkull had been making the decisions at the head of the march, and the always restless de la Barre, as director of operations, had been back and forth.

In one of the road's less churned up places, Armfelt saw wheel tracks leaving the road, and stopped to look at them. From their narrow spacing, he realized what they were, and turned to de la Barre. "The howitzers," he said.

"Yes. This is Möller's bypass. He would never get them through on the road; not till winter freezes the mud."

Armfelt nodded. Freezeup was at least two months away, perhaps three, and His Majesty wanted him in possession of Trondheim by then. At its walls, at least. His eyes followed the howitzer tracks in among the trees, on a trail first swamped out by a pioneer axman, then kept open by driving cattle to and from some high pasture, and by farmers with pack horses, bringing down cheese and butter. Himself the son of a farmer—a gentry farmer—the commander felt a pang of discomfort. What would these farmers use for pack horses now? Probably their wives and children, and their own aging legs and backs. And the cheeses, and tubs of butter, would be fewer since the governor's provisioning parties had passed through, commandeering cattle.

Armfelt touched his horse's ribs with the spurs, and rode on. One does what one must, he told himself. Beneath that thought lay another: a report of what had happened a decade earlier in Kurland and Livonia. In an effort to supply His Majesty's invasion army in Russia, almost everything had been taken. Children had even been held hostage, to force the peasants to show where they'd hidden food in the forest. When

he'd heard of that, Armfelt vowed it was something he would never do.

But afterward the Russians had marched in, and no doubt taken what little had been missed. It was not the peasants the troops had deprived, but the tsar's soldiers. Interesting that he hadn't thought of that before.

Möller's detour. The tracks would be two days old now. Armfeld knew Captain Möller. He'd have scouted the trail personally before trying it out.

They rode on. "This hog wallow," de la Barre said, "is worse than any road I saw in Finland."

Armfelt considered. "The track we took through the Tavast wilderness might have been as bad, except the summer and fall had been dry, and it was six months instead of six weeks since the snow had melted."

De la Barre thought of the Russian road that Lewenhaupt's relief column had taken, ten years past, hauling critical supplies for His Majesty's main army, advancing on Moscow. By all reports, it had been this bad. But for the grace of God, he thought, I might have been with it. Lewenhaupt's great wagon train had taken three months—three unusually rainy months—to struggle 250 km through mud.

"If His Majesty could see this," he said, "it might cool his fire a bit." He didn't actually believe that though. The king was driven: driven to restore Swedish rule over the eastern Baltic; driven to stop Russian expansion. He would prevail or die trying.

"Cool his fire? Perhaps. But even so, he would push us." Armfelt chuckled. "You must prod the bullock, or it will not move."

The bullock? de la Barre thought. *You, my friend, are not a bullock but a bull. How many children have you fathered now? A dozen at least, not counting the eight or ten God has taken into heaven. It's a wonder Lovisa has any teeth left, after birthing so many.* "Two teeth for each birth" was the rule he'd heard. She must have been bearing them on credit.

As for prodding... The king was a skilled improviser, at his best when on the scene, operating in the moment. But at foreseeing the future? Once more de la Barre thought of Lewenhaupt's relief column—2,000 supply wagons pulled by 8,000 horses, escorted by 5,000 cavalry and dragoons, and 7,000 infantry. Too few horses even then, he told himself. Meanwhile, for compelling reasons, the king had changed his mind, his plan, his location. And Lewenhaupt was cut off, surrounded by a Russian army. He'd

destroyed his wagons and precious supplies to keep them out of Russian hands. In a snowstorm. In September.

More than half the 12,000 escorts had been killed or captured.

It seems, de la Barre thought, that armies attract the worst weather. The Finnish grandson of a Huguenot soldier of fortune brushed at the black flies. "One thing we are not short of," he said, "is these accursed gnats. I've never seen them so numerous or so hungry."

"This is soggy country," Armfelt answered. "Ideal for them. And it was so cold for so long, they could not fly to feed. Now they're making up for lost time."

De la Barre grimaced. "What we need is a hard freeze, hard enough to do away with them, and stiffen the mud."

His commander chuckled without humor. "Amen to that, Brother Johan, amen to that."



After their night's sleep, the artillerists and their laborers followed the cattle driveway to where it turned westward. From there it climbed the northeast flank of Bunneflätan. The howitzers, on the other hand, needed to be taken not up the mountain, but around its north flank to another cattle driveway. Which would bring them out at a tiny settlement below Medstugan. There they would meet the military road again, hopefully having bypassed the worst of it.

So on their advance scouting trip, Lars and Captain Möller had left the trail, keeping to gentler terrain, easier for the draft horses. Lars had ridden with a hand ax in his right fist, leaning frequently from the saddle to cut blazes in trees, marking the route.

The trail crew was still ahead of them, but the captain expected to catch up with it soon. Once off the cattle driveway, there'd been a lot more blowdowns to remove. And standing trees as well; a four-wheeled howitzer pulled by six horses was not very maneuverable.

They were also to corduroy the worst sections. Lars had suggested sphagnum moss as a guide: where there was sphagnum, lay corduroy.

For now, though, the going was good. The howitzers were rolling, and Captain

Möller seemed cheerful. Lars, on the other hand, felt like he had a rock in his stomach. At morning prayer, Möller had asked God to bring them to Medstugan with both howitzers, but it seemed to Lars that God had already done as much as he was likely to: he'd put forest here. There were, however, limits to how much weight the root network would support.

After a bit the spruces became smaller, and the stand less dense. The layer of tree roots would also be less dense, and the roots smaller, it seemed to Lars. He'd warned the captain before that this stretch was particularly worrisome. There was sphagnum here and there in the carpet of feather mosses. But there was no better alternative; off to their left the ground became steeper—a side slope—and to the right, wetter.

The hindmost gun was the first to break through and bog down. A moment later the lead gun broke through, some forty meters ahead.

"Olofsson," Möller said, "ride ahead and bring the trail crew back. And see how far it is before the ground gets better."

"Yessir."

The captain and Sergeant Nederby watched the young Jämtlander swing into the saddle and ride out of sight ahead. "He should have known we couldn't get through here," Nederby grumbled.

Möller's eyes fixed the man calmly. "Sergeant," he said, "Private Olofsson spoke his misgivings. The decision was mine. Here we have a possibility, or so it seemed. On the road we had a clear impossibility. Understood?"

"Yes captain," Nederby replied. But he was clearly unhappy with the situation, and wanted someone to blame. Someone other than the captain, who was a good commander.



Lars found the trail no better for some 200 meters. Over the worst stretch, where sphagnum was conspicuous, the trail crew had laid some thirty meters of corduroy. Meanwhile he could hear the crisp chunking sound of axes ahead; they may, he thought, have come to the brook he remembered as somewhere about there.

In fact the trail crew was busy bridging it. They'd manhandled a pair of tree trunks across it—pines separated by the width of a howitzer's wheel spacing, to bear the

weight better. Both were supported in the center by a timber pier, and now the crew was flooring them with small logs.

The ensign in charge saw Lars coming, and rode to meet him. "What is it, private?"

"The guns are stuck, sir. The captain wants your crew."

The ensign was not surprised. He and his crew back-tracked to the lead howitzer and began cutting corduroys. The teamsters unhitched the gun horses and led them a short distance north, to a pond Lars told them of, ringed with wet meadow to graze on. The artillerists began laying corduroys snugly together on the mossy ground.

Even with the help of the artillerists, it took them nearly till dusk to corduroy a hundred meters. Then they returned to the howitzers—to find both had settled more deeply into the muck. Again they hitched all the draft horses to the first gun, then every man who could crowd close enough got a pole behind a wheel or axle, and the teamsters wielded their whips.

Bellybands and hame straps snapped; half the horses walked out of their harnesses. One of the wheel horses went down and couldn't get up. Captain Möller swore extensively in German.



They repaired the harnesses, then tried the hindmost gun with similar results; they even lost another horse. By that time it was getting dark, so they set up camp again, a little way down the trail. Captain Möller returned to the two collapsed, wind-broken horses. The men heard the shots and shuddered. But the disabled horses could hardly be left alive for wolves or a bear.

In the morning, they found the two bogged howitzers had settled deeper still, as if the earth was slowly absorbing, digesting them. Briefly Möller stared, unbelieving, then sat down grimly on the barrel of the lead gun, which wasn't much above the mud now. Sat there without a word for all of five minutes, while his slump-shouldered men looked on. Finally he got to his feet. "Break camp," he ordered. "We'll go back to the road."

It seemed to him the guns were beyond salvage, certainly with the resources he had at hand.

Chapter 14

Events at Skalstugan

Skalstugan (The Skal Cabin) was a one-room log cabin at timberline, overlooking Skals Lake, a sizeable body of water sparkling in the sunshine two and a half kilometers west, across boggy tundra with patches of sparse birch scrub. East across the road rose the long lumpy mountain known as Saxvall, with scrubby birch woodland on its lower, sun-facing slopes. Ten kilometers northwest, the road crossed the border and turned west a dozen kilometers to a Norwegian settlement called Sul, then 20 km farther to Steine Skans, a fort built to protect the fertile coastal valley against Swedish incursions.

But the terrain that would count most rose from the far shore of Skals Lake: a steep slope that climbed to a broad boggy fjeld, interrupted with peaks, and strewn with hundreds of tundra pools.

The cabin had a long history, for this road was an ancient trade route between the Vikings' North Sea trading and plundering ground, and its counterpart on the Gulf of Bothnia—the north arm of the Baltic. A route that bypassed the pirate-infested straits between the two seas. Because of the nature of the road, it had been used mainly in winter, when it was frozen, and the terrain covered deeply with snow. Caravans of laboring pack and sleigh horses—even occasional, long-legged pack moose!—had crossed there. Skalstugan provided shelter for the traders to rest a night, or survive a blizzard.

In Viking times the cabin site had held a sizeable longhouse, which had burned and been rebuilt, decayed and rebuilt again, no one knew how many times. The 1718 version was considerably smaller—there'd been no caravans for centuries—but it was still used occasionally by travelers. Each wall had an unglazed window, with shutters newly made by an army renovation crew. The shutters were open now, to let in light, and the fireplace held a low fire on which green heath shrubs had been added. With its

flue mostly closed, its smoke discouraged gnats and mosquitoes.

The furnishings were four benches and a sturdy table, adequate for a party of travelers to share a meal. But now the table had been moved to one of the windows, for light, leaving room on three sides for the general's staff and regimental commanders. And Hård, who remained with them as the king's observer. Armfelt called them to order.

"I want to read something to you," he said, and held up a leaflet. "Some of you have seen it already, but those more recently arrived have not. Captain Longström's people have carried copies of it into Norway, to be passed around and talked about. It was written to dilute the slanders we've been subject to, and reduce the troubles we might otherwise suffer." He raised a sheet of paper so the light struck it, holding it almost at arm's length. Actually, what he read was his Swedish original; the printed leaflets were in Norwegian.

To the people of Trøndelag, so long oppressed by the Danes! You are to stay in your homes in friendship and tolerance, and not take arms against Swedish soldiers. By so doing, you will not be harmed. But those who undertake to harm the army will be persecuted with gun and sword, at risk of life and property.

"It will save us much trouble," he finished, "and the Norwegian people it will save even more."

He spread a large linen map on the table; his staff crowded close to see. Their aides and some of the regimental commanders would follow their general's talk on smaller maps of their own.

Reading his message had put Armfelt in a notably good mood, despite the still and muggy weather. "The Dane knows we are on the way," he said, "but he does not know what approach we shall use. Captain Longström's people have arrested several spies between the Skal River and the border crossing, and his scouts have observed enemy troops in ambush positions in the *förhuggningar* between Steine Skans and Sul.

General Yxkull interrupted. "Why would Budde send spies, when there are local

people who would be glad to tell him what we're doing?"

"There were few people up here to begin with," Armfelt answered, "and when we began our march, all but a handful moved out—east into Sweden or west into Norway. Those who stayed are the spies Captain Longström arrested."

The action had been high-handed, but this was no time to quibble.

"If we continue on the road beyond Sul, we will suffer many killed and wounded. So I have decided on another route, the last one the Dane would consider. We will go west, over Mare Pass and across the wilderness. Mostly there isn't even a path. We will take Steine Skans from the rear."

"Across the wilderness?" It was Yxkull again. "My map shows nothing but mountains, bogs, and lakes."

Armfelt nodded. "Exactly. And Captain Longström says it is even worse than it looks on the map."

There was a moment of stunned silence, broken this time by de la Barre. "No doubt you have thoughts on how to accomplish this."

"Indeed. We no longer need worry about getting the howitzers through; they are lost to us. We will also leave most of our wagons, and rely even more on pack horses. Officers will leave most of their baggage on this side with the wagons. The number of pack horses for each officer will be the same as the number of wagons he would have had under better circumstances. I'll send a courier to Frisius, with orders to take the wagons back to Duved." There was a moment of shock among the assembly. "We will corduroy as needed, and where we must climb steep slopes, we will use manpower and ropes to help get the remaining wagons up."

He paused. "Captain Longström has convinced me it is possible, and he has made a career out of doing successfully what others thought impossible."

No one argued. They simply looked glum. Some would have argued, but had no real alternative to offer, and at any rate they were the king's men. And to the king it was a question of will.

"On Tuesday we will break camp here, and march west over Mare Pass, then cross the fjeld to Lake Feren, and rest there on Wednesday. Meanwhile we will continue to send patrols out: two southward, toward Meråker, another west down the Forr River,

and still another northwest toward Lake Grönningen. Fisherfolk have cabins and boathouses on Feren, and there is a dairy camp on the south shore. When they see us coming, they will move out, but some will hang about to spy. We may harrass and disperse them, but we will not undertake to run them down, for their reports will confuse the Dane.

"On Thursday we will break camp at Feren and move around the north side of Hermans Nose, then west to Grönningen. By then, word should have reached the Dane at Steine Skans. There is a *förhuggning* there too, but Captain Longström has found a way around it. He has sketched it on my map."

He looked away from the table, his attention now on those who hadn't found room at it. "We will make our final march at night, and keep the Dane guessing till the end."

There were questions now for Horn, the director of planning, on what materials would be transferred from wagons to pack horses. De la Barre, who was skilled at dividing his attention, gave his ears to Horn and his questioners, but his curious gaze remained on Yxkull. The man had never seemed especially intelligent, but when given orders, he asked good questions. He was a proven warrior and tactician who never flinched under fire, but felt uncomfortable with daring; and Karl Gustaf, de la Barre told himself, was being daring today. It was not Armfelt's usual mode, and he was likeliest to use it in efforts to avoid casualties. *We'll see how it plays out this time*, de la Barre thought.



Matts Karlsson still bivouacked with the Jämtland regiment, but Sergeant Björkebom had told his herdboys that the regimental herds would be combined when they left Skalstugan. This would require fewer herdboys, who themselves would be combined into a separate unit attached to army headquarters. The leftover boys would remain with their regiments, drawing duty as baggage boys: tending the pack horses, loading and unloading them, and helping to pull and push them out of mudholes.

So Matts did his first deliberate act of daring since he'd volunteered, back home at Solslätte: he went to regimental headquarters and told the clerk he wanted to talk to the sergeant major. Because Sergeant Björkebom had told him once that most of a regiment's decisions were made by its sergeant major.

For a civilian laborer to approach the sergeant major was unheard of, but the clerk, instead of erupting with indignation, found the request amusing, and went to the sergeant major with it. Sergeant Major Jakob Petersson Wallmo had an excellent memory for names and reports, a trait which could be good or bad, depending on the report. There were nine Matts Karlssons in the regiment, but only one Matts Karlsson in Stentorp, and the sergeant major had already heard of him. Ensign Hasselbeck, in reporting on his herdboys, had commended Matts as the best of the lot, "who will make a fine soldier when he's grown a bit." A boy who took responsibility, wove his own birchbark shoes, and at night snared rabbits to supplement his rations. Who'd spied on the Finns and been caught at it, had ended up standing night guard with them, and shot a bear attracted to the herd. Shot it through the eye, at night. (The story, as heard or recalled by the sergeant major, was not quite accurate, but he had the essence of it.)

His curiosity ignited, the sergeant major told the clerk to send the boy in. The clerk was astonished—he hadn't expected this—and ushered Matts into Wallmo's presence. Matts stopped at attention, two strides in front of the sergeant major's folding table. He could salute as well as an actual soldier; he'd observed and practiced. And he stood up well to the sergeant major's penetrating gaze.

"At ease, Stentorp," Wallmo said. *The boy knows "at ease" too*, he thought. "What is it you want?"

"Sergeant major, sir, I want to remain in Jämtland's Regiment! I don't want to be a herdboy any longer and be sent somewhere else!"

Wallmo's rust-red brows curled down. "Surely you know by now that the army pays little heed to what a herdboy wants, or a soldier, or even a sergeant major! Why should you be different than the rest of us?"

Having no answer, Matts bypassed the question. "Sergeant major, sir, I want to be a soldier, and wear a uniform, and carry a musket and sword, and fight for the King."

"Ah! Hmm. There is more to being a soldier than wearing a uniform and carrying a musket. You will have to drill, and learn a soldier's skills."

"I am learning, Sergeant Major sir. I have asked Sergeant Björkebom questions about what soldiers must know and what they do, and often he tells me. Also Private Lars Olofsson Skoogh has taught me. He is not yet a corporal, but he is a very good

soldier. We tented together when we worked on the road, and when we were with Captain Möller and his howitzers, and he explained to me how soldiers do things. He has even begun to teach me Norwegian! I hope in Norway to become a spy."

"Do you now! Did Skoogh suggest that? That you become a spy?"

"No sir. I thought of it myself. When I told him, he said it would be very dangerous. I would have to speak Norwegian so well, no one would know the difference."

Apparently Skoogh was not taking advantage of the boy's credulity. "Skoogh was right," said Wallmo. "If you were caught, they would hang you."

"That's why I will learn it very well, sir."

While Matts was speaking, Wallmo had put a pinch of powdered punk on a small brass plate. Now, with his fire starter, he struck a spark into it, blew gently, and with the resulting flame, lit a stubby candle. Interesting that Skoogh had come up in this matter, he thought. Captain Möller had commended Skoogh's service, and earlier, he himself had recommended Skoogh to General Horn, as a guide for Longström's Free Company. (He wouldn't have recommended him as a son-in-law, but as a guide—by all means.) And now...

Wallmo hummed musingly. "I often need someone to carry messages," he said. "I have one to send now." He took a piece of paper from the table and folded it, then lifted the candle, dripped a dollop of melted wax onto the fold, then took a signet from a small box and pressed it on the wax.

"Do you know what I just did?" he asked. He held the paper up with the seal facing Matts.

"You dripped candle wax on the paper, sergeant major sir."

"That's right. And made a mark on it with this." He held up the signet. "No one is allowed to do that except the regimental commander, his deputy, and myself. You are to take this letter to Captain Longström, who will know by the mark that no one has read it who shouldn't."

He eyed Matts thoughtfully again. "Do you read, boy?"

"Yes sergeant!"

"Usually I do not seal messages. But sealed or not, never read one I've given you to

deliver, unless I tell you to. And don't give them to anyone except the one I send it to. If you do, I will find out, and you will get to meet the provost!"

"Yes sergeant major sir! Uh, sergeant major?"

"Yes?"

"Where is Captain Longström?"

"Try his company area."

After a moment of uncertainty, Matts saluted. "Yes sergeant major! Thank you sergeant major!" Then saluted again and trotted out of the tent. When he was gone, the clerk came in. He'd overheard it all; canvas doesn't muffle sound well.

"Do you think he'll deliver it?"

"Why not? He's not stupid, only ignorant." The sergeant major shrugged. "If he doesn't, it's not urgent. I'll know by supper."



A sentry outside regimental headquarters pointed out to Matts where Longström's Free Company was bivouacked—only 2 or 3 hundred meters from Skalstugan, which was the general's headquarters. Matts loped off. By now he knew how to recognize a company headquarters tent when he saw one, but in this case he didn't see one. What he did see was a man doing something he'd never imagined. A scrubby birch about ten inches thick had been pruned of branches as high as a man could reach. A soldier was throwing a sheath knife at it from five meters away, throwing hard, as if seeing how deeply he could sink the blade. He pulled it free, sheathed it, then strode back to where he'd thrown it from, and returned his attention to the tree. Matts stared. The across-the-body draw was compact and quick, looping into a short, bent-elbowed casting movement that left the knifeman in a low crouch, balanced on the balls of his feet. Matts watched the action repeated several times. Each time the knife struck deeply, about chest high.

The man had been aware of him, Matts realized, when he'd first approached, and had ignored him. Again the big fist wrenched the blade from the wood. Then the Finn turned, and fixed Matts with hard eyes.

"Päivää," Matts called in greeting. On the cattle drive, it had been almost the only Finnish word he'd learned. It brought a response: the eyes changed from hard to

curious, examining the boy, the ragged peasant homespuns, the woven birchbark mocassins, the folded paper in one grimy hand. A slight smile touched the man's face.

"Päivää," he replied.

The boy seemed to fumble now, as if not knowing how to proceed, so Erkki switched to Swedish. "What do you want?"

"I have a message to give Captain Longström."

"I'm his 1st sergeant. I'll take it."

Matts was very aware of the knife in the tall Finn's right hand. "My sergeant major told me I must not give it to anyone but Captain Longström."

The Finn's face showed no response, but somehow Matts read approval in it. Half turning, the 1st sergeant pointed with the knife to Skalstugan. "Captain Longström is with the general, in his headquarters."

Matts jerked half a bow. "Thank you, 1st sergeant, sir," he said, then trotted off toward the building. 1st Sergeant Erik Stenfors—his army name—watched the boy the first fifty yards, then returned to his practice. It troubled him to see someone so open, so—unspoiled. Troubled him because it couldn't last, because sooner or later, someone or something would kill it.



Skalstugan had a stoop raised a meter above the ground, to simplify going in and out in winter. On it stood a sentry with fixed bayonet, guarding the door. Also on the stoop sat a boy of seemingly twelve or thirteen years (eleven, actually, but large and arrogant for his age), wearing a uniform like an officer's, but without insignia. His dangling feet, in small cavalry boots, swung back and forth, out of unison. He was whittling, his sheath knife not much smaller than the Finn's. His stroke paused as he watched Matts approach.

Matts stopped at the steps, his eyes on the sentry. "Private, sir," he said, "I have a message for Captain Longström, from Sergeant Major Wallmo at Jämtland's Regiment."

The whittling boy responded before the soldier could. "Give it to me. I'll take it to him." As he'd spoken, he'd gotten to his feet and sheathed his knife. Now he bent, holding out his hand to receive the paper.

Matts' features stiffened. "Sergeant Wallmo told me to give it only to Captain

Longström."

"Do you know who I am?"

"I know you are not Captain Longström."

The boy stiffened, reddening as if he'd been slapped. "I am Anders Henrik Ramsay," he said. "I am General Armfelt's pistol bearer. My father is Major Axel Wilhelm Ramsay, commander of the Åbo Cavalry Regiment. My uncle is Anders Erik Ramsay, governor of Norrbotten. And what are you? You're a clod! You don't know anything."

"I know you're not Captain Longström."

Laughter interrupted them. Three officers had stepped to the door and were watching, two of them clearly amused. The other, tall and strong-featured, was deep into middle age. "Anders," the older man said mildly, "this lad is in the right. He is obeying orders. Go inside now; we'll talk later."

Anders Henrik Ramsay turned, a crisp about-face, and the officers stepped aside for him. He was no longer red-faced; he'd whitened with humiliation.

One of the officers, the youngest, wore insignia that was familiar to Matts: a captain's. "I'm Captain Longström," the man said grinning, "and this is General Armfelt. He will vouch for me." He came down the steps then, heels rapping, and put out a hand to receive the message. Matts handed it to him without hesitating. The captain peeled off the seal, which wasn't real sealing wax, and read quickly. "Hmm. Good." He looked at Matts. "What is your name?"

"Matts Karlsson i Stentorp, Captain sir."

"Matts, wait here for me. I have something to tell General Armfelt. Then you and I will go to see your sergeant major."

He turned, and with the other two officers, went inside. Matts felt suddenly dizzy, almost fell, catching himself against the stoop. "Sit down, boy," the sentry said, "before you fall down."

The moment's dizziness had already passed. "I'm all right," Matts said, and hoped the sentry wouldn't mention it to the captain. The captain might tell the sergeant major, and he might never be made a soldier.

A minute later Longström came back out. "Captain, sir," the sentry said, "I don't

think your messenger has eaten lately. He almost fainted."

It was Matts' turn to flush. "Ah." The captain's eyes examined him. "We'll go to my quarters and have something to eat before we go to see your sergeant major. My business with him isn't too urgent for that. And if you're not hungry, I am."

They set off on foot for the Free Company bivouac. "How old are you, Matts?" Longström asked.

"Fifteen this spring, captain sir."

"Fifteen. You're as tall as I, very nearly."

Matts realized that in fact he was only two or three inches shorter. The strongly-built captain was of ordinary height. It was the cavalry boots that gave him elevation. "Yes sir," Matts said.

"How long have you been with the army?"

Matts gave him the history, in brief. There was something about this officer that made it all right to talk, to tell him things. They went talking into the company headquarters, which was also the tent in which the captain and his 1st sergeant lived. Their bedrolls lay in a corner, ready to load if need be. Its furnishings were a small folding table and three folding chairs. It wasn't meal time, so nothing was cooked, but as they talked, Captain Longström's hands busied themselves with hardtack, butter, and salt herring. Somehow there were two plates, one for the captain and one for Matts. Actually the second plate belonged to the 1st sergeant, though Matts didn't know it. Erkki stood at the entrance, listening unobtrusively.

Before they left, Matts had told the captain more about himself than he'd told anyone before, even Skoogh. He even told about Lieutenant Hjalmar Fågelsund, the aborted moose hunt, and shooting the bear. And his friendship with Lars Olofsson Skoogh, and Pål Eriksson's death. Then they rode off together on Captain Longström's horse, to see Sergeant Major Wallmo. Matts hoped the sergeant major wouldn't be angry with him for being gone so long.

At regimental headquarters, the captain told him to wait outside; that he needed to talk privately with the sergeant major. Matts could hear their voices, and with a little concentration could have caught some of what they said, so he walked off away, far enough he couldn't hear them anymore. When the captain came back out, Matts went

over to him.

"I'm done here," the captain said. "The sergeant major wants to see you now."

Matts went inside, and the clerk ushered him into the sergeant major's office again. "So, Stentorp," said Wallmo, "you delivered the message." His eyes examined the boy. The captain, still amused, had told him about the encounter with the general's pistol bearer. Something the sergeant major wouldn't mention, because this was a warrior who stood before him—a very young, very unformed warrior, but a warrior nonetheless. That was clear to him now. "I have another message for you to deliver," he said. "I will not trouble to write it down. Find Private Skoogh and tell him I want to see him at once. When you have done that, get your gear and bring it here. You are now reassigned to headquarters company as one of my messengers. Corporal Nordgren will show you where you'll sleep."

For just a moment Matts gawped, then recovered himself and saluted. "Yes, Sergeant Major sir!" he said, and again made a proper about face before rushing out.

Wallmo looked ruefully at the place where his new messenger had stood seconds earlier. He should have warned him not to be too happy about his new posting. Ah well. He'd discover it in good time.



The bivouac was new but the layout familiar; Matts had no trouble finding Lars's tent. And it was a rest day; Lars and three others were napping there despite the gnats. Matts woke him with a touch and a gesture, and told his glorious news: he was now the regimental sergeant major's messenger. But what brought Lars fully awake was that he himself was to meet with Captain Longström at the captain's tent, at once.



Peter Longström pulled off his deerskin riding pants. It was chilly this evening, the touch of it sharp on his hairy legs. Chilly enough that the mosquitoes were comatose in the grass. He lay down on his bedroll with an almost audible groan. He'd ridden all night the night before. I'm getting old, he thought. A good oldness though. A good life. It seemed to him he'd been born for it. He still enjoyed it at nearly forty; he simply tired out a bit more easily. And he missed the featherbed he'd abandoned at Gävle!

Well, he told himself, if this campaign goes the way it should, we'll be in Trondheim

in a month, month and a half. He looked at the thought, tasted it, and didn't believe it. No siege guns. They wouldn't have any till after the roads froze hard, and meanwhile they'd need to eat. Fortunately the crops in Norway looked promising, in Trøndelag at least. They'd had rain when they'd needed it, and sun when that was needed.

He was interrupted by a murmured "Captain?"

He turned his head toward the dark shape lying across the tent from him. "Yes Erkki?"

"Do you know what that boy said to me today? The first thing he said? 'Päivää!' In Finnish. The first thing."

Longström chuckled.

"He's a good lad, captain."

"You're right, he is." He nearly added "I've never known you to like a Swede before," but didn't say it. It seemed to Longström that Erkki had been born not liking much of anything he saw around him, but it also seemed to him the man sometimes tried. As if dredging, looking for jewels, but used to finding only what seemed to him like muck.

"Thank you, Erkki Kivikoski," he said, using the sergeant's full Finnish name, his pre-army name.

Erkki didn't answer at once. Longström was almost asleep when the sergeant spoke again. "You're welcome, Captain," he said.

Don't lie awake trying to figure it out, Erkki, Longström thought. You're my best friend. It's as simple as that.



Usually, Karl Gustaf Armfelt fell readily asleep, a process requiring little more than lying down and closing his eyes. But occasionally, when he lay down, some oversight visited his mind. Then, if it seemed best, he got up and did something about it.

Today his pistol bearer had clashed with a courier—a lad of what? Fifteen years perhaps, and half a head taller than Anders, though not so much heavier. Anders had undertaken to domineer the older lad, and overreached himself.

And he, with all good intentions, had intended to talk with Anders about it, but given the command problems needing his attention, he'd forgotten. Now Anders was

asleep, had been for hours.

So, the general told himself, tomorrow then. It shouldn't be put off.

How old had Anders been when the Ramsay family was uprooted from their estate in Finland? A major's farm, with bond servants, hired workers, tenant farmers.... That would have been in May 1713, and Anders six years old. After that they'd followed the army as refugees, living at intervals in poor lodgings in some unfamiliar town, or sleeping in a tent. During Major Ramsay's long absences, the boy had become more than his mother could manage. Always large and strong for his age, he'd become overbearing, even abusive toward other children, and there'd been complaints, so Axel had begun taking the boy with him, exposing him to the discipline and responsibilities of military life.

But the father soon lost patience with the boy's sullen moods, and upbraded him, making them worse.

Armfelt smiled, mentally shaking his head. *So you*, he told himself, *in your infinite wisdom, offered to take the boy as your pistol bearer.*

Still, Anders had taken pride in the appointment, had begun to see himself as the general's pupil. Armfelt had given him a copy of Chapelle's manual to read—the military catechism of the Swedish army.

Armfelt himself had been given one in his twelfth year, by Colonel Otto Vellingk, a half brother of a great uncle. "Uncle Otto" had taken the newly fatherless boy into his home as his page, expanded the boy's rudimentary Swedish, and made a soldier of him. So Armfelt considered his kindness to the Ramsays, father and son, as passing along Vellingk's legacy of kindness. Tomorrow he would talk with Anders about the responsibility and consideration that went with rank and power, and with such wealth as might become available to high-born Swedes and Finns in better times. Do it in a manner that would not trigger the boy's resentment and resistance.

With that decision made, the general relaxed and drifted into sleep.

Chapter 15

Lars the Spy

The old Sami (Lapp), Utsi, had the sparse beard common among boreal indigines. But for a Sami he was tall; perhaps his half-Norwegian maternal grandfather had something to do with that. He was half a head shorter than Lars Skoogh, though, who in turn was a hand shorter than Erkki Stenfors, who stood to one side. But sinewy and tough; enduring. A second glance might have added observant to his attributes, and with a bit of familiarity, wise within the purview of his world and tribe.

At the moment he had a reindeer bull on the end of his braided leather lasso. He didn't try to reel the animal in, simply walked to it, taking up the slack as he approached. When he reached it, he rested a hand on its neck, and looked to Lars.

"Do you wish to lead it? Or butcher it now?"

"Kill it now."

Erkki watched, not understanding what was said; the other two had spoken in Sami, pidginized for Lars's needs. The language was akin to Finnish, but not closely. The Sami led the animal to a birch, tied it, chanted a brief prayer, then drew his knife and cut its throat. It was Lars who gutted it, and not in formal Lapp fashion (which Old Utsi had taught him years before). He simply field-dressed it, as his own father had taught him, keeping heart, liver, kidneys, and tongue. Explaining as he did that he had a special purpose for this bull—it *had* to be done without proper ritual. For that same reason, he had no use for the entrails, which he was giving to the Sami, who would know uses for them. All this in pidgin.

Meanwhile, from a tunic pocket, Erkki took the Swedish daler Captain Longström had provided, and gave it to the Sami. Adding "paljon kitoksia" and "tack så mycket" for good measure. War provided enemies; the wise warrior cultivated friendships.

The coin had spoken for itself. "Ja ja! Vær saa go'," the Sami replied grinning,

aware that someone who spoke Swedish would understand that bit of Norwegian. He pocketed the coin.

Now, Erkki told himself, we'll see how well the Swede performs the hard part of this mission.



Like forts in general, Steine Skans was on a hill, this one small, a short climb from the Sul River. Lars's eyes were busy as he rode, his mind registering what they saw. Captain Longström had briefed him—him and Sergeant Stenfors—from a sketch and diagram of the skans, dated 1689. It had helped: told him what to expect, and what to watch for. In particular, he was to remember whatever had been changed.

He'd been stopped at the foot of the hill, and questioned. The red-uniformed guard hadn't seemed worried by what appeared to be a Norwegian farmer on horseback. His challenge, though properly officious, had not sounded concerned. By his dialect, Lars was local. (And of course, he approached from the direction of the coast, not from Sweden.) In fact, the guard seemed more interested in Lars's packhorse than in Lars himself, who led it by a tether. A field-dressed reindeer was tied across its back,

As for Erkki—he was lying in cover, watching from a distance.



At the gate, another guard stopped Lars. "What is your business here?" he demanded. The guard's speech was not local, which probably meant army, not militia.

"I have a reindeer to sell," Lars answered. "To your commissary."

The Norwegian stared, frowning. *Puzzled, not suspicious*, Lars thought. *He doesn't know what to say.*

"Just a minute." The man turned, and strode through the open gate. Taking advantage of his back, Lars followed him, leading his horse. They'd hardly arrest him for that. More than a few merchants and other civilians must have passed through, and he really did need to see the inside.

"Corporal of the guard!" the man called.

A scowling corporal looked from a door. "What is it, Magnussen?" His speech wasn't local either.

"There's a farmer here with a reindeer. He wants to sell it to the commissary."

The corporal disappeared. Meanwhile Lars stood straight but relaxed, scanning the bailey, the walkways on the stockade, the three-pounders on their corners. A lance corporal emerged, a musket in his hands, bayonet fixed, and spoke to Lars's guard. "Corporal Smed says return to your post. I'm to guard this man."

The gate guard nodded, and trotted off. The new guard stood at port arms, uncertain eyes on Lars, who spoke casually. "Is it true what is said? That the Swedes are coming?"

The uncertainty became suspicion. "How is it you must ask what is common knowledge?"

"I'm the second mate on a dutchman, the *Katrina*, at the dock in Verdal, unloading wheat. Then it will load lumber for Holland. I told the skipper I wanted to visit my parents at Klæbu." He laughed. "I needed to get away from the ship for a while, but if I went home they'd expect me to work. My mother is dead, and my father a slave driver, if he's still alive. And if he's not, my older brother wouldn't want to see me. He'd worry I'd come for my share of the inheritance."

His guard nodded sympathetically; it was not an unfamiliar story. "If the Swede comes," he said, "we'll send him home with his tail between his legs."

The sergeant major emerged, sized up first Lars, then the horse and reindeer, then Lars again. "What is your name, and where are you from?"

"I am Lars Olavsson, from Klæbu, now mate on the *Katrina*, a dutchman out of Gravenhagen."

"Where did you get this?" The sergeant major indicated the reindeer.

"The captain gave me leave to visit home. Instead I rented these two horses and went hunting. The reindeer aren't rutting yet, so the meat should be prime. Perhaps your commander would like a change from salt beef."

The sergeant looked the bull over, prodding; reindeer are in good flesh in September.

"I can sell it to the ship's steward," Lars added, "but he'd want it for half what it's worth."

"Which is?"

"Three dalers. For fresh venison for the officers; a welcome change."

The sergeant major examined the head. The velvet was beginning to tatter on the antlers. Then found the wound where the bullet had broken the shoulders shortly after the Lapp had cut its throat. (It had occurred to Lars that the Norwegians might look to see whether the prime cuts had been spoiled by the bullet, and the absence of a bullet hole would be suspicious.)

The sergeant major's flinty eyes fixed on Lars. "Wait here," he said, then left. A few minutes later he returned with a stocky officer wearing a periwig. Once more the bull was examined, then the officer looked up at Lars.

"I'm told you want three dalers for this."

"Yes sir." Then almost without pause, added "General Budde."

The officer frowned. "How do you know who I am?"

"I heard of you in Verdal, General Budde sir."

Narrow lips pursed. "And you got this...?"

"Over west, on the fjeld."

"What did the Lapps say about that?"

Lars gestured innocently. "I saw no Lapps. I didn't worry about it."

"And you want three dalers." He turned to the sergeant major. "What did you offer?"

"One daler."

They were playing with him, Lars realized.

The general turned back to Lars. "So. One daler then."

"Two. It cost me a daler to rent the horses."

"One and a half. No more. Answer now."

Lars answered glumly. "One and a half then." He accepted the silver and left, his job done. He'd seen as much as he was likely to, and gotten a bonus—knowledge that General Budde was at the skans.

Chapter 16 Through the Wilderness

Matts Karlsson received two fascines—all his tough, skinny boy-arms could wrap around—bundles of slender tundra willow stems bound with withes of the same kind. The soldier who'd burdened him said nothing, simply began to cut more, his hands aching from icy water, despite the bright sun, the warm morning. He was a Hälsinglander, a gaunt man of perhaps forty years, worn by some thirty of hard labor and several of short rations. Behind his worn face, he was grateful not to be carrying corduroys.

Matts turned and slogged off with his burden, following a soldier ahead of him, part of a thin, winding, ant-like file of men that converged with others to form a stream of burdened figures slopping upslope across boggy fjeld. With each step, cold soupy muck covered Matts' bare feet. The feet of men ahead had compressed the deep, spongy sphagnum moss, pressing water from it, forming a shallow watery trail. It wasn't nearly as effortful as pushing pack horses or heaving on wagons, but with both arms occupied the whole distance, the blackflies, mosquitoes, deer flies, bull flies—all had free access to face, neck and hands.

Matts wore a pack now, not heavy because he had so little to put in it: a half-loaf of rye bread, brown, tough, and rank—and his shoes! Actual shoes! He didn't want to lose them in the slop. Worn previously by a pneumonia victim, they'd been issued to Matts as one of the sergeant major's messengers. The lines of fascine bearers moved slowly but steadily upslope to where other men lay the fascines on the boggy fjeld as a sort of sub-pavement. Other men slogged on other trails, from farther down the slope, where spruce forest grew. Soldiers felled trees with axes, limbed them, and chopped them into lengths, to be carried off on strong shoulders, and laid as crude paving atop the fascines.

On the general's orders, no one was exempt from cutting and carrying. Even officers—even chaplains!—were assigned their turns. It was rumored that “gen'ralen själv” —the general himself—had been seen bearing fascines in his long arms.

For three months Matts had been with the army—he'd figured it himself, from June nearly to September—and none of it had been what he'd expected. No drilling, no firing a musket, no slashing and thrusting with saber or bayonet. No enemy that he'd seen! He felt a little disappointed. But just now his biggest problems were the insects and his grumbling stomach. The first chance he had, he would take out his hunk of bread and bite off as many mouthfuls as time allowed. Two bites at least!



Lars Olofsson Skoogh set aside his axe, and pushed on the slender spruce he'd chopped almost off its stump. Grudgingly it gave way to his pressure and began to fall, branches swishing against those of another still standing, which twisted it; abruptly it kicked backward off the stump, to thud softly onto the moss and low heath.

Lars's axe served for more than chopping. Four axe-lengths measured the length of one corduroy here, and quickly, deftly, he chopped through the prostrate, 25 cm trunk. Then, lopping thin branches as he went, he measured off and cut another length, and three more, before the trunk became too slender and limby to serve. He paused a moment to straighten—the axe was short, and his back complained—then strode to the next tree. Meanwhile another soldier upended one of the cut lengths, wrapped his arms around it and straightened his legs, tipping the small log onto a shoulder. Then, balancing it, he plodded off.

Lars much preferred his occasional work with Longström's raiders—interesting men, interesting jobs, and less dangerous, it seemed to him, than battle would be—but this wasn't bad. He'd cut a lot of trees in his life, and was good at it.



Karl Gustaf Armfelt stopped his horse atop a rise at the front of the column. Beside him Captain Rickman pointed at the body of blue water some kilometers ahead. “Feren,” Rickman said pointing. There was woodland around the lake, Armfelt noted, much of it birch, coarse and open, but more than a little of it spruce, relatively crowded, probably suitable for corduroys. How much more corduroy would be needed? Just

here it wasn't so boggy.

Soldiering was hard. The general had begun his career in the usual way, as a common, teen-aged soldier in a German mercenary regiment (not counting his earlier, periodic service in his uncle's regiment in peacetime Finland). That had been common, then, for the sons of Ingrian gentry.²¹

Most of his soldiers were peasants, whose life outside the army had been hard. He knew them well, and admired them—men who'd soldiered for years, with no end in sight. They'd waste little energy cursing the fjeld. As for himself—he had worries and responsibilities they did not. Like them he'd continue to accept things as they came, working with, through, and around the difficulties, making use of whatever came to hand.

He did, though, have unkind thoughts about the clouds of gnats, mosquitoes and flies that tormented men and horses. His long, strong-boned face was puffy from their bites. His horse's head tossed continuously, snorting to dislodge the fierce and ruthless gnats from its nostrils. Its suffering ears twitched constantly. The general wondered if horses knew enough to long for a hard freeze, to lay their tormentors low.

His thoughts slid back to soldiering. *War is hard. One does what one must, and trusts in God.* And God willing, if this strategy worked, bypassing the Dano-Norwegian *förhuggningar* along the upper Sul, he would capture Trondheim without the lost howitzers, and with far fewer casualties along the way.

He took a map from a saddlebag, and began to connect what he saw around him to the inked depiction he held.



The army bivouacked that evening near the east end of Feren, where a stream flowed into it. The mild, humid air was motionless. Even sitting or lying in their tents, the men sweated. Birchbark had been peeled and lit, the flames fed first with dead

²¹ Ingria was a district south across the Gulf of Finland. Its peasants were Finnish, and Finnish-speaking, its gentry ethnic Germans, Swedes and Russians, with German as their common speech. But they spoke Finnish, too, to communicate with the farmhands, domestics, and tenants. The sons of gentry often enlisted as common soldiers in German mercenary companies, for a living and a way of life. You could advance in rank if you survived. Meanwhile you experienced the life and hardships of common soldiers.

twigs and branches, then with green, for smoke, the soldiers' weapon against the insects. And in their tents, stuffed and lit their pungent pipes. They were weary. And famished. Supper would be barley porridge, pea soup, tough stringy beef, and rye bread with butter or lard. Few complained; back home, their families mostly had less. Especially in Finland, where they were a conquered people, required to feed the occupying Russians, Tartars, and Cossacks.

Matts no longer bivouacked with the herdboys and baggage boys. As one of the sergeant major's messengers, he'd been assigned to headquarters company, and tented with its men, who told more interesting stories than herdboys or baggage boys could.

And nearby, Lars Olofsson Skoogh was quartered. He'd also been assigned to headquarters company, ready to hand when Longström wanted him. Matts still wanted to learn Norwegian, and Lars had begun teaching him as circumstances allowed, drilling him on words and idioms that differed from Swedish, or from Swedish as Lars knew it. And by practicing the differences in pronunciation of words that were similar.

"If you were among them right now," Lars had told him, "you would mostly understand what they said. But they would know you for a Swede the first time you opened your mouth. So if you have to make your way among them, say no more than you truly must. And pray a lot. Silently."

Matts began to think he should forget about being a spy. Even the Jämtlanders could tell he was a southerner, not a Jämtlander. And the Finns? When they spoke their own language, he wondered how they could even understand each other!

But if nothing else, it was a way to pass half an hour in the evening, and he could practice to himself when Lars was off somewhere with Longström's folk.



At Feren there was no farmhouse in which the general and his staff could lodge. Not even a humble shelter like Skalstuga. So the staff tent was erected, and with supper in their bellies, Armfelt met with his staff and other senior commanders. A small smudge fire smoldered near the rear, and one side of the tent was rolled up a bit to reduce the smoke.

"Iggström," Armfelt said, "how stands the horse herd?"

"General, of some 6,800 horses we had when we left Duved, we have lost 712 at last

report. Wagon horses especially, but many pack horses too. The saddle horses were the soundest to begin with, and the wagon horses have been the hardest used. Mostly they died of exhaustion, or became windbroken and were put down. But many seem to have been poisoned, perhaps from bad water; some pools were full of dead lemmings."

Armfelt nodded glumly. "Longström, what of the Dane? Have we misled him, do you think? It is not too late to alter our plan."

Longström summarized his efforts to confuse "the Dane," then told what he'd learned of the approaches to Steine Skans. "It would be easier to go south to Meråker than north to Steine, and Meråker is on the Stjørdal, the most direct approach to Trondheim. But below Meråker, the river passes through a deep gorge, with *förhugningar* that make it deadly. West of Feren here, the Forra River would take us to the Stjørdal below the gorge, but that's a long way through forest, cutting road for the wagons, in the teeth of *förhugningar* again. It would be bloody.

"Just now the Dane can't be sure we won't try one of the others; my patrols have shown themselves on all approaches. Marching northwest to Lake Grønningen is not only the best approach to Steine. We can also travel west from Grønningen to the Tylda, and follow that to Stjørdal below the gorge. But that way, like the Forra, requires cutting road through some kilometers of *förhugningar*, with many opportunities for ambushes.

"Steine is still the best route. Longest but best. We'll have to climb another steep pitch, but it is little if any worse than the one we climbed above Skals Lake. A lot of cordoruy will be needed, but not much more than it took to get here. As we near the skans, there'll be another *förhugning*, but we can flank it. It was felled against a march from the upper Sul, and when we scouted it earlier today, it wasn't manned.

"As for the skans itself—two days ago, General Budde was there."

This generated a buzz. "How do you know that?" It was the king's adjutant, Major Hård, who asked.

"We put a spy inside: a guide and interpreter from Jämtland's regiment. He speaks the dialect. He even talked to General Budde—sold him a reindeer he'd shot. That's the pretense that got him inside, where he had a good look around. It seems unchanged from what we'd been told earlier, except for an earthen wingwall added on the north

flank, apparently with eight guns. Emplaced facing *east!*” The wrong direction. “Judging from the size of the skans, and from Skoogh's observations, the garrison can hardly number a thousand. The numbers we'd heard earlier probably included units manning the *förhuggningar* we've bypassed above Sul.”

Hård interrupted. “This Jämtlander who passes as Norwegian—how can we know he's reliable? He probably has cousins in the Norwegian forces.”

The challenge annoyed Captain Longström, who did not hide it. He wasn't used to having his judgement challenged, or his preparations. “I learned what there is to know about him from General Horn's sergeant major, who knows the man and his family. Also, Skoogh left Norway with a grudge.

“And I have trusted him with my life. I would have asked the general for his transfer to my company, something I seldom do, but some of my men speak little Swedish, and Skoogh no Finnish. So I settle for borrowing him.”

Hård grunted; what was already done was beyond changing. “Nonetheless, watch him.”

There was another brief discussion—Major General Yxkull wanted to reconsider the Tyllda River Route, which might have been a long march out of the wilderness, but was a considerably shorter march to Trondheim. Armfelt granted it was shorter, but besides the military risks, there was the matter of provisions. “Taking Steine Skans will give us an open road through a fertile district where the crop this year is much better than in Sweden. And the skans itself should contain a large stock of provisions. Also, controlling it will force the Norwegians to abandon their defensive positions eastward up the Sul, which will give us the road. Autumn is nearly upon us, and when the road has frozen, we can bring siege guns over, and supplies, and evacuate the sick and wounded.”

Yxkull subsided. And Hård, still worried about treachery and a trap, reminded himself there were risks in whatever they might do. So he sat quietly through the rest of the meeting, listening and watching.

In his brief time with Armfelt, he'd seen evidence of rivalries and grudges. Not extreme, as such things went, but troublesome. Armfelt had a light hand and a mild tongue—too light, too mild, Hård told himself—but his ranking officers had shared

campaigns with him in Finland, dating back sixteen, eighteen years to Karelia and Ingria. They respected him. The ill will centered mainly on de la Barre; Colonel Stiernschantz clearly disliked him. And de la Barre's character had been questioned in Finland. But then, so had Stiernschantz's, and de la Barre was the one man who matched Armfelt in rank. More importantly, he was the only other officer there, in Hård's view, suited to command so large a force, should a command change become necessary.

Meanwhile de la Barre seemed firmly loyal to his commander. In Hård's view, Stiernschantz's reliability could still be questioned, though His Majesty had dismissed the charges against him. In fact, His Majesty had discussed Armfelt and his officers—their perceived strengths and weaknesses—before sending Hård on this mission. "Stiernschantz' weaknesses," the king had said, "do not include disloyalty. He is inclined to jealousy and grudges, but he was born a fighting man, and has repeatedly put his life at risk for king and country."

Nonetheless, as His Majesty's eyes with the Army of Jämtland, Hård would remain alert for problems.

As for Armfelt's plan...attacking Steine Skans probably was the right decision, but Steine was far from Trondheim. And Armfelt had never won a campaign, nor a major battle. Skirmishes, brief fights, yes, and his early record as a cavalry commander, he'd proven a bold, clever, and accomplished raider. "His only fear," His Majesty had said, "is not for himself. It is for his troops. And his Finns know it. They trust him not to waste them." His Majesty went on to describe Armfelt's shrewd strategy at Pälkäne, his generalship at Storkyro, his tireless persistence. And his Finnish regiments had stayed with him through the worst of times, in the teeth of hunger, hardship and discouragement, outnumbered, outgunned, and almost never paid.

"The risk," His Majesty had finished, "the *danger* is, he may think too long, study too long, wait too long. There is a time to strike—while the iron is hot. Be sensitive to the possibilities."

Remembering, Hård shook his head. Since Lewenhaupt's bitter defeat at Lesnaya, in the Ukraine, Sweden had little margin for error. And since Poltava, there was no Lewenhaupt or Rehnskiöld to put in command here. So Armfelt it must be.

Meanwhile—this was an exhausted army, men and horses both, and the campaign was barely underway. If the attack on Steine Skans turned out badly, morale would plunge.



“Hey you! Boy!”

Matts Karlsson i Stentorp looked back.

“Yes, you!” Thirty meters downslope, a soldier glared up at him. “Lend a hand on this rope!”

The soldier was one of a dozen or more pulling on a mud-slicked rope, trying to synchronize their effort with those of a teamster and eight horses struggling to pull a loaded wagon up a steep corduroyed pitch. More men were behind, prying with tough birch handspikes. But Matts had been berated for accepting tasks from others while carrying out the sergeant major’s orders. So he gave the shouting man only a glance, then continued his work, driving stakes, stabilizing corduroys.

He was working his way upslope on the left-hand side of the road, a bag of twenty-inch wooden stakes on his shoulder. Using a hatchet, he hammered a stake on the downhill side of every fourth corduroy, stones permitting. A sometime baggage boy was doing the same thing on the right-hand side, both working fast, to keep up with the men laying corduroys. Matts had just taken another stake from his bag when his work partner called from the other side of the road: “Matts! Behind you!”

Approaching a few meters downslope was the soldier who’d called to him, breathing hard, fists clenched, muddy face twisted with anger. Matts straightened, heart and breath frozen in his chest. It was the ex-sailor who’d cooked for the gravel crew; the one the others thought was crazy.

“God damn you!” the man shouted, spittle spraying, and lunging, swung a fist. Matts raised an arm against the blow. The soldier slipped in the mud, and falling, clutched at the arm, catching a sleeve. The worn-out shirt split up the back, pulling over Matts’ shoulders and down his arms. Twisting, Matts shucked free of it, scrabbling back, leaving the rags in the soldier’s hand.

“Private, sir,” the boy said, “Sergeant Major Wallmo told me that when he put me to a task, I am not to leave it when others tell me to.”

The man stared first at the boy's earnest face, then at the hatchet. With an effort he got to his knees, then slowly stood, and without a word, turned back to the men still pulling on the rope. For a moment Matts gawped after him, then picked up his ruined muddy shirt, stuffed it into his waist band, and began to drive another stake.



When the corduroy reached the top of the pitch, Matts left the stake bag by the road, to be picked up by the boy who brought stakes, and trotted off to report to Sergeant Major Wallmo. The sergeant major frowned. "Where's your shirt?"

Matts pulled it from his waistband and held it out. "Sergeant Major, sir, it is destroyed."

"How?"

In a few words, Matts told him, ending with, "and then he left."

Wallmo's frown deepened. He knew the man. "Go to Sergeant Löfgren. Tell him I want to see him when he has a chance. Then go to Supply and tell them I sent you. You are to be given another shirt. And breeches while you're there. Give him the ruined shirt, and tell him I will not have a naked messenger. Then come back here."

Matts saluted. "Thank you, sergeant major sir." He turned and hurried off, Wallmo watching.

Löfgren arrived in minutes. "You wanted to see me, sergeant major?"

"Yes. How is Ekblad doing?"

"He has been...coming along. Is this about your messenger?"

"Right. What do you know about it?"

"That the two had an encounter, Ekblad and the boy. Starrbäck reported it to me. His squad—two squads, actually—were on ropes, pulling a wagon up that steep little draw north of Herman's Nose. Ekblad shouted to the boy to come help. The boy ignored him, so Ekblad...went over to him. Uphill."

"Then what?"

"It seems Ekblad tried to strike him, but slipped and fell, ripping the boy's shirt off. But the boy kept his feet. Then Ekblad went back to his squad." Löfgren hesitated, then added, "According to Starrbäck, they exchanged words, but he doesn't know what was said."

“Do you want to be rid of Ekblad?”

“Well, I wouldn’t argue, but he’s been getting better. I believe he tries.”

“Thank you, Löfgren. Keep me informed. This is the army, not a circus. I may need to send him to the provost marshal.”

Löfgren left, wondering. For most men, a visit to “profossen” could perform miracles, but for others...

Watching Löfgren leave, the sergeant major wondered what those words had been that Ekblad and Matts had exchanged.



That evening the army bivouacked in the open tundra above Lake Grønningen, and Wallmo found his way to the camp of the regiment’s baggage boys, to the tent that sheltered Lennart Arnesson Kulle.

The sergeant major ducked, and looked inside. “Boy!” he said. “When you were staking corduroys today, did you see what went on between Private Ekblad and Matts Karlsson?”

Young Arnesson could guess to whom the sergeant major alluded, but asked, to be certain. “Ekblad?”

“The soldier that went over to Karlsson and may have struck him. Tried to. What did you see?”

“He struck at Matts, all right, but Matts dodged, and the soldier fell down. It was slippery.”

“What was said between them?”

“Well, first—first the soldier cursed Matts, then struck at him and fell down. Matts didn’t quite fall. His shirt pulled off. Then he said you’d ordered him not to go off whenever someone told him to. Not while he was on your orders. Then the soldier got up and went back where he’d been. To the rope he’d been pulling on.” The boy paused, then continued. “I think the soldier was afraid. Matts still held the hatchet he’d been using.”

Wallmo’s eyebrows rose. “Did Matts threaten him with it?”

“No sir, sergeant major sir. He didn’t raise it or anything, not even when the soldier tried to hit him. I’m sure of it. I was thinking I would have, but Matts didn’t.”

For a moment, Wallmo wasn't sure he altogether approved of that much self control. But Björkebom had said the boy could act when he thought it was the right thing to do. And Ekblad still had wits enough to back off. That was hopeful. "Thank you, Arnesson," said the sergeant major, and started back to his tent. It was, he thought, time to put this day behind him, and sleep.

He'd gone no more than fifty paces when a shout turned his head. Night had fallen—at this late date, true night—and flames had appeared atop a prominence off to the northwest, growing as he watched. A signal beacon! And now, due west atop a more distant bald, another appeared, and southwest across Grønningen, another. They grew, warning whoever was out that "the Swedes have come! The Swedes have come!" Wallmo had no doubt they'd know it in Trondheim within minutes, 80 km off west. Meanwhile, more serious for now, they'd know in Steine Skans.



Few in the army watched till the flames died. Bugles and voices would rouse them from sleep all too soon, to another day of chop and carry, pull and push. And march. The word was, the new day would be less strenuous than today had been. And the beacons had been less worrisome than exciting. For most of the army they carried little flavor of menace. The Finns, grown stoic over years of war, shrugged them off as unimportant.



This time the general convened his staff and regimental commanders under the sky. "So," he said, "the Dane knows we are here. Now he'll want to know whether we'll ride against Steine or to the Tylda. Budde will guess Steine, but he won't settle for guessing. He'll send a patrol, probably by early light, to estimate our force, intentions, and progress. Captain Rickman had patrols out toward Steine this afternoon, looking for Norwegians, and if there'd been any, we would know of them. No doubt Budde was reached by one of the fisherfolk who fled Feren west on foot, then north to Værdal. Or folk who fled south to Meråker, from where couriers could have ridden west, then north across the fjeld.

"Whatever the case, I just sent Colonel Jungh and a company of his Karelians to deal with any patrols from Steine. Disrupt and bloody them before they can learn

much, and bring prisoners for questioning. Any who make their way back to Steine will know one thing for certain—that the Finns have come, and are terrible to fight.”

PART THREE

VICTORIES

Chapter 17

Steine Skans

It's well that horses see better in the dark than men do, thought Major Hård. They rode through open stands of coarse mountain birch, sparse enough to let in the first dawnlight. But even so, Hård could discern little and dimly what was around them. Behind and to the sides, he could hear horses plodding on wet ground, carrying Armfelt and Captain Longström, along with the general's adjutant, Major Gotthard Vilhelm Marks von Württemberg, and the commander of the Karelian cavalry.

They'd broken camp before first light, and were well beyond the corduroy now. The trail was a scant path, created, he supposed, by patrols. And by the Jämtish infantry company sent to make a diversion.

Dawnlight grew reluctantly, but before they reached spruce forest, the sun had risen. By the time they reached the *förhuggning*, it had warmed the blackflies, mosquitoes and bull flies back to life. From downslope came the faint sound of axes, but not of falling trees. Nor musketry. The diversionary infantry, Hård realized, were clearing their way through the *förhuggning*, and meeting no resistance. Hopefully they wouldn't. Jungh had jumped a Norwegian patrol the day before, killing some and capturing some, while others had successfully fled. Whether Budde knew Steine was the target was uncertain, but he'd be prepared.

Now Longström had turned west, flanking the *förhuggning* quietly, neither dawdling nor rushing. Here the way was mostly firm, and the scattered fallen trees that hampered them had fallen to decay, shallow rooting and wind, not axes.

So far, Hård had been reasonably well impressed by Armfelt and his army, having reconciled himself to the tardy departure from Duved, the slow pace of progress westward, and the loss of the 6-pounders. As for leaving the road at Skalstugan to cross the wilderness...that was the sort of bold strategy His Majesty liked, had been known

for, beginning with his forced march to relieve the first siege of Narva, taking the Russians unaware and casting them into dismay, confusion and defeat.

Now, escorted by bloodthirsty flies, the army moved to attack Steine Skans. By midday they would fight, for Armfelt didn't intend to wait for most of his army to catch up. He'd begin the battle with his Karelian and Jämtish cavalry, some 700 in all.



At the flank of the *förhuggning*, they reached the cattle driveway. According to Longström, it led from the river Sul, west of the Skans, to a summer dairy on the fjeld. It had been left unblocked, presumably for Budde's own patrols—unless he'd sent axmen to block it the day before. Last night would have been too late, and night in the spruce forest too dark to even think of felling trees. But might there be ambushes?

Abruptly Hård heard distant musketry off east; the general's diversion. *A company of Jämtish infantry is getting its baptism of fire*, he told himself. Armfelt turned and beckoned, and Hård joined him. Then Jungh signalled, and followed by his Karelian cavalry, started off downhill, followed by Rickman's mounted Jämtlanders. Hård felt a thrill of gooseflesh; the dice were cast!, and the cavalry charge was the soul of war. When they had passed, Armfelt himself, with Longström, Marks von Würtemberg, Hård—and Armfelt's young pistol bearer—also started downhill, following the shock troops. Taking the boy was an expression of Armfelt's confidence.



It was late afternoon before Matts saw the Sul, and from a little distance, the skans. He was famished, muddy to the eyes, and felt used up despite much of the march having been downhill. But even so, there'd been abundant pushing and pulling of horses and wagons, even for the sergeant major's messengers.

Then, while the regiment ate its evening meal—a porridge of barley and peas, with hardtack and slimey salt herring—Matts, as the junior messenger, carried the sergeant major's report to General Horn, who was at the skans now. His meal was a fragment of hardtack, gnawed on as he trotted.

Steine Skans had something Duved had not: a long low earthen wall extended northward from the skans proper, fronted by a low palisade, and topped by a row of cannon. Even Matts realized what it would have meant if it had been necessary to

storm the fort from the east.

Inside the skans, he waited in a vestibule, on a bench against a log wall, listening to loud talk and laughter from feasting officers. There'd been abundant rum in the skans's commissary. After a few minutes, the officer of the watch, an ensign, came into the vestibule. The ensign was old for his rank, had thick peasant fingers, and his rugged features were frost-scarred from the Ukraine. He too had been drinking. Seeing Matts, he frowned.

"Why haven't you washed, soldier?"

It was the first time Matts had been called soldier. "Sir, we have just arrived, and Sergeant Major Wallmo sent me with a message to General Horn.

"Ah!" The ensign examined the boy more closely. "Where is your saber, soldier?"

"Sir, I do not have a saber. I'm not really a soldier, sir. I was a herdboyc till the sergeant major made me a messenger."

The frown deepened. "You wear a uniform hat. And shirt. And breeches."

"Sir, these are all I have, sir. My old shirt was destroyed, and Sergeant Major Wallmo had these things issued to me. He said he could not have a naked messenger, sir."

"Ah," the ensign repeated, nodding slowly, as if Matts had said something profound. "Very well, messenger. Give me the message."

"Sir, I do not have permission to give the message to anyone other than General Horn or his adjutant or aide, sir."

Again the slow nod. "Have you eaten, messenger?"

"No sir."

"Very well." The ensign winked at Matts then, and left, leaving the boy puzzled. A few minutes later a soldier entered, carrying a large plate piled with boiled beef, turnip, peas, carrots, and buttered bread. Grinning, he gave it to Matts, saying "the officer of the watch said 'feed the boy.'"

"They are making merry in there," the soldier confided. "This has been a great day. The Danes scattered like quail. Only one of ours was killed, and two wounded. In two weeks we will be in Trondheim."

A little later, Horn's aide came in and took Sergeant Major Wallmo's message. Then

Matts left the empty plate on the bench and started back to his regiment, thinking the day had ended very well.

Chapter 18

Langstein Pass

On the morning following the capture of Steine Skans, Armfelt again convened his staff, the rest of his regimental commanders, and commanders of smaller units not attached to a regiment. Notably Captain Longström. They met in the staff room at the Skans, relaxed and confident, though more than one brought a headache with him from the previous night's partying.

Chaplain Falck had stayed in bed. The grueling trip through the wilderness had worsened his lumbago, his arthritic hips and knees, and his now bleeding hemorrhoids. So it was Nils Idman, a chaplain in Armfelt's own old regiment, who opened the meeting with prayer.

"Heavenly Father," Idman began, "we thank Thee for the victory here. Bless these brave commanders and this brave army. Give them the strength and will to continue to overcome. Give us, we pray Thee—give the town of Trondheim into our hands, and the land and people of Norway into the merciful hands of Your servant, our blessed King Karl. Bless Sweden and her people, and please God give strength and succor to the people of Finland. Give the occupying army—its commander, its officers, its soldiers—a sense of Your own blessed mercy, that they may manifest it..."

Idman was less long-winded and his prayer more pertinent than the general's staff was used to. After the *Amen*, it was de la Barre who spoke, before Armfelt could begin the proceedings they were gathered for. "Where is Pastor Falck?"

"He finished yesterday's march on a litter," Armfelt answered. "There was blood on his saddle, and he could not walk. He's as hard-willed as any man among us, but I would not see him suffer so at his age. I'm leaving him here with the garrison. When the road through Sul freezes, and we have snow, he will ride back to Sweden in a sleigh. God spare him another day on horseback!"

De la Barre smiled inwardly. *Hard-willed? Karl Gustaf is being polite.* "And your army's new bishop?"

"Pastor Idman will serve in that capacity."

Armfelt scanned the room. "The army will have to do with a single day of rest for now; we leave tomorrow morning. Skaanes Skans is a day's march west, and I want it in our hands by tomorrow night, if possible without fighting. The army can rest another day there.

"Then we'll move on Trondheim, and God willing, capture it before Budde can complete its defenses. Captain Rickman has reported on the routes from Skaanes to Stjørdal...." Armfelt reviewed the routes with them, and Captains Rickman and Longström elaborated with the details they'd observed, or their patrols had reported.

Armfelt suspected that Budde would not seriously contend for Skaanes Skans. It was on the shore of Trondheim Fjord, built more to protect its upper reaches from naval incursions, and neither placed nor designed to inhibit a land invasion from Sweden. But while it could therefore be bypassed, its capture was dictated by the provisions it held. And as a strategic strong point on the road from Sweden, for the shipment of supplies and the evacuation of wounded. By contrast, he expected hard fighting at Givings Ridge, where both Longström and Rickman had reported *förhuggningar* and breastworks. While Trondheim itself would feature more difficult defenses.

Meanwhile, given the sorry state of the supply route from Duved, in Sweden, the provisions at Skaanes were very important. To capture military stores had been part of warfare since before history, but Armfelt had never been happy confiscating provisions from civilians, any civilians. And in fact, the king had ruled they must be paid for, in Norway as in Sweden and Finland. Which was especially appropriate since he intended to join Norway to Sweden. And though 18 years of war had left his treasury effectively bankrupt, he'd managed to provide Armfelt with a money chest for the purpose. It would cover only a fraction of the value, but there *would* be payment. And while the farmers might not like it—*would* not like it—they'd recognize that the Swedish king viewed them as having rights. In fact, he was treating them as he treated his own subjects in wartime: no harder than he must.

Further, military discipline was to be strictly, and broadly, enforced among the foragers, with regard to the persons and goods of all Norwegian civilians who remained on their farms, and did not war against or threaten the invaders. Whom King Karl represented as their liberators. Foraging was to be orderly, and restricted to assigned units, which were to abide strictly by regulations. Robbing, looting and abusing would be severely punished. In Sweden, men had been forced to run the gantlet for crimes like those, and some had not survived it. Another had been hung. The point would be emphasized—and if necessary, publicly demonstrated—by similar punishments in Norway.

After a day of rest, on the morning of September 3, the army marched west from Steine Skans on a decent road (though the bridges had been destroyed), through pleasant sunshine and fields of late-ripening grain. At about 8 PM that evening, the commander of Skaanes Skans surrendered the small fort without resistance, and the army set up camp in nearby fields. In the dark, for the equinox was closing on them, reminding them that winter was coming.

The next day the army enjoyed another day of rest. It had marched as far west as the ocean allowed. On September 5, it turned southward, for a two-day march through fertile farmland to the village of Åsen. From Åsen they marched 10 km farther, and camped again. Ahead the road entered a narrow pass, but not a pass over a mountain range. This one bypassed a steep-faced mountain by creeping along its foot, whose shattered stones edged Trondheim Fjord. It was a trail pretending to be a road, on one side cliffy, aproned here and there with scree slopes. On the other edge lay deep cold salty water. And Budde had closed the option of bypassing it by boat; for many kilometers, every boat his men could find, they'd commandeered or destroyed.

Here and there it was bordered on the upslope side by forest. Near its entrance, *förhugningar* had been felled, and breastworks built and manned, a forbidding proposition. But it seemed to Armfelt there might be an option.

During the fighting in Finland, Karelia and Ingria, Armfelt had proven himself a good analyst and planner, with analyses and plans built on the excellence of his outnumbered and outgunned troops. In the final battle of his unsuccessful defense of Finland, a key engagement was described in a letter by the Russian commander: «Then began a firefight that continued for almost an hour, and please believe me when I tell you, I hope never, ever again to witness such skill in firing and reloading.»²²

But directing large-scale actions was not Armfelt's forte. His successes had come in leading a cavalry company, or a battalion, in action, and his reputation was rooted in Ingria and Karelia. There he'd led raids in force against Russians and Cossacks, disrupting and pillaging enemy positions, often operating in a wild, ill-defined and forested no-man's land, striking unexpectedly, capturing prisoners, horses, wagons, and the always much-needed supplies. His capture of Steine Skans had made use of somewhat the same approach but with a large force, surprising, attacking out of the wilderness. And even there, the force involved in the fighting had been small and skillfully led.



Not often does a general accompany a patrol. This was a patrol in some force—Captain Peter Longström's entire 70-man company of mounted raiders. It had left camp at first dawn, on a rough farmers' road, a wagon trail through heavy forest of spruce and old pines, with scattered birch and aspen.

A much smaller patrol, six men, had scouted the area two days earlier, on Armfelt's orders, and its report seemed to promise what the general had hoped for. And needing a break from administration and planning, he decided to view the terrain for himself. There might even be a fight, something he hadn't really seen, personally, since Isokyrjö, in the failed defense of Finland.

Armfelt didn't at first hear the thuding hooves of a single horse; his hearing was less sensitive than it had once been. But Captain Longström heard them, and raised a gloved hand. His small column stopped. Some seconds later, one of his scouts appeared, his horse jogging back to them, its rider relaxed and grinning.

²² General Prince Mikael Golitsyn in a letter to General Admiral Feodor Matveevich Apraksin; this is my translation of a Swedish translation from Russian.

"Sir, it turns off a couple of furlongs ahead. With no fresh tracks except ours from day before yesterday."

"Ours" referred to the earlier, six-man patrol, of which the trooper had been a member. They'd reported a dairy camp trail, old and now little used.

"Good, Ahti," Longström said. "Continue."

Ahti saluted again, and turning his horse, jogged off.

The patrol rode on. A second scout sat his horse at the foot of the side trail. When he saw his captain and the general, the man waved, and receiving an answering wave, disappeared among the trees.

Longström and Armfelt followed, with the company. This trail was narrower and much less trampled than the one they'd left. Blowdowns had not recently been cleared, but Longström's men had lopped them down so horses could step over them. It climbed steadily, slanting mildly upward along the mountainside, with occasional switchbacks. The patrol rode without speaking, and slowly, sparing their overused mounts. After a bit, off to the right between the trees, they glimpsed the deep blue fjord sparkling in the sun. Armfelt's pulse quickened, his eyes brightening.

A little later, at another switchback, Ahti met them again, and beckoning, led them off the trail. For a while they picked their way among the trees, around or over occasional blowdowns, for here, winds from the north swept the forest, culling weakly rooted or decaying trees. A bit farther along, the slope steepened below, the forest opened, and Ahti swung off his mount. "Here," he said. "This is the place."

They all dismounted, leaving their reins trailing. On their right, a precipice overlooked the fjord. To their left, the mountain continued to climb, steep but no longer precipitous, and forested. On foot, Armfelt walked with Longström to the terrain break, where peering down the plunging slope, they saw outcrops and broken rock, with scattered scraggly pines precariously rooted. Far below, it tailed off a bit, with aprons of scree—treacherous accumulations of broken rock spreading downward. Between the scree aprons, scattered clumps of trees had stood, but many had been felled, and dragged downslope to form log breastworks overlooking the pass "road." In their shelter, scores of small figures could be seen, some wearing red jackets, others peasant homespun—militia and armed peasants lounging behind the felled tree trunks, muskets

at hand, waiting for the invaders to try the pass.

Armfelt seldom grinned—he was a sober man—but he grinned now, wolfishly, and spoke to Longström, who gave orders in rapid Finnish. His hard-bitten Finns too were grinning. Some unsheathed hatchets and attacked young birches, cutting pry poles. Then their captain raised and aimed his carbine—Saxon-made, its barrel rifled, a gift from the king himself—and squeezed the trigger. The boom rolled, but the source direction was uncertain, as usual with a first shot, and the men below sat up or got to their feet, looking around. High above them, his movements deft but quick, Longström reloaded, fired again, and this time a red jacketed figure fell sprawling.

Meanwhile his Finns had spread out, positioning themselves by boulders—no shortage of those—and began to push and pry. One rock, then others began to roll, then to *bound* down the precipitous slope, dislodging others and going airborne, until a thin avalanche of rocks was bounding, hurtling, crashing downward. Faintly the Finns, moving to other sizable rocks, heard cries of alarm from downslope. Even Longström and the general himself joined in the action. Below, figures clambered over the breastworks, fleeing—running where the ground permitted—two of them half carrying, half dragging a wounded comrade, and angled westward toward where boats could be seen at the water's edge. Farther along the slope, they were joined by scores more, that the Finns and their general hadn't seen.

The Finns watched the boats, some 30 of them, pull away, 10 or 12 men in each, their oarsmen long hardened to rowing, they and their passengers peering up the precipice to where men in blue jackets exulted. The boats made good time, westward down the fjord. It seemed to the Norwegians their defensive positions had become untenable, and the primordial crashing rocks had broken their morale.

Armfelt had followed up promptly on the opportunity. Several infantry companies started along the pass road before evening, to discourage a return by the Norwegians, but it proved unnecessary. The next morning the army followed.

Besides being the general's adjutant, Major Karl Kristof von Gertten was Armfelt's director of the march. To fully appreciate Langstein Pass, it had to be experienced, and

Gertten was doing just that. No "road" he'd seen before had matched it. Meanwhile it had begun to rain—the rocks were slick with it—and adding to everything else, just ahead a mass of rock and earth had slumped onto the already miserable road.

There is no way we can get that powder wagon—or any wagon—over that, von Gertten told himself. And bellowed. "Wallmo! Get that pile of rocks out of the way!"

"At once, major!" Sergeant Major Jakob Petersson Wallmo had already been eyeing the low mound, very largely of rock, expecting the order. Turning in his saddle, Wallmo addressed Sergeant Karl Gustafsson Björkebom, giving more explicit instructions. Björkebom turned his horse and rode back along the line of march, shouting his own orders. Within seconds, soldiers were yielding the right-of-way to the engineer platoon of Jämtland's regimental headquarters company, with its tool wagon. The platoon, with its appended civilian laborers, hustled forward as fast as the jumbled, wet stoney surface allowed.

Meanwhile, Langstein Pass was chewing up the army's badly worn shoes, and only God knew how they'd replace them.



Matts Karlsson i Stentorp was not having a good day. That morning, while loading a pack horse, he'd been kicked in the thigh. Fortunately it wasn't broken, but it looked like a port wine Christmas sausage port wine. A Norwegian horse it was, whose owner hadn't wanted to sell, but like Swedish farmers before him, had been given no choice. The horse had exacted revenge. The leg hurt severely, but Sergeant Björkebom had told Matts to work it off. *He's as bad as my mother,* Matts told himself glumly. Well, not quite. She'd have wrapped the injury with a poultice of cow manure before sending him back to his duties. The sergeant had imposed no poultice.

And in fact the pain's edge had dulled to a hard constant hurting that made him hobble but didn't disable him. Meanwhile Sergeant Löfgren had teamed him with Crazy Ekblad—who for whatever reason hated his guts—to lift and carry rocks and dump them into the fjord.

Still, Ekblad hadn't struck him, or even threatened to. He simply scowled a lot. Mostly they worked independently, taking separate rocks, but sometimes they took a larger rock together.

"Here! This one next!" Ekblad ordered, and setting his feet, bent to grasp the end of a longish slab larger than they'd dealt with before. Matts bent and strained, but could not raise his end. His hands slipped off it. Setting his own end down, Ekblad straightened, reexamining the rock. "Here," he said, "take this end. It's smaller; you can wrap your arms around it," and stepped around to the end Matts had failed with. The order startled Matts, who exchanged positions with the ex-sailor and grasped the smaller end. Ekblad raised the larger end, while Matts, with an effort, raised the smaller. Then, taking small uncertain steps, they bore it carefully across slippery, uneven footing to the water's edge and set it down, watching it slip into the dark water. Ekblad turned to Matts. "We won't take another so large, if I can help it. You do well for a boy, and we don't want to kill you."

Matts almost stared. "Thank you, Private Ekblad sir," he said, and went for a solo rock. He'd thought killing him was what Ekblad *wanted* to do, would already have done, if the army had permitted. Now Ekblad's praise—or implied praise—had somehow made his day, and Matts' painful leg felt not quite as bad as it had a minute earlier.



It happened on a short, steep pitch. The horses were driving hard, when the cannon they pulled slid sideways on a tilting slab, and a wheel caught in a gap between two boulders. Several things broke then simultaneously: the main wheel of the gun carriage, and the belly-bands and hames straps of the horses pulling it. Released by the broken harness, they burst forward, and the left wheelhorse went down on the rocks, dumping the teamster.²³ Surprisingly, both horse and man got up on their own. Well trained, the other three horses stopped too, to stand motionless.

The gun carriage was tilted half sideways, and the gun commander ordered his crew to unseat the gun barrel. They did, with some effort, then they waited for a replacement carriage to be brought up, and a harness mender.

Meanwhile a passing Finn, a large, massive, taciturn man, stopped, squatted deeply, wrapped his arms around the cannon barrel, and with a roar of effort—"SAATANNA!"—straightened. Then set the muzzle on a rock, raised it again, and struggled the heavy

²³ In the armies of Karl XII, teamsters mostly rode on the back of the left-hand wheel horse.

barrel backward onto his shoulder till it balanced. Soldiers paused, stared. Then, with small shuffling steps, and grunts of effort, he carried it up the short pitch and let it down at the top, leaning it against a boulder. One of his squad had paused to pick up the man's musket, and grinning, handed it to him. The giant muttered his thanks, and they resumed the march.

For two days the army worked its way along the 10 km-long pass, arriving at the other end somewhat disordered. There von Gertten and the unit officers sorted them out, and exhausted but in decent enough spirits, the army made camp at a place called Vold. Once more they'd overcome real difficulties without loss of human life—this time without even being shot at! When the general went to bed that night, in a comfortable farmhouse near Skatvold's church, he was pleased with what he'd accomplished, and fell asleep without foreboding.

Eventually to dream—dreamt of dreaming, and of waking to find himself in a sleigh. Idman was with him, looking like the Christ—brown-blond beard, white robe... "Where are we going, pastor?" asked the dreamer, and Idman said "to hell, Karl Gustaf." The words shocked him, filled him with dread. "To hell?"

"Hell on earth, general. That's where hell is, you know."

Then Idman disappeared, and he was alone. Looking around, he saw only a long line of men marching past him on the road, through snow to their thighs. They were white as the snow. "Are you my army?" he asked one of the them. "Ja visst, herr general," the soldier said. He too looked like the Christ. "Why are you so white?" "Because I am dead, herr general."

A thought arose then. "Am I dead too?" "Oh no, general."

"How...how did *you* die?" But the man was gone. All the soldiers were gone. His horses were gone, and the driver, the sleigh. He looked all around, and all he could see was snow.

Alone in the night. His heart shriveled to a walnut.

And he wakened. The room was lit only by embers in the fireplace. His face was wet with tears, and his soul desolate. He swung his legs out of bed, felt the plank floor

beneath his feet, and stood. *What a terrible dream*, he thought, even as the images slipped away, were gone or buried. Leaving only desolation tintured with dread. Going to his baggage, he dug from it a silver flask, sat down on his bed, and unstopping the flask, drank. Shuddered, felt heat scald his throat, and after a moment drank again. A few minutes and a few swallows later, he lay back down, and after a bit, fell once more asleep. So far as he knew, he dreamed no more that night.

In the morning he awakened to the shadow of that desolation, a vague, low-grade dread undefined and unrecognized. By the time he'd dressed and eaten, and participated in morning prayers, the dread had slipped beneath awareness, leaving only a faint residue to color his frame of mind, his decisions, his actions.

Chapter 19

Lord Weather Turns the Tide

With Steine Skans in Armfelt's hands, Norwegian forces upstream had abandoned their positions, leaving the road from Sweden uncontested. So Armfelt had sent a message to Frisenheim in Duved Skans, ordering that supplies be sent. For while he now held the supplies captured at Steine and Skaanes, an army of more than 6,000 men was using them up rapidly.

Now, with his army resting a day near Skatvold's Church, Armfelt had a decision to make: move on at once toward Trondheim? Or wait where he was till the supply train arrived? He chose to wait. To advance now would increase the distance the supplies would need to come.

But the wait dragged on for six days, and when the supply train arrived, the supplies it brought were little more than those the army had consumed while waiting. And meanwhile, the showery weather that had arrived during the struggle over Langstein Pass, had turned into serious rains.

As a result of the delay, the army arrived to find the Stjørdal River swollen and raging. Using logs as pontoons, he undertook to bridge it, but the rampaging river swept the bridge away before it could be anchored. His response was typical Armfelt: bite the bullet, adjust, and proceed with what appeared to him the best option remaining—*backtracking northward!*, first to the Levanger district, then to the Værdal district, where he set about harvesting the abandoned fields, while threshing, baking, foraging—building up a commissary on the site. Only then would he strike southward again toward Trondheim.

Chapter 20

An Old Adversary

The army was camped beneath leaden skies, largely in muddy pastures and stubble fields where rain swept the puddles. The more senior officers were billeted in farmhouses, from whose stone chimneys the rank smoke barely rose, spilling over and flowing sluggishly down the roofs, dissipating in the saturated air. Sergeants and some of the junior officers occupied the outbuildings, and envied their seniors. The lower ranks, most of them, sheltered in rows of lugubrious gray tents, too demoralized even to envy. Meanwhile half the army was coughing.

Rain had been falling almost uninterruptedly for days, with no intervening sunshine to spark hope in soldier hearts. Or dry their cold wet clothes, their cold, sodden, disintegrating shoes, their dank and miserable blankets. Fires were hard to kindle, and burned poorly, spending most of their heat to dry their wood. An adolescent boy, his pants around his knees, squatted over a straddle trench, relieving his bowels of the thin and retched excrement produced by seriously inadequate rations. He was fortunate not to have rampant diarrhea. When he was done, and had fastened his breeches with cold-clumsy fingers, he scuttled through the thin rain and disappeared into one of two crude log buildings, long and low, hurriedly raised by the Jämtland Regiment as one of its two *sjukhusena*—"sickhouses"—built to accommodate the seriously ill.

For two days Matts had worked harvesting a rye field. The work was more like gleaning than harvesting, for the Norwegian farmhands had fled to the forest when the Finns and Swedes first appeared, and again when the army had returned, and most of the crop, unharvested, had been beaten down by the rain, to lay on the sodden ground. To harvest it, the soldiers had to pick up the heads with wet fingers clumsy from cold.

The luckier worked in outbuildings—worked day and night—threshing, grinding, and baking. Building up a commissary for the march south against Trondheim.

An army of coughing, shitting, and sometimes puking soldiers. In an army of the sick, only the sickest were sent to the sickhouses, whose orderlies tended to catch what their patients had, and joined their ranks. Sergeant Major Wallmo had pulled Matts from harvesting and assigned him as orderly in one of the sickhouses. Crude, cold, drafty, it reeked of wood smoke. And gunpowder, burned to "clean the air." The dirt floor was largely covered with rows of blanket-covered sick, on low piles of damp moldy straw and marsh hay. Beneath the reek of smoke lurked the smell of mold, sickness, sour excrement...and death.

Matts fed more wet wood into a fire pit, grateful he wasn't out in the weather, harvesting. Another soldier had died, minutes earlier, before Matts' very eyes; his labored breathing had simply stopped. Died of *lungsjukan*, influenzal pneumonia in this case, but the barber/surgeons had only the vernacular name for it. Matts did not wonder why God let men die. It simply happened; death was part of life, its closing episode. Nor did he worry whether he might die in this cold damp place; he either would or he wouldn't.

Nonetheless, the experience shook him. No one before had ever died while he watched.

Having fed that fire, he went on to feed the others, and when next he noticed, another man occupied the straw where the dead man had been, though the blankets had been changed. This man seemed less sick, and his cough was different. Stronger. When he finished coughing, Matts recognized him.

"Good day, Private Eckblad sir," Matts said.

The blurry eyes shifted, focused, and the soldier grunted. "We meet again," Eckblad husked weakly, then paused. "You're not sick... What are you doing here?"

"Sergeant Major Wallmo sent me to help the surgeons, sir."

"Ah." <Cough cough cough cough!> "You're lucky... You could be out in that *djävla* rain...gleaning grain out of the mud." Ekblad's speech was punctuated with pauses to get his breath.

"I was, sir, until yesterday. Two orderlies here came down with *lungsjukan*, and I

had helped in the sickhouse at Duved Skans, so the Sergeant Major posted me here."

Ekblad lay staring at Matts without speaking, as if gathering strength. Then, "You look a lot like Elof...the last time I saw him... My younger brother."

"Thank you sir."

"Don't thank me for that... I didn't like him much... I was jealous of him. Mother always favored him at table... He got bigger servings." <cough cough cough cough!>... "But father favored me. I was...more help on the farm. And Elof was sneaky... He'd slip away. You're not sneaky... You always speak honestly; act honestly."

Matts didn't know how to answer that. "Uh...where is your home?"

Ekblad's eyes had closed, and for a moment he did not answer. Then they opened. "An island off the Finnish coast. But Swedish... It was called Mellanö... Then <cough cough cough cough! Gasp, wheeze>... "then, when I was 13...my father's squad was called into service, and...I was oldest, so I <cough cough cough! Snargle; spit>...so I became the man on the farm... But my mother was the boss. Then" <chuckle; cough cough cough>..."then she gave me the bigger servings... I had more work...to do...than ever."

He coughed some more, and afterward his eyes closed. Matts could hear the breath rattle in Ekblad's chest. The boy straightened, looking around for more work; then, eyes still closed, Ekblad spoke again.

"It was a good torp...we kept a cow...and an ox" <cough cough cough cough! Groan>... "Near the shore...were sand dunes...with thin grass here and there...and gulls and terns would swoop and circle... We grazed a few sheep." He paused again, to catch his breath. "And on one side was heath...with heather, and juniper, and pines...and swales with bog cotton...and sedge." <cough cough cough cough cough! Groan! Wheeze>.

"And...between the house and the meadow...a grove of birches and pines...that sheltered the house from the sea winds... Thrushes nested there..." <chuckle> "They would swoop on the cat when it climbed the nesting trees<cough cough cough> And I helped... I'd throw sticks and stones at the cat...and pine cones...and she'd give me a dirty look.... 'Go catch mice!' I'd tell her." Ekblad actually twitched a smile, and closed his eyes again, as if revisiting the grove in his mind, perhaps hearing the thrush's liquid

trills. "How they would sing, those thrushes, when it was...getting <cough cough cough cough, gasp>...getting light in the morning...and again at dusk in the evening... It was...beautiful."

The eyes remained closed, the only sound Ekblad's rattling breath, and after a minute Matts slipped away to find things needing to be done: a new patient helped in, a message carried, a slop bucket emptied. And always the fires to tend.



Later that day, Ekblad was beset by chills, so the on-duty barber/surgeon ordered him taken to the nearby sauna to cook the chills out. The sauna, like the sick house, was crudely built, of logs hastily squared, chinked with clay and sphagnum. The slab roof leaked, its door sagged on crude leather hinges, and in lieu of a chimney, it had a small smokehole in the roof. A savusauna it was, oven-hot, and reeking strongly with woodsmoke. More smoke than in the sickhouse, because the smoke hole was so small. Smoky enough, tears flowed with the sweat.

And hot! Almost too hot to breathe, it seemed to Matts.

Its benches were half full of naked men wearing only their ragged underdrawers, if anything. And even in haying time, Matts had never seen such sweating! It dripped from brows, noses, chins; rivulets flowed down limbs and torsos, drained from benches, turned the floor to mud.

The regiment was Swedes, and therefore the occupants were Swedes, not Finns. The sick slumped apathetically. Others simply sat glumly, ordered there to clean themselves. Once in a while one would whisk himself with a birch switch, or wash himself at a bucket, while on a block of wood, a corporal sat in charge, also in his underdrawers, as glum as any of them, a birch rod in one hand as his badge of office. After that first curious scan, Matts carefully looked no more; what would Pastor Sundberg say to such flagrant nudity!

Jössi Ekblad, on the other hand, did not fret. His home island was in the Turku Archdiocese, its Archbishop Finnish, not Swedish, and the attitude toward the sauna's nudity there was at worst casual, even friendly. In fact, on Mellanö, the parish men's sauna was a popular weekly meeting place—even the pastor attended—and no underdrawers were worn!

Meanwhile Jössi settled gratefully on a bench, the only man there who was happy with the situation.

Matts, on the other hand, left as soon as Ekblad sat down—he'd been ordered not to stay, and was grateful to leave. Old taboos, enforced by shame and priestly authority, and strengthened by threats of hellfire, can be hard to shed.

But no one hesitated to drink from the common cup. Heedless and unknowing, they shared their various pathogens. When, an hour later, Matts was sent to retrieve the ex-sailor, he found him unconscious on the mud floor. He'd fallen asleep and toppled off the bench, and the corporal had decided to let him lie there. Matts gripped Ekblad's sweat-slick shoulder and shook it. Slowly the soldier got up, took off his underdrawers, plunged them into a bucket, used them to clean the mud off, rinsed and wrung them out, put them back on, and smiling, nodded to Matts.

They left then, Ekblad seeming on the path to recovery.



That evening, by the flickering russet light of the sickhouse's heating fires, activity had stilled. Then Matts went to Jössi Ekblad and squatted beside him. He'd been thinking, wondering. "Why did you leave the torp to become a sailor?" he asked. "Did your brother take your place?—Elof? Is that his name? Or did your father come home?"

Ekblad's eyes had dulled since returning from the sauna. Now it seemed to Matts they sharpened for a moment, just a little. The chill hadn't come back, so far as Matts knew, but except for that, the rejuvenation from the sauna had faded. Died.

"My father did not come home... I, we..." He was seized again with coughing that left his hands shaking as if trying to dislodge ants. It left Matts shaken, too, witnessing it. After half a minute Ekblad answered. "When I was 15...my sister went to work at...the landlord's house... She was 14. Less than a year later she was discharged, six or seven months pregnant." The question had burned Ekblad, and he'd gotten that last sentence out without pausing. Then he had another coughing seizure that uncovered a new and weaker state. For two or three minutes he lay flaccid, too weak even to shake. But his eyes did not close, only stared at the roof, dull eyes in a dull gray face. Finally he spoke again, his voice a whisper now; Matts had to lean close to hear. "That whore's

son knocked her up...then discharged her for" <cough cough cough; cough cough cough cough! gasp, wheeze>..."for lewd behavior. She died giving birth. I'll never forget how she screamed... At least...Pastor Englund...let her be buried...in the churchyard."

For the first time in his life, Matts Karlsson I Stentorp seethed with sudden rage at injustice, a rage that swamped his generally good nature. Then Ekblad spoke again, a splash of cold water that brought Matts back shocked. "I would have killed him," Ekblad said, "but..." Matts had to lean close again. "My mother lost her mind then... She killed herself with the butcher knife... Pastor Englund buried her, too...though I was told later...the landlord complained to the bishop that her burial had...profaned the ground, and the others buried there."

Ekblad said almost nothing more that evening, except...when half an hour later Matts stopped to look at him, the man spoke as if no time had intervened since he'd last spoken. "*Själv mord* (self murder) they called it... Elof and I both left then. The *djävul* landlord kicked us off the torp...and let it to someone else... So we went to sea... After Englund confirmed Elof in the Church so...so he could get work...though he knew hardly a word of his catechism.

"I think he tried...Englund did...to be a good man... I never looked at that before."



Matts slept in the sickhouse, to be available if needed. He was up, and emptying slop buckets in the latrine, when Sergeant Major Wallmo checked the sickhouse next morning. The barber/surgeon told the sergeant major the boy was a find—that his diligence and good sense were exemplary. Wallmo toned it down a bit, passing it on, telling Matts only that the surgeon had spoken well of him.

When Matts had a chance, he approached Ekblad's bed, then held back. The barber/surgeon was checking the sick soldier, who it seemed had a conspicuously high temperature. His hand was on Ekblad's forehead. "I could feel your heat when I was two meters away!" he said. Then noticed the hovering boy. "You! Matts! Fetch me a basin! I need to bleed this man."

Matts knew the drill. He scurried off, to return with a basin. The surgeon was ready for him. From his small field kit he'd removed a *snäppare*, a small blood-letting scalpel. Raised Ekblad's limp arm and pulled up the sleeve, while Matts positioned the

basin. Then, with the scalpel, the man opened a vein. Blood poured weakly into the basin, a pint or more of it, before the surgeon pinched the cut closed, wrapped the forearm tightly with bandage, tied it, and nodded approvingly.

"That should do it," he said to Ekblad. "I'll be back later. If you are still this hot, I'll let out some more."

A little later Matts returned. Ekblad's eyes were closed, his breathing more labored than ever. Matts bent, speaking quietly. "Are you awake sir?"

The eyes opened, their focus seeking slowly for the boy. "Ja." The word was barely audible.

"Should I leave you alone?"

Ekblad's arm moved feebly. "No... Stay."

Then, slowly, with many pauses for breath, he began telling about his life as a sailor. His coughs, when they came, were weaker than before, the rattling worse, the words harder to hear, but he persisted. It was as if he was transferring his life, his memories, to the boy. Matt did not leave him, to feed a fire or even look around, till after half an hour the voice stopped, and the face sagged. But Ekblad still lived; Matts could hear his breath rattle.



The next time Matts checked, Ekblad was rolling around on his straw, muttering incoherently, and emitting heat Matts could feel without having to reach toward his forehead. Straightening, he hurried to the barber/surgeon. "Sir!" he began.

The man gestured silence. "Stay," he said, and finished the examination he was doing. Then, straightening, he turned to Matts. "All right. What is it?"

"Private Ekblad is thrashing on his bed, sir. And talking, but I can't understand what he's saying. He is really hot!"

The surgeon gusted a sigh. "*Förbanna!* I'll have to bleed him again. Get the basin."

This time he took more blood, two pints. Ordinarily he was not a surgeon who bled his patients heavily, but it seemed to him the case was urgent.

Now Matts stayed by Ekblad, willing him to live. Ekblad's breathing was weaker than ever, and he'd ceased his rolling about. Sometime later, his breathing stopped entirely. A few minutes later a chaplain came by and prayed briefly, then soldiers

removed the body.

Matts finished the day in a daze. When Sergeant Major Wallmo came in with the supervisory surgeon, Matts went to him. "Sergeant Major, sir, I want to be transferred back to harvesting."

Wallmo's eyebrows rose. "Why?"

"Private Ekblad died today."

"Several men died today. What was there about Ekblad's death that troubles you?"

Tears threatened to overflow Matts' eyes. "We had become friends, sir. Except for me, I think he had none in the army."

Friends? Ekblad? The sergeant major's attention sharpened.

Then Matts told briefly of Ekblad's narrative, of the torp, his sister and mother, even the birds, and began on his years at sea. Wallmo had listened gravely; now, spurred by pressing duties, cut it short. "Well. Do you still want to be a soldier?"

"Yessir, Sergeant Major sir." The words didn't have the certainty Wallmo was used to from the boy.

"Soldiers become used to death, Matts. Go and find Lars Skoogh. Tell him what you told me. See what he says. Go now."

When Matts had left, Wallmo shook his head. *Still a boy*, he told himself, *but you cannot let yourself become his father*. Perhaps Skoogh would be his big brother. Otherwise the boy would have to tough it out on his own.



Matts went to Lars's tent, and finding him asleep, left without waking him. He would, he thought, talk with him another time. Meanwhile he returned to his own straw bed in the sickhouse. Where, briefly, quietly, he wept. Silently. Afterward, lying there, it occurred to him he hadn't wept when Pål Eriksson had died, at Duved Skans. Pål, whom he'd known and played with all his life. Later, before sleeping, he realized that he and Pål had shared little of consequence, while Ekblad...Ekblad had shared everything.

The men who'd died during the army's harvesting/threshing/baking were buried

in neat rows of graves there, each marked by a short upright pine board carved with the deceased's name and *hvil i frid*, "rest in peace." Pine because the pitch it contained slowed decay. But even so, the board would rot soon enough, and break off.

To be reclaimed by the earth, as would the dead soldiers. In time, grain would grow there, or pasturage, or trees, and life would proceed.

Chapter 21

On toward Trondheim

Major Gotthard Vilhelm Marcks von Württemberg arrived at a prosperous farm named Marivold, on the fringe of the port town called Værdalsøren. The general had made his headquarters there. It was mid-afternoon on a slate-colored October 18, with sporadic rain and occasional confused snowflakes. Marcks was wet, numb with cold, and bone-tired. Had ridden nearly 900 km in 10 days, much of it in bad weather, snatching brief sleep when accommodations presented themselves. Changing horses at every infrequent opportunity, because decent horses—or any horses—were hard to find.

On the road, he'd met two of the king's aides, Didron and Zander, riding south to report to His Majesty. They'd paused, and told Marcks what to expect—a ragged, demoralized army, half starved and riddled with sickness. The general himself had had a severe fever, but refused to be bled. He'd survived without it.

"Too sick to die," Didron had said.

Dismounting, Marcks handed his reins to an orderly, then clumped up the sturdy wooden steps onto the stoop. "I have come from the king," he told the guard, and the man let him in. Inside, another soldier ushered him down a short hall, and opened a door. Marcks stepped inside and heard it close behind him.

Armfelt had looked up. "Major," he said, and unfolding his frame from his chair, stepped around the desk to greet his one-time aide, a king's courier now. Armfelt himself had come in just minutes earlier, from inspecting the Hälsingland regiment; had removed his boots for his orderly to clean, dry, and oil, and changed his wet breeches. Now, in his stocking feet, he greeted the king's courier. He knew the king's message would be critical. At best.

Marcks, though bone tired, was observant. He noted the general's haggard face, marked as much by stress as by illness. And the slight, uncharacteristic slump of his shoulders. He looked to have lost 10 kilograms or more.

"Sit if you'd like," Armfelt said gesturing. From the the gray-tinged face and mud-splashed boots, breeches, and cape, he knew the grueling ride the major had had.

"Thank you, Herr general." Marcks remained standing however. "I bear a message to you from His Majesty."

Armfelt nodded gravely, and extended a hand to receive it. Marcks glanced at a clerk, at a table across the room. "Eirik," Armfelt said, "leave us for now. I'll call you."

The clerk scuttled out. (It is possible to scuttle with the back straight.) When the man had closed the door behind himself, Marcks met the general's eyes; when delivering a message from His Majesty, diffidence was not appropriate, even before a general. "Herr general, His Majesty did not write it down. He had me memorize it."

"Ah," the general said, and straightened his shoulders, bracing himself.

Major Gotthard Vilhelm Marcks von Württemberg cleared his throat, preparing. "The ongoing withdrawal of the army toward Sweden is unacceptable! There must be no further delay! You will return southward to Trondheim at once, and capture the city, including Christensten, and Munksholm, and the entire diocese! No one must even consider returning to Sweden until that is accomplished, and even then not until I order it."

Marcks stopped then, indicating that was all of it. Armfelt nodded gravely. "Thank you, major. Now, stay a moment" Then he walked to the door and opened it. "Eirik! I have something for you to do!"



Armfelt called a meeting of his staff and regimental commanders, then summarized the king's orders, softening the tone slightly, but not the substance. Then he ordered intensified harvesting, threshing and baking. And foraging. Marcks attended, of course. He wondered what the king would say about those orders—they did not include marching orders—but having delivered the king's message, he'd reverted to the general's staff again. And thanks to Didron and Zander, he knew the half-starved state of the army, and the state of its health. So he would hold his tongue. The general faced very real problems here, and his plan, if not bold, was decisive and explicit, with targets. Clearly the king's message had re-energized him—though he still aimed at minimizing risk to his army. And while the actions he assigned, most of them, were

things they'd already been doing, that energy, that new and forceful sense of intention, it seemed to Marcks, would spread and grow.

And if some of the feuds within the general's staff had become as bad as Didron and Zander had described, they were stifled in the general's presence. Though what the feudists might say *outside* the general's presence...

He'd keep his ears open, as well as his eyes.



Captain Heiki Wapenkunnig sat his gelding beside a four-horse freight wagon half loaded with barrels, baskets, and sacks. Its tailgate was down, ready for more. One platoon stood guard, facing watchfully outward. His other three, short-handed platoons had dispersed to the three farmsteads, set more or less back from the road, to search for provisions. And fodder, which under the circumstances meant hay. Any grain they might find would feed men, not horses.

The sky had been clear, the past two days, and the nights had frozen hard. Today, though—today was cloudy, with a nasty wind and a threat of snow.

Heiki, a Finn, was functional in Swedish but uncertain with Norwegian. Most of Heiki's platoon, largely *Savolainit*—men from Savo—spoke little but Finnish, but each squad had at least one man assigned who spoke tolerable Swedish, and could make himself understood, more or less, to Norwegians. Men from the Jämtland regiment, used to Norwegian, were sometimes detailed to Finnish regiments as interpreters, one for each platoon on foraging duty.

Thus Corporal Lars Olofsson Skoogh stood beside the captain, both men scanning the small cluster of farms and the forest edges behind them. Their eyes were open for skulkers—Norwegian militia or scouts. Foraging was hazardous duty: Norwegian militias had attacked foraging parties. In upper Trondheim fjord, an entire short battalion of *Savolainit* had been foraging on the island of Ytterøy, when a flotilla of armed Norwegian coastal vessels had appeared offshore. The battalion had dispersed. Some tried to escape on the boat they'd come on, rowing for Skaanes Skans, and being caught up with, surrendered. More than 50 *Savolainit* had been taken prisoner.

And a more serious result was the damage to the Finnish reputation in the minds of Norwegians who heard of it.

Wapenkunnig disliked foraging duty. He'd been a sergeant in Lithuania, during the draconian foraging there to gather supplies for the Swedish-Finnish army in the Ukraine, and had despised the job. That had been 10 years previous, 10 years of a war that had made a cynic of him.

During the defense of Finland, he'd been commissioned an officer, and after the battle of Pälkäne, and again after Isokyrjö, he'd been promoted. He knew well the military necessity of foraging, but still didn't like it; Russians, Cossacks and Kalmucks were foraging in Finland today. Foraging and worse.

And to his mind, the king was Finland's only hope for freedom. There was no other.

There'd been intervals of sunshine the past two days, and the nights had frozen hard. But today, tattered dark clouds scudded across a leaden overcast, driven by a cutting wind, and threatening snow. One by one, the foraging platoons returned from their assigned farms. The last arrived a man short, with a sergeant bringing up the rear.

"Sergeant," the Captain called, "where is Private Skarpskytt?"

"He stopped to take a shit, sir. He'll be right along."

"Where was that? He was in a scouting squad."

"At the farm house. Said he was going to use the privy there, sir, out of the wind. Said he'd catch up with us."

Wapenkunnig grunted, and turned to the platoon leader. "Ensign, what did you find over there?"

"Three or four old turnips in a bag, sir. Some sour buttermilk in a crock. Sour but not rotten. Cleary they've had a cow there recently," he added meaningfully. "And there was a bag with about a hatful of rye flour. And an old woman who walks with a cane. Nothing worthwhile. No livestock now, but there was shit in the sheep pen and the cow shed, and the stable had a manure pile out back, none of it fresh—two or three days at least—but it's not old, either. The scout squad followed a trail back through the forest to a bigger trail. Looks like it goes to a summer dairy up on the fjeld. There were no tracks since the last hard rain, but it could be worth following up on."

Wapenkunnig nodded. All three farms had probably moved their livestock up on the mountain for safe keeping. The old woman had been left behind so they could

claim the sale money in case the livestock was found.

"Here comes Skarpskytt now," someone said.

Wapenkunnig's gaze shifted. The man was hurrying down the lane from the farmstead. When he arrived, the captain looked him over. "You took a shit before we left camp. You got diarrhea?"

"Not me, sir. It just wasn't ready yet."

"Take off your pack."

"Sir?"

"Take off your pack! I want to see what's in it."

Skarpskytt stood irresolute. Wapenkunnig drew his long pistol from its saddle holster and pointed it casually toward the man, gesturing. "Take it off! Now!"

The other men stood silent, watching while Skarpskytt reluctantly removed his pack. The pistol gestured again, a twitch. "Sergeant, empty it onto the tailgate. A piece at a time."

He watched—so did Skarpskytt—as the platoon sergeant lined up items on the tailgate. Along with assorted military gear was a silver candlestick. "Turn out your pockets. Now!"

Skarpskytt paled but obeyed. He added a silver brooch and some coins.

"How did you get those?"

"I...found them."

"At the farmhouse?"

"They're hiding food from us back there. Serves them right sir!"

With his free hand, Captain Heiki Wapenkunnig reached in a saddlebag, took out a pair of wrist irons, and tossed them to the platoon sergeant. "Shackle him."

For a moment it seemed Skarpskytt might resist, then he held out his rugged, scarred and callused peasant hands, and the sergeant shackled them.

The captain turned to his 1st sergeant, who was also mounted, and gestured toward the farmhouse. "Sergeant Krigsfalk, ride over there and see what you find."

The sergeant cantered his horse to the log farmhouse. They watched him dismount and go inside. Hardly a minute later he emerged, mounted, and cantered back.

"What did you find, sergeant?"

"The old woman, sir," the sergeant said. "Dead. Eyes bulged, tongue out. Choked to death."

The captain nodded and turned to the platoon leader. "Ensign, chain Skarpskytt behind a wagon and detail a man to watch him. Constantly. Skarpskytt, Provost Poponen will know what to do with you." He struck the edge of his hard right hand sharply onto the palm of his left. Skarpskytt flinched.



Wapenkunnig's forecast was mistaken. Their general would have a better, more just and satisfying idea. One that might even be memorialized in Trøndelag's folk lore.



Captain Jakob Johan Rickman, commander of Jämtland's cavalry company, led his men down a rough forest trail toward the settlement of Hegra. He was glad to be away from Værdal, with its miserable and unending gleaning, sickness, and suffering. And foraging, a hateful task. So far as practical, crossing the fjeld, they'd skirted within or along the edge of forest, where they were less likely to be spotted. But the terrain was less rugged on the open fjeld, better traveling, and in places he'd taken advantage of it. It hadn't rained—was too cold to rain—and given the wind, the transient snow showers had failed to blanket the ground and mark their passing. God be praised.

Now if the Stjørdal River is frozen... It was, almost certainly, at least in places; the real question being how thickly. That's what privates are for, he reminded himself. To test the ice.

Shortly they came to a förhuggning, recently felled but unmanned, smelling of spruce pitch. Its tangle of felled trees required leaving the trail, bypassing through trackless forest, where the horses had to pick their way around blowdowns and steep declines.

He wondered if the general's planted rumors had anything to do with the absence of Norwegian militia. And whether the *förhuggningar* on Givings Ridge were also unmanned.

At any rate, his orders took him only to the river. If Givings Ridge is manned, Rickman told himself, the army can bypass it via Hommel Creek. Then the Dane may pull all his people back into Trondheim. There's where we'll find out how good we really are. And how

good they are.



It was October 31,²⁴ and the army was on the move again with rations for 14 days. This time, crossing a plateau was very different from before. Its bogs and pools were frozen thickly enough to bear the weight of horses and men. The loaded wagons (some of them liberated from the Norwegians), and the few field pieces, were lashed onto “liberted” or newly made sledges so as not to break through. So the soldiers and civilian laborers weren't struggling to get horses and wagons out of mud holes; they simply marched. No blackflies, no sweat, no mud, no cutting and carrying of corduroys and fascines. These early days of winter cold had banished all that. And there was only a skim of snow on the ground.

The sun, always low in this season, brightened spirits, even as it failed to warm, and Rickman had reported stretches of weight-bearing ice on the Stjørdal River. Which meant other rivers would be crossable too, though the Dane no doubt had ships at work, clearing the ice from the Nidelva at Trondheim. De la Barre, with his two regiments of Finnish cavalry, might already know. There could be a courier on his way right now, to report what they'd learned. Meanwhile they'd give the Dane something to think about, keep him guessing.

My luck has turned good again, Armfelt told himself.

His morale hadn't been that good since he'd been with Longström on the mountain above Langstein. It was partly the sound of drums; he loved it. It cheered him as much as the sunshine. The army and each of its regiments had a kettle drummer riding in the lead, a great drum at each shoulder of his horse. Rolling thunder on horseback! And after the lead drummers, an undulant serpent of infantry and cavalry—a blue and yellow, 6 km long serpent—studded with lesser drummers and lesser drums, their staccatos crisp in the cold high air. Combined, the sound was like nothing else.

Karl Gustaf felt expanded.

He turned his mount off the trail, to watch his headquarters unit pass: soldiers, pack horses and wagons. And in their wake, a cluster of soldiers under arrest, slogging

²⁴ By the Julian calendar. By our calendar, it was November 10.

dully or sullenly behind the provost marshal, their hands shackled in front of them. He recognized Private Skarpskytt, who'd robbed and murdered an old woman. The man would do useful service yet.

Chapter 22

Three Spies and a Pig

Budde had succeeded in rekindling a degree of confidence in Trondheim, and was getting his defenses in order. Thirteen merchant ships had come with grain, and reinforcements had arrived from the south. The city now had a defense force of about 8,000. Also, a Danish man-of-war and two frigates lay in Trondheim harbor, prepared to shell any Swedish forces within reach. On the other hand, by October 16—in Armfelt's army, 171 had died since leaving Sweden, about 1,200 seriously ill had been sent to the forts, and of course he'd had to garrison Forts Steine and Skaanes. More had died since. Thus the army Armfelt had with him numbered fewer than 5,000.

Budde didn't realize how few men he faced.

The army crossed the Stjørdal River on the ice; Trondheim was only a few days march farther on.

Local tradition tells of an older woman who showed the army the way from the hamlet of Frigård to the hamlet of Høyby. When the general paid her, he advised her to put the money in her shoes. He then detailed two men to guard her till the army had passed. It also tells of a soldier who had robbed and murdered an old woman. Armfelt had the man escorted to Trondheim and turned over to the authorities there for trial and punishment, a story that spread throughout Trøndelag.

The weather warmed sharply, and there were more rains, melting the ice and regenerating mud. But there were no more boggy fjelds to cross; they were done with that.

As the army neared Trondheim, it found itself running low on food

again, and more than once paused awhile, to thresh grain and bake more bread, on which it largely subsisted. Then it moved on. Norwegian patrols skirmished with the invaders' patrols, with modest casualties on both sides.

Reaching the vicinity of Trondheim, they were shelled by the Norwegian forts, the cannon fire cheering Trondheim's people, whose morale was not high: thousands of reinforcements from the south [plus refugees from the countryside] had more than doubled the number of people crowded within; sickness was rampant.

The artillery fire was not returned. Armfelt lacked artillery heavier than 3-pounders. This lack also made a siege impractical. So Armfelt decided to storm the narrow neck of the peninsula on which Trondheim was situated, and had storming ladders built. (Norwegian spies would spread the word, depressing civilian morale.) Meanwhile the army changed locations several times. Rains had raised the river level, so from a captured sawmill, a quantity of lumber was taken, and pontoons built for a bridge to move troops into position to storm the wall.²⁵

The time was evening, the place Armfelt's headquarters on a large estate, a *herregård*, near Nypan. With Armfelt was Colonel von Gertte, with Ensign Iggström taking notes. Also General Horn, Major Cronstedt, Major Hård, Captain Longström, and Sgt Major Wallmo. (General de la Barre was off giving Budde another factor to account for, and seriously intimidating his reconnaissance efforts.) They discussed what was known about Trondheim's defenses.

"And what do we not know?" Armfelt asked.

It was Cronstedt, an engineer and expert on fortifications, who replied. "I have two answers. The first is, what *was* known has probably been changed. And the second is,

²⁵ Compiled and expanded from *Tre tusen man kvar på fjällen*, Majström & Boberg, 1944: pages 48-54; and *Armfelts Fälttåg mot Trondheim 1718-1719*, Svante Hedin, 1986: pages 52-57.

even as we speak, Budde is working as hard as he can to strengthen them further."

"Let me add a known," said Hård. "The Dane's warships will provide him with serious artillery support." He paused, glanced around. "It may be self-evident, but it bears repeating."

"We need a spy inside Trondheim," Armfelt said, "someone who can learn useful things about their defenses. Someone knowledgeable about fortifications, who knows what to look for. And what he's looking at." He scanned the room. "Someone who speaks the language well enough to pass as Norwegian. Or Danish."

Again it was Cronstedt who replied. "Lieutenant Rosenqvist might serve."

"Rosenqvist? The only Rosenqvist I know of is with the Hälsinglanders." Armfelt grimaced when he said it; the regiment had become anathema.

"That's him, General; Rosenqvist was assigned to the regiment after Tönningen. But he is personally from Bohuslän, and until the time of Karl X, Bohuslän was part of Norway. Even now the language there has a Norwegian sound. Also, Rosenqvist's mother was Norwegian, born and raised. From Østmark, which is in the south. Rosenqvist would have learned the language at her knee, or across it."

Hård spoke again. "Østmark is just south of Christiania, where I'm told Norwegian is spoken much differently than in the north."

"Your lordship..." This was a voice unfamiliar to most. In surprise, even annoyance, all eyes turned to the speaker, Sergeant Major Wallmo, who'd gone virtually unnoticed, part of the furniture. General Horn, with Armfelt's acquiescence, had brought him for his knowledge of Trøndelag and its people. "I lived and worked in Norway for a time, in the mine at Røros," Wallmo said. "Long enough to know that a Trønder will recognize a southerner's speech as being Norwegian."

Armfelt's eyebrows rose. "Then we need to question Rosenqvist. Find out whether he can successfully pass as one of them; a countryman." The general turned to Marcks von Würtemberg. "Gotthard," he said, "bring Rosenqvist here at once."

"Ja, Herr General." The adjutant got quickly to his feet and hurried out.

Armfelt turned the meeting to other matters then: troop morale; provisions; and information obtained from Norwegians. A few of whom were cooperative; agreeable at least. Their Danish overlords were tolerated but not generally loved. He suspected that

among many, the anti-Swedish attitude rested on the behavior of past Swedish commanders, and the consideration that better the king we're accustomed to than the king we scarcely know. *We Finns*, Armfelt told himself, *have experienced both Russians and Swedes. Our choice is simple.*

Lieutenant Rosenqvist arrived. He appeared to be in his early 30s, slim and blond. And worried looking: his regiment had been in serious trouble, and its command structure culled and reassembled. As for himself—he'd escaped the culling as much because of his junior rank as from any particular virtue he'd displayed. That and serving under a strong battery commander with a strong 1st sergeant. He'd even been promoted, posted as his company executive officer.

"Yes, General," he said, "in the north I could easily pass as a Norwegian from the south. But if I run into someone from Østmark, say, or Christiania—they might wonder. And more dangerous, Swedish usages are natural to me. As a spy, I would do well to speak no more than I must."

It was Longström who spoke next. "How often do you shave, lieutenant?"

Annoyance flashed in the blue eyes. "As often as need be."

"Ah. Your beard seems very pale and fine, what there is of it. Clean shaven and dressed in woman's clothes, you might pass for a farm wife, might you not? Your voice is even rather high."

The lieutenant flushed now. As an adolescent he'd gotten in fights over his voice. And done well in them; a free-holder's son, he'd worked in the fields and forest from childhood, and his slender body was supple, agile as well as strong.

Armfelt frowned. "What are you telling us, Captain?"

"The lieutenant, sir, might be better able to observe, be more ignored—dressed as a sour-faced farm wife. And be required to speak less. It would be her husband people would pay attention to, and question. Or answer his questions."

Armfelt's expression and voice turned thoughtful. "And who would be her husband?"

"I was thinking of Corporal Lars Olofsson Skoogh, of Jämtland's Regiment, General. He has served me boldly and well in the role of a Trønder. He fooled the Norwegians as

our spy at Holtålen and Steine, and had to think on his feet. He even fooled Budde himself in conversation."

Marcks von Württemberg spoke now, his expression interested, alert. It was he who'd arranged Skoogh's assignment and received the report. "So. A Trønder and his wife. If they were questioned, what might he say, this Corporal Skoogh?"

"Give him a fat swine," Longström said. "He could take it to town, to sell. He sold a reindeer to Budde."

"And how to explain bringing his wife?"

"She was afraid to be left on the farm. Afraid the Finns might get her."

Heads began to nod.

"So she left the children behind?"

"They have only one child. Hers. They brought him with them. He is...not bright."

"Why the child? Why so complicated a scenario?" Hård asked, more curious than challenging. Longström's mind and reputation had intrigued the king himself.

"Skoogh has a mind suited to spying. As I've said before, if he spoke Finnish, I'd have asked the Herr General to transfer him to me. Also, complexity provides opportunities.

"Skoogh is younger than his wife," he went on. "But she is strong, and has this child who is a problem to her, a child from her years as a bond girl, with a master who took advantage of his house girls. And Skoogh, who was visiting in Christiania, was in the market for a strong wife who would be beholden to him. And this one came with a bonus, a son to help on the farm. A dull-witted son, but well able to work and do as instructed. This is the sort of impression they need to give. To deflect attention."

"How do you propose to find a suitable child?"

"God has already provided him; I know the boy well." Longström turned to the sergeant major. "He is the messenger you sent me, and in truth is quite bright, as I believe you know." Then, turning back to Armfelt, he grinned: "You've seen him: the lad who dealt so well with your pistol bearer, by the stoop at Skalstugan. He is also a friend of Skoogh, who has been teaching him Norwegian. He has even learned a few words of Finnish! He has a good ear and good tongue for languages, though as a spy he must appear to be dull-witted and sullen, so the Trønder will not expect him to talk."

He paused. "His mother must appear sullen, too. That sullenness will protect them all from the hazards of idle conversation."

Armfelt nodded thoughtfully. "Which brings us to the matter of what questions they must be able to answer when they return."

They sorted that over till near midnight, with Armfelt, von Gertten and Cronstedt central to the discussion.

Four men and a boy lugged the clinker-built boat through the darkness, down to the riverbank. A well-grown barrow—a castrated pig—followed them on quick small hooves, led on a tether by a tall lank woman. A pig on a tether was not common, but neither was it so uncommon that it would draw particular attention. And who would expect a spy to be leading a pig?

Longström was inspired, it seemed to him.

Overnight the mud had frozen. None of the men wanted to get their boots wet needlessly, so they used the boat's prow to break the rim of new ice along the riverbank. Then, with the bow afloat, the woman and boy clambered in, she moving to the bow. One of the men, thick-shouldered and wearing farmer garb, picked up the pig, which out-weighed him, and put it in the stern. Its jaws had been tied shut with rawhide, to immobilize its tusks. Briefly it squealed, but did not try to struggle free; it had been a household pig since weaning—was used to being manhandled—and this man had lifted and carried it earlier. The boy took the tether and led the animal forward, giving the tether to the farm wife. She then turned the animal on its side and began scratching its ears, crooning to it. The boy, in turn, slipped a loop of rawhide around a hind foot, threw a loop around the other, and tied them together.

They'd drilled this on dry ground, overseen, coached, by Captain Longström himself.

With an effort, the men lifted the stern, and with strong rushing steps, pushed the craft free of the shore, the farmer pouncing aboard at the last moment. In quiet Norwegian, brief words were exchanged between the couple, then the farm-wife, crouching, worked her way back to the stern, while the farmer and his stepson took the

rowing seats. Meanwhile one of Longström's Finns hacked a blaze on the downstream side of a spruce on the riverbank. The man and boy seated the oars between thole pins and began to row downstream, keeping to the middle, letting the current do most of the work. The farm wife might take a turn later, but for now she simply rode; she outranked the man and boy.

They had a very long day ahead of them.



Morning was thinning the darkness when the boat passed Trondheim's upriver fortifications, giving the farmwife a decent look at them. An officer with a spyglass eyed but did not challenge the little family. By the time Lars tied up at a downstream wharf for small boats, visibility had widened. There a guard corporal questioned him, wrote down the names of the farmer and his farm, and gave Lars a chit. Meanwhile the pig's feet were freed. Then the family walked off toward the market, Lars in the lead, feigning a limp, followed by Lieutenant Rosenqvist and trailed by Matts, who led the pig on a short leash.

To a boy from Solslätte, the street up which they walked was a marvel, paved with smooth river rocks. He could see the advantage; even if the ground weren't frozen, it wouldn't be muddy. And the buildings along the street!—there was no space between them! And none were of logs. His curiosity almost compelled questions: Why? To what purpose? What are they called? Do such things exist elsewhere in Norway? But he'd been warned repeatedly, before they'd set out, not to ask questions, or talk at all except when ordered. No, not even if no one was near them. And there were lots of people on the street; there was always someone near enough to overhear, and realize he was not a dullard. So he stifled the impulses.

The market was remarkable for its size, and for the number of people there. Soldiers were there, too, Norwegian militia uniformed in red and white, carrying muskets with bayonets, and wearing sabers at their sides, making the danger real to Matts.

But Lieutenant Rosenqvist seemed unimpressed. The little "family" paused, and Matts took a shorter grip on the tether while the lieutenant scanned the crowd. The "farm wife" nudged "her husband," and when he looked at her, she gestured, barely,

with her scarf-bound head. They changed direction then, picking their way through the market crowd, all three Swedes listening for whatever seemed useful.

Till they reached a guarded area with a trestle table and two wagons. A Norwegian army officer stood by the table, listening to a man with a wheelbarrow that held a large basket-like crate stuffed with miserable-looking live ducks. Lars turned to Matts and took the tether from him, then positioned himself behind the short wiry man with the ducks. At the table, the man offered the birds for sale, and removed one for examination. The officer examined it, prodding and squeezing, referred to a list, and named a price. The farmer with the ducks looked as if he'd been slapped.

"They are worth three times that!"

The officer shrugged. "You can hardly take them home. The Swedes will take them and pay next to nothing. If that."

"Next to nothing is what you just offered. I'll sell them to a fowler."

"You should have done that in the first place. The army can hardly trouble with a few scrawny ducks..."

"A few? There are ten of them, and as well fed as you'll find! A table of officers would feed happily on them for a week with no trouble at all, and their lackeys would take care of the plucking and drawing." He put the abused, apathetic duck back in with the others, as if to leave.

"Just a moment. I'll give you, um...two shillings, and not a penny more. Duck *would* make someone a welcome change from herring."

The seller stood reluctant for a moment, then nodded glumly. The officer wrote a bill of sale. The man hoisted the crate onto one of the wagons, received his shillings, and left trundling the now empty wheelbarrow.

The ensign turned to Lars. "And I suppose you want to sell me a pig."

Lars, large and powerful, met his gaze calmly. "A very good pig. Weaned on buttermilk."

The ensign peered disapprovingly at the pig, then at his list. "Half a riksdaler."

Lars scowled. On him a scowl meant something. "There are laws against theft," he said.

The ensign scowled back, then abruptly grinned. "Sell it to the Swedes then."

"Never!" Lars gestured. "There's a butcher over there who'll offer more."

The ensign cocked an eyebrow. He'd been a farmer's son, and enjoyed a little dickering. "No, he'll offer less, then sell it to me for the price I just offered you."

Lars never blinked. "Shall we put it to the test?"

The ensign looked him up and down. "Why weren't you mobilized with the militia?"

"Because I lack toes on one foot. As a lad I broke a ski far out on the fjeld, and froze them badly enough to lose them. Now I can't keep up with others, especially on skis."

"Hmph." The ensign paused, pursing his lips, then looked around and spoke more softly. "I may get in trouble for this, but...I'll make that a riksdaler."

"A riksdaler." Lars's gaze dropped, and he gnawed a lip. "All right," he said, "a riksdaler... With the Swedes in the country, I could be dead by Christmas. We all could."



As they left the market, Matts looked around, sizing up their distance from the nearest other ears. "

"Pappa," he murmured, remembering their roles, "this is not the way we came."

Lars scowled at him. "Idiot! Of course not. I want to see the town. Matts blushed and nodded, and said nothing more. He'd been warned about talking needlessly, and determined to err no more. Walking, they soon approached a building he recognized as a church, though it was immensely larger than the church at Solslätte, and featured a massive, square stone tower. He wondered if that was where they were going.

It was. A heavy door opened into a lobby with a worn, much-swept carpet. There they paused briefly. Lars knew the local lore related to it, and spoke without muting. If anyone heard him through one of the inside doors, what he said would establish him as local, and his small family as from somewhere else—the south, judging by his wife's speech. "This is where Saint Olaf lies in his tomb," Lars said, "the greatest king of all time. It was built by King Harald the Harsh, a very long time ago, and was the greatest church in Norway, until it burned in the great fire some forty, fifty years ago. But when it was rebuilt, they left off the spire. Couldn't afford it."

"The greatest in Norway?" said his wife sniffily. "It is nowhere near as grand as the

cathedral in Christiania."



Deacon Tryggve Haraldsson had seen them from a window in the archbishopric, a man, woman, and gawky adolescent boy starting up the roadway from the street. But they were of no account, and he was putting on his coat, not so easy with arthritic shoulders, so his attention didn't follow them. A minute later he stepped out onto the stoop. It was cold but not freezing, or barely, and there was little breeze, so after he'd tasted the air, he went carefully down the several steps. (Though still quite active, he was elderly, and cautious going down stairs.) Ahead he saw the visitors he'd noticed out the window, a farm family from their clothing. Noticed now that although they walked briskly, the man limped.

As he trudged well behind them, they turned into the entranceway, climbed the steps and disappeared. Fritjhof had neglected to lock the door when he'd left; he'd have to scold him about that. With all the strangers in town, there was an increased risk of theft.

From the lobby he entered a side aisle. The pews were almost empty. Only the farmer and his son were there, in a pew near the rear. The woman, he decided, must be in the public *hemmelighus*. Going to the vestry, he hung up his cap and coat, then briefly visited the staff privy. Entering the nave, he saw the man and boy still sitting near the back. The woman still was not with them. Where then? He was sure he'd locked the vestry, where there were valuables worth stealing, but returned anyway and checked the lock.

Dismissing his concern, he went to the alter to pray and meditate. Then, his contemplations completed, he peered down the nave. The woman had not rejoined the man and boy, who still sat where they'd been. Where might she be?



Lars had seen the churchman enter, and felt vaguely uncomfortable, though not alarmed. A grayhead like him would hardly climb the steep stairs into the tower. After a time, the churchman finished praying and left, and still they sat, he waiting, Matts dozing. Lars grew restless. What could be taking Rosenqvist so long? Still he held patient a while. Finally he got to his feet, and waking Matts, murmured for him to

follow, then sidled from the pew and started back down the aisle. In the lobby, steep stairs climbed to an opening through the high ceiling, and soft-footedly they climbed them. The stairs opened onto a landing, from which two further flights rose to another opening high above. After pausing, they went on, as quietly as possible without removing their farmer boots. At the top, the stairs opened onto a final landing...where they found the deacon sprawled on the floor, seemingly dead, a puppet with the strings cut. Lieutenant Rosenqvist stood at a window, peering out. A small sketch pad and paper-wrapped graphite stick lay on the plank floor near his right foot.

"I heard you coming," he said, in Norwegian over his shoulder. Then paused, took a small spyglass from inside his blouse and looked briefly at something. "I've been sketching the new fortification work. I'll be done soon. Budde's had his people busy."

"What happened with...this?" Lars asked, gesturing toward the body.

"The churchman is dead, God rest him. He started up the stairs a while ago. I could hear his feet, and his loud breathing. After a few rests, he got here, and asked me what I was doing. I told him I'd come up to see God's splendid view. For a few seconds he said nothing more, just stared at me, his faced screwed up as if puzzling. Then his eyes grew wide, and I knew...he'd decided I was not a woman...or perhaps not Norwegian. His mouth opened as if to shout, so I grabbed him and struck his head against the stone wall. He went limp, and I choked him to make sure he wouldn't wake up."

Rosenqvist shrugged, then gestured. "Don't show yourselves at the windows. I'll soon be done with my sketching; then we can leave. It's unlikely anyone will think to look for him up here for a day or two—it's cold enough he shouldn't stink—and by that time we'll be with the army again."

Matts was pale as wheat dough, and looked as if he might vomit. Lars, himself a little pale, clapped Matts' shoulder. "We are at war," he murmured in Norwegian, "and at war it is often necessary to kill." Matts nodded without speaking. Meanwhile Rosenqvist alternately sketched and peered through his pocket spyglass,

Lars did peer briefly through a window, but kept half an arm's length back from it. Matts was not tempted; the corpse on the floor had shown him all he cared to see.



The three Swedes left as quietly as they could, then in the guise of a farm family, rubber-necked slowly along Kjøpmans Gata—Merchants Street—that paralleled the river. It bustled with construction. The riverside itself was lined with warehouses and shipwrights, most of wood, and storage yards, where the activity was greatest. Some buildings had been pulled down, providing space and materials, and workmen bustled. Much of it Rosenqvist had sketched from the tower. Now he was getting a closer look.

From time to time the farm wife would mutter something to her husband. He might then question an onlooker or working man about the work, as if from out of town, perhaps considering employment. It went well enough. Rosenqvist, maintaining his sullen demeanor, listened, recording it all in his mind, filling in his earlier observations and impressions, piecing things together.

The November daylight was short, and it was past midday when Lars bought a *limpa* of rye bread, tearing it in three parts. While they ate, they sauntered west on Kings Street to the narrow, strongly fortified neck, the land approach of the small, tadpole-shaped peninsula on which Trondheim was built. This fortification was known from earlier descriptions, but the general wanted to know what new work might have been accomplished or underway.

They paused where the street emerged from among the buildings—some 200 meters from the massive stone rampart, with its narrow gate. Uniformed men, muskets at order arms, stood atop the rampart, facing outward, away from town. Meanwhile, standing between the rampart and the town, was a mostly completed palisade perhaps 4 meters tall, its upright logs set in the earth, and backed by a dirt mound to withstand cannon fire. There was a walkway on top, and firing notches, with armed soldiers looking outward. Rosenqvist hadn't seen it from the church tower. Buildings had interrupted the view.

"Will you draw it, sir?" Lars murmured.

"No. I have drawn it in my mind."

"What next then?"

"We are at risk as long as we stay here, but we will take a roundabout way to the boat. There'll be as much to learn by listening as by seeing. And you will talk to one

and another of the locals, as a farmer from up the valley, curious about matters here in town."

"You listen too, Matts," Lars put in. "It's part of your duty here. Listen, but continue to act dull-witted. If they discover we are Swedes, we are dead men."

Rosenqvist didn't comment, but wondered why Lars had troubled to say it. Actually, since seeing the dead deacon, Matts had seemed in a state of shock, and Lars was trying to nudge him out of it.



They wandered east up Olav Tryggvasons Street to the north end of Kjøpmans Street—here a chaos of muddy ruts. Outside a tavern, three men stood talking; they'd obviously been inside already. By their clothes, they were townsmen. Lars stepped over to them. "What do people think here?" he asked. "Will the Swedes attack the town?"

One of the men grunted. "Why else would they come all this way?" Another added, "If they do, they'll get a bloody nose." The third added: "They may not stay long. Three englishmen—one of them three masted!—dropped anchor in the fjord two weeks ago. They'd expected the Swedes to be here already. One of their skippers told the mayor they'd come to haul the Swedes across to Scotland. That's what's said, anyway. Crazy! Why would they do that? Why would the Swedes want to go to Scotland? And it would take a lot more than three ships to haul that army."

One of the others laughed. "Scotland! They must have gotten some bad whiskey!"

The farm family betrayed no interest, but the wife recalled a rumor "she'd" overheard between two couriers from Strömsund—one newly arrived, one about to return—that when Trondheim was taken, it would be shipped from there to Scotland, to support the Jacobite pretender to the British throne.

A rumor he had not passed on. He considered rumor mongering a shameful effort to seem important. But he remembered. His memory was perhaps his best talent.



Where the Nidelva entered the fjord, the fortification work featured additions to pre-existing stone defense works at the end of the peninsula. A small gaggle of gaffers stood watching the work, exchanging comments, and Lars engaged them.

"Are most of the workers townsmen?" he asked. "Or are they farmers come to find paying jobs?"

The gaffers were not only hard of hearing, they'd been drinking, and the question loudened them. "Both," one said.

"Ja," said another, "and some are militia that got put to work..."

"That or conscripts. And if they want to eat, they need to work..."

"They came pouring in to town to defend it from the Swedes..."

"Or escape the Swedes..."

"So the army picked them up."

Not far off, a sergeant heard the exchanges—the noise mostly, he didn't catch most of the words—and spoke sharply to his men. The six *landvern*, militia lounging about in a semblance of order arms, came more or less to attention, their eyes on the gaffers and the man they were speaking with. The gaffers, who'd been aware of them before, saw the movement. Their attention shifted, drawing and directing Lars's. And Rosenqvist's. One of the gaffers noticed, and speaking less loudly, gestured with his head. "Farmer, I think you are about to join them."

"I want to go home," Rosenqvist said.

Lars faced his "wife." "Damn you, woman!" he bellowed. "I've had enough of your complaining! You and your damn kid! I can't even share a drink with these *gubber* without you whining! All right! We'll go home, but *you* will row, damn you, you and the boy! And when we get there..." He turned abruptly, stumbling, almost falling, caught himself and started off east, limping up Kjøpmans Street, his wife and stepson following. The bemused press squad watched them pass without accosting them, the farm family looking straight ahead.

Two furlongs farther on they reached the farmers' boat dock, where Lars showed his chit to the corporal of the guard. Then they clambered into their boat, the farmer giving orders, staying in the stern while his wife and stepson took the rowing seats. They shoved off with two of the oars, then seated them and rowed away, upstream into the current. Shortly they passed the end of the shore fortifications, from which a corporal called to them, more bantering than challenging. "Hey there, shit kicker, where are you going at this hour? Don't you know it's November! It'll be getting dark soon!"

Lars waved at them. "I left my money with the tavern keeper," he shouted back. "I have nothing left to hire a bed."

"You better be careful! The Swedes may catch you!"

"Ja, well maybe they'll steal my wife. Something good needs to happen to me!"

The soldiers laughed, and waved as "Anna" and Matts stroked past them upstream. Rosenqvist scowled at Lars but said nothing. "Sorry," Lars muttered when they'd pulled farther from the soldiers. "I needed to do something, or we might be there yet." He paused. "Should I take the oars now?"

Rosenqvist grunted, then barked a humorless laugh. "Not till we're out of sight. But then I'm done with rowing. After that it's you and the boy."

It wasn't though, for it was a long pull against the current, and he spelled each of them more than once. Meanwhile night came. Overcast. It seemed unlikely they'd spot the blazed spruce in the darkness, so they stopped when they saw a candlelit window in a farm house. The farmer there let them bed down in a hayshed, and they slept exhausted till they were wakened by lowing cows calling to be milked. With the farmer's family, they breakfasted sparsely on flatbread, cheese, and yesterday's buttermilk, then got into the boat again and pulled away upstream in the foggy, not quite freezing pre-dawn.



It was late in the day, and getting dark, and the general's headquarters, still at the manorial farmhouse, was lit mainly by the fireplace. Von Gertten was with him. Longström came in, bringing Rosenqvist, Lars and Matts.

"Your spies, general," Longström announced, "back from Trondheim. I brought them as soon as they arrived. They haven't eaten since breakfast."

The army hadn't either, of course. The general's gaze moved to Rosenqvist. "Indeed! What have you learned, lieutenant?"

"I made sketches of the work along the Nidelva. From the tower of the cathedral." He handed them to the general, who looked them over. "Also, we found a largely completed palisade at the neck, between the bastion and the town. Any forces climbing over the bastion will come immediately under fire again."

"Anything else?"

"A rumor. Corporal Skoogh was told that several Scottish ships had been there. And that they had come to take 'the Swedes' across to Scotland."

Armfelt grunted, but did not comment, then turned to Matts. "And what did you learn?"

Lars nudged the boy to answer. "That against the current, it is a long way to row from Trondheim to the army," Matts said.

Armfelt smiled just a little. "Ah. And did you have to row it alone?"

"No, general. The lieutenant and I rowed at first, when we left the dock, while Corporal Skoogh cursed us, as if he'd been drinking. Otherwise some Norwegian soldiers would have taken him into their army, or arrested us all. Afterward it was Corporal Skoogh and I who mostly rowed."

The general's eyebrows lifted a bit, but the slight smile remained. "Ah! I'm sure there's a story there." His gaze returned to Longström. "Take them out. They are to wait, in case I have further questions. Meanwhile have them fed."



They ate on a bench in the vestibule, where Matts fell asleep. He awoke when Captain Longström returned. "Lieutenant, corporal, report back to your units. Stentorp, you stay a bit. I have questions to ask you."

The lieutenant and Lars left, both wondering what those questions could possibly be. Longström sat down on the bench, then spoke in an undertone. "Look at me, Matts. Something happened while you were gone, something that troubled you, and that you didn't tell the general. What was it?"

Matts lowered his voice to a whisper, and told Longström what had happened in the cathedral tower.

"Ah! Come outside with me."

They left. It was already freezing, and their exhalations made puffs of white. Dusk had faded into night. Beyond, to one side, small campfires dotted the fields, reflecting off ranks of canvas tents. "Ordinarily," Longström was saying, "to kill a civilian is against army regulations, whether churchman or anyone else. You know that; you've seen at least one man hanged for it. But the lieutenant was right in what he did. You are all three soldiers of the king, in a land ruled by the treacherous Dane, and as a spy

you've done important and daring service to your king and your country. If the churchman had told what he saw, police and soldiers would have gone looking for you. You could not have completed your mission, and would probably have been caught and executed."

"I know, sir, but..."

"Did Lieutenant Rosenqvist explain that? Or Corporal Skoogh?"

"Neither, sir. I could see it for myself."

"But it still feels wicked to you that a churchman was killed." The words came thoughtfully, more statement than question.

Matts slowed a step before answering. "Not as much now, sir."

"Good. Good. Meanwhile I want you to talk with someone."

Minutes later they arrived at the small sharecropper's torp on which Longström's small company was billeted. He, with Lieutenant Björnsjö, Ensign Roström and the 1st sergeant shared the small log cabin with the young sharecropper and his family, while his men occupied the hay shed, cow shed, stable and smoke house. Outside the cabin, one of Longström's men stood guard, motionless, easy to miss against the dark cabin wall. His bayonet was fixed, his ears tuned to the night. He did not challenge his captain, whose figure and stride he recognized. Longström pushed open the door, and entered, Matts at his heels.

Inside, the cabin was lit dimly by the fire on the hearth. All eyes had turned to the two arrivals, and Matts' eyes took in a scene much like the *stuga* he'd grown up in, in Värmland. The farmer's hard hands had been whittling peg-like teeth to install in a hay rake, but paused as the newcomers entered. As did the knitting needles in his wife's hands; a partly knit stocking rested on her aproned lap. Nearby, a hand-carved and painted pull-bed cabinet held a sleeping infant. Three soldiers got to their feet from a bench, and saluted.

"Erkki," Longström said, "come outside for a few minutes."

Without pausing for his jacket, the tall 1st sergeant followed his captain and Matts outside, where Longström led them to a three-walled woodshed. There they seated themselves on sections of pine log awaiting splitting.

Longström spoke in Swedish rather than Finnish. "Sergeant Kivikoski, today Matts

witnessed a killing. Of a priest. The priest had realized Rosenqvist was a spy, and was about to call out, so Rosenqvist strangled him. Matts realized the strangling was necessary, but it still troubles him, because the victim was a churchman. So of course I thought of you, who can explain to him about priests—that they are not special, no more than other men."

Erkki had scarcely more than glimpsed Matts since Skalstuga, but he remembered him well. "Of course, captain." He thought for a few seconds before saying anything more, then turned his eyes to the boy. "Matts, what do you think makes a churchman special, beyond other people?"

Matts thought for a moment. "Because...because they do God's work. They are like God's...God's hired men. But they are more than that. He gives them the right, the duty, to tell us how to live. What to do."

Erkki groped for words, thoughts. It was difficult; he didn't believe in God. "How does a priest instruct people?"

"I...he talks about what is written in *den Helige Skriften*."

Erkki frowned, looking back to his boyhood, when he walked with his parents to church each Sunday, to sit through sermons, interminable harangues. To fight boredom, he actually listened, and even as a child found things to disagree with, silently picking the sermons apart. "In the eyes of God," he said, "every man is as good as he treats other people. Think back to your priest at home, where you came from. How did he treat his people?"

Matts looked back, remembering Pastor Sundberg, the only pastor he knew. "He was always kind."

This was not, Erkki thought, going very well. "Did he treat his bond folk well?... Did he *knulla* the house girls, do you suppose?"

Matts thought back again. "No." Then, "he only had two."

"Did either of them have a child while they were there?"

Reluctantly, "Yes, one of them. Marta."

"What did Marta look like?"

"She was the prettiest girl in the parish. But she got married to Johan i Övretorp, because he was the father. Pastor Sundberg let her out of her contract."

Övre Torp. The "upper farm," far from the rectory then. Of course, Erkki thought. "Married her after the baby came?"

"I'm not sure, sir. But he married her because he was the father." By now, though, Matts was remembering his mother's tone of voice when she and grandfather spoke of it.

"Was Övretorp near the church?"

"No, it was the farthest farm up the creek. That's why it was named that."

"How would Johan have come to *knulla* a house girl so far from where he lived?"

"They could have done it at *Midsommar*, when the whole parish makes merry." But even as he said it, Matts remembered that the baby had come during harvest, not at winter's end.

"Was Johan a young man?" Priests with pretty house girls were known to arrange marriages with prosperous, usually older, widowed parishioners, for a fee or out of friendship. But torpers were reliably poor, and hardly chosen by priests as friends.

"Young? Kind of inbetween," Matts replied. "Maybe thirty. He had three children already."

Four children then, to be fed from a torp. Common enough, but hard. "Where was Johan's wife, that he was free to marry Marta?"

"His first wife had died. In childbirth. The baby died too."

Erkki grunted. "Such things are commonplace. You know how it sounds to me? The pastor had this pretty house girl and decided to take advantage of her. So he did, probably often, and got her with child. And to hide the fact, as best he could, he got her a husband, a man who needed a wife on the torp. I hope Johan is good to her. Meanwhile, in my experience, churchmen are no better than anyone else. Worse! Hypocrits! Some may be all right, but many are arrogant and overbearing. Many farmers are poor, and all laborers are, men who work their fingers to the bone. But priests? Never! Churchmen are greedy, and they never eat bark bread. They become priests so they don't have to work hard or live hard. And men who want to lord it over others are drawn to the priesthood, for the power."

Erkki had been watching Matt's face, especially his eyes. It was time, he decided, to end this conversation. "Priests are not like the Christ," he finished. "So do not grieve

the churchman. Your lieutenant saved your lives." Erkki turned his gaze away then, his mouth somehow sour from the words it had spoken.

"Thank you, Erkki," Longström said, and got to his feet. Matts got up too, and all three left the woodshed, Erkki striding off to the cabin. When the 1st sergeant had gone inside, Longström turned to Matts again. "What do you think about churchmen now, lad?"

"I think...I think that Pastor Sundberg is a good man... He may have laid with Marta Jonsdotter. Maybe even if she didn't want to, but gave in because she was afraid. But I think he tries to do good. If he did what the 1st sergeant thinks he did, he at least tried to help her out afterward."

"Ah. I suspect you are right about him; I trust your judgment." More each time I speak with you, Longström added to himself. "Also it is good to be loyal." These words drew Matts' eyes to his. "But it is also good not to close your eyes to what may be the truth. Erkki too is loyal, loyal to me, to Finland, and to his friends. And you are his friend. I know, because he speaks well of you. He wanted to help you see the truth: that churchmen are not the elect of God. In the sight of God they are no more than other men, and perhaps have more temptations."

Longström turned, looking through the night across the campfire-dotted field, wondering what Pastor Muus would think of all this, waiting for sleep in his hostage bed in Gävle. "Can you find your tent from here, Matts?"

"Yes, captain."

"Good. Then go. Get your rest."

Longström turned and went back into the *stuga*, the cabin, while Matts jogged off toward the campfires.



The sentry watched him leave, and wondered what Erkki had said to give rise to what he'd just overheard. *The captain's a strange man, he thought. But a good one. One in a thousand.*

Chapter 23

Another Bridge

Armfelt's soldiers came very largely from peasant farms. Where, if something was needed, you ordinarily made it yourself, using whatever came to hand. Thus his engineering officers found abundant building skills among the troops. When they needed something made, artisan talents were ready to hand.

For generations, Jonsplatsen had been a ferry crossing over the Nidelva, but the ferry had been cut loose and sculled to Trondheim, to keep it out of Swedish hands. Surrounded by cropland and open pastures, Jonsplatsen was not well-suited to building a pontoon bridge secretly, but strategically it was the best site available. And under cover of night, perhaps... Also, the dock abutments, on both sides of the river, remained intact; almost no alterations were necessary.

To provide the bridging material, the army had taken over the sawmill at Leiren for the planks. And for the balks—the square spacers/bridge timbers. The mill also had a long storage shed usable to conceal the construction and storage of pontoons, and which already contained a large quantity of narrow planks, needing only to be trimmed to length, and narrowed near both ends to accommodate the lashings. Because for flexibility, the bridge would be lashed together, not spiked.

The preparations went rapidly. Then in the night, without torches or shouting, wagon after liberated six-horse wagon was loaded by lantern light. Thirty of them bore the pontoons, each pontoon with its stone anchor. The pontoons were some 6 meters long, and heavy, one per wagon. Other wagons bore the long balks, 12 cm square, while numerous others bore loads of bridge planks and wooden curbing. Still other wagons, army wagons with wagon boxes, brought tools, cordage, additional stone anchors and other accessories. And finally came two blacksmith's wagons.

With their cavalry escort, they were a considerable train, wending southward through the moonless hours.

One by one, they were parked close along Jonsplatsen's east bank, positioned by engineering officers and sergeants. Pontoon crews manhandled the pontoons. As dawn paled the darkness, the first pontoon, guided by a sergeant on the shore and rowed by soldiers, moved upstream near the bank. At the sergeant's command, they lowered a 20 kilogram stone anchor into the water, and when it rested on the bottom, the crew let the current carry them downstream on the anchor line, stopping when ordered. By that time, the crew of the second pontoon had dropped their anchor.

As the darkness paled further, the Swedes discovered they were not alone. Across the river were units of Norwegian cavalry and militia, which, as the light strengthened, fired volleys from the far shore. Two hundred meters was too far for anything resembling accuracy, but rather quickly, several Swedes had fallen wounded. Their officers then ordered their crews back far enough that the firing stopped. The Norwegians hooted with derisive pleasure. Then de la Barre's cavalry moved up to return fire, followed quickly by several Swedish three-pounders with canister shot. The jeering ceased and the Norwegians dispersed. Quickly the bridge builders returned to their tasks, working briskly, directed by veterans who'd bridged rivers in Poland, Livonia and Russia, men who'd then failed on the Stjørdal, and were determined not to fail again. This time everything would be done right.



Armfelt played no supervisory role. From a little distance, he simply watched appreciatively. As a young soldier of fortune, he'd helped bridge rivers in Savoy and Catalonia, and knew the drill. Sitting next to him was a guest, a cavalry officer, Captain Lars Hammarskiöld of Jämtland's regiment, a noted marksman. Carrying "Långa Lisa," his rifled sporting musket.

Rapidly the bridge grew, until its leading end came within the range of aimed musket fire. Across the river, a company of Norwegian dragoons rode to the shore and dismounted, lining up along the bank with carbines ready. On the Swedish side, Hammarskiöld nudged his mount to the riverbank, slid from the saddle with Långa Lisa in hand, and knelt. On command, the Norwegian dragoons fired a volley. More Swedes fell. From the Swedish shore, soldiers with grenade launchers were ordered

trotting out onto the partly-built bridge.²⁶

Hammariskiöld's gaze had fixed on his first target, an officer who had remained in the saddle. The Norwegian watched his men reload. Hammariskiöld squeezed the trigger, and Lisa boomed. The Norwegian officer fell sideways from his horse, one boot caught in a stirrup. His well-trained horse barely moved. A sergeant with him called an order to fire again. This time the volley was ragged—not all his men had finished reloading—but more Swedes fell.

The sergeant too toppled from his horse (Hammariskiöld's speed in reloading was as well-honed as his accuracy); then a corporal pitched forward off the bank, headfirst into the water. The men nearest in his squad dropped their muskets and scrambled after him, grabbing his ankles and pulling him from the water. As they dragged the corpse up the bank, a lieutenant rode over to see. His hand started to raise, as if to signal, and he too toppled. Four shots, four down, from no one knew where. Then, back somewhat from the shore (so as not to endanger the bridge builders), a canister began to explode overhead, their leaden balls pattering like heavy hailstones, while along the bank the first grenade exploded. More Norwegians dropped, and some men, unordered, began to pull back. To control the situation, the acting commander called to his trumpeter, who signalled for withdrawal...



De la Barre had ridden up with two battalions of his Finnish cavalry, and sat his horse beside Armfelt. Their arrival had brought a Norwegian response: some 800 mounted Norwegians, regulars and militia, had ridden into position. On the bridge near the far shore, Swedish infantry arrived and exchanged fire with them. Meanwhile the bridge grew, the work intensifying, the artillery and grenade launchers speeding their fire.

The final pontoons reached the shore and were anchored, the final bridge sections were planked—and the two generals trotted onto the bridge, followed by de la Barre's cavalry, pistols in their gloved fists. Armfelt didn't articulate the thought, not even in his mind, but it was there: cavalry was the queen of battle, the cavalry charge its soul, and he felt young again. Hooves thudded on the seasoned planks, and hearing it, the

²⁶ By the time of Karl XII, grenade launchers were very much a part of the Swedish infantry arsenal.

construction crew and musketeers shrank to the edges, out of their way. At the far end, the horses' hooves found dry ground, and surged up the slight slope. The scene became a melee. But for the Finns, this was familiar, while for most of their opponents it was something they'd known only as a drill. The reality shook them. The dragoons broke, compromising the entire defense, and trumpets signalled a general retreat.

In fact, the only thing that didn't go right was, Budde wasn't coaxed out of Trondheim's walls into open battle. But at least, Armfelt's army was now able to attack Trondheim without the river being frozen. Whether the attack was wise or not.

PART FOUR

REVERSALS

Chapter 24

Too Much Reputation

It took the rest of the army four hours to cross the bridge, after which it made camp in the vicinity.

The general set up headquarters in another large farmhouse, and the next evening sent for Longström. The captain was ushered into Armfelt's room, and saluted. Getting to his feet, Armfelt gestured his orderly to leave, and watched till the door had closed behind the man. Then he turned to his visitor.

"I have another task for you, captain," he said, and held up a leather dispatch pouch that lay on his work table. "This must reach General Frisenheim at Duved Skans as quickly as you can safely deliver it. It contains reports on the army, my analysis of the situation, and how I will deliver the town into the king's hands." He laid the leather pouch back on the table and picked up an envelope that lay beside it. "And this—this is a personal letter to the king, which Frisenheim is also to forward, with the reports. When you've delivered them, return to me."

Then, belatedly, Armfelt gestured the captain to a seat, and sat down himself. For a long moment he said nothing, as if reviewing. "For these to be captured would be extremely damaging. Take as many men — and as few — as you think adequate, keeping in mind that a large force draws more attention. And carry the letter inside your tunic, in case something happens.

"You will wear civilian clothing, of course, carrying your uniforms with you."

He paused thoughtfully again. "If you are attacked," he said at last, "it is vital that you escape capture, and deliver what I now tell you to Frisenheim. Even if only by mouth. Tell him I'm preparing an assault on Trondheim with the resources at hand. And when those preparations are complete, if winter weather has not arrived, I will attack at once. But if the ground has frozen sufficiently, I will await word from him about when he can deliver artillery to me."

Ah, Longström thought, and last night the puddles froze again.

"He is also to inform me when there is enough snow for sleighs to deliver the awaited howitzers, and when they are sent."

The general got to his feet again, the captain also rising. "Say nothing of this where you can be overheard," he finished. They shook hands then. "God be with you."



The captain reached his new quarters and in Finnish, spoke to his staff—Lieutenant Björnsjö, Ensign Roström, and 1st Sergeant Stenfors, summarizing the general's orders. Then designated the three short squads he'd take with him. "And you, Erkki," he said to the 1st sergeant. You will come with me, too. "Paavo, Kuusta," he went on, "I'm leaving you with the rest of the company, to take care of whatever else the general needs us to do. Meanwhile let yourself be seen. Let it appear to the locals that we're all still here."

"Are you going to take a guide?" Paavo asked, "to talk with the locals if needed? I am thinking of the Jämtlander, Olofsson."

"No. So far as possible we'll avoid Norwegians. You're likelier to need Olofsson than we are.

"Now, here is what we'll do. Tomorrow we sleep till daylight, then prepare everything we need. Without being conspicuous about it. The morning after that, we leave in darkness."



The next day bedding was hung to dry thoroughly, boots were oiled, carbines and pistols cleaned and oiled, sabers and knives honed, and provisions, and powder and ball were drawn, while the captain and 1st sergeant pored over maps, discussing. They would, they decided, travel via Steine Skans, to reprovision themselves.

The captain sat looking inward a long moment. This mission was as important as any he'd been given. Ever. He'd take no chances with it. So he repeated it to Erkki, effectively verbatim. And then, to make sure, he penned a summary and handed it to the 1st sergeant. "Put it in your breast pocket," he finished.



At 63° north latitude, in late November, nights are very long, and in the absence of moon and snow cover, dark. With the first faint light of a frosty dawn, 22 men in uniform saddled up and left the farm on which they were billeted, riding through a thin

cloud of fogged breath from horses and men. Their departure was no secret to their unwilling hosts—who also had a pretty good idea of their identity; Longström and his activities had become notorious in the province of Trøndelag. The farmwife had cooked the officers' breakfast porridge that morning, and the eldest son spied from the cowshed as the soldiers rode away. Rode away southward, not northward, on the river road.

To make sure they were noticed, and their identity and direction known, they twice stopped briefly at farms where smoke from a chimney indicated someone at home. Stopped to feed their horses from the farmers' already depleted hay sheds. Their rapid Finnish speech was unmistakable and of course unintelligible, but the name Røros, a mining town a few days ride south, was caught more than once. Clearly the fabled Finnish captain was riding south. When they'd left, a young farmhand hurried off to carry the information to Trondheim.

After a few hours, Longström led his men off the frozen road into dense young forest, where they changed into farmer clothing. Then, changing direction, they followed a track northeastward toward Klæbu.

Winter had arrived again, presumably this time to stay. Real winter, lacking only the snow needed to enable sleigh transport. Snow, to allow siege guns and winter uniforms to reach Armfelt, from Duved via Steine and Skaanes, or more directly via Tydalen. Or even from Dalarna via Røros.

Meanwhile the army's food supplies were seriously low again, and soldiers faint from starvation conquer nothing. So Armfelt ordered his army not north against Trondheim, but south to a fertile district not yet picked over by his army.

De la Barre had been on von Motzfeldt's trail before Armfelt's army had finished crossing the bridge. Motzfeldt seemed to have sent his militias back to Trondheim, reducing his force to an estimated 400 to 600 regulars. De la Barre pursued him southward with 350 Finns, and orders to either destroy the Norwegian cavalry or drive them southward out of the region. The major point being to prevent their attacking supply trains and foraging parties, or harassing the army in its camp. The Finns found this duty much preferable to harvesting, though long hours in the saddle was hard and hungry work. Hard for men and harder on horses. Initially de la Barre expected von Motzfeldt to try breaking back around him toward Trondheim. Or perhaps watching

for a good place to set an ambush.

Meanwhile Motzfeldt continued south up the Gaul River, to facilitate foraging. He too had to live off the land now. Armfelt moved south again, too, dispersing units nearly to Støren. The general made his headquarters at the Melhus rectory, the location nearest Trondheim.

Meanwhile the winter temperatures froze more than the roads, the mud; it also froze the soldiers in their increasingly tattered summer uniforms. But with winter temperatures, snow was sure to follow, and supply trains from Sweden.²⁷

Longström's party had ridden long and hard, but the peasant clothes they wore were winter garb. It was the final moments of evening twilight, and the slender moon was shrouded by overcast. Twenty-two mounted, trail-worn men, avoiding unnecessary noise, came to a frozen entry lane bordered by stubble fields. There they paused, a log farmhouse dimly visible to their right, the east. The captain muttered instructions; the acknowledgments were little more than grunts. They turned in, quietly, watchfully. Soon they discerned the hops patch, outbuildings, teepee-shaped stacks of firewood.

Most of the patrol left the lane, as if to set sentries around the steading, to prevent anyone escaping. Five more proceeded the last hundred meters to the house. It was too dark to discern the thin wood smoke rising lazily from the chimneys, but candle light glimmered through a window. Someone was at home.

Two of the five Finns who rode to the house stayed outside, stationing themselves at diagonally opposite corners, carbines ready, to watch for anyone trying to escape out a window. The captain, 1st sergeant, and one other mounted the stoop, and Longström knocked. Inside a dog gruffed, barely audible through the stout homemade door. After a moment, a tall lanky farmer opened it—to find a horse pistol in his face.

"Let us in please."

The words were civil but the voice cold and overbearing, and the pistol deadly. And the words were Swedish, strangely spoken. The farmer backed away, a cold stone, big as a fist, in his belly. Then three other men shouldered their way in, roughly it seemed, though none of them touched him. One was taller than the tall farmer. The

²⁷ Condensed and recast from Maijström & Boberg (1944)

farm dog growled once, but did not show his teeth; he was no longer young, knew the smell of gunsteel and powder, and sensed that these newcomers would kill him without quibble. His tail dropped, and his gaze.

Meanwhile his master had gathered his wits somewhat. "If you are deserters returning to your home, you are welcome here," the farmer said.

The lead intruder looked at him, still coldly, the pistol still pointing, but the sense of threat seemed clearly eased. "Call your family into the room," the man ordered. "And any servants." The farmer called names and orders, his voice sharp, his words commanding. In less than half a minute, the rest of the family had gathered: a middle-aged woman, two girls of perhaps 12 and 16 years, and a youth of perhaps 14.

"Is this all of them?"

"There is a *dreng* in the privy."

There followed a rattle of Finnish. The tall Finn went to the door and called outside, also in Finnish. Minutes later, two additional Finns came in, gripping the arms of the 17-year-old hired boy, who looked, if not frightened, at least very worried.

It was Sunday evening, and some thirty families had gathered at Hegra church for evening service. An abbreviated service, because Inge Larssøn had come in late, interrupting instead of slipping in quietly, and asked to speak. Inge was a steady man, well respected, so the pastor had given him leave. He'd seen a number of armed men turning off the Stjørdal River road onto the Forra River road. There'd been some twilight left, and Inge and his wife and children, all afoot, had stopped, hung back while he'd counted the riders. Swedes, it had seemed to him, or Finns, but not in uniform. With the last of them riding off north, he'd turned back, leading his family the 4 kilometers back home. Then he'd saddled his horse and ridden to church.

Quickly, Pastor Bentssen ended the service with a brief prayer; then, with a question, began a multi-sided discussion. "What would Swedes be doing here now? If they were Swedes. The invader army was reportedly well off south, south even of Trondheim."

Hands rose, and voices.

"Are you sure they were Swedes?" someone asked. "Or Finns?"

"They must be," someone else said. "And they carried guns."

"Anyone might carry guns in times like these."

"But they weren't in uniform you said."

"No. They appeared to wear work clothes."

"Why would 20 Swedes in work clothes be riding up the Forra?"

"Maybe to cross the fjeld to Steine."

"You don't know they're Swedes. You should have spoken to them."

"I didn't trust them. And I didn't want to call to them."

"Didn't they say anything? You didn't hear them speak?"

"Not a word."

"They were Finns! They didn't want you to hear them talk."

"They could just have been people from up the valley, traveling home from Stjørdalsøra. And done nothing to you."

"Twenty armed men traveling home to where? Inge was right! They were Finns!"

"If they were Finns, he's lucky they didn't they stop and cut his throat."

The pastor had stayed clear of the exchanges. Now he spoke again. "Wouldn't Finns be in uniform like the Swedes?"

Now Inge said what was central in his thoughts; in perhaps all their thoughts.

"Not the Finns with that Longström devil. It's said they go dressed like anyone else; some of the time anyway."

Longström! Once spoken, it clicked firmly in place. The question was settled. Big Nils spoke then, and when Big Nils spoke, people paid attention. "I say we gather every man in the parish and meet at Hjeldessøns, every man armed. I don't think they'd go far up the Forra on a night as dark as this. They'd probably stop at the Big Bend Farm, and spend the night. Farther up, the forest swallows the road, and they couldn't see 10 meters."

Someone threw in a witticism: "It's so dark along there, even the owls stay home."

No one laughed. "What if it's not them?"

"If it's not, all we're out is a night's sleep. And if it *is* them, we ambush them, kill Longström, and as many of the rest as we can. Rid the country of a curse."

Pastor Bentssen shook his grizzled head. *Or they kill you*, he thought. *They've had much experience killing*. But he didn't say it, because Big Nils was right: it was the thing to do.

The farmhouse had been crowded that chill night. The farmfolk were in the loft; the ground level was taken up by Longström's men, all of them now except the sentry on the stoop. They slept on the beds and the floors, wrapped in their very non-issue furs. And while the Finns slept (each with a mental alarm set against danger), the farmer in the loft above, whispered instructions to the hired boy, the youth repeating them back till he had them pat.

Throughout the night, a series of guards stood on the stoop, carbine in gloved hand, cavalry pistol holstered opposite his saber. Tired to the bone but standing, they neither drowsed nor wool-gathered. Indeed they more than *stood* their post. Each in turn was quietly intent, ears attuned to the surroundings: hearing, attending, appraising the sounds that reached him: cows, horses, owls, and twice wolves communing in the distance. "Watched" mainly with his ears, for the moon, a sliver, had set early, and the overcast filtered out the starlight.

Meanwhile the house was back far enough from the road that hooves, passing at a walk, would be inaudible to the sharpest human ears.

Each sentry was replaced at the end of his hour's shift, as determined by the captain's bulky pocket watch, read by candle light from the window, and passed from shift to shift until the last of them took over. Each sentry, in his turn wore the farmer's bearskin coat, which hung to the stoop, helping to keep even his feet warm.

Their captain was a man who created, and modified, his own procedures, according to circumstance.



When the final sentry had taken over, the man he'd relieved built up the fire and wakened the captain. Who collected his watch and wakened his men, thumped the ceiling with his carbine to rouse the farmfolk overhead, then stepped outside to relieve himself and evaluate the weather, which was not particularly cold, but freezing. Meanwhile his men shucked off their civvies, donned uniforms, packed gear; a drill familiar and swift. The farmwife came down and cooked their porridge, and while it bubbled, sliced cheese, and scooped salt herring from a barrel in the pantry. Breakfast consisted of those plus flatbread with butter. Even if their food ran out, she hoped to survive, she and her family, encouraged by rumors that the Swedes and Finns were not killing people, or burning them out. Simply depriving them.



When they'd finished eating, the soldiers saddled their horses. Inside the house, Longström gathered the farmfolk and appraised them thoughtfully. Briefly he looked at the farmer's 14-year-old son, then turned his gaze to the hired boy. "You!" he said, pointing at the youth, "tell me about yourself! Slowly, for I do not easily understand Norwegian."

The lad stared a moment. The Finn's hand moved toward a pistol, lightly, perhaps unintentionally, and the boy began. "I am...I am Steffan Emilssøn i Storrbekk. That is farther up the river. My father was *dreng* here in his time, but our farm is small, so when I became old enough, my father hired me out here. He said Oskar Magnussøn is a good and just employer, and it's near enough I could visit home on holy days, and on my name day."

The intruder nodded thoughtfully, as if considering, and when he spoke again, his voice was quiet. Friendly. "Good. Good. But I must claim your services now, Steffan, as my guide. I do not know all the *förhugningar* above here. You must lead us safely around them, for I don't doubt you helped fell them. We will leave at once, while the light is still faint, and I will let you come back when we have reached the fjeld safely."

Now his voice became more firm, and the youth's eyes could not evade his gaze. "You ride beside me, and if we are ambushed, you will surely die. For musket balls will be coming our way. Also you will have betrayed us, me and my men, and you'll be treated accordingly." While talking, Longström had leaned toward the boy. Now he paused, straightened, smiled, and his tone lightened. "And you'll be riding Herr Magnussøn's horse, which might also be killed. So you must be careful, you even more than me."

The boy looked at Magnussøn now, almost beseechingly. The farmer nodded. "We will be waiting for you when you return, Steffan. Brita will bake kanelboller for your safe arrival back."

For a moment no one said anything, and Steffan felt all their eyes on him, the soldiers' and the Magnussøn's. Then Longström stood, and his voice was brisk, commanding. "All right! Time to leave!" The soldiers in the house donned their capes, gloves, and winter caps (they were the only company in the army to have winter caps with them), and in no more than a minute they had clomped outside, Steffan with the 1st sergeant's long left hand gripping his arm. Their horses had been brought from the

sheds, where they'd been sheltered and saddled. And Magnussøn's, from the small stable, also saddled. Now the orders were in Finnish, the sound utterly, alarmingly, foreign to the youth. How could anyone understand such speech? Then the short column trotted easily down the lane toward the road, in single file. Except for the 1st sergeant, who rode beside Steffan and a half length back, his left hand no longer on the boy's arm. A glance showed it resting near his saber.

Quickly they reached the river road, then paused, and Longström looked back. "We turn right, I suppose." The words were a test, not a question.

"Yes sir."

They turned northeastward up the primitive river road, again at an easy trot. Gradually the faint morning twilight grew. Before long they reached the point where they should leave the road again, to avoid the *förhugning* not far ahead. Magnussøn had hoped—supposed—the Finns had been seen and recognized, for there were farms scattered along both shores of the lower Stjørdal River. And unless the Finns knew about the Fulset Trail, they must have passed a number of them in the evening twilight—on a Sunday evening when there'd have been people walking or riding to Hegra.

And if they'd been seen, there might well be a welcoming party waiting in the *forhogning*.

Steffan's task was to lead the Finns into a possible ambush. At the first sound of a shot, he was to fall from his horse, lose himself in the confusion and whatever cover was at hand. He hoped it wouldn't happen. These men had behaved civilly to the Magnussøns and himself, considering the circumstances, and he felt no devotion to the Danish king, nor any desire to die. But meanwhile, what would happen was in the hands of God.

Dawnlight had grown, and a hundred meters ahead, the first *förhugning* became visible. Longström glanced back at Steffan, but did not signal a stop; 50 meters, 40... Steffan, his senses sharpened by the situation, smelled a faint odor of tobacco smoke—someone had smoked a pipe! Longström raised an arm.

From the shelter of fallen trees a musket boomed, and almost at once many more. Captain Peter Veikkopoika Longström felt the first ball strike his belly like a cannon ball. Another struck his neck, and he nearly fell from the saddle, reining his horse toward the river, which just there was open riffles, a rapid. A lucky ball struck his mount below the ear, and it stumbled, fell; its wounded rider hit the frozen ground like

a sack of sand, heavily, without rolling, the wind knocked out of him. Only one other of the Finns had been hit, and two horses. The first shot had been fired sooner than it should have, and the visibility was poor. The Finns fired their carbines from the saddle—suppression fire—then attacked.

Longström lurched to his feet. He'd been carrying the dispatch pouch slung by its shoulder strap. He wrested it free, and staggering toward the shore, threw it in the direction of the water, then fell again. Once more he made it to his feet, and staggered a few meters farther—a letter, thrown, wouldn't carry well—thrust a hand inside his tunic, withdrawing the letter to the king. And threw it too, before falling a final time. Meanwhile the farmers had not foreseen the fury they'd roused. Erkki had shouted a command to a man known for his skill with wounds—"see to the captain!"—then led the rest of his Finns in a charge, sheathing their now empty carbines and drawing pistols. Reaching the fallen treetops, they dismounted, to clamber among and over them like madmen, pistols booming at occasional targets before drawing their sabers.

The assembled farmers, inexperienced, and exultant at the sight of Longström falling, had been too slow in reloading. Now they folded, most of them fleeing upslope toward their horses.

Only then did Erkki call off his men and turn back for his captain, whom he found doubled up on the frozen ground, hands on his bloody slimey abdomen. The ball that had struck his neck was a small one, but the wound had bled copiously. The man tending him was staunching it with a piece of scarf. "Can you ride, captain?" Erkki asked.

"Ride? No, good friend, this is the final wound. I have failed both general and king. And Finland." Suddenly it seemed life had played a joke on him, triggering a laugh. A single bark, for the large ball had scrambled his entrails, and his abdominal muscles had spasmed with his laugh, generating a massive shock of pain.

He paused, gasping, and for a moment gathered his strength. Then "I threw the dispatch pouch in the river," he husked. "And the letter. They could have been captured by an eddy, though, and held to the shore. If they have, rescue them. If not, they've been carried downstream and taken under the ice." His eyes had closed, but his lips moved again. "Leave me. This is as good a place..."

And spoke no more.

While leading the charge, Erkki had glimpsed the dispatch pouch laying half in the

water. But it wasn't there now, nor any envelope, so he whistled up his horse, and mounting, rode downstream along the bank to where the river was frozen, finding nothing — no saddle bag, no envelope.

By that time his men had gathered. He looked around for Magnussøn's horse; it wasn't there. It was a farm horse, not used to guns booming around it; it could have panicked, thrown the boy and run off. Or the boy might have ridden it back to Magnussøn's, or perhaps to his home farm. Well, he was no use to them now anyway.

"Jalmari," Erkki said, "I'm leaving you in command. I want you all to ride on to Steine. Tell them what happened here, and that the captain ordered you to proceed to Duved, to report to General Frisenheim. No one is to divert you. No one!

"Pekka," he said then, "you're the man who carries messages in his head and delivers them exactly. So you are my messenger. Listen now. You too, Jalmari."

The small man grinned despite the situation, and nodded, and 1st Sergeant Erik Stenfors repeated what the general had told the captain, word for word. Then remembering, the 1st sergeant took the summary from his tunic and handed it to the small trooper.

"And where will you go, Erkki Veikkopoika?", asked Sergeant Jalmari Hautaluoma.

"I will return to the general. It's important that he learns what happened here."

No one needed to ask why. What happened here would be told throughout Trøndelag. Returning would be less dangerous alone than with others.



Steffan rode into the farmyard, slid from the horse's back, and ran into the house without even putting the horse away. "Herr Magnussøn! Herr Magnussøn! There has been a gun battle at the lower *forhogning*, and the captain has been shot! Killed maybe! And he threw a saddlebag in the river — and I rescued it!" He slipped the dispatch pouch off his shoulder and held it up. "I poured the water out of it, and looked. It's full of papers. Probably important!"

Magnussøn stared, then turned to his wife. "Agda, I must take this to Pastor Bentssen. He will know how to deal with it. And I will take Steffan with me, because he was there, and rescued it."

Chapter 25

Caught in Limbo

Armfelt frowned at the report he held. The Hälsinge Regiment again! How much trouble could one regiment make? *Too many trips to the woodshed*, he thought. *After awhile, all you found was bark, and dry rot riddled with insect holes.* And that's what the recruiters brought back with them: empty bark, dry rot, worms.

A sharp rap on his door jerked his attention. "Come!"

It opened to the charge of quarters. "Herr general, a man is here with a report from Captain Longström."

So. Perhaps now he'd learn if the rumor from Trondheim was false. "Thank you sergeant. Send him in."

He remembered the 1st sergeant, for his height if nothing more. The man looked hungrier than before, and worn. "News from Steine?" Armfelt asked. "You traveled fast!"

"I haven't been to Steine, herr general. We were ambushed at a *förhuggning* above the mouth of the Forra, and Captain Longström was shot. He lived long enough to give us orders. I was to return here to report to you. The rest of the patrol continued to Steine under Sergeant Kyrkogård. From there they were to continue to Duved, to General Frisenheim. As you ordered." He paused for just a moment. "The river at the ambush was swift, had no ice, and the musket fire was heavy, so Captain Longström threw the dispatch pouch into the river to keep it from being captured—the pouch and the letter to the king.

"Dear God!" Armfelt paused "Did you lose many men?"

"Only Captain Longström. Another was wounded but able to ride. It was as if all of them knew the captain, and aimed at him. We charged at once, and they scattered. They were probably farmers, and lacked fire discipline."

The general spoke then as if thinking aloud. "There couldn't have been many, if

only two of ours were hit."

"From the sound of their musketry, there were a lot of them. But it was barely dawn, and they fired too soon. I smelled a pipe—one of them must have been smoking—and the captain raised his arm, stopping us. So they fired."

"Umm." The general had rested an elbow on the table. Now he cupped his forehead in his hands for a moment. "So," he said, "at least the reports weren't captured."

"I'm not sure, general. I glimpsed the pouch in the water's edge, but I can't be sure it was afloat. And when we returned from running the enemy off, it wasn't there. It wasn't anywhere along the bank, and a little way downstream the river was frozen, so it may have been carried under the ice. In that case they'd hardly find it. It would waterlog and go to the bottom."

He paused, then added: "Our guide was a *trenki*, and after we ran the ambushers off, and returned to the captain, the *trenki* was gone, Also the horse he'd been riding. Looking back, it's possible he saw the dispatch pouch and retrieved it, ran off with it."

Erkki had recognized the possibility before, on his long solitary ride back, and now, having voiced it, it seemed to him that's what had happened.

The general folded his hands on the table in front of him and closed his eyes. Erkki wondered if he was praying. If so, it was a very short prayer. When he looked up, his face was grim, but his voice was neither angry nor despondent.. "Of what use was it, then, to send the rest of the men on to Duved?"

"The captain gave Jalmari—Sergeant Hautaluoma—a paper with what you'd told him to tell General Frisenheim. And lived long enough to repeat it to *Korprali* Roshage, the man he relied on to repeat things exactly.

The general didn't respond at once, then nodded. "Thank you sergeant," he said. "Your captain was sent to us by God. Now he has returned to him in heaven."

For a horrified moment, Erkki Kivikoski feared the general might dissolve in tears. But just for a moment. Actually his face had barely creased. He'd seen too many men die to spill tears, even for the captain.

When the general dismissed him, Erkki left thinking there was no heaven, no god. But the best friend he'd ever known still lived in the hearts of his men, and in the general's heart. Which wasn't good enough, but it was something.



The general sent for von Gertten. If Budde had those reports in his hands, and he very well might, the chance of a successful assault was meager. But winter had to come soon. Then the fjelds would freeze deep and hard, and it would snow, and either Frisenheim would send artillery from Duved, or the king would send some via Härjedalen and Røros, or both.

Then, he told himself, we will have Trondheim, maybe even before the king takes Christiania. And bygones will be bygones.

Or not, as the case might be. He no longer believed in the king, or cared.

Meanwhile conditions were not good in Trondheim. The food shortage of early autumn had grown worse. Thus many farmers who'd been called into Trondheim to aid in its defense were allowed to go home. The supply of firewood was very short, and several buildings were torn down for fuel. Crowding was severe. A new epidemic had broken out. On November 25, in Trondheim, only 3,600 soldiers were fit for duty, and in early December it got worse. The situation was almost desperate.

◇

On November 29, mild winds and heavy rains blew in from the south, delaying the onset of serious winter. Five hundred and five of Armfelt's men were reported sick, in addition to the 1,211 already hauled off to the forts.

◇

Meanwhile, de la Barre had been busy to the south. Motzfeldt and his dragoons had been stranded in the Dovre Mountains. De la Barre rested his men at Opdal, and after capturing quantities of provisions and hay, had led them toward the mines at Kvikne.

The director of mines there had gotten a message supposedly from the pastor at Melhus, saying that Budde had sent a force of not less than 2,000 men toward Rennebu to stop de la Barre. The director promptly called the local armed peasantry to Rennebu, to teach the cocksure Swedes (actually Finns) a lesson.

It was not, however, Budde's men who came down from the north, but a force sent by Armfelt. When the farmers learned this, most of them scattered and went home. The director and 32 others took refuge in the mine, and were captured. The Finns also got several tons of copper and a large cache of weapons.

De la Barre then led his troops to Røros, which opened a new route to Duved, via Härjedalen. According to local tradition, de la Barre used the church at Røros as a stable. His treatment of the people did not give the Swedish army a good reputation there.



To best handle the gathering of supplies from the countryside, beginning on 26 November, the army occupied scattered quarters throughout almost the entire valley between Melhus and Stören, a stretch of some 30 kilometers. Foraging patrols went everywhere.

Budde's intelligence sources reported that in the Swedish army, severe discipline, even hanging, was being meted out for theft and other criminal acts, despite terrible privation. Budde was deeply angered by reports of several Norwegian peasant men and women not only giving the Swedes information, but acting as traitors.



On the other hand, Colonel Maidell and 400 men of the Tavastehus Infantry, were jumped and bloodied by a strong Norwegian force sent out by Budde and supported by mobilized peasants.

One December morning, Capt. Erik Löfving of Jämtland's Regiment encountered a larger Norwegian force, capturing a noncom and 13 soldiers. A detachment of the same regiment, under Ensign Magnus Brewitz, captured 16 Danish soldiers, and Arvid Wadenstjerna (presumably a noncom), with four other mounted men of the "Tavastehus Regiment" took 20 prisoners.

Just before the army broke camp and left Melhus, the Norwegian Capt. Lossius captured 10-12 sleighs of provisions which de la Barre's foragers had taken from farms around Opdal.^{EN13}

Chapter 26

Karl XII

November 30 — After supper, 36-year-old King Karl XII of Sweden left his field kitchen with his small retinue of the moment, and returned via a zig-zag, 7-foot-deep communication trench to the current forward trench, to observe the initial work on what was to be the next trench forward. Digging a new trench under fire was seriously dangerous, and Karl intended that the sappers see their king sharing their risk.

He needed no guide, knew the layout intimately, and could have pointed on a map to his location at any moment.

The evening was not yet freezing, and the trench smelled of recently dug soil, but it was high enough, and the soil porous enough, there was no standing water to splash through, and little mud. At an appropriate location he stopped, stepped onto the firing step, and glanced back to an aide. "Captain," he said "boost me up."

Crouching, the man provided a shoulder, and when the king had placed a boot on it, raised him up. Then, with the toe of the other boot, Karl kicked two toe-holds in the trench's steep front wall, and settled against it, forearms and elbows on the low parapet, to help support his weight. Cheekbone on his left hand, he scanned the field, and the hill and fortifications close ahead. Pitch pots flaming on the battlements lit the scene with russet light, and helped Norwegian snipers find targets. Tracers tracked the artificial twilight, and on the intervening field, 200 Swedish sappers lay each on his side, digging, protected to a degree by facines, and baskets containing the dirt he'd just dug. Overhead, occasional canister rounds exploded, blasting angry iron balls onto the field below. The sappers dug diligently; the deeper they got, the less their danger.

After a while, Captain Bengt Vilhelm Carlberg joined Karl's small retinue. Carlberg had been off on an errand. Now he took a position at one edge of the group of officers who stood around the king's feet, keeping him company.

"Your Majesty," said Captain Andre Sicre, "might it not be well to come down? The musketry is worrisome, and there are quite a few shells bursting overhead."

Karl answered without turning his eyes from the action in front of him. "Canister is a hazard to you as well. And at any rate, my life is in the hands of God, as yours is, so I do not worry about it."

Another shell burst not far ahead, and balls smacked the upper back wall of the trench only a few meters distant. *Overhead is one thing, Carlberg told himself, but that one was forward, and a greater hazard to you than to us.*

Kaulbars too had noticed. "Your Majesty, either God is playing with hailstones, or that one was close."

"Be careful what you say, Kaulbars. It's not wise to tempt God."

This quieted the banter, though the king's reply had been light. Carlberg watched the king's face, what he could see of it between tricorne and upturned collar, thinking how often God was tempted. *The Lord must be very tolerant, His children are so heedless and headstrong.*

Then, snatching the young captain's gaze, the king's head jerked abruptly, and rolled to the right. The left hand slid away, leaving the face on the cold earth. The left arm slipped off the parapet, to hang limply on the sloping wall. Kaulbars too had seen. "Lord Jesus!" he hissed. "The king has been hit!"

The quiet words were a shock, like something in a bad dream. For a moment no one spoke; no one even breathed. Then Kaulbars's hard hand cuffed Carlberg's shoulder. "Quick! Get von Schwerin! He must be told!"

But von Schwerin had already arrived, stood only a few meters behind him. Hearing the words, he came at once, looked up at the king, then called the attending officers into a small cluster. "Keep your mouths shut about this. All of you. We don't want word to spread." He shook his head, then looked around. "Carlberg, Posse, go bring a stretcher. And if anyone asks who it's for...." He gave instructions.

Carlberg and Captain Knut Posse trotted off. A stretcher? The king's field kitchen, shielded by terrain, had been used as a temporary medical station, and they found a stretcher there, with straps to secure the wounded.

They returned with the stretcher, which they positioned under the king's feet. Then von Schwerin was boosted up the steep front wall, and raised the king's head. There was no question; Karl XII was very dead. Without a word, von Schwerin motioned with a hand. The officers below drew the body carefully down, then strapped it on the stretcher. Two capes were used to cover him. Then Captain Sicre stepped forward, and

crouching, removed the king's ruined hat. Then replaced it with his own white periwig—the king had never worn a periwig—and added his own richly ornamented hat, something else foreign to the warrior king.

"Good!" said von Schwerin. "Carlberg, the casualty is a Hessian; a Captain... Meinert. Take Captain Meinert's body to Tistedalen."

Again Carlberg trotted off, this time to find Captain Malcolm Hamilton, who was the Royal Guard charge of quarters that evening.

"Hamilton," he said, 'a Hessian officer has been killed, a Captain Meinert. I'm to see his body to Tistedalen, and I need a stretcher crew.

"What's going on?" Hamilton asked. "Why not a crew of his own people?"

Carlberg grimaced, then whispered in Hamilton's ear. The man appeared stunned. "The king?" he murmured.

"Ja."

"Good lord." Hamilton left the watch in the hands of his second, then promptly roused out two teams of litter bearers and a torch bearer, and they hurried to the trench. Someone had rearranged one of the capes to cover the head as well. One of the teams picked up the stretcher, and it was carried off.

Away from the brass, one of the bearers, a corporal, asked "Who is it we carry, sir?"

It was Carlberg who answered. "A Captain Meinert; a Hessian. That's why we're taking him to Tistedalen." Tistedalen was where Fredrik of Hesse, a man committed to Sweden's victory, had established his headquarters.



Tistedalen wasn't a long walk, ordinarily, but the night was dark, the road rutted and the ruts freezing again. And carrying a stretcher was always awkward. After a bit they switched carrier teams. Here and there, ruts left the road, headed for unknown destinations. At one point, Carlberg stumbled, caught his balance. "Damn!" he said, this can't be right. It's getting too rough...and turning uphill."

"You're right." Hamilton scowled at the torch bearer.

"Men, set the stretcher down," he ordered. "Carefully." He looked around. "We'll backtrack. Torch bearer, be alert. When you come to the main road, stop."

The stretcher bearers reversed direction, raised the stretcher again, and started back. They'd gone only 30 meters or so when the right front bearer turned an ankle and fell. The remaining men lost control of their burden, a handle hit the ground, and the

stretcher overturned. Hearing his captain curse, the torchbearer stopped and raised his light overhead. The stretcher bearers had frozen; to drop a corpse, especially of an officer, was even worse than dropping someone wounded.

The capes, hat and periwig had been dislodged. Carlberg picked the hat and wig off the ground. "All right, men. Turn it back over."

They did. The straps had kept the body in place, and Carlberg moved quickly to replace wig and hat. But for a moment the torchlight showed the king's retreating hairline, the cranium holed and bloody—and the face, its narrow full-lipped mouth tied shut with a kerchief. A very familiar face, for these were men of the Royal Guard.

The soldiers backed away in horror.

"GIV AKT!" Hamilton snapped.

His men jerked to attention..

"Good. You will mention this to no one. You will not even discuss it among yourselves. Understood?" After the sharp "giv akt," Hamilton's voice had softened to little more than a murmur, honey sweet, as if serious trouble would follow any breach of silence. They nodded. "I know who each of you is. And I trust you." He paused. "Now, pick up *Meinert's* body again, and we shall proceed."

They lifted.

"Route step, march!"

As they started down the road again, it seemed to Carlberg this would not remain a secret very long.

Crown Prince Fredrik of Hesse was the husband of Karl's eldest sister, Sweden's Crown Princess Ulrika Eleanora, which made him the senior surviving figure in the area. "Gentlemen," Fredrik said, "it is not practical to continue this campaign. When word of the king's death spreads, the spirit of the army will drain away like the king's blood. While the Dane and his people, Dane and Norwegian alike, will take on new life, new vigor, and a determination to drive and harry the last of us back over the border. We are better advised to leave on our own volition. To be driven out by force of arms, with the army's tail between its legs, would be to lose whatever standing we have in the peace council, and inspire the Dane to renew his ambitions for Skåne. While quenching whatever aspirations we may have sparked in Norway to cast off the Danish

leash."

There were no cheers, but he did not doubt that agreement was unanimous.

Still... "Does anyone here see it differently?"

General Kurt Christoph von Schwerin got to his feet. "Not differently. I support your decision. This remains an excellent army, and if we withdraw it with its discipline and pride intact, Sweden will still have a proud future."

"Thank you, general," Fredrik said.

"What of the Army of Jämtland?" someone asked. "Should it not be withdrawn too?"

Jämtland, a desolate place far away off north. "Yes, of course," Fredrik answered off-handedly. In fact he had no attention on, or interest in, the Army of Jämtland, but it too should be notified.



After the meeting was adjourned, Fredrik sat down with his personal secretary, Captain Sicre, and dictated a letter to Princess Ulrika Eleanora. Informing her of her Royal brother's death, and of his own decision to withdraw Sweden's armies from Norway. And of course that he looked forward to seeing her as soon as possible.

Chapter 23

Another Bridge

Armfelt's soldiers came very largely from peasant farms. Where, if something was needed, you ordinarily made it yourself, using whatever came to hand. Thus his engineering officers found abundant building skills among the troops. When they needed something made, artisan talents were ready to hand.^{EN8}

For generations, Jonsplatsen had been a ferry crossing over the Nidelva, but the ferry had been cut loose and towed to Trondheim to keep it out of Swedish hands. Surrounded by cropland and open pastures, Jonsplatsen was not well-suited to building a pontoon bridge secretly, but strategically it was the best site available. And under cover of night, perhaps... Also, the dock abutments, on both sides of the river, remained intact; almost no alterations were necessary.^{EN9}

To provide the bridging material, the army had taken over the sawmill at Leiren for the planks. And for the balks—the square spacers/bridge timbers. The mill also had a long storage shed usable to conceal the construction and storage of pontoons, and which already contained a large quantity of narrow planks, needing only to be trimmed to length, and narrowed near both ends to accommodate the lashings. Because for flexibility, the bridge would be lashed together, not spiked.

The preparations went rapidly. Then in the night, without torches or shouting, wagon after liberated six-horse wagon was loaded by lantern light. Thirty of them bore the pontoons, each with its stone anchor. The pontoons were some 6 meters long, and heavy, one per wagon. Other wagons bore the long balks, 12 cm square, while numerous others bore loads of bridge planks and wooden curbing. Still other wagons, army wagons with wagon boxes, brought tools, cordage, additional stone anchors and other accessories. And finally came two blacksmith's wagons.

With their cavalry escort, they were a considerable train, wending southward

through the moonless hours.

One by one, they were parked close along Jonsplatsen's east bank, positioned by engineering officers and sergeants. Pontoon crews manhandled the pontoons. As dawn paled the darkness, the first pontoon, guided by a sergeant on the shore and rowed by soldiers, moved upstream near the bank. At the sergeant's command, they lowered a 20 kilogram stone anchor into the water, and when it rested on the bottom, the crew let the current carry them downstream on the anchor line, stopping when ordered. By that time, the crew of the second pontoon had dropped their anchor.

As the darkness paled further, the Swedes discovered they were not alone. Across the river were units of Norwegian cavalry and militia, which, as the light strengthened, fired volleys from the far shore. Two hundred meters was too far for anything resembling accuracy, but rather quickly, several Swedes had fallen wounded. Their officers then ordered their crews back far enough that the firing stopped. The Norwegians hooted with derisive pleasure. Then de la Barre's cavalry moved up to return fire, followed quickly by several Swedish three-pounders with canister shot. The jeering ceased and the Norwegians dispersed. Quickly the bridge builders returned to their tasks, working briskly, directed by veterans who'd bridged rivers in Poland, Livonia and Russia, men who'd failed on the Stjørdal and were determined not to fail again.



Armfelt played no supervisory role. From a little distance, he simply watched appreciatively. As a young soldier of fortune, he'd helped bridge rivers in Savoy and Catalonia, and knew the drill. Sitting next to him was a guest, a cavalry officer, Captain Lars Hammarskiöld of Jämtland's regiment, and noted marksman. Carrying "Långa Lisa," his rifled sporting musket.

Rapidly the bridge grew, until its leading end came within the range of aimed musket fire. Across the river, a company of Norwegian dragoons rode to the shore and dismounted, lining up along the bank with carbines ready. On the Swedish side, Hammarskiöld nudged his mount to the riverbank, slid from the saddle with Långa Lisa in hand, and knelt. On command, the Norwegian dragoons fired a volley. More Swedes fell. From the Swedish shore, soldiers with grenade launchers were ordered trotting out onto the partly-built bridge.^{EN10}

Hammarskiöld's gaze had fixed on his first target, an officer who had remained in

the saddle. The Norwegian watched his men reload. Hammarskiöld squeezed the trigger, and Lisa boomed. The Norwegian officer fell sideways from his horse, one boot caught in a stirrup. His well-trained horse barely moved. A sergeant with him called an order to fire again. This time the volley was ragged—not all his men had finished reloading—but more Swedes fell.

The sergeant too toppled from his horse (Hammarskiöld's speed in reloading was as well-honed as his accuracy); then a corporal pitched forward off the bank, headfirst into the water. The men nearest in his squad dropped their muskets and scrambled after him, grabbing his ankles and pulling him from the water. As they dragged the corpse up the bank, a lieutenant rode over to see. His hand started to raise, as if to signal, and he too toppled. Four shots, four down, from no one knew where. Then, back somewhat from the shore (so as not to endanger the bridge builders), canister began to explode overhead, their leaden balls pattering like heavy hailstones, while along the bank the first grenade exploded. More Norwegians dropped, and some men, unordered, began to pull back. To control the situation, the acting commander called to his trumpeter, who signalled for withdrawal...



De la Barre had ridden up with two battalions of his Finnish cavalry, and sat his horse beside Armfelt. Their arrival had brought a Norwegian response: some 800 mounted Norwegians, regulars and militia, had ridden into position. On the bridge near the far shore, Swedish infantry arrived and exchanged fire with them. Meanwhile the bridge grew, the work intensifying, the artillery and grenade launchers speeding their fire.

The final pontoons reached the shore and were anchored, the final bridge sections were planked—and the two generals trotted onto the bridge, followed by de la Barre's cavalry, pistols in their gloved fists. Armfelt didn't articulate the thought, not even in his mind, but it was there: cavalry was the queen of battle, the cavalry charge it's soul, and he felt young again. Hooves thudded on the seasoned planks, and hearing it, the construction crew and musketeers shrank to the edges, out of their way. At the far end, the horses' hooves found dry ground, and surged up the slight slope. The scene became a melee. But for the Finns, this was familiar, while for most of their opponents it was something they'd known only as a drill. The reality shook them. The dragoons broke, compromising the entire defense, and trumpets signalled a general retreat.

In fact, the only thing that didn't go right was, Budde wasn't coaxed out of Trondheim's walls into open battle. But at least, Armfelt's army was now able to attack Trondheim without the river being frozen. Whether the attack was wise or not.

PART FOUR

REVERSALS

Chapter 24

Too Much Reputation

It took the rest of the army four hours to cross the bridge, after which it made camp in the vicinity.

The general set up headquarters in another large farmhouse, and the next evening sent for Longström. The captain was ushered into Armfelt's room, and saluted. Getting to his feet, Armfelt gestured his orderly to leave, and watched till the door had closed behind the man. Then he turned to his visitor.

"I have another task for you, captain," he said, and held up a leather dispatch pouch that lay on his work table. "This must reach General Frisenheim at Duved Skans as quickly as you can safely deliver it. It contains reports on the army, my analysis of the situation, and how I will deliver the town into the king's hands." He laid the leather pouch back on the table and picked up an envelope that lay beside it. "And this — this is a personal letter to the king, which Frisenheim is also to forward, with the reports. When you've delivered them, return to me."

Then, belatedly, Armfelt gestured the captain to a seat, and sat down himself. For a long moment he said nothing, as if reviewing. "For these to be captured would be extremely damaging. Take as many men — and as few — as you think adequate, keeping in mind that a large force draws more attention. And carry the letter inside your tunic, in case something happens.

"You will wear civilian clothing, of course, carrying your uniforms with you."

He paused thoughtfully again. "If you are attacked," he said at last, "it is vital that you escape capture, and deliver what I now tell you to Frisenheim. Even if only by mouth. Tell him I'm preparing an assault on Trondheim with the resources at hand. And when those preparations are complete, if winter weather has not arrived, I will attack at once. But if the ground has frozen sufficiently, I will await word from him about when he can deliver artillery to me."

Ah, Longström thought, and last night the puddles froze.

"He is also to inform me when there is enough snow for sleighs to deliver the awaited howitzers, and when they are sent."

The general got to his feet again, the captain also rising. "Say nothing of this where you can be overheard," he finished. They shook hands then. "God be with you."



The captain reached his new quarters and in Finnish, spoke to his staff—Lieutenant Björnsjö, Ensign Roström, and 1st Sergeant Stenfors, summarizing the general's orders. Then designated the three short squads he'd take with him. "And you, Erkki," he said to the 1st sergeant. You will come with me, too. "Paavo, Kuusta," he went on, "I'm leaving you with the rest of the company, to take care of whatever else the general needs us to do. Meanwhile let yourself be seen. Let it appear to the locals that we're all still here."

"Are you going to take a guide?" Paavo asked, "to talk with the locals if needed? I am thinking of the Jämtlander, Olofsson."

"No. So far as possible we'll avoid Norwegians. You're likelier to need Olofsson than we are."

"Now, here is what we'll do. Tomorrow we sleep till daylight, then prepare everything we need. Without being conspicuous about it. The morning after that, we leave in darkness."



The next day bedding was hung to dry thoroughly, boots were oiled, carbines and pistols cleaned and oiled, sabers and knives honed, and provisions, and powder and ball were drawn, while the captain and 1st sergeant pored over maps, discussing. They would, they decided, travel via Steine Skans, to reprovision themselves.

The captain sat looking inward a long moment. This mission was as important as any he'd been given. Ever. He'd take no chances with it. So he repeated it to Erkki, effectively verbatim. And then, to make sure, he penned a summary and handed it to the 1st sergeant. "Put it in your breast pocket," he finished.



At 63° north latitude, in late November, nights are very long, and in the absence of moon and snow cover, dark. With the first faint light of a frosty dawn, 22 men in uniform saddled up and left the farm on which they were billeted, riding through a thin

cloud of fogged breath from horses and men. Their departure was no secret to their unwilling hosts—who also had a pretty good idea of their identity; Longström and his activities had become notorious in the province of Trøndelag. The farmwife had cooked the officers' breakfast porridge that morning, and the eldest son spied from the cowshed as the soldiers rode away. Rode away southward, not northward, on the river road.

To make sure they were noticed, and their identity and direction known, they twice stopped briefly at farms where smoke from a chimney indicated someone at home. Stopped to feed their horses from the farmers' already depleted hay sheds. Their rapid Finnish speech was unmistakable and of course unintelligible, but the name Røros, a mining town a few days ride south, was caught more than once. Clearly the fabled Finnish captain was riding south. When they'd left, a young farmer hurried off to carry the information to Trondheim.

After a few hours, Longström led his men off the frozen road into dense young forest, where they changed into farmer clothing. Then, changing direction, they followed a track northeastward toward Klæbu.

Winter had arrived again, presumably this time to stay. Real winter, lacking only the snow needed to enable sleigh transport. Snow, to allow siege guns and winter uniforms to reach Armfelt, from Duved via Steine and Skaanes, or more directly via Tydalen. Or even from Dalarna via Røros.

Meanwhile the army's food supplies were seriously low again, and soldiers faint from starvation conquer nothing. So Armfelt ordered his army not north against Trondheim, but south to a fertile district not yet picked over by his army.

De la Barre had been on von Motzfeldt's trail before Armfelt's army had finished crossing the bridge. Motzfeldt seemed to have sent his militias back to Trondheim, reducing his force to an estimated 400 to 600 regulars. De la Barre pursued him southward with 350 Finns, and orders to either destroy the Norwegian cavalry or drive them southward out of the region. The major point being to prevent their attacking supply trains and foraging parties, or harassing the army in its camp. The Finns found this duty much preferable to harvesting, though long hours in the saddle was hard and hungry work. Hard for men and harder on horses. Initially de la Barre expected von Motzfeldt to try breaking back around him toward Trondheim. Or perhaps watching

for a good place to set an ambush.

Meanwhile Motzfeldt continued south up the Gaul River, to facilitate foraging, He too had to live off the land now. Armfelt moved south again, too, dispersing units nearly to Støren. The general made his headquarters at the Melhus rectory, the location nearest Trondheim.

Meanwhile the winter temperatures froze more than the roads, the mud; it also froze the soldiers in their increasingly tattered summer uniforms. But with winter temperatures, snow was sure to follow, and supply trains from Sweden.^{EN11}

Longström too had ridden long and hard. It was the final moments of twilight, and the slender moon was shrouded by overcast. Twenty-two mounted, trail-worn men, avoiding unnecessary noise, came to a frozen entry lane bordered by stubble fields. There they paused, a log farmhouse dimly visible to their right, the east. The captain muttered instructions; the acknowledgments were little more than grunts. They turned in, quietly, watchfully. Soon they discerned the hops patch, outbuildings, teepee-shaped stacks of firewood.

Most of the patrol left the lane, as if to set sentries around the steading, as if to prevent anyone escaping. Five more proceeded the last hundred meters to the house. It was too dark to discern the thin wood smoke rising lazily from the chimneys, but candle light glimmered through a window. Someone was at home.

Two of the five Finns who rode to the house stayed outside, stationing themselves at diagonally opposite corners, carbines ready, to watch for anyone trying to escape out a window. The captain, 1st sergeant and one other mounted the stoop, and Longström knocked. Inside a dog gruffed, barely audible through the stout homemade door. After a moment, a tall lanky farmer opened it—to find a horse pistol in his face.

"Let us in please."

The words were civil but the voice cold, overbearing, and the pistol deadly. And the words were Swedish, strangely spoken. The farmer backed away, a cold stone, big as a fist, in his belly. Then three other men shouldered their way in, roughly it seemed, though none of them touched him. One was taller than the tall farmer. The farm dog growled once, but did not show his teeth; he was no longer young, knew the smell of gunsteel and powder, and sensed that these newcomers would kill him without

quibble. His tail dropped, and his gaze.

Meanwhile his master had gathered his wits somewhat. "If you are deserters returning to your home, you are welcome here," the farmer said.

The lead intruder looked at him, still coldly, the pistol still pointing, but the sense of threat seemed clearly eased. "Call your family into the room," the man ordered. "And any servants." The farmer called names and orders, his voice sharp, his words commanding. In less than half a minute, the rest of the family had gathered: a middle-aged woman, two girls of perhaps 12 and 16 years, and a youth of perhaps 14.

"Is this all of them?"

"There is a *dreng* in the privy."

There followed a rattle of Finnish. The tall Finn went to the door and called outside, also in Finnish. Minutes later, two additional Finns came in, gripping the arms of the 17-year-old hired boy, who looked, if not frightened, at least very worried.

It was Sunday evening, and some thirty families had gathered at Hegra church for evening service. An abbreviated service, because Inge Larssøn had come in late, interrupting instead of slipping in quietly, and asked to speak. Inge was a steady man, well respected, so the pastor had given him leave. He'd seen a number of armed men turning off the Stjørdal River road onto the Forra River road. There'd been some twilight left, and Inge and his wife and children, all afoot, had stopped, hung back while he'd counted the riders. Swedes, it had seemed to him. Or Finns. With the last of them riding off north, he'd turned back, leading his family the 4 km home. Then he'd saddled his horse and ridden to church.

Quickly, Pastor Bentssen ended the service with a prayer; then, with a question, began a multi-sided discussion. "What would Swedes be doing here now? If they were Swedes. The invader army was reportedly well off south, south even of Trondheim."

Hands rose, and voices.

"Are you sure they were Swedes?" someone asked. "Or Finns?"

"They must be," someone else said. "And they carried guns."

"Anyone might carry guns in times like these."

"But they weren't in uniform you said. Right?"

"No. They appeared to wear work clothes."

"Why would 20 Swedes in work clothes be riding up the Forra?"

"Maybe to cross the fjeld to Steine."

"You don't know they're Swedes. You should have spoken to them."

"I didn't trust them. And I didn't want to call to them."

"Didn't they say anything? You didn't hear them speak?"

"Not a word."

"They were Finns! They didn't want you to hear them talk."

"They could just have been people from up the valley, traveling home from Stjørdalsøra. And done nothing to you."

"Twenty armed men traveling home to where? Inge was right! They were Finns!"

"If they were Finns, he's lucky they didn't stop and cut his throat."

The pastor had stayed clear of the exchanges. Now he spoke again. "Wouldn't Finns be in uniform like the Swedes?"

Now Inge said what was central in his thoughts; in perhaps all their thoughts. "Not the Finns with that Longström devil. It's said they go dressed like anyone else; some of the time anyway."

Longström! Once spoken, it clicked firmly in place. The question was settled. Big Nils spoke then, and when Big Nils spoke, people paid attention. "I say we gather every man in the parish and meet at Hjeldessøns, every man armed. I don't think they'd go far up the Forra on a night as dark as this. They'd probably stop at the Big Bend Farm, and spend the night. Farther up, the forest swallows the road, and they couldn't see 10 meters."

Someone threw in a witticism: "It's so dark along there, even the owls stay home."

No one laughed. "What if it's not them?"

"If it's not, all we're out is a night's sleep. And if it *is* them, we ambush them, kill Longström, and as many of the rest as we can. Rid the country of a curse."

Pastor Bentssen shook his grizzled head. *Or they kill you*, he thought. *They've had much experience killing*. But he didn't say it, because Big Nils was right: it was the thing to do.

The farmhouse had been crowded that chill night. The farmfolk were in the loft; the ground level was taken up by Longström's men, all of them now except the sentry

on the stoop. They slept on the beds and the floors, wrapped in their very non-issue furs. And while the Finns slept (each with a mental alarm set against danger), the farmer in the loft above, whispered instructions to the hired boy, the youth repeating them back till he had them pat.

Throughout the night, a series of guards stood on the stoop, carbine in gloved hand, cavalry pistol holstered opposite his saber. Tired to the bone but standing, they neither drowsed nor wool-gathered. Indeed they more than *stood* their post. Each in turn was quietly intent, ears attuned to the surroundings: hearing, attending, appraising the sounds that reached him: cows, horses, owls, and twice wolves communing in the distance. "Watched" mainly with his ears, for the moon, a sliver, had set early, and the overcast filtered out the starlight.

Meanwhile the house was back far enough from the road that hooves, if any, passing at a walk, were inaudible.

Each sentry was replaced at the end of his hour's shift, as determined by the captain's bulky pocket watch, read by candle light from the window, and passed from shift to shift until the last of them took over. Each man in his turn wore the farmer's bearskin coat, which hung to the stoop, helping to keep even his feet warm.

Their captain, in fact, was a man who created, and modified, his *own* "standard" procedures, according to circumstance.



When the final sentry had taken over, the man he'd relieved built up the fire and wakened the captain. Who collected his watch and wakened his men, thumped the ceiling with his carbine to rouse the farmfolk overhead, then stepped outside to relieve himself and evaluate the weather, which was not particularly cold, but freezing. Meanwhile his men shucked off their civvies, donned uniforms, packed gear; a drill familiar and swift. The farmwife came down and cooked their porridge, and while it bubbled, sliced cheese, and scooped salt herring from a barrel in the pantry. Breakfast consisted of those plus flatbread with butter. Even if their food ran out, she hoped to survive, she and her family, encouraged by rumors that the Swedes and Finns were not killing people, or burning them out. Simply depriving them.



When they'd finished eating, the soldiers saddled their horses. Inside the house, Longström gathered the farmfolk and appraised them thoughtfully. Briefly he looked at

the farmer's 14-year-old son, then turned his gaze to the hired boy. "You!" he said, pointing at the youth, "tell me about yourself! Slowly, for I do not easily understand Norwegian."

The lad stared a moment. The Finn's hand moved toward a pistol, lightly, perhaps unintentionally, and the boy began. "I am...I am Steffan Emilssøn i Storrbekk. My family's farm is farther up the river. My father was *dreng* here in his time, but our farm is small, so when I became old enough, my father hired me out here. He said Oskar Magnussøn is a good and just employer, and near enough I could visit home on holy days, and on my name day."

The intruder nodded thoughtfully, as if considering, and when he spoke again, his voice was quiet. Friendly. "Good. Good. But I must claim your services now, Steffan, as my guide. I do not know all the förhugningar above here. You must lead us safely around them, for I don't doubt you helped fell them. We will leave at once, while the light is still faint, and I will let you come back when we have reached the fjeld safely."

Now his voice became more firm, and the youth's eyes could not evade his gaze. "You ride beside me, and if we are ambushed, you will surely die. For musket balls will be coming our way. Also you will have betrayed us, me and my men, and you'll be treated accordingly." While talking, Longström had leaned toward the boy. Now he paused, straightened, smiled, and his tone lightened. "And you'll be riding Magnussøn's horse, which might also be killed. So you must be careful, you even more than me."

The boy looked at Magnussøn now, almost beseechingly. The farmer nodded. "We will be waiting for you when you return, Steffan. Brita will bake kanelboller for your safe arrival back."

For a moment no one said anything, and Steffan felt all their eyes on him, the soldiers' and the Magnussøn's. Then Longström stood, and his voice was brisk, commanding. "All right! Time to leave!" The soldiers in the house donned their capes, gloves, and winter caps (they were the only company in the army to have winter caps with them), and in no more than a minute they had clomped outside, Steffan with the 1st sergeant's long left hand gripping his arm. Their horses had been brought from the sheds, where they'd been sheltered and saddled. And Magnussøn's, from the small stable, also saddled. Now the orders were in Finnish, the sound utterly, alarmingly, foreign to the youth. Then the short column trotted easily down the lane toward the

road, in single file. Except for the 1st sergeant, who rode beside Steffan and a half length back, his left hand no longer on the boy's arm. A glance showed it resting near his saber.

Quickly they reached the river road, then paused, and Longström looked back. "We turn right, I suppose." The words were a test, not a question.

"Yes sir."

They turned northeastward up the primitive river road, again at an easy trot. Gradually the faint morning twilight grew. Before long they reached the point where they should leave the road again, to avoid the förhuggning not far ahead. Magnussøn had hoped—supposed—the Finns had been seen and recognized, for there were farms scattered along both shores of the lower Stjørdal River. And unless the Finns knew about the Fulset Trail, they must have passed a number of them in the evening twilight—on a Sunday evening when there'd have been people walking or riding to Hegra.

And if they'd been seen, there might well be a welcoming party waiting in the *forhogning*.

Steffan's task was to lead the Finns into a possible ambush. At the first sound of a shot, he was to fall from his horse, lose himself in the confusion and whatever cover was at hand. He hoped it wouldn't happen. These men had behaved civilly to the Magnussøns and himself, considering the circumstances, and he felt no devotion to the Danish king, nor a desire to die. But meanwhile, what would happen was in the hands of God.

Dawnlight had grown, and a hundred meters ahead, the first förhuggning became visible. Longström glanced back at Steffan, but did not signal a stop; 50 meters, 40... Steffan, his senses sharpened by the situation, smelled a faint odor of tobacco smoke—someone had smoked a pipe! Longström raised an arm... A musket boomed, and almost at once another, then quickly many more, from the shelter of fallen trees.

From the shelter of fallen trees a musket boomed, and almost at once another, then quickly many more. Captain Peter Veikkopoika Longström felt the first ball strike his belly like a cannon ball. Another struck his neck, and he nearly fell from the saddle, reining his horse toward the river, which just there was open riffles, a rapid. A lucky ball struck his mount below the ear, and it stumbled, fell; its wounded rider hit the frozen ground like a sack of sand, heavily, without rolling, the wind knocked out of him. Only one other of the Finns had been hit, and two horses. The first shot had been

fired sooner than it should have, and the visibility was poor. The Finns fired their carbines from the saddle—suppression fire—then attacked.

Longström lurched to his feet. He'd been carrying the dispatch pouch slung by its shoulder strap. He wrested it free, and staggering toward the shore, threw it in the direction of the water, then fell again. Once more he made it to his feet, and staggered a few meters farther — a letter, thrown, wouldn't carry well — thrust a hand inside his tunic, withdrawing the letter to the king. And threw it too, before falling a final time. Meanwhile the farmers had not foreseen the fury they'd roused. Erkki had shouted a command to a man known for his skill with wounds — "see to the captain!" — then led the rest of his Finns in a charge, sheathing their now empty carbines and drawing pistols. Reaching the fallen treetops, they dismounted, to clamber among and over them like madmen, pistols booming at occasional targets before drawing their sabers.

The assembled farmers, inexperienced, and exultant at the sight of Longström falling, had been too slow in reloading. Now they folded, most of them fleeing upslope toward their horses.

Only then did Erkki call off his men and turn back for his captain, whom he found doubled up on the frozen ground, hands on his bloody slimey abdomen. The ball that had struck his neck was a small one, but the wound had bled copiously. The man tending him was staunching it with a piece of scarf. "Can you ride, captain?" Erkki asked.

"Ride? No, good friend, this is the final wound. I have failed both general and king. And Finland." Suddenly it seemed life had played a joke on him, triggering a laugh. A single bark, for the large ball had scrambled his entrails, and the spasming of his abdominal muscles generated a massive shock of pain.

He paused, gasping, and for a moment gathered his strength. Then "I threw the dispatch pouch in the river," he husked. "And the letter. They could have been captured by an eddy, though, and held to the shore. If they have, rescue them. If not, they've been carried downstream and taken under the ice." His eyes had closed, but his lips moved again. "Leave me. This is as good a place..."

And spoke no more.

While leading the charge, Erkki had glimpsed the dispatch pouch laying half in the water. But it wasn't there now, nor any envelope, so he whistled up his horse, and mounting, rode downstream along the bank to where the river was frozen, finding

nothing — no saddle bag, no envelope.

By that time his men had gathered. He looked around for Magnussøn's horse; it wasn't there. It was a farm horse, not used to guns booming around it; it could have panicked, thrown the boy and run off. Or the boy might have ridden it back to Magnussøn's, or perhaps to his home farm. Well, he was no use to them now anyway.

"Jalmari," Erkki said, "I'm leaving you in command. I want you all to ride on to Steine. Tell them what happened here, and that the captain ordered you to proceed to Duved, to report to General Frisenheim. No one is to divert you. No one!

"Pekka," he said then, "you're the man who carries messages in his head and delivers them exactly. So you are my messenger. Listen now. You too, Jalmari."

The small man grinned despite the situation, and nodded, and 1st Sergeant Erik Stenfors repeated what the general had told the captain, word for word. Then remembering, the 1st sergeant took the summary from his tunic and handed it to the small trooper.

"And where will you go, Erkki Veikkopoika?", asked Sergeant Jalmari Hautaluoma.

"I will return to the general. It's important that he learns what happened here."

No one needed to ask why. What happened here would be told throughout Trøndelag. Returning would be less dangerous alone than with others.



Steffan rode into the farmyard, slid from the horse's back, and ran into the house without even putting the horse away. "Herr Magnussøn! Herr Magnussøn! There has been a battle at the lower *forhogning*, and the captain has been shot! Killed maybe! And he threw a saddlebag in the river — and I rescued it!" He slipped the dispatch pouch off his shoulder and held it up. "I poured the water out of it, and looked. It's full of papers. Probably important!"

Magnussøn stared, then turned to his wife. "Agda, I must take this to Pastor Bentssen. He will know how to deal with it. And I will take Steffan with me, because he was there, and rescued it."

Chapter 25

Caught in Limbo

Armfelt frowned at the report he held. The Hälsinge Regiment again! How much trouble could one regiment make? *Too many trips to the woodshed*, he thought. *After awhile, all you found was bark, and dry rot riddled with insect holes.* And that's what the recruiters brought back with them: empty bark, dry rot and worms.

A sharp rap on his door jerked his attention. "Come!"

It opened to the charge of quarters. "Herr general, a man is here with a report from Captain Longström."

So. Now he'd know if the rumor from Trondheim was false. "Thank you sergeant. Send him in."

He remembered the 1st sergeant, for his height if nothing more. The man looked hungrier than before, and worn. "News from Steine?" Armfelt asked. "You traveled fast!"

"I haven't been to Steine, herr general. We were ambushed at a *förhuggning* above the mouth of the Forra, and Captain Longström was shot. He lived long enough to give us orders. I was to return here to report to you. The rest of the patrol continued to Steine under Sergeant Kyrkogård. From there they were to continue to Duved, to General Frisenheim." He paused for just a moment. "The river at the ambush was swift, had no ice, and the musket fire was heavy, so Captain Longström threw the dispatch pouch into the river to keep it from being captured—the pouch and the letter to the king.

"Dear God!" Armfelt paused "Did you lose many men?"

"Only Captain Longström, general. Another was wounded but able to ride. It was as if all of them knew the captain, and aimed at him. We charged at once, and they scattered. They were probably farmers, and lacked fire discipline."

The general spoke then as if thinking aloud. "There couldn't have been many, if only two of ours were hit."

"From the sound of their musketry, there were a lot of them. But it was barely

dawn, and they fired too soon. I smelled a pipe—one of them must have been smoking—and the captain raised his arm, stopping us. So they fired."

"Umm." The general had rested an elbow on the table. Now he cupped his forehead in his hands for a moment. "So," he said, "at least the reports weren't captured."

"I'm not sure, general. I glimpsed the pouch in, or at, the water's edge, but when we returned from running the enemy off, it wasn't there. It wasn't anywhere along the bank, and a little way downstream the river was frozen, so it may have been carried under the ice. In that case they'd hardly find it. It would waterlog and go to the bottom."

He paused, then added: "Our guide was a *trenki*, and after we ran the ambushers off, and returned to the captain, the *trenki* was gone, Also the horse he'd been riding. It's possible he saw the dispatch pouch and retrieved it, ran off with it."

Erkki had recognized the possibility before; now, having voiced it, it seemed to him that's what had happened.

The general folded his hands on the table in front of him and closed his eyes. Erkki wondered if he was praying. If so, it was a very short prayer. When he looked up, his face was grim, but his voice was neither angry nor despondent.. "Of what use was it, then, to send the rest of the men on to Duved?"

"The captain gave Jalmari—Sergeant Hautaluoma—a paper with what you'd told him to tell General Frisenheim. And lived long enough to repeat it to *Korprali* Roshage, the man he relied on to repeat things exactly.

The general didn't respond at once, then nodded. "Thank you sergeant," he said. "Your captain was sent to us by God. Now he has returned to him in heaven."

For a horrified moment, Erkki Kivikoski feared the general might dissolve in tears. But just for a moment. Actually his face had barely creased. He was a man of steel, and had seen too many men die to spill tears, even for the captain.

When the general dismissed him, Erkki left thinking there was no heaven, no god. But the best friend he'd ever known still lived in the hearts of his men. And clearly, it seemed to him, in the general's heart.



The general sent for von Gertten. If Budde had those reports in his hands, and he very well might, the chance of a successful assault was meager. But winter had to come

soon. Then the fields would freeze deep and hard, and it would snow, and either Frisenheim would send artillery from Duved, or the king would send some via Härjedalen and Røros, or both.

Then, he told himself, we will have Trondheim, maybe even before the king takes Christiania. And bygones will be bygones.

Or not, as the case might be.

Meanwhile conditions were not good in Trondheim. The food shortage of early autumn had grown worse. Thus many farmers who'd been called into Trondheim to aid in its defense were allowed to go home. The supply of firewood was very short, and several buildings were torn down for fuel. Crowding was severe. Epidemics broke out. On November 25, in Trondheim, only 3,600 soldiers were fit for duty, and in early December it got worse. The situation was almost desperate.



On November 29, mild winds and heavy rains blew in from the south, delaying the onset of serious winter. Five hundred and five of Armfelt's men were reported sick, in addition to the 1,211 already hauled off to the forts.



Meanwhile, de la Barre had been busy to the south. Motzfeldt and his dragoons had been stranded in the Dovre Mountains. De la Barre rested his men at Opdal, and after capturing quantities of provisions and hay, had led them toward the mines at Kvikne.

The director of mines there had gotten a message supposedly from the pastor at Melhus, saying that Budde had sent a force of not less than 2,000 men toward Rennebu to stop de la Barre. The director promptly called the local armed peasantry to Rennebu, to teach the cocksure Swedes (actually Finns) a lesson.

It was not, however, Budde's men who came down from the north, but a force sent by Armfelt. When the farmers learned this, most of them scattered and went home. The director and 32 others took refuge in the mine, and were captured. The Finns also got several tons of copper and a large cache of weapons.

De la Barre then led his troops to Røros, which opened a new route to Duved, via Härjedalen. According to local tradition, de la Barre used the church at Røros as a

stable. The treatment of the people did not give the Swedish army a good reputation there.



To best handle the gathering of supplies from the countryside, beginning on 26 November, the army occupied scattered quarters throughout almost the entire valley between Melhus and Stören, a stretch of some 30 kilometers. Foraging patrols went everywhere.

Budde's intelligence sources reported that in the Swedish army, severe discipline, even hanging, was being meted out for theft and other criminal acts, despite terrible privation. Budde was deeply angered by reports of several Norwegian peasant men and women not only giving the Swedes information, but acting as traitors.

On the other hand, Colonel Maidell and 400 men of the Tavastehus Infantry, were jumped and bloodied by a strong Norwegian force sent out by Budde and supported by mobilized peasants.

One December morning, Capt. Erik Löfving of Jämtland's Regiment encountered a larger Norwegian force, capturing a noncom and 13 soldiers. A detachment of the same regiment, under Ensign Magnus Brewitz, captured 16 Danish soldiers, and Arvid Wadenstjerna (presumably a noncom), with four other mounted men of the "Tavastehus Regiment" took 20 prisoners.

Just before the army broke camp and left Melhus, the Norwegian Capt. Lossius captured 10-12 sleighs of provisions which de la Barre's foragers had taken from farms around Opdal.^{EN13}

Chapter 26

Karl XII

November 30 — After supper, 36-year-old King Karl XII of Sweden left his field kitchen with his small retinue of the moment, and returned via a zig-zag, 7-foot-deep communication trench to the current forward trench, to observe the initial work on what was to be the next trench forward. Digging a new trench under fire was seriously dangerous, and Karl intended that the sappers see their king sharing their risk.

He needed no guide, knew the layout intimately, and could have pointed on a map to his location at any moment.

The evening was not yet freezing, and the trench smelled of recently dug soil, but it was high enough, and the soil porous enough, there was no standing water to splash through, and little mud. At an appropriate location he stopped, stepped onto the firing step, and glanced back to an aide. "Captain," he said "boost me up."

Crouching, the man provided a shoulder, and when the king had placed a boot on it, raised him up. Then, with the toe of the other boot, Karl kicked two toe-holds in the trench's steep front wall, and settled against it, forearms and elbows on the low parapet, to help support his weight. Cheekbone on his left hand, he scanned the field, and the hill and fortifications close ahead. Pitch pots flaming on the battlements lit the scene with russet light, and helped Norwegian snipers find targets. Tracers tracked the artificial twilight, and on the intervening field, 200 Swedish sappers lay each on his side, digging, protected to a degree by facines, and baskets containing the dirt he'd just dug. Overhead, occasional canister rounds exploded, blasting angry iron balls onto the field below. The sappers dug diligently; the deeper they got, the less their danger.

After a while, Captain Bengt Vilhelm Carlberg joined Karl's small retinue. Carlberg had been off on an errand. Now he took a position at one edge of the group of officers who stood around the king's feet, keeping him company.

"Your Majesty," said Captain Andre Sicre, "might it not be well to come down? The musketry is worrisome, and there are quite a few shells bursting overhead."

Karl answered without turning his eyes from the action in front of him. "Canister is a hazard to you as well. And at any rate, my life is in the hands of God, as yours is, so I do not worry about it."

Another shell burst not far ahead, and balls smacked the upper back wall of the trench only a few meters distant. *Overhead is one thing, Carlberg told himself, but that one was forward, and a greater hazard to you than to us.*

Kaulbars too had noticed. "Your Majesty, either God is playing with hailstones, or that one was close."

"Be careful what you say, Kaulbars. It's not wise to tempt God."

This quieted the banter, though the king's reply had been light. Carlberg watched the king's face, what he could see of it between tricorne and upturned collar, thinking how often God was tempted. *The Lord must be very tolerant, His children are so heedless and headstrong.*

Then, snatching the young captain's gaze, the king's head jerked abruptly, and rolled to the right. The left hand slid away, leaving the face on the cold earth. The left arm slipped off the parapet, to hang limply on the sloping wall. Kaulbars too had seen. "Lord Jesus!" he hissed. "The king has been hit!"

The quiet words were a shock, like something in a bad dream. For a moment no one spoke; no one even breathed. Then Kaulbars's hard hand cuffed Carlberg's shoulder. "Quick! Get von Schwerin! He must be told!"

But von Schwerin had already arrived, stood only a few meters behind him. Hearing the words, he came at once, looked up at the king, then called the attending officers into a small cluster. "Keep your mouths shut about this. All of you. We don't want word to spread." He shook his head, then looked around. "Carlberg, Posse, go bring a stretcher. And if anyone asks who it's for...." He gave instructions.

Carlberg and Captain Knut Posse trotted off. A stretcher? The king's field kitchen, shielded by terrain, had been used as a temporary medical station, and they found a stretcher there, with straps to secure the wounded.

They returned with the stretcher, which they positioned under the king's feet. Then von Schwerin was boosted up the steep front wall, and raised the king's head. There was no question; Karl XII was very dead. Without a word, von Schwerin motioned with a hand. The officers below drew the body carefully down, then strapped it on the stretcher. Two capes were used to cover him. Then Captain Sicre stepped forward, and

crouching, removed the king's ruined hat. Then replaced it with his own white periwig—the king had never worn a periwig—and added his own richly ornamented hat, something else foreign to the warrior king.

"Good!" said von Schwerin. "Carlberg, the casualty is a Hessian; a Captain... Meinert. Take Captain Meinert's body to Tistedalen."

Again Carlberg trotted off, this time to find Captain Malcolm Hamilton, who was the Royal Guard charge of quarters that evening.

"Hamilton," he said, 'a Hessian officer has been killed, a Captain Meinert. I'm to see his body to Tistedalen, and I need a stretcher crew.

"What's going on?" Hamilton asked. "Why not a crew of his own people?"

Carlberg grimaced, then whispered in Hamilton's ear. The man appeared stunned. "The king?" he murmured.

"Ja."

"Good lord." Hamilton left the watch in the hands of his second, then promptly roused out two teams of litter bearers and a torch bearer, and they hurried to the trench. Someone had rearranged one of the capes to cover the head as well. One of the teams picked up the stretcher, and it was carried off.

Away from the brass, one of the bearers, a corporal, asked "Who is it we carry, sir?"

It was Carlberg who answered. "A Captain Meinert; a Hessian. That's why we're taking him to Tistedalen." Tistedalen was where Fredrik of Hesse, a man committed to Sweden's victory, had established his headquarters.



Tistedalen wasn't a long walk, ordinarily, but the night was dark, the road rutted and the ruts freezing again. And carrying a stretcher was always awkward. After a bit they switched carrier teams. Here and there, ruts left the road, headed for unknown destinations. At one point, Carlberg stumbled, caught his balance. "Damn!" he said, this can't be right. It's getting too rough...and turning uphill."

"You're right." Hamilton scowled at the torch bearer.

"Men, set the stretcher down," he ordered. "Carefully." He looked around. "We'll backtrack. Torch bearer, be alert. When you come to the main road, stop."

The stretcher bearers reversed direction, raised the stretcher again, and started back. They'd gone only 30 meters or so when the right front bearer turned an ankle and fell. The remaining men lost control of their burden, a handle hit the ground, and the

stretcher overturned. Hearing his captain curse, the torchbearer stopped and raised his light overhead. The stretcher bearers had frozen; to drop a corpse, especially of an officer, was even worse than dropping someone wounded.

The capes, hat and periwig had been dislodged. Carlberg picked the hat and wig off the ground. "All right, men. Turn it back over."

They did. The straps had kept the body in place, and Carlberg moved quickly to replace wig and hat. But for a moment the torchlight showed the king's retreating hairline, the cranium holed and bloody—and the face, its narrow full-lipped mouth tied shut with a kerchief. A very familiar face, for these were men of the Royal Guard.

The soldiers backed away in horror.

"GIV AKT!" Hamilton snapped.

His men jerked to attention..

"Good. You will mention this to no one. You will not even discuss it among yourselves. Understood?" After the sharp "giv akt," Hamilton's voice had softened to little more than a murmur, honey sweet, as if serious trouble would follow any breach of silence. They nodded. "I know who each of you is. And I trust you." He paused. "Now, pick up *Meinert's* body again, and we shall proceed."

They lifted.

"Route step, march!"

As they started down the road again, it seemed to Carlberg this would not remain a secret very long.

Crown Prince Fredrik of Hesse was the husband of Karl's eldest sister, Sweden's Crown Princess Ulrika Eleanora, which made him the senior surviving figure in the area. "Gentlemen," Fredrik said, "it is not practical to continue this campaign. When word of the king's death spreads, the spirit of the army will drain away like the king's blood. While the Dane and his people, Dane and Norwegian alike, will take on new life, new vigor, and a determination to drive and harry the last of us back over the border. We are better advised to leave on our own volition. To be driven out by force of arms, with the army's tail between its legs, would be to lose whatever standing we have in the peace council, and inspire the Dane to renew his ambitions for Skåne. While quenching whatever aspirations we may have sparked in Norway to cast off the Danish

leash."

There were no cheers, but he did not doubt that agreement was unanimous.

Still... "Does anyone here see it differently?"

General Kurt Christoph von Schwerin got to his feet. "Not differently. I support your decision. This remains an excellent army, and if we withdraw it with its discipline and pride intact, Sweden will still have a proud future."

"Thank you, general," Fredrik said.

"What of the Army of Jämtland?" someone asked. "Should it not be withdrawn too?"

Jämtland, a desolate place far away off north. "Yes, of course," Fredrik answered off-handedly. In fact he had no attention on, or interest in, the Army of Jämtland, but it too should be notified.



After the meeting was adjourned, Fredrik sat down with his personal secretary, Captain Sicre, and dictated a letter to Princess Ulrika Eleanora. Informing her of her Royal brother's death, and of his own decision to withdraw Sweden's armies from Norway. And of course that he looked forward to seeing her as soon as possible.

Chapter 23

Another Bridge

Armfelt's soldiers came very largely from peasant farms. Where, if something was needed, you ordinarily made it yourself, using whatever came to hand. Thus his engineering officers found abundant building skills among the troops. When they needed something made, artisan talents were ready to hand.^{EN8}

For generations, Jonsplatsen had been a ferry crossing over the Nidelva, but the ferry had been cut loose and towed to Trondheim to keep it out of Swedish hands. Surrounded by cropland and open pastures, Jonsplatsen was not well-suited to building a pontoon bridge secretly, but strategically it was the best site available. And under cover of night, perhaps... Also, the dock abutments, on both sides of the river, remained intact; almost no alterations were necessary.^{EN9}

To provide the bridging material, the army had taken over the sawmill at Leiren for the planks. And for the balks—the square spacers/bridge timbers. The mill also had a long storage shed usable to conceal the construction and storage of pontoons, and which already contained a large quantity of narrow planks, needing only to be trimmed to length, and narrowed near both ends to accommodate the lashings. Because for flexibility, the bridge would be lashed together, not spiked.

The preparations went rapidly. Then in the night, without torches or shouting, wagon after liberated six-horse wagon was loaded by lantern light. Thirty of them bore the pontoons, each with its stone anchor. The pontoons were some 6 meters long, and heavy, one per wagon. Other wagons bore the long balks, 12 cm square, while numerous others bore loads of bridge planks and wooden curbing. Still other wagons, army wagons with wagon boxes, brought tools, cordage, additional stone anchors and other accessories. And finally came two blacksmith's wagons.

With their cavalry escort, they were a considerable train, wending southward

through the moonless hours.

One by one, they were parked close along Jonsplatsen's east bank, positioned by engineering officers and sergeants. Pontoon crews manhandled the pontoons. As dawn paled the darkness, the first pontoon, guided by a sergeant on the shore and rowed by soldiers, moved upstream near the bank. At the sergeant's command, they lowered a 20 kilogram stone anchor into the water, and when it rested on the bottom, the crew let the current carry them downstream on the anchor line, stopping when ordered. By that time, the crew of the second pontoon had dropped their anchor.

As the darkness paled further, the Swedes discovered they were not alone. Across the river were units of Norwegian cavalry and militia, which, as the light strengthened, fired volleys from the far shore. Two hundred meters was too far for anything resembling accuracy, but rather quickly, several Swedes had fallen wounded. Their officers then ordered their crews back far enough that the firing stopped. The Norwegians hooted with derisive pleasure. Then de la Barre's cavalry moved up to return fire, followed quickly by several Swedish three-pounders with canister shot. The jeering ceased and the Norwegians dispersed. Quickly the bridge builders returned to their tasks, working briskly, directed by veterans who'd bridged rivers in Poland, Livonia and Russia, men who'd failed on the Stjørdal and were determined not to fail again.



Armfelt played no supervisory role. From a little distance, he simply watched appreciatively. As a young soldier of fortune, he'd helped bridge rivers in Savoy and Catalonia, and knew the drill. Sitting next to him was a guest, a cavalry officer, Captain Lars Hammarskiöld of Jämtland's regiment, and noted marksman. Carrying "Långa Lisa," his rifled sporting musket.

Rapidly the bridge grew, until its leading end came within the range of aimed musket fire. Across the river, a company of Norwegian dragoons rode to the shore and dismounted, lining up along the bank with carbines ready. On the Swedish side, Hammarskiöld nudged his mount to the riverbank, slid from the saddle with Långa Lisa in hand, and knelt. On command, the Norwegian dragoons fired a volley. More Swedes fell. From the Swedish shore, soldiers with grenade launchers were ordered trotting out onto the partly-built bridge.^{EN10}

Hammarskiöld's gaze had fixed on his first target, an officer who had remained in

the saddle. The Norwegian watched his men reload. Hammarskiöld squeezed the trigger, and Lisa boomed. The Norwegian officer fell sideways from his horse, one boot caught in a stirrup. His well-trained horse barely moved. A sergeant with him called an order to fire again. This time the volley was ragged—not all his men had finished reloading—but more Swedes fell.

The sergeant too toppled from his horse (Hammarskiöld's speed in reloading was as well-honed as his accuracy); then a corporal pitched forward off the bank, headfirst into the water. The men nearest in his squad dropped their muskets and scrambled after him, grabbing his ankles and pulling him from the water. As they dragged the corpse up the bank, a lieutenant rode over to see. His hand started to raise, as if to signal, and he too toppled. Four shots, four down, from no one knew where. Then, back somewhat from the shore (so as not to endanger the bridge builders), canister began to explode overhead, their leaden balls pattering like heavy hailstones, while along the bank the first grenade exploded. More Norwegians dropped, and some men, unordered, began to pull back. To control the situation, the acting commander called to his trumpeter, who signalled for withdrawal...



De la Barre had ridden up with two battalions of his Finnish cavalry, and sat his horse beside Armfelt. Their arrival had brought a Norwegian response: some 800 mounted Norwegians, regulars and militia, had ridden into position. On the bridge near the far shore, Swedish infantry arrived and exchanged fire with them. Meanwhile the bridge grew, the work intensifying, the artillery and grenade launchers speeding their fire.

The final pontoons reached the shore and were anchored, the final bridge sections were planked—and the two generals trotted onto the bridge, followed by de la Barre's cavalry, pistols in their gloved fists. Armfelt didn't articulate the thought, not even in his mind, but it was there: cavalry was the queen of battle, the cavalry charge it's soul, and he felt young again. Hooves thudded on the seasoned planks, and hearing it, the construction crew and musketeers shrank to the edges, out of their way. At the far end, the horses' hooves found dry ground, and surged up the slight slope. The scene became a melee. But for the Finns, this was familiar, while for most of their opponents it was something they'd known only as a drill. The reality shook them. The dragoons broke, compromising the entire defense, and trumpets signalled a general retreat.

In fact, the only thing that didn't go right was, Budde wasn't coaxed out of Trondheim's walls into open battle. But at least, Armfelt's army was now able to attack Trondheim without the river being frozen. Whether the attack was wise or not.

PART FOUR

REVERSALS

Chapter 24

Too Much Reputation

It took the rest of the army four hours to cross the bridge, after which it made camp in the vicinity.

The general set up headquarters in another large farmhouse, and the next evening sent for Longström. The captain was ushered into Armfelt's room, and saluted. Getting to his feet, Armfelt gestured his orderly to leave, and watched till the door had closed behind the man. Then he turned to his visitor.

"I have another task for you, captain," he said, and held up a leather dispatch pouch that lay on his work table. "This must reach General Frisenheim at Duved Skans as quickly as you can safely deliver it. It contains reports on the army, my analysis of the situation, and how I will deliver the town into the king's hands." He laid the leather pouch back on the table and picked up an envelope that lay beside it. "And this — this is a personal letter to the king, which Frisenheim is also to forward, with the reports. When you've delivered them, return to me."

Then, belatedly, Armfelt gestured the captain to a seat, and sat down himself. For a long moment he said nothing, as if reviewing. "For these to be captured would be extremely damaging. Take as many men — and as few — as you think adequate, keeping in mind that a large force draws more attention. And carry the letter inside your tunic, in case something happens.

"You will wear civilian clothing, of course, carrying your uniforms with you."

He paused thoughtfully again. "If you are attacked," he said at last, "it is vital that you escape capture, and deliver what I now tell you to Frisenheim. Even if only by mouth. Tell him I'm preparing an assault on Trondheim with the resources at hand. And when those preparations are complete, if winter weather has not arrived, I will attack at once. But if the ground has frozen sufficiently, I will await word from him

about when he can deliver artillery to me."

Ah, Longström thought, and last night the puddles froze.

"He is also to inform me when there is enough snow for sleighs to deliver the awaited howitzers, and when they are sent."

The general got to his feet again, the captain also rising. "Say nothing of this where you can be overheard," he finished. They shook hands then. "God be with you."



The captain reached his new quarters and in Finnish, spoke to his staff—Lieutenant Björnsjö, Ensign Roström, and 1st Sergeant Stenfors, summarizing the general's orders. Then designated the three short squads he'd take with him. "And you, Erkki," he said to the 1st sergeant. You will come with me, too. "Paavo, Kuusta," he went on, "I'm leaving you with the rest of the company, to take care of whatever else the general needs us to do. Meanwhile let yourself be seen. Let it appear to the locals that we're all still here."

"Are you going to take a guide?" Paavo asked, "to talk with the locals if needed? I am thinking of the Jämtlander, Olofsson."

"No. So far as possible we'll avoid Norwegians. You're likelier to need Olofsson than we are.

"Now, here is what we'll do. Tomorrow we sleep till daylight, then prepare everything we need. Without being conspicuous about it. The morning after that, we leave in darkness."



The next day bedding was hung to dry thoroughly, boots were oiled, carbines and pistols cleaned and oiled, sabers and knives honed, and provisions, and powder and ball were drawn, while the captain and 1st sergeant pored over maps, discussing. They would, they decided, travel via Steine Skans, to reprovision themselves.

The captain sat looking inward a long moment. This mission was as important as any he'd been given. Ever. He'd take no chances with it. So he repeated it to Erkki, effectively verbatim. And then, to make sure, he penned a summary and handed it to the 1st sergeant. "Put it in your breast pocket," he finished.



At 63° north latitude, in late November, nights are very long, and in the absence of moon and snow cover, dark. With the first faint light of a frosty dawn, 22 men in

uniform saddled up and left the farm on which they were billeted, riding through a thin cloud of fogged breath from horses and men. Their departure was no secret to their unwilling hosts—who also had a pretty good idea of their identity; Longström and his activities had become notorious in the province of Trøndelag. The farmwife had cooked the officers' breakfast porridge that morning, and the eldest son spied from the cowshed as the soldiers rode away. Rode away southward, not northward, on the river road.

To make sure they were noticed, and their identity and direction known, they twice stopped briefly at farms where smoke from a chimney indicated someone at home. Stopped to feed their horses from the farmers' already depleted hay sheds. Their rapid Finnish speech was unmistakable and of course unintelligible, but the name Røros, a mining town a few days ride south, was caught more than once. Clearly the fabled Finnish captain was riding south. When they'd left, a young farmer hurried off to carry the information to Trondheim.

After a few hours, Longström led his men off the frozen road into dense young forest, where they changed into farmer clothing. Then, changing direction, they followed a track northeastward toward Klæbu.

Winter had arrived again, presumably this time to stay. Real winter, lacking only the snow needed to enable sleigh transport. Snow, to allow siege guns and winter uniforms to reach Armfelt, from Duved via Steine and Skaanes, or more directly via Tydalen. Or even from Dalarna via Røros.

Meanwhile the army's food supplies were seriously low again, and soldiers faint from starvation conquer nothing. So Armfelt ordered his army not north against Trondheim, but south to a fertile district not yet picked over by his army.

De la Barre had been on von Motzfeldt's trail before Armfelt's army had finished crossing the bridge. Motzfeldt seemed to have sent his militias back to Trondheim, reducing his force to an estimated 400 to 600 regulars. De la Barre pursued him southward with 350 Finns, and orders to either destroy the Norwegian cavalry or drive them southward out of the region. The major point being to prevent their attacking supply trains and foraging parties, or harassing the army in its camp. The Finns found this duty much preferable to harvesting, though long hours in the saddle was hard and hungry work. Hard for men and harder on horses. Initially de la Barre expected von

Motzfeldt to try breaking back around him toward Trondheim. Or perhaps watching for a good place to set an ambush.

Meanwhile Motzfeldt continued south up the Gaul River, to facilitate foraging. He too had to live off the land now. Armfelt moved south again, too, dispersing units nearly to Støren. The general made his headquarters at the Melhus rectory, the location nearest Trondheim.

Meanwhile the winter temperatures froze more than the roads, the mud; it also froze the soldiers in their increasingly tattered summer uniforms. But with winter temperatures, snow was sure to follow, and supply trains from Sweden.^{EN11}

Longström too had ridden long and hard. It was the final moments of twilight, and the slender moon was shrouded by overcast. Twenty-two mounted, trail-worn men, avoiding unnecessary noise, came to a frozen entry lane bordered by stubble fields. There they paused, a log farmhouse dimly visible to their right, the east. The captain muttered instructions; the acknowledgments were little more than grunts. They turned in, quietly, watchfully. Soon they discerned the hops patch, outbuildings, teepee-shaped stacks of firewood.

Most of the patrol left the lane, as if to set sentries around the steading, as if to prevent anyone escaping. Five more proceeded the last hundred meters to the house. It was too dark to discern the thin wood smoke rising lazily from the chimneys, but candle light glimmered through a window. Someone was at home.

Two of the five Finns who rode to the house stayed outside, stationing themselves at diagonally opposite corners, carbines ready, to watch for anyone trying to escape out a window. The captain, 1st sergeant and one other mounted the stoop, and Longström knocked. Inside a dog gruffed, barely audible through the stout homemade door. After a moment, a tall lanky farmer opened it—to find a horse pistol in his face.

"Let us in please."

The words were civil but the voice cold, overbearing, and the pistol deadly. And the words were Swedish, strangely spoken. The farmer backed away, a cold stone, big as a fist, in his belly. Then three other men shouldered their way in, roughly it seemed, though none of them touched him. One was taller than the tall farmer. The farm dog growled once, but did not show his teeth; he was no longer young, knew the smell of

gunsteel and powder, and sensed that these newcomers would kill him without quibble. His tail dropped, and his gaze.

Meanwhile his master had gathered his wits somewhat. "If you are deserters returning to your home, you are welcome here," the farmer said.

The lead intruder looked at him, still coldly, the pistol still pointing, but the sense of threat seemed clearly eased. "Call your family into the room," the man ordered. "And any servants." The farmer called names and orders, his voice sharp, his words commanding. In less than half a minute, the rest of the family had gathered: a middle-aged woman, two girls of perhaps 12 and 16 years, and a youth of perhaps 14.

"Is this all of them?"

"There is a *dreng* in the privy."

There followed a rattle of Finnish. The tall Finn went to the door and called outside, also in Finnish. Minutes later, two additional Finns came in, gripping the arms of the 17-year-old hired boy, who looked, if not frightened, at least very worried.

It was Sunday evening, and some thirty families had gathered at Hegra church for evening service. An abbreviated service, because Inge Larssøn had come in late, interrupting instead of slipping in quietly, and asked to speak. Inge was a steady man, well respected, so the pastor had given him leave. He'd seen a number of armed men turning off the Stjørdal River road onto the Forra River road. There'd been some twilight left, and Inge and his wife and children, all afoot, had stopped, hung back while he'd counted the riders. Swedes, it had seemed to him. Or Finns. With the last of them riding off north, he'd turned back, leading his family the 4 km home. Then he'd saddled his horse and ridden to church.

Quickly, Pastor Bentssen ended the service with a prayer; then, with a question, began a multi-sided discussion. "What would Swedes be doing here now? If they were Swedes. The invader army was reportedly well off south, south even of Trondheim."

Hands rose, and voices.

"Are you sure they were Swedes?" someone asked. "Or Finns?"

"They must be," someone else said. "And they carried guns."

"Anyone might carry guns in times like these."

"But they weren't in uniform you said. Right?"

"No. They appeared to wear work clothes."

"Why would 20 Swedes in work clothes be riding up the Forra?"

"Maybe to cross the fjeld to Steine."

"You don't know they're Swedes. You should have spoken to them."

"I didn't trust them. And I didn't want to call to them."

"Didn't they say anything? You didn't hear them speak?"

"Not a word."

"They were Finns! They didn't want you to hear them talk."

"They could just have been people from up the valley, traveling home from Stjørdalsøra. And done nothing to you."

"Twenty armed men traveling home to where? Inge was right! They were Finns!"

"If they were Finns, he's lucky they didn't stop and cut his throat."

The pastor had stayed clear of the exchanges. Now he spoke again. "Wouldn't Finns be in uniform like the Swedes?"

Now Inge said what was central in his thoughts; in perhaps all their thoughts. "Not the Finns with that Longström devil. It's said they go dressed like anyone else; some of the time anyway."

Longström! Once spoken, it clicked firmly in place. The question was settled. Big Nils spoke then, and when Big Nils spoke, people paid attention. "I say we gather every man in the parish and meet at Hjeldessøns, every man armed. I don't think they'd go far up the Forra on a night as dark as this. They'd probably stop at the Big Bend Farm, and spend the night. Farther up, the forest swallows the road, and they couldn't see 10 meters."

Someone threw in a witticism: "It's so dark along there, even the owls stay home."

No one laughed. "What if it's not them?"

"If it's not, all we're out is a night's sleep. And if it *is* them, we ambush them, kill Longström, and as many of the rest as we can. Rid the country of a curse."

Pastor Bentssen shook his grizzled head. *Or they kill you*, he thought. *They've had much experience killing*. But he didn't say it, because Big Nils was right: it was the thing to do.

The farmhouse had been crowded that chill night. The farmfolk were in the loft;

the ground level was taken up by Longström's men, all of them now except the sentry on the stoop. They slept on the beds and the floors, wrapped in their very non-issue furs. And while the Finns slept (each with a mental alarm set against danger), the farmer in the loft above, whispered instructions to the hired boy, the youth repeating them back till he had them pat.

Throughout the night, a series of guards stood on the stoop, carbine in gloved hand, cavalry pistol holstered opposite his saber. Tired to the bone but standing, they neither drowsed nor wool-gathered. Indeed they more than *stood* their post. Each in turn was quietly intent, ears attuned to the surroundings: hearing, attending, appraising the sounds that reached him: cows, horses, owls, and twice wolves communing in the distance. "Watched" mainly with his ears, for the moon, a sliver, had set early, and the overcast filtered out the starlight.

Meanwhile the house was back far enough from the road that hooves, if any, passing at a walk, were inaudible.

Each sentry was replaced at the end of his hour's shift, as determined by the captain's bulky pocket watch, read by candle light from the window, and passed from shift to shift until the last of them took over. Each man in his turn wore the farmer's bearskin coat, which hung to the stoop, helping to keep even his feet warm.

Their captain, in fact, was a man who created, and modified, his *own* "standard" procedures, according to circumstance.



When the final sentry had taken over, the man he'd relieved built up the fire and wakened the captain. Who collected his watch and wakened his men, thumped the ceiling with his carbine to rouse the farmfolk overhead, then stepped outside to relieve himself and evaluate the weather, which was not particularly cold, but freezing. Meanwhile his men shucked off their civvies, donned uniforms, packed gear; a drill familiar and swift. The farmwife came down and cooked their porridge, and while it bubbled, sliced cheese, and scooped salt herring from a barrel in the pantry. Breakfast consisted of those plus flatbread with butter. Even if their food ran out, she hoped to survive, she and her family, encouraged by rumors that the Swedes and Finns were not killing people, or burning them out. Simply depriving them.



When they'd finished eating, the soldiers saddled their horses. Inside the house,

Longström gathered the farmfolk and appraised them thoughtfully. Briefly he looked at the farmer's 14-year-old son, then turned his gaze to the hired boy. "You!" he said, pointing at the youth, "tell me about yourself! Slowly, for I do not easily understand Norwegian."

The lad stared a moment. The Finn's hand moved toward a pistol, lightly, perhaps unintentionally, and the boy began. "I am...I am Steffan Emilssøn i Storrbekk. My family's farm is farther up the river. My father was *dreng* here in his time, but our farm is small, so when I became old enough, my father hired me out here. He said Oskar Magnussøn is a good and just employer, and near enough I could visit home on holy days, and on my name day."

The intruder nodded thoughtfully, as if considering, and when he spoke again, his voice was quiet. Friendly. "Good. Good. But I must claim your services now, Steffan, as my guide. I do not know all the *förhuggningar* above here. You must lead us safely around them, for I don't doubt you helped fell them. We will leave at once, while the light is still faint, and I will let you come back when we have reached the *fjeld* safely."

Now his voice became more firm, and the youth's eyes could not evade his gaze. "You ride beside me, and if we are ambushed, you will surely die. For musket balls will be coming our way. Also you will have betrayed us, me and my men, and you'll be treated accordingly." While talking, Longström had leaned toward the boy. Now he paused, straightened, smiled, and his tone lightened. "And you'll be riding Magnussøn's horse, which might also be killed. So you must be careful, you even more than me."

The boy looked at Magnussøn now, almost beseechingly. The farmer nodded. "We will be waiting for you when you return, Steffan. Brita will bake *kanelboller* for your safe arrival back."

For a moment no one said anything, and Steffan felt all their eyes on him, the soldiers' and the Magnussøn's. Then Longström stood, and his voice was brisk, commanding. "All right! Time to leave!" The soldiers in the house donned their capes, gloves, and winter caps (they were the only company in the army to have winter caps with them), and in no more than a minute they had clomped outside, Steffan with the 1st sergeant's long left hand gripping his arm. Their horses had been brought from the sheds, where they'd been sheltered and saddled. And Magnussøn's, from the small stable, also saddled. Now the orders were in Finnish, the sound utterly, alarmingly,

foreign to the youth. Then the short column trotted easily down the lane toward the road, in single file. Except for the 1st sergeant, who rode beside Steffan and a half length back, his left hand no longer on the boy's arm. A glance showed it resting near his saber.

Quickly they reached the river road, then paused, and Longström looked back. "We turn right, I suppose." The words were a test, not a question.

"Yes sir."

They turned northeastward up the primitive river road, again at an easy trot. Gradually the faint morning twilight grew. Before long they reached the point where they should leave the road again, to avoid the förhuggning not far ahead. Magnussøn had hoped—supposed—the Finns had been seen and recognized, for there were farms scattered along both shores of the lower Stjørdal River. And unless the Finns knew about the Fulset Trail, they must have passed a number of them in the evening twilight—on a Sunday evening when there'd have been people walking or riding to Hegra.

And if they'd been seen, there might well be a welcoming party waiting in the *forhogning*.

Steffan's task was to lead the Finns into a possible ambush. At the first sound of a shot, he was to fall from his horse, lose himself in the confusion and whatever cover was at hand. He hoped it wouldn't happen. These men had behaved civilly to the Magnussøns and himself, considering the circumstances, and he felt no devotion to the Danish king, nor a desire to die. But meanwhile, what would happen was in the hands of God.

Dawnlight had grown, and a hundred meters ahead, the first förhuggning became visible. Longström glanced back at Steffan, but did not signal a stop; 50 meters, 40... Steffan, his senses sharpened by the situation, smelled a faint odor of tobacco smoke—someone had smoked a pipe! Longström raised an arm... A musket boomed, and almost at once another, then quickly many more, from the shelter of fallen trees.

From the shelter of fallen trees a musket boomed, and almost at once another, then quickly many more. Captain Peter Veikkopoika Longström felt the first ball strike his belly like a cannon ball. Another struck his neck, and he nearly fell from the saddle, reining his horse toward the river, which just there was open riffles, a rapid. A lucky ball struck his mount below the ear, and it stumbled, fell; its wounded rider hit the frozen ground like a sack of sand, heavily, without rolling, the wind knocked out of

him. Only one other of the Finns had been hit, and two horses. The first shot had been fired sooner than it should have, and the visibility was poor. The Finns fired their carbines from the saddle—suppression fire—then attacked.

Longström lurched to his feet. He'd been carrying the dispatch pouch slung by its shoulder strap. He wrested it free, and staggering toward the shore, threw it in the direction of the water, then fell again. Once more he made it to his feet, and staggered a few meters farther — a letter, thrown, wouldn't carry well — thrust a hand inside his tunic, withdrawing the letter to the king. And threw it too, before falling a final time. Meanwhile the farmers had not foreseen the fury they'd roused. Erkki had shouted a command to a man known for his skill with wounds — "see to the captain!" — then led the rest of his Finns in a charge, sheathing their now empty carbines and drawing pistols. Reaching the fallen treetops, they dismounted, to clamber among and over them like madmen, pistols booming at occasional targets before drawing their sabers.

The assembled farmers, inexperienced, and exultant at the sight of Longström falling, had been too slow in reloading. Now they folded, most of them fleeing upslope toward their horses.

Only then did Erkki call off his men and turn back for his captain, whom he found doubled up on the frozen ground, hands on his bloody slimey abdomen. The ball that had struck his neck was a small one, but the wound had bled copiously. The man tending him was staunching it with a piece of scarf. "Can you ride, captain?" Erkki asked.

"Ride? No, good friend, this is the final wound. I have failed both general and king. And Finland." Suddenly it seemed life had played a joke on him, triggering a laugh. A single bark, for the large ball had scrambled his entrails, and the spasming of his abdominal muscles generated a massive shock of pain.

He paused, gasping, and for a moment gathered his strength. Then "I threw the dispatch pouch in the river," he husked. "And the letter. They could have been captured by an eddy, though, and held to the shore. If they have, rescue them. If not, they've been carried downstream and taken under the ice." His eyes had closed, but his lips moved again. "Leave me. This is as good a place..."

And spoke no more.

While leading the charge, Erkki had glimpsed the dispatch pouch laying half in the water. But it wasn't there now, nor any envelope, so he whistled up his horse, and

mounting, rode downstream along the bank to where the river was frozen, finding nothing — no saddle bag, no envelope.

By that time his men had gathered. He looked around for Magnussøn's horse; it wasn't there. It was a farm horse, not used to guns booming around it; it could have panicked, thrown the boy and run off. Or the boy might have ridden it back to Magnussøn's, or perhaps to his home farm. Well, he was no use to them now anyway.

"Jalmari," Erkki said, "I'm leaving you in command. I want you all to ride on to Steine. Tell them what happened here, and that the captain ordered you to proceed to Duved, to report to General Frisenheim. No one is to divert you. No one!

"Pekka," he said then, "you're the man who carries messages in his head and delivers them exactly. So you are my messenger. Listen now. You too, Jalmari."

The small man grinned despite the situation, and nodded, and 1st Sergeant Erik Stenfors repeated what the general had told the captain, word for word. Then remembering, the 1st sergeant took the summary from his tunic and handed it to the small trooper.

"And where will you go, Erkki Veikkopoika?", asked Sergeant Jalmari Hautaluoma.

"I will return to the general. It's important that he learns what happened here."

No one needed to ask why. What happened here would be told throughout Trøndelag. Returning would be less dangerous alone than with others.



Steffan rode into the farmyard, slid from the horse's back, and ran into the house without even putting the horse away. "Herr Magnussøn! Herr Magnussøn! There has been a battle at the lower *forhogning*, and the captain has been shot! Killed maybe! And he threw a saddlebag in the river — and I rescued it!" He slipped the dispatch pouch off his shoulder and held it up. "I poured the water out of it, and looked. It's full of papers. Probably important!"

Magnussøn stared, then turned to his wife. "Agda, I must take this to Pastor Bentssen. He will know how to deal with it. And I will take Steffan with me, because he was there, and rescued it."

Chapter 25

Caught in Limbo

Armfelt frowned at the report he held. The Hälsinge Regiment again! How much trouble could one regiment make? *Too many trips to the woodshed*, he thought. *After awhile, all you found was bark, and dry rot riddled with insect holes.* And that's what the recruiters brought back with them: empty bark, dry rot and worms.

A sharp rap on his door jerked his attention. "Come!"

It opened to the charge of quarters. "Herr general, a man is here with a report from Captain Longström."

So. Now he'd know if the rumor from Trondheim was false. "Thank you sergeant. Send him in."

He remembered the 1st sergeant, for his height if nothing more. The man looked hungrier than before, and worn. "News from Steine?" Armfelt asked. "You traveled fast!"

"I haven't been to Steine, herr general. We were ambushed at a *förhuggning* above the mouth of the Forra, and Captain Longström was shot. He lived long enough to give us orders. I was to return here to report to you. The rest of the patrol continued to Steine under Sergeant Kyrkogård. From there they were to continue to Duved, to General Frisenheim." He paused for just a moment. "The river at the ambush was swift, had no ice, and the musket fire was heavy, so Captain Longström threw the dispatch pouch into the river to keep it from being captured—the pouch and the letter to the king.

"Dear God!" Armfelt paused "Did you lose many men?"

"Only Captain Longström, general. Another was wounded but able to ride. It was as if all of them knew the captain, and aimed at him. We charged at once, and they scattered. They were probably farmers, and lacked fire discipline."

The general spoke then as if thinking aloud. "There couldn't have been many, if only two of ours were hit."

"From the sound of their musketry, there were a lot of them. But it was barely

dawn, and they fired too soon. I smelled a pipe—one of them must have been smoking—and the captain raised his arm, stopping us. So they fired."

"Umm." The general had rested an elbow on the table. Now he cupped his forehead in his hands for a moment. "So," he said, "at least the reports weren't captured."

"I'm not sure, general. I glimpsed the pouch in, or at, the water's edge, but when we returned from running the enemy off, it wasn't there. It wasn't anywhere along the bank, and a little way downstream the river was frozen, so it may have been carried under the ice. In that case they'd hardly find it. It would waterlog and go to the bottom."

He paused, then added: "Our guide was a *trenki*, and after we ran the ambushers off, and returned to the captain, the *trenki* was gone, Also the horse he'd been riding. It's possible he saw the dispatch pouch and retrieved it, ran off with it."

Erkki had recognized the possibility before; now, having voiced it, it seemed to him that's what had happened.

The general folded his hands on the table in front of him and closed his eyes. Erkki wondered if he was praying. If so, it was a very short prayer. When he looked up, his face was grim, but his voice was neither angry nor despondent.. "Of what use was it, then, to send the rest of the men on to Duved?"

"The captain gave Jalmari—Sergeant Hautaluoma—a paper with what you'd told him to tell General Frisenheim. And lived long enough to repeat it to *Korprali* Roshage, the man he relied on to repeat things exactly.

The general didn't respond at once, then nodded. "Thank you sergeant," he said. "Your captain was sent to us by God. Now he has returned to him in heaven."

For a horrified moment, Erkki Kivikoski feared the general might dissolve in tears. But just for a moment. Actually his face had barely creased. He was a man of steel, and had seen too many men die to spill tears, even for the captain.

When the general dismissed him, Erkki left thinking there was no heaven, no god. But the best friend he'd ever known still lived in the hearts of his men. And clearly, it seemed to him, in the general's heart.



The general sent for von Gertten. If Budde had those reports in his hands, and he very well might, the chance of a successful assault was meager. But winter had to come

soon. Then the fields would freeze deep and hard, and it would snow, and either Frisenheim would send artillery from Duved, or the king would send some via Härjedalen and Røros, or both.

Then, he told himself, we will have Trondheim, maybe even before the king takes Christiania. And bygones will be bygones.

Or not, as the case might be.

Meanwhile conditions were not good in Trondheim. The food shortage of early autumn had grown worse. Thus many farmers who'd been called into Trondheim to aid in its defense were allowed to go home. The supply of firewood was very short, and several buildings were torn down for fuel. Crowding was severe. Epidemics broke out. On November 25, in Trondheim, only 3,600 soldiers were fit for duty, and in early December it got worse. The situation was approaching desperate.

◇

On November 29, mild winds and heavy rains blew in from the south, delaying the onset of serious winter. Five hundred and five of Armfelt's men were reported sick, in addition to the 1,211 already hauled off to the forts.

◇

Meanwhile, de la Barre had been busy to the south. Motzfeldt and his dragoons had been stranded in the Dovre Mountains. De la Barre rested his men at Opdal, and after capturing quantities of provisions and hay, had led them toward the mines at Kvikne.

The director of mines there had gotten a message supposedly from the pastor at Melhus, saying that Budde had sent a force of not less than 2,000 men toward Rennebu to stop de la Barre. The director promptly called the local armed peasantry to Rennebu, to teach the cocksure Swedes (actually Finns) a lesson.

It was not, however, Budde's men who came down from the north, but a force sent by Armfelt. When the farmers learned this, most of them scattered and went home. The director and 32 others took refuge in the mine, and were captured. The Finns also got several tons of copper and a large cache of weapons.

De la Barre then led his troops to Røros, which opened a new route to Duved, via Härjedalen. According to local tradition, de la Barre used the church at Røros as a

stable. The treatment of the people did not give the Swedish army a good reputation there.



To best handle the gathering of supplies from the countryside, beginning on 26 November, the army occupied scattered quarters throughout almost the entire valley between Melhus and Stören, a stretch of some 30 kilometers. Foraging patrols went everywhere.

Budde's intelligence sources reported that in the Swedish army, severe discipline, even hanging, was being meted out for theft and other criminal acts, despite terrible privation. Budde was deeply angered by reports of several Norwegian peasant men and women not only giving the Swedes information, but acting as traitors.

On the other hand, Colonel Maidell and 400 men of the Tavastehus Infantry, were jumped and bloodied by a strong Norwegian force sent out by Budde and supported by mobilized peasants.

One December morning, Capt. Erik Löfving of Jämtland's Regiment encountered a larger Norwegian force, capturing a noncom and 13 soldiers. A detachment of the same regiment, under Ensign Magnus Brewitz, captured 16 Danish soldiers, and Arvid Wadenstjerna (presumably a noncom), with four other mounted men of the "Tavastehus Regiment" took 20 prisoners.

Just before the army broke camp and left Melhus, the Norwegian Capt. Lossius captured 10-12 sleighs of provisions which de la Barre's foragers had taken from farms around Opdal.²⁸

²⁸ Condensed and recast from Majström & Boberg (1944).

Chapter 26

Karl XII

November 30 — After supper, 36-year-old King Karl XII of Sweden left his field kitchen with his small retinue of the moment, and returned via a zig-zag, 7-foot-deep communication trench to the current forward trench, to observe the initial work on what was to be the next forward trench. Digging a new trench under fire was seriously dangerous, and Karl intended that the sappers see their king sharing their risk.

He needed no guide, knew the layout intimately, and could have pointed on a map to his location at any moment.

The evening was not yet freezing, and the trench smelled of recently dug soil, but it was high enough, and the soil porous enough, there was no standing water to splash through, and little mud. At an appropriate location he stopped, stepped onto the firing step, and glanced back to an aide. "Captain," he said "boost me up."

Crouching, the man provided a shoulder, and when the king had placed a boot on it, raised him up. Then, with the toe of the other boot, Karl kicked two toe-holds in the trench's steep front wall, and settled against it, forearms and elbows on the low parapet, to help support his weight. Cheekbone on his left hand, he scanned the field, and the hill and fortifications close ahead. Pitch pots flaming on the battlements lit the scene with russet light, and helped Norwegian snipers find targets. Tracers tracked the artificial twilight, and on the intervening field, 200 Swedish sappers lay each on his side, digging, protected to a degree by facines, and baskets containing the dirt he'd just dug. Overhead, occasional canister rounds exploded, blasting angry iron balls onto the field below. The sappers dug diligently; the deeper they got, the less their danger.

After a while, Captain Bengt Vilhelm Carlberg joined Karl's small retinue. Carlberg had been off on an errand. Now he took a position at one edge of the group of officers who stood around the king's feet, keeping him company.

"Your Majesty," said Captain Andre Sicre, "might it not be well to come down? The

musketry is worrisome, and there are quite a few shells bursting overhead."

Karl answered without turning his eyes from the action in front of him. "Canister is a hazard to you as well. And at any rate, my life is in the hands of God, as yours is, so I do not worry about it."

Another shell burst not far ahead, and balls smacked the upper back wall of the trench only a few meters distant. *Overhead is one thing, Carlberg told himself, but that one was forward, and a greater hazard to you than to us.*

Kaulbars too had noticed. "Your Majesty, either God is playing with hailstones, or that one was close."

"Be careful what you say, Kaulbars. It's not wise to tempt God."

This quieted the banter, though the king's reply had been light. Carlberg watched the king's face, what he could see of it between tricorne and upturned collar, thinking how often God was tempted. *The Lord must be very tolerant, His children are so heedless and headstrong.*

Then, snatching the young captain's gaze, the king's head jerked abruptly, and rolled to the right. The left hand slid away, leaving the face on the cold earth. The left arm slipped off the parapet, to hang limply on the sloping wall. Kaulbars too had seen. "Lord Jesus!" he hissed. "The king has been hit!"

The quiet words were a shock, like something in a bad dream. For a moment no one spoke; no one even breathed. Then Kaulbars's hard hand cuffed Carlberg's shoulder. "Quick! Get von Schwerin! He must be told!"

But von Schwerin had already arrived, stood only a few meters behind him. Hearing the words, he came at once, looked up at the king, then called the attending officers into a small cluster. "Keep your mouths shut about this. All of you. We don't want word to spread." He shook his head, then looked around. "Carlberg, Posse, go bring a stretcher. And if anyone asks who it's for..." He gave instructions.

Carlberg and Captain Knut Posse trotted off. A stretcher? The king's field kitchen, shielded by terrain, had been used as a temporary medical station, and they found a stretcher there, with straps to secure the wounded.

They returned with the stretcher, which they positioned under the king's feet. Then von Schwerin was boosted up the steep front wall, and raised the king's head. There was no question; Karl XII was very dead. Without a word, von Schwerin motioned with a hand. The officers below drew the body carefully down, then strapped it on the

stretcher. Two capes were used to cover him. Then Captain Sicre stepped forward, and crouching, removed the king's ruined hat. Then replaced it with his own white periwig—the king had never worn a periwig—and added his own richly ornamented hat, something else foreign to the warrior king.

"Good!" said von Schwerin. "Carlberg, the casualty is a Hessian; a Captain Meinert. Take Captain Meinert's body to Tistedalen."

Again Carlberg trotted off, this time to find Captain Malcolm Hamilton, who was the Royal Guard charge of quarters that evening.

"Hamilton," he said, 'a Hessian officer has been killed, a Captain Meinert. I'm to see his body to Tistedalen, and I need a stretcher crew.

"What's going on?" Hamilton asked. "Why not a crew of his own people?"

Carlberg grimaced, then whispered in Hamilton's ear. The man appeared stunned. "The king?" he murmured.

"Ja."

"Good lord." Hamilton left the watch in the hands of his second, then promptly roused out two teams of litter bearers and a torch bearer, and they hurried to the trench. Someone had rearranged one of the capes to cover the head as well. One of the teams picked up the stretcher, and it was carried off.

Away from the brass, one of the bearers, a corporal, asked "Who is it we carry, sir?"

It was Carlberg who answered. "A Captain Meinert; a Hessian. That's why we're taking him to Tistedalen." Tistedalen was where Fredrik of Hesse, a man committed to Sweden's victory, had established his headquarters.



Tistedalen wasn't a long walk, ordinarily, but the night was dark, the road rutted and the ruts freezing again. And carrying a stretcher was always awkward. After a bit they switched carrier teams. Here and there, ruts left the road, headed for unknown destinations. At one point, Carlberg stumbled, caught his balance. "Damn!" he said, this can't be right. It's getting too rough...and turning uphill."

"You're right." Hamilton scowled at the torch bearer.

"Men, set the stretcher down," he ordered. "Carefully." He looked around. "We'll backtrack. Torch bearer, be alert. When you come to the main road, stop."

The stretcher bearers reversed direction, raised the stretcher again, and started back. They'd gone only 30 meters or so when the right front bearer turned an ankle and fell.

The remaining men lost control of their burden, a handle hit the ground, and the stretcher overturned. Hearing his captain curse, the torchbearer stopped and raised his light overhead. The stretcher bearers had frozen; to drop a corpse, especially of an officer, was even worse than dropping someone wounded.

The capes, hat and periwig had been dislodged. Carlberg picked the hat and wig off the ground. "All right, men. Turn it back over."

They did. The straps had kept the body in place, and Carlberg moved quickly to replace wig and hat. But for a moment the torchlight showed the king's retreating hairline, the cranium holed and bloody—and the face, its narrow full-lipped mouth tied shut with a kerchief. A very familiar face, for these were men of the Royal Guard.

The soldiers backed away in horror.

"GIV AKT!" Hamilton snapped.

His men jerked to attention..

"Good. You will mention this to *no one*. You will not even discuss it among yourselves. Understood?" After the sharp "giv akt," Hamilton's voice had softened to little more than a murmur, honey sweet, as if serious trouble would follow any breach of silence. They nodded. "I know who each of you is. And I trust you." He paused. "Now, pick up *Captain Meinert's* body again, and we shall proceed."

They lifted.

"Route step, march!"

As they started down the road again, it seemed to Carlberg this would not remain a secret very long.

Crown Prince Fredrik of Hesse was the husband of Karl's eldest sister, Sweden's Crown Princess Ulrika Eleanora, which made him the senior surviving figure in the area. "Gentlemen," Fredrik said, "it is not practical to continue this campaign. When word of the king's death spreads, the spirit of the army will drain away like the king's blood. While the Dane and his people, Dane and Norwegian alike, will take on new life, new vigor, and a determination to drive and harry the last of us back over the border. We are better advised to leave on our own volition. To be driven out by force of arms, with the army's tail between its legs, would be to lose whatever standing we have in the peace council, and inspire the Dane to renew his ambitions for Skåne. While

quenching whatever aspirations we may have sparked in Norway to cast off the Danish leash."

There were no cheers, but he did not doubt that agreement was unanimous.

Still... "Does anyone here see it differently?"

General Kurt Christoph von Schwerin got to his feet. "Not differently. I support your decision. This remains an excellent army, and if we withdraw it with its discipline and pride intact, Sweden will still have a proud future."

"Thank you, general," Fredrik said.

"What of the Army of Jämtland?" someone asked. "Should it not be withdrawn too?"

Jämtland, a desolate place far away off north. "Yes, of course," Fredrik answered off-handedly. In fact he had no attention on, or interest in, the Army of Jämtland, but it too should be notified.



After the meeting was adjourned, Fredrik sat down with his personal secretary, Captain Sicre, and dictated a letter to Princess Ulrika Eleanora. Informing her of her Royal brother's death, and of his own decision to withdraw Sweden's armies from Norway. And of course that he looked forward to seeing her as soon as possible.

PART FIVE
WINTER AT LAST

Chapter 27

Swinging in the Wind

The king's death at Fredrikstein Fortress on November 30 led to the prompt withdrawal of his main army from southern Norway.

Two days later (December 2) and much farther north, at Duved Skans, Commissary General Frisenheim, who knew nothing of the events in the south, sent 12 freight sleighs—drawn by tough mountain ponies and driven by tough mountain farmers—to the remote Jämtish frontier settlement (three farms) of Handöl. And from there, escorted by a platoon of cavalry, over river ice and fjeld, to Tydalen, a mostly roadless backdoor route to Armfelt's army.

At midday, December 5, Captain Sicre reached Stockholm with word of the king's death. Princess Ulrika Eleanora was informed along toward evening. The next day the royal council declared her Queen.

On December 8(!), Crown Prince Fredrik of Hesse, now prince consort of Sweden, sent Captain Ernst Johan Ratkie with an order to Armfelt to evacuate his Army of Jämtland back into Sweden. Two days later, Ratkie passed through Gävle, some 160 km north of Stockholm and 530 km short of Duved. A good start on a late sending.

On December 10—two days later—Governor-General Taube, also back in Stockholm, sent a message to Governor Hugo Hamilton at Sundsvall, telling him of the king's death, and that Ulrika Eleanora had been declared Queen.

On December 13, at Sundsvall, Governor Hamilton learned of the king's death, doubtlessly from Ratkie, and of Fredrik's order *to send no more supplies to Armfelt*.

On December 16, word of the king's death finally reached Frisenheim, at Duved. Unfortunately, Frisenheim no longer knew where, in Norway, Armfelt's army was.

Meanwhile, Armfelt and Frisenheim separately prayed for serious winter, frozen bogs, bridges of ice, and more snow, but not a lot more.

It was Thursday, December 18, though Matts Karlsson i Stentorp didn't know it. He simply knew he was cold to the bone. It had remained well below freezing the past few days—the Gaul River had frozen over again wherever the current was moderate, but this night—this night was *really* cold.

His dreams had been of being cold, and they'd come true. His reaction was to shrink himself more deeply into his solitary blanket and go back to sleep, but that proving impossible, he lay awake and miserable, wondering vaguely if he was dying. After a bit he did drift off, now and then, but never deeply enough to be unaware of how cold he was

It was a relief when a trumpet bleated reveille. Reveille in the dark of night. He'd been bivouacked with other civilian laborers again; Sergeant Major Wallmo hadn't needed his services as a messenger or sick house orderly, so he'd been assigned to foraging parties.

Matts got up fully dressed—the only one in his tent who had a shirt inside his jacket—and fell out for muster. In the regimental labor pool, four failed to appear. Of those four, two were dead. The other two, stupid with hypothermia, were buffeted and pushed out of their tents, and their names taken. Then were shoved into ranks, ranks from which coughing could constantly be heard. Another day was underway.



Armfelt recognized the sound of boot heels, and looked up from the morning muster reports. The hard brisk sound promised an officer of rank. Von Gertten heard it at the same time, and stepped back a half step to be out of his commander's line of view when the door should open. The boots stopped. A moment's pause followed, as if their wearer was taking a last internal look at what he'd come to say. Or ask. But the knock, when it came, was firm and assured.

"Come!"

General Otto Reinhold Yxkull, commander of the Åbo cavalry regiment, stepped in

and closed the door behind him. "Good Morning, General Armfelt. I have...what may be an important letter for you. Addressed to General Budde, and captured by one of my patrols." He handed an envelope to Armfelt. Who frowned; he'd noticed the brief pause, followed by "what may be...."

The seal, of course, had been broken. A long finger extracted and unfolded the letter, and he read. It reported that Karl XII, king of Sweden, had been killed outside Frederiksten fortress on Dec 11 (by the Gregorian, Norwegian, calendar), and that his army had withdrawn east across the border. It was signed Lt. Gen. Barthold Lützow, Commander-in-Chief, Norwegian Army.

Armfelt stared paralyzed at the paper, then a thought came, and he looked up at Yxkull. "What were the circumstances of its capture?"

"The usual. A rider in civilian clothes was intercepted and searched." He paused. "You're wondering if it's a Norwegian trick."

"Exactly. If the king truly is dead, and I receive no orders to the contrary, we should go back to Sweden. But if Lützow *is* the source of this"—he raised the letter—"if he is trying to trick me into leaving, then to leave would be...criminal."

Would be...criminal. Yxkull wondered what thought had triggered the pause. Then Armfelt shifted his gaze to his adjutant, von Gertten. "Karl, send someone to get von Würtemberg; I want to see him as soon as he can get here. Then come back and copy this captured letter exactly. We can finish reviewing the muster reports later."

"Yes, General!" Von Gertten strode to the door and out, then Armfelt turned his troubled gaze to Yxkull. "Otto, before you leave—I appreciate your promptness in bringing this to me. I must learn the truth of this as soon as possible."

When the door closed behind Yxkull, Armfelt picked up a sheet of foolscap, dipped his pen, and began to write a letter of his own. To de la Barre, who was at Røros, with a channel to Christiania that provided occasional reports and rumors—of allusions, reassignments, troop movements—and that might cast light on this matter. Marcks von Würtemberg was a fearless, tireless rider. He could be in Røros by evening, and back perhaps by the next.

Meanwhile he himself needed to plan for whatever reply von Würtemberg sent back.

This time it's come to stay. Kjersti Romstad was thinking of the weather, the hard winter cold. In one mittened hand she carried a lantern, in the other a wooden bucket with a rope handle. Raising the latch with an elbow, she bunted the door open with a hip and entered the cowshed, then quickly set the pail down and closed the door behind her. Inside was warmth, provided by the body heat of a half-dozen cows, a pen of calves, and a larger pen of sheep. Warmth and the smell of manure and hay, and more faintly the sweet breath of ruminants. Thorleif had already fed them, and brought the wooden milk tubs. There was no grain—the Swedes had taken it for a pittance—and when they left would no doubt take much of the hay.

The real question was, would they take all of it? If they did, she told herself, they'd probably take the animals, too. It seemed to her that whatever happened would happen soon. Their general, who was staying at the big house, had a swarm of other officers there right now, holding a meeting of some kind; the house was full of their pipe smoke, and they had to be meeting for a reason.

She always milked Smørblome (Buttercup) first. Just now she crooned to the animals—it kept them calm—as she got the milking stool and went to the yellow cow's right flank. Smørblome gave the most milk, had a mild disposition, and with fly season past, didn't swish her dirty tail around. She *would* kick the bucket over, if you weren't careful, but Kjersti handled that. With her left hand she placed the one-legged stool behind her and settled down on it, crowding her shoulder into the cow's flank, blocking her from kicking. Then she began to milk, strong hands squeezing, tugging, the milk thrumming roughly on the wooden bottom. Probably, she told herself, the Swedes were preparing their attack on Trondheim.

The thrumming changed, became a chush chush chush, the streams striking milk now instead of wood. The barn cats had gathered, circling impatiently behind the cow, and Kjersti squirted a quick stream into the face of the mother cat, who wiped with a dainty paw, then licked the paw. The barndoor opened—she heard it, but couldn't see from where she sat— then closed again. It was said the Swedes had not molested women, but she nonetheless felt ill-at-ease. Still she said nothing, continuing to milk.

At the edge of vision, a movement caught her eye, and glancing, she realized the intruder was a preadolescent boy she'd seen at the house, the general's page, she assumed. She relaxed a bit. He settled onto a small pile of straw, and it seemed to her he was sniveling. Perhaps he'd gotten into trouble, and been punished.

When Smørblome had been milked out, Kjersti got to her feet, set the stool aside, and walking to the milk tubs, poured milk into one of them, then put a lid on it. She'd saved half a cup and poured it into the cats' bowl, then looked at the boy.

"Why are you crying, lad?"

His face contorted. "Our king is dead," he said, "and we will never be able to go home to Finland again."

"Well," she said, "go to Sweden then. You can go back to Sweden."

He had no answer to that. The sniveling had stopped, but she saw silent tears roll down his face.



The general's guard, a heavy-shouldered man, eyed the 11-year-old coming fully clad down the hall, smelling faintly of cowshed. Briefly, Anders Henrik Ramsay stopped outside the general's door, hesitated, looked at the guard, then raised a fist to knock.

Corporal Juhani Strand caught the boy's hand in his own much larger. "Just a moment, lad," he said in Finnish, "it's the middle of the night, and the general is asleep. What do you have to tell him that can't wait till morning?"

"I..." Anders' voice almost broke, and when the words came out, they were high-pitched, plaintive, almost desperate. "I have to confess something to him."

"Confess to the chaplain then. Or to..."

The latch raised, and the door opened. "Who's talking at my door?" the general asked quietly.

"Sorry, sir, I thought you were sleeping. Your pistol bearer wants to talk to you."

Normally he would have been sleeping. Now he examined the boy. *Still two months short of his 12th birthday*, he reminded himself. "Come in, Anders," he said, wondering *what could you have done that requires confession?* He didn't ask it though; this was a proud and troubled boy, not someone to condescend to. So he simply held the door,

and when his pistol bearer had stepped inside, nodded to the corporal before closing it. "Now," he said, his voice deliberately soft, "let's hear that confession."

"Yes sir, general sir." Anders too spoke softly. "You said—you told your staff—not to tell anyone the king is dead, has been shot. And I forgot! And I told...I told the dairy girl, sir! She asked why I was crying..."

"Wait! The dairy girl? Where was this?"

"In the cow barn, sir. I went there so no one would see me crying. She had poured milk into a tub, and asked what I was crying about." His face began to work, as if to cry again.

"Ah. Well. That was not well done, but the world will not end because of it. First, you left too soon; you didn't hear it all. True, a captured Norwegian message says the king has been killed, but it could be a lie, intended to trick us into leaving. I have sent Major Marcks von Württemberg to Røros, to ask General de la Barre what he may have heard. And from Røros, to go to Sweden if necessary, to learn the truth.

"But it isn't the Norwegians I'm worried about now. It's our soldiers. If they think the king is dead, they will despair. Especially my Finns. So..."

He looked intently at the boy now. "So you must promise me you'll tell no one else—no one at all—and I will excuse your slip. Meanwhile we will pray God for the best possible outcome, whatever the truth."

Anders Henrik Ramsay stood straight now, and stiff. "Yes, General Armfelt sir. I will tell no one else. By the Bible, sir."

"By the Bible? That will not be necessary. I trust you, Anders. You're a good man. A bit young, but a good man."



Since he'd been little, Anders Henrik Ramsey had rarely prayed, though he bowed his head when the chaplain led the morning and evening prayers. But that night he prayed earnestly.



When his pistol bearer/page had left, the general swallowed another slug of whiskey, then went to bed. And again, lying beneath his bearskin, thoughts cycled through his consciousness, of soldiers huddled in their tents, sharing blankets, lying

close for mutual warmth, bellies growling in hunger. A man needed more than just flatbread to survive—needed butter or cheese, or lard. And meat or fish.

How many would fail to wake in the morning? The ground was frozen a foot or more deep, deeper every night now, and graves, mass graves would need to be dug, hacked through the frost. At evening prayer, Idman had looked bleak, praying for the souls harvested by last night's cold. Surely God had welcomed them, they'd suffered so much in this war—most of his Finns for years—for most of their adult lives.

Then the long day, and the whiskey, did their work, and Armfelt slept.

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Chapter 28

Efforts and Actions

Captain Johan Ratkie arrived at Duved Skans tired, hungry, saddle sore, and 725 km from Stockholm. He was an experienced horseman, but until this assignment hadn't ridden hard, or seriously far, for months. And in the interim had gained weight, so that his saddle was a less than perfect fit. When he'd arrived at Gävle, and again at Sundsvall, he could have laid over a day, applied an ointment and gotten a different saddle, but he'd told himself he'd toughen. Besides, he'd taken seriously the prince consort's order to get his message to Duved as soon as he could.

That morning he'd left the rectory at Frösön well before dawn. (The ground and the lake ice were snow-covered, providing good visibility.) He hadn't gotten a fresh horse since Sundsvall—the country was scraped clean of horses—but he pushed his trail-worn mount as hard as he dared, and arrived at Duved late in the evening. Then insisted that general Frisenheim be wakened (the message was, after all, from the prince consort), and handed him the envelope. And short though the message was, had fallen asleep in a chair while Frisenheim studied it, reading it aloud to himself. (The prince consort had written it in German, much used in the Swedish court.)

Afterward, Frisenheim's loyal, efficient, and ever-ready servant, Väinö Ridala, led the courier to the king's room (the king had never used it, but his adjutants and couriers were sometimes put up there), pulled off his boots, then fed him bread and butter with brandy. Ratkie was asleep again within seconds of his last swallow.

Meanwhile Frisenheim understood urgency when he saw it, so he was up again early. He knew what was needed, and could have recited the goods on hand, including freight sleighs, horses, able teamsters...everything except where the army was. He'd send a small force, to find the army and its general, and what and where the hazards were, and cook up a withdrawal strategy.

Twelve sleighs then, with high priority cargoes and a strong escort of seasoned

Finns. Send them to Handöl, then over the fjeld to Tydalen and down the Nidelva . By all accounts there was a "good" road from Tydalen to Selbu.

Damned shame about Longström, but Fieandt could find his way from there. He'd give him the few he had of Longström's folk, along with whatever platoon Fieandt chose from his own battalion, and with Hautaluoma as the senior noncom. After they reached Selbu, the ice of Selbu Lake could be their road most of the way to Flå, where Armfelt had been, the last he'd heard.

Also the last he'd heard, enemy patrols were an increasing problem. And to send a train of twelve heavily laden sleighs through hostile territory was risky. But it was also necessary.

The kettle drums boomed, resonating over and through the snap and rattle of snare drums. At Flå, the general's regiment had been mustered well before dawn, eaten a quick, cold and inadequate breakfast, held a brief prayer service, and set out on the march, the long column of men in route step. A column that grew with every additional unit they picked up along the route. Twenty centimeters of snow lay now on the frozen fields, the rugged road, and the ice on the Gaula.

Armfelt had caught himself thinking it might be best if the king *had* died; then they could return to Sweden. He'd shaken off the treasonous thought; Finland depended on the king. Besides, people in Sweden were starving, too.

"Vanity, vanity," he thought, "all is vanity!"

"Excuse me, general?"

The query jerked him out of his soliloquy; he hadn't intended to speak it aloud. "I was recalling a bible verse."

"Ah. Excuse me general."

Von Gertten had been thinking too. As director of the march, he'd ranged along the growing column, observing conditions, seeing that stragglers were properly harried and hurried, and that nothing was drastically amiss. The general wanted headquarters company at Støren by day's end. By midday they'd be past the lower falls of the Gaula, leaving Trondheim ever farther behind. He didn't know whether that was good or bad.

He pitied the infantry, this bitter winter morning. Only officers and the cavalry had been issued gloves; riding gloves, not the greatest for warmth, but better than none. The infantry, most of them, marched with their off-hand in a pocket, or tucked beneath an arm or in their jacket, or with both hands swaddled awkwardly in rags. And in infantry and cavalry alike, almost no units had army-issue winter caps that covered their ears. Some men had found and filched caps while foraging abandoned farms. Others had wrapped cloths over their heads. And many had tied their coming-apart shoes together with strips of leather or cloth.

It wasn't as cold as the night before last, but still, he did not doubt there'd be men today who'd lose fingers, toes or ears to frostbite.



Rundown though the soldiers might be, whenever the long column stopped for a rest break, men would trot into the woods and gather branchwood. Within two or three minutes, soldiers would hover around small but growing fires. Lars Olofsson Skoogh was kneeling by one of those fires, hands toward the flames. He'd been issued cavalry gloves when riding with Longström's folk, and had kept them—he was still on call—but even so, his hands felt frozen, his fingers wooden.

A sound caught his attention—distant, near the edge of hearing.

"What's that?" someone asked.

"Thunder," someone else replied.

"Thunder? On a day like this?"

"It doesn't sound right for thunder."

"What else could it be?"

"Artillery." This from a corporal who'd fought in Poland. "Once you've heard it, there's no mistaking it."

This brought looks of confusion, uncertainty. Concern.

"Whose artillery?"

"What would they be shooting at?"

The faint and distant booming continued, seemed even to grow.

"Maybe it's ships," someone ventured. "At Trondheim. Maybe the king has sent warships."

That calmed the alarm, even brought some hopeful looks. But not on Lars's face. Somehow, it seemed to him he knew. They weren't shooting *at* anything, just shooting. In celebration. Maybe because the Finns and Swedes had left the vicinity of Trondheim.

He considered that briefly, but was not convinced. Still, if not in celebration, then what?



Karl Gustaf Armfelt didn't hear the cannonading. He learned of the sound by puzzled comments from the officers around him. And without even hearing it, he thought *celebration!*. As Corporal Lars Olofsson Skoogh had. But unlike Skoogh, he feared the actual cause.

Jalmari Hautaluoma's lean hard body moved in easy harmony with the horse he sat. Riding, for him, rarely required conscious thought; his mental focus was on his surroundings, and missed little of consequence. He had a nodding familiarity with Tydalen—had been there once before—a steep country, standing on edge. He'd recognized the mill with the brook-sized waterfall plunging through an opening in the roof, and the farm with the dog that had failed to intimidate the Jämtish interpreter/ guide. This time the dog did not appear; in fact the valley seemed deserted. Except for ski tracks, *abundant, recent* ski tracks. It seemed to him the small supply column would not go much farther unchallenged.

Corporal Pekka Roshage was his point man. From time to time, where the road was straight, Jalmari could spot him ahead—small, unimpressive, but with ears and eyes as sharp as his wits. Now, on a curve through a screen of naked roadside birch saplings, Jalmari glimpsed him ahead, motionless in the saddle, and turning to the major, gestured. "Sir!" The major raised a hand, and the gesture was passed down the line of soldiers and teamsters. The train of freight sleighs slid to a stop. The major signalled then to Pekka's back. Pekka turned his horse and sauntered nonchalantly back toward them; seemingly the man had eyes in the back of his head, and no fear at all.

"What did you see up there?" Fieandt asked.

"A bridge."

Fieandt frowned. "A bridge?... We are stopped by a bridge?"

Pekka grinned; Captain Longström would have taken his meaning instantly. "The last bridge we came to," he explained, "had been destroyed by the people whose tracks we've been following. Why not this one?"

Fieandt's mouth formed a silent *ah*. "Did you see any sign of ambush?"

Pekka shrugged. "I could *see* no fallen trees yet, but farther back, the tree crowns are thinner. so trees probably *have* been felled. Not a *förhuggning* though. Breastworks. The Norwegians are waiting behind them, I do not doubt." He did not say *I can feel them*. He didn't know the major well enough for that.

Fieandt's lips pursed. He grunted, then turned to his aide. "From their tracks, there are a lot of them. We will proceed; see what they're up to, what they're made of." He paused, eyes scanning through the trees across the snow-covered river, perhaps seeking Norwegian pickets. "Presumably they know we're here, and they're nervous, maybe eager, wondering why we've stopped. Let them wait, get them on edge, maybe draw premature fire. We'll take our time; give the men time to eat a piece of flatbread before we move on.

"Meanwhile have them ready to fight at any moment, carbines and pistols charged and cocked. Sleighs will maintain intervals. If we're attacked, escort will charge at once. Teamsters should be prepared to turn and retreat with the sleighs if I so order."

"Take the point again," said Jalmari to Pekka. "Where I can see you. When the major wants us to move on, I'll let you know."

Pekka grinned acknowledgment, took a fragment of flatbread from a saddlebag, and turning downstream, rode off chewing. Flatbread was good, with or without butter. He didn't wonder if he might die today. He'd been in the army since before Viipuri, been in pitched battles, bayonet charges, reconnaissance patrols, a kidnapping foray that captured a Russian general. Every day he awoke to was his day to die, and he was content with that. When he reached the end of his tracks, where he'd turned back, he kept riding, his eyes watching for movements among the trees—a picket reaching for his own piece of flatbread perhaps, or scratching a louse bite.

Soon, some 80 meters ahead, some fallen spruces showed on the slope, not breastworks, but not right for blowdown, either, magnets for those penetrating eyes—

and behind some branches, a movement that was not a squirrel. He raised an arm, signalling a stop. Saw something else, something linear, at an angle that proclaimed itself not a branch. Careless. Then ahead, someone jumpy fired. The ball missed the little Finn, but the shot triggered a heavy, booming volley, and Pekka—born Ruusulaidun—died Roshage, from a bullet through the brain, and toppled from his saddle into the snow.

The Finns responded at once. Fieandt recognized by the volume of Norwegian fire that his small force was seriously outgunned. Indeed that if the Norwegians had waited just a little longer, the situation would have been truly desperate. He signaled again, and his teamsters began to jockey their sleighs around, to retreat. The Norwegians were reloading, some already moving down the slope toward the road. Their fire was irregular now—some reloaded more slowly or more tardily than others—and his Finns answered with their carbines. There were shouts in Norwegian from the forest, and in Finnish from the road. The Norwegians now realized they were up against Finns, not Swedes, and were especially nervous about it. Some of the Norwegians took cover again behind trees, while others moved along the slope, attempting to get closer before exposing themselves. Some of the Finns drew back to better protect the sleighs. The sleigh horses weren't cavalry, and some had panicked at the shooting, the excitement, the sounds and smells of alarm. The skiers moving upstream paused to fire again, this time aiming at horses instead of riders or teamsters, but the range was still marginal, and after firing, they needed to reload before moving on.

In less than a minute, the nine rearmost sleighs had gotten turned around, and began fleeing eastward. In another minute the Finnish soldiers followed them. Only three of the sleighs were captured, the result of horses downed, and Pekka was the only Finn killed. Meanwhile, a squad of the Norwegians turned downstream, to ski to the Hillmo Church, from which farmers would be sent to bring in the three abandoned sleighs.

The Swedish teamsters of those abandoned sleighs unhitched and mounted their surviving horses, and with them, rode off with the Finns. They were not pursued, at

least not that they could see. And Armfelt would not hear of Frisenheim's small relief train for weeks. Had it reached Flå, it would not have found him there.

Chapter 29

Christmas

At 63° north latitude, at 7:00 AM on Christmas by the Julian calendar, the first pale light of dawn was an hour and a half away, the sky a deep and crystalline black, the moisture frozen out of it, exposing a panoply of stars undimmed by light pollution, and crossed by "the Winter Road," the Milky Way, our galaxy seen from within one edge. Looking upward was to see God, the universe, with human eyes, and perhaps... perhaps sense its soul.

These men thought no such thoughts, but surely some felt the touch.

The only light of human origin was warming fires beside and on the thick river ice. The evening before, Jämtland's regiment had torn down the wooden bridge over the Gaula, to fuel them. Most of the regiment had found no roofs to shelter under, and had spent the night huddled around warming fires, slumped against each other, sleeping fitfully, if sleep's the word. At 5 AM their officers had roused them to their feet (except for those who'd rise no more). They'd built up their fires then, thawed their breakfast, eaten with teeth loose in their gums, then were marched onto the river for morning prayers. In this case Christmas mass.

The officers' shouting had also wakened the local population, for air so crystalline, so unencumbered with moisture, carries sound clearly, crisply. And all, of course, had officers billeted on them, so the wife, perforce, had climbed down from the loft to prepare their meager breakfast. Thus a double handful of Norwegian farmfolk had emerged from their log houses, well-wrapped in winter clothes, to cluster on the river road and observe what the Swedes could possibly be up to on a morning so black and bitterly cold. For while to the Swedes and Finns this might be Christmas morning, to their unwilling hosts it was January 5th.

The ranks were formed up on the river ice, ordered to attention, or a semblance of

it, and the chaplain led it in reciting "Our Father..." the familiar droning lines firming as they went. And then—then something the Norwegians watching from the riverside would remember and tell about as long as they lived; the chaplain led the ranks in singing "Vår Gud är oss en väldig borg"—Luther's magnificent and sonorous hymn—the sound of it swelling beneath the panoply of stars.

When the hymn was over, their pastor, with a decision unusually perceptive, ended the service with another short prayer, and turned them over to their officers, who assigned the morning's task: they were to assemble their gear and prepare to march again. Before dawn. The Jämtlanders would be the vanguard in crossing the mountain.



The civilian labor pool was well underway up a narrow wagon road, hedged in by dense spruce forest, when first dawn tinged the eastern sky. A tinge invisible to Matts Karlsson i Stentorp, because forest cut off the sky. But with the ground snow-covered, and a wagon-trail to follow, he needed only to raise and advance one cold numb foot ahead of the other. Cold! Even given the labor of slogging uphill, and the protection of his (threadbare) homespun woolen breeches, his thighs ached with it. It could have been worse, for the trees cut off the wind.

Meanwhile his pace was already dragging. But Matts had long since learned that lethargy, in the guise of fatigue, often seemed worst in the first hour of hiking; and that he was unlikely to play out early in the day. Or to play out at all, actually. So far, no one, ever, had had to pummel him into proceeding.

It was daylight when the trail brought them into open ground again, with a log house and outbuildings visible not far ahead, and other farmsteads close by. But the Jämtlanders would not see them close up; at the head of their column, their commander shouted an order, and the column left the road, turning northward. The sun stood above the horizon now, but Matts felt no warmth from it, none at all. What he did feel was a stiff, sharp-edged breeze that stole what warmth his scrawny body had generated while climbing the mountain.

Bukkhammeren, Sergeant Major Wallmo had called it. They were to cross it today, and outside the forest, distances seemed magnified. But also that there were many farms on the other side; foraging would be good there, and there'd be roofs and walls

for shelter.

Matts discounted the roofs and walls; for officers perhaps, but not for common soldiers, and surely not for civilian laborers.



There wasn't a cloud in the sky, and the wind stung their faces. When the regiment had plodded above the final scrubby birches, the snow surface crawled and curled around their shins and knees like something alive. As the sun crept slowly along the skyline behind them, the wind grew stronger, deepening the crawling current of airborne snow, raising swirls of it well above their bowed heads. Matts wondered what it would do if the snow on the ground was deeper.

As it was, the ground blizzard hid many of the stone cairns marking the trail, at times even hiding men only 12 or 15 meters ahead. The column lost its definition. Men sometimes paused to rest a moment in the shelter of terrain features. The tracks of their passage blew out, smoothed, filled with snow. Faced with choices of terrain, and uncertainty as to what was and was not the intended route, the platoons strung out and unraveled. The long regimental column became a fan of segments, short strings of men who depended on the sun behind them, and the wind in their face, to guide them generally northward. With a tendency to pull off eastward somewhat, to protect the face from the cutting wind and the fine, dry, stinging snow it carried. And when they saw men off to one side, there was no way to know whose course was right.

They plodded on.

By midday, most had eaten the last of the skimpy rations they'd carried when they'd left the river. Thigh-deep drifts became frequent and wind-packed, hard to walk in. Most men attached themselves behind someone who appeared to know where he was going, their sergeant perhaps, or a corporal. Some, especially some of the oldest, and the sickest, hunkered down "to rest," and didn't respond to buffeting or shaking.

By twilight, about 3 PM, much of Jämtland's regiment had crossed the balds and entered the forest fringe on the other side, but by that time they'd lost any semblance of military order, and had little idea where they were. Out of the wind, that was the main thing. The terrain itself would lead them down to the Nidelva, but they'd reach it miles and hours apart..

By the time the Jämtland regiment had crossed into forest again, out of the wind, the only reference was the slope. The North Star stood where it always stood, but from within the forest it couldn't be seen. The terrain was their guide now, and downhill their salvation.



Corporal Lars Olofsson Skoogh could see forest ahead. He stopped, looked around. He was already aware he was alone; didn't know where his company was, or anyone. What he did know was, the wind had veered to westward, and slackened somewhat, and the development of a windslab had thinned the ground blizzard. It also made hiking more difficult in the open. He wondered how many men who'd sung "Var Gud är oss..." on the ice of the Gaula that morning, had died on the heights of Bukkhammeren that day, and if any who'd died were men he knew.

He'd heard and believed the rumor of the king's death, and to him that meant the war was over. For better or for worse. And with the war over, another agenda had occurred to him—his agenda, not the king's, not the army's. Had *recurred* to him, actually; it had laid dormant for years, to revive briefly that summer past, when he'd seen Signe Andersdatter in her in-laws doorway. Somehow he would take her home with him, and marry her. And he knew where to start looking—or thought he did. There might be difficulties—her husband, her mother-in-law... Or she might have gone to Trondheim. If she'd left, no one might be willing to tell him where to. It occurred to him he didn't even know where her parents were now; Klæbu probably. But he'd always been something of an optimist, and more intuitive than intellectual (though he was intelligent enough). And his self-confidence grew less from hubris and wishful thinking than from good results. All his life, things had tended to work out for him.

Meanwhile he was a hard young man, of extraordinary stamina not greatly blunted by his months of inadequate nourishment.

The open slope below him showed spruce forest less than a kilometer downhill, and he began hiking again. Before reaching it, he paused to look back again. Saw a single human figure, taking advantage of the trail he himself had broken. Despite his conditional, only sporadically conscious agenda—which required independence, a freedom to go where he would—he waved his arms vigorously. Getting no response, he

decided to wait. The man he watched seemed near exhaustion, and didn't wave back. Probably his gaze was on the snow at his knees.

As his solitary follower grew nearer, it seemed to waver, and Lars shouted to him. The figure paused, seemed to look up, then started again, more strongly, a little less slowly. Lars waved again, and now the figure waved back. And Lars knew, knew even before he could see the face, it was Matts Karlsson he was watching. "Come on, Matts!" he called, "we sleep beneath a roof tonight."

Matts heard, and might have grinned if his face hadn't been stiff with cold.

For many kilometers, the valley of the Nea stretched more or less east and west, and so far the Swedes had not foraged there. A few days earlier, 12 Swedish sleighs and a cavalry escort had intruded, but they'd been chased back to Sweden by Major Emahusen's ski company.

Meanwhile, farmer Christian Frederik Erikssøn and his family felt reasonably secure. Rumor had it that the Swedes, off south on the Gaula, were headed farther south to Røros, and would soon be out of the country entirely, their sleighs loaded with copper stolen from the Røros mines. "We were lucky this time," he'd told Brita, his wife. "Not like in great grampa's time, when that *jævel* Sparre burned every farm in the valley."

Just now, though, he said nothing. He had a birch ax-handle stave in the home-made vice on his work bench, and was carefully shaping it prior to fitting the ax head. Nonetheless he was aware that Brita was ladling porridge into grandmother's bowl. The old woman had declined seriously after grandfather died, and feeling always cold now, she ate in the chimney corner, muttering to herself. Meanwhile the ladling was a signal, and their three children still at home quickly seated themselves at the table, restless to feed their hungry bellies...

Then the door burst open and a man pushed in, and another, and—five in all, all with muskets, a compact wad of men, all trying to get in at once. "Oh, blessed God!" one of them cried out. "Warmth! Oh God!" and closed the door behind them, anxious not to let any heat get out needlessly. Another spied the old woman in the corner with

her bowl. "Ah! Food! And hot I'll wager." He started toward her, but his corporal, moving quickly, swung a cupped and reddened paw, nearly knocking the soldier down, and his tricorn almost into the fireplace. "Behave yourself, Melgård," the corporal growled, "or I'll make you wait outside!"

The soldier, who might have been seventeen, backed away quickly.

The corporal, who'd grown up not far from the border at Medstugan, turned to the farmer. "We just crossed Bukkhammeren. Merry Christmas! Ain't been under a roof for days, and ain't ate since breakfast. And that just a scrap of salt beef and a piece of flatbread. The boy there"—he gestured at the soldier he'd cuffed—"has been on punishment; ain't eaten since day before. Thinks he's dyin'."

Erikssøn stared. He only now fully grasped the situation, despite the blue and yellow jackets, dirty beyond belief. Their lapels, like their stubbly beards, were frosted white from the frozen moisture of their breath. Their speech alone should have told him, but he'd worked in the mines at Røros, where there'd been Jämtlanders working, and he'd gotten used to their lingo. In those days he hadn't thought of them as Swedes, just Jämtlanders.

"Brita," Erikssøn said, "we need to feed these men." Wondering as he said it what they'd take with them when they left. His horse? His cows? Or...when would they leave? It seemed to him they'd spend the night. Where else was there? This could be serious trouble. Or maybe not.



Erikssøn and his family had climbed into the loft to sleep, all but grandmother, too feeble to climb the ladder or be carried up. So the Swedes had left her bed to her. And hungry for warmth, had built the fire higher; he hoped they wouldn't burn the house down. For a little while he continued to hear their voices, but soon enough they fell silent, too tired even to snore.

Still, sleep was elusive; he lay worrying awhile before drifting off.

To be startled awake by more men entering the house, their speech incomprehensible, alarming. Finns, he realized, and crawled to the ladderway to raise the trapdoor and peer down at them. They looked just like other people, despite their language. There were seven or eight of them, briefly noisily manic with relief from the

cold, and at the prospect of food. The Swedish corporal spoke to them in Swedish, and one of the Finns, a sergeant, replied in the same language:

"What is there to eat?" the sergeant asked.

"Peas porridge, with bits of carrot and turnip. And herring with flatbread."

"No meat?"

"Herring is all; what the family here was eating. Back in Sweden this year, people pray to eat herring. You know that."

The Finnish sergeant rattled off some Finnish, and got replies from his men, then spoke to the Swedish corporal again. "My boys want red meat." He spoke in Finnish once more, and three of his men fastened their jackets, picked up their muskets and left, closing the door behind them. The Swedish corporal shrugged. Overhead in the loft, Christian Frederik Erikssøn pulled on his boots, grabbed jacket and mittens. Brita started to ask, worriedly, what he intended to do, but he stilled her with a gesture and started down the ladder.

"What do you think you're doing?" asked the Swedish corporal.

"I'm going out to help those guys pick an animal to kill. I don't want them to kill a good milk cow. A sheep maybe, or a calf."

The Finnish sergeant raised his eyebrows, half grinned, then replied in Swedish, "As long as it's red meat." As the farmer reached for the door handle, the Finn called after him: "Maybe you should kill an ox. God knows how many hungry visitors you'll have before the night is over."

Given that disturbing comment, Erikssøn's hand paused on the latch for an instant, then he opened the door and went out.

Lars Olofsson Skoogh might have traveled faster, for the snow beneath the dense spruce crowns was shallower, and there was no windslab. But there seemed no point in pushing, and Matts was seriously leg weary. After a bit, the slope leveled off, and they came to a sizable opening some 200 meters across. The day's wind had picked up snow from the treetops and harried it across the forest roof, then eddied at the edge of openings and dumped its white burden into a mighty drift, two meters deep or more, in

the edge of the opening. This Lars skirted, keeping within the forest margin until the drift tapered off. There they slogged through into the clearing. Near the far side was a farmstead—a modest log house, with the usual set of outbuildings and teepeed firewood poles. All dark. The family was either gone or asleep, Lars told himself. Hopefully gone, though that seemed unlikely. He checked his musket, assuring himself it was loaded and primed. These farmers were armed, could be dangerous, and he was effectively alone, for Matts had no weapon.

Among the buildings, paths had been trodden in the snow, a reflection of chores, of human activity. There the privy; there the cowshed, marked by a pile of manure at one end; there the stable with its pile of horse manure; the hops patch with its skinny poles; the small brewery / smokehouse with its stone chimney. He couldn't tell yet whether thin smoke was coming from the chimneys or not.

As they approached, he saw that the house chimney was indeed smoking, thinly, as from a fire burned down nearly to embers. Almost certainly someone was at home. It also seemed that nothing would be gained by hanging about outside, especially if they had a dog. So. Knock, or just walk in? He stepped softly onto the stoop, then in one motion raised the latch and pushed. It opened with little sound. No squeak of hinges, no barking, no...

A male voice spoke. "Who is it?"

Lars replied in Norwegian. "My name is Lars Olafsson. I came over Bukkhammeren from Haltdalen, and got lost in a ground blizzard. The Swedes are there."

"The Swedes? At Haltdalen?" An oath, followed by coughing. "Just a minute."

A middle-size man in a night shirt came into the room, and stared at the Swedish uniforms more puzzled than shocked. "What are you doing here, dressed like that?"

"Looking for something to eat, and a place to warm ourselves."

"You can go to hell!"

Lars answered amiably, waving the muzzle of his musket slightly. "Or I can send you to hell."

The farmer grimaced, and after a moment gestured at the fire. "There's enough stew for you two, and flatbread on the table. And butter in the crock there. Bowls and

plates are on the shelf."

"Matts," Lars said, "put food on the table for us, while I keep the gun ready."

Matts began to put out plates, bowls, and spoons. Meanwhile the Norwegian edged farther into the room. "How is it you speak such good Norwegian?"

"I have sailed with Norwegians, and lived in Norway for a time. Don't go any closer to your gun, or I will have to shoot you. Matts, get his gun. Make sure it's loaded, and lay it on the table close to your hand. If our host threatens us, I'll shoot him, and it will be your job to back me up."

Another grimace, then the farmer coughed some more, deep but loose, cleared his throat and swallowed.

"You are married," Lars went on. Almost all farmers were married. A woman was needful on a farm. There were things to be done: cooking, milking, churning, spinning, weaving, bearing and nursing children...

"Of course, but she went to Hilmo to stay with he sister, who just birthed her first. Took the children, they're big enough to walk that far, and they wanted to. I'm well enough to do barn chores, and any man can prepare food for himself if it comes to it." He paused. "Do you intend to rob me?"

"I don't. There'll be more of us along though, hungry like Matts and me. They'll be looking for food and a place to sleep."

"Matts. Hmph! They take them awfully young in Karl XII's army these days."

Per Hansson Järvbäck had kept his whole squad together on the crossing of Bukkhammeren, all of it who'd lived to start the day. Järvbäck was large, hard-bodied, and overbearing beyond his rank, aggressive and sometimes truculent. He did not take kindly to any of his men dying, and contested fearlessly with death. When two had deserted during the harvesting at Levanger, he'd browbeaten their plan of escape from a friend of theirs, and pursued them, catching them at a farmhouse near Steine, where he single-handedly bullied the Norwegian farm family who'd sheltered them, into giving them up. Subdued the deserters with his fists, tied their hands, and walked them back to the army. There, when they were sentenced to hang, he'd pleaded their case to the

regimental commander, who was sufficiently impressed (not by their case but by their corporal) to plead their case to General Armfelt. Who commuted their sentence to public flogging. Meanwhile, Järvbäck had impressed everyone, and been promoted to sergeant.

Crossing Bukkhammeren, he'd coaxed, browbeaten, shamed, threatened, kicked and lifted men to their feet.

When they'd reached the shelter of forest on the north side, they'd bypassed a summer dairy occupied by men of the Jämtland regiment—it had firewood but little food—and herded his men on downhill, till near the valley bottom, they reached a farm with a house larger than most; a cowshed large enough for a dozen cows!; and other buildings to match. There he detailed men to check the outbuildings and cover the house from outside, then with three others, and holding a pistol, he went to the front door and thrust it open. The farm dog, large and hard like himself, was on its feet instantly, and sensing invasion, charged. Hansson shot him dead, then strode inside to a chorus of shrieks. The farmer, who'd leapt from his chair, started for the guns hung on a wall by the fireplace, but stopped when he saw muskets pointing at him. Meanwhile the sergeant's overpowering presence, and a terrible oath, stilled the family. The farmer was scarcely less large and hard than the sergeant, and strong-willed as well, but his demeanor was not overbearing, and his aura suggested shrewdness, persuasiveness and persistence, not force. His initial shock had given way to pragmatism. *Get through this with as little loss as possible.*

"We have just crossed the mountain in a ground blizzard," said Per Hansson Järvbäck, "and my men are starving. You will feed us, now!"

The farmwife and her children were hardly breathing. "We are a poor family," the farmer said, "but we will share what we have."

"Poor family? You live in a *herrehus*, yet call yourself poor? Do you think I'm blind? Or a fool? You sonofabitch! You just showed me what a liar you are." The sergeant spoke to the farmwife then, without taking his eyes off her husband. "Woman, bring us food! There are six of us all told."

Actually his men knew they numbered nine—only five of them inside—and did not doubt their sergeant knew as well. He'd said what he had for a reason.

The farm wife scurried to a cabinet and brought bowls, in her anxiety dropping one of them, and set them on the table, with spoons. Then she ladled porridge into a large serving bowl. A daughter set out a plate of flatbread. "And butter!" the sergeant ordered. "With a cowshed the size of yours, you have plenty of butter." The farmwife gave orders, and another daughter put the butter crock on the table.

A corporal stepped through the door. "Sergeant, there's a barn full of cows and sheep, a loft and sheds full of hay. There's not many farms richer than this one."

"Good! Good!" the sergeant said. "Stay here a minute. And eat! Eat, all of you! I need to see to something outside." Then he left, and when he came back, several minutes later, it was with two more of his men. By then the first four hungry soldiers had finished their porridge and were gnawing on flatbread.

"Farmer," Järvbäck said, looking around, "where has your wife gone?"

"She's putting the children to bed. And hearing their prayers."

"Ah. Let's you and me look at your livestock together. There's a lot of men coming across the mountain, and they're hungry. Starving! The general will want them fed."

This sounded more serious than the farmer had thought. He didn't get out his warm reindeer-fur coat—he was in trouble enough already—settling instead for his barn jacket, mittens, and knit woolen cap. Keep this ugly Swede happy for now, he told himself, and see how things play out.

They went outside then, where he saw what seemed to him a pointless act of destruction. A soldier had laid a fire inside one of the teepeed stacks of firewood, and was preparing to light it. "Wait!" the farmer shouted, and started for the man, but the sergeant grasped the farmer's jacket from behind and threw him down in the snow. The tinder ignited, and with it the soldier lit a strip of birchbark, poking it into the kindling. The horrified farmer stopped struggling, and simply stared as the birchbark in the kindling pile began to burn. Pine shavings, in turn, were also quickly burning. The sergeant gripped the farmer's coat again, to pull him to his feet, when a musket boomed.

"What the devil was that about?" he shouted.

"A boy came out a back window, sergeant," a soldier called back. "I shot to scare him."

"Bring him to me!"

Oh God, the farmer thought, don't let them do anything to Fridtjof.

The soldier hustled the boy around a corner of the house. He appeared to be fifteen, perhaps sixteen years old. "What did you think you were doing?" Hansson asked.

"Nothing."

Hansson back-handed the boy, knocking his cap into the snow and bloodying his nose. "You were sneaking off to spread the alarm. and bring help. You've got the makings of a good man, but first you need to live long enough. Now, pick up your cap." He turned his eyes to the sentry who'd caught the boy. "Olsson, take him inside. Tie him. Take away his boots and mittens, and his coat."

He turned back to the farmer. "You! You're going to do some butchering for me. There's a lot more men coming over the mountain. They'll see the fire and know where to come, and you're going to feed them. Feed them roast meat."

Chapter 30

The Second Day of Christmas

About a hundred kilometers east of the border, in Sweden, lies the tiny settlement of Vemdalen, in the province of Härjedalen. It was the second day of Christmas, and Vemdalen's tiny stave church was bathed in the sparkle of newly risen sun on snow. Idyllic. Remote. Cold.

"...for we have heard him say," the pastor intoned, "that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us...."

Major Gotthard Vilhelm Marcks von Württemberg had seated himself in a pew near the back, where a seat was available on the aisle. Some pastors were enamored of their own voice, and he needed to be on the road at a reasonable hour, so he preferred a place that he could leave early, if need be, without disturbing the people in attendance. It was 190 km to Duved skans—north, then west—and he was determined to be there by the night after next. He'd ridden the 145 km from Røros the day before, a long cold ride, with a stop at Långå skans to leave off his cavalry escort, eat a warm meal and get a fresh horse, arriving at the Vemdalen rectory late in the evening. But today and tomorrow there might be no fresh horse, and attending this Annandag Jul service was giving him a late start.

Württemberg didn't, at first, notice another man in uniform, a young lieutenant, who'd entered the rear of the sanctuary after the service began. The man had paused there without seating himself, waiting while the pastor finished the reading. Now he hurried forward before the liturgy could proceed, the pastor frowning at the interruption. Württemberg's attention sharpened; such an interruption was highly irregular. The lieutenant mounted to the pulpit and murmured to the pastor, who for a moment appeared thunderstruck, putting a hand on the railing as if to keep from staggering, and seemed to ask for more information. Clarification perhaps. When the

officer had answered, the pastor nodded, then faced his congregation again.

"This young man," the pastor announced, "has just ridden from Stockholm, with heavy news: our blessed king, His Majesty Karl XII, is dead, killed by an enemy bullet on November 30 outside Fredriksten Fortress. His sister, the blessed princess Ulrika Eleanora, has been named Queen, and..."

Marcks von Württemberg was already on his feet, and hurried out, to intercept the lieutenant in the anteroom. "Where did you learn this?" he asked.

"It is common knowledge in Stockholm. Throughout all the south. His majesty Fredrik, the queen's husband, ordered me to take word to General de la Barre, who is thought to be at Røros, and to Långå Skans, and when I arrived here and saw the church, it seemed to me..."

Württemberg interrupted. "And the king's army; what of it?"

"It has withdrawn into Sweden, sir."

"Ah!" The major gripped the young officer's arm. "Come with me," he said, and led the lieutenant to the rectory, to the room where he himself had lodged the night before. There he penned a quick letter to Armfelt and de la Barre, then handed it to the young officer. "This is to General Armfelt, but show it to General de la Barre, too, when you get to Røros." He felt a foreboding, though he didn't know why. "And hurry! You can reach Røros late tonight. It's 140 km. De la Barre will leave there tomorrow, probably early, to join Armfelt. You must give him this *before he leaves*, because when his rearguard leaves, Røros will become a very dangerous place for a Swedish soldier. So do not stop at Långå skans for more than a fresh horse and a very quick meal."

The lieutenant saluted, and Württemberg watched him hurry out. The foreboding remained, however. Quickly the major gathered what little gear he'd brought with him, and clattered downstairs for his own quick meal before starting the long ride to Duved.

Chapter 31

Discourse in a Parsonage

Lieutenant General Reinhold Johan de la Barre preferred to arrive at a destination briskly, at a canter. But on the long ride from Røros, he'd worn his horse out, and settled for arriving at an easy trot. A guard corporal stepped quickly out to meet him, but de la Barre swung his long figure from the saddle without waiting for his help. The young officer with him followed suit.

The guard corporal wore a pair of very non-standard—bright red—knitted mittens. De la Barre's eyebrows arched, but all he said was, "Corporal, I must see the commander at once!"

"Yes general."

De la Barre looked back at the lieutenant. "Come!" he ordered, and they followed the corporal into the parsonage. The vestibule had hooks for winter jackets and cloaks, hooks which, under the circumstances, were unused by either soldiers or the household. The vestibule opened into a comfortable living room, where Pastor Lobe, responding to the activity in the vestibule, had gotten to his feet. His face stiffened when he saw who'd come in. De la Barre ignored him as inconsequential, and followed the corporal into an adjoining alcove, a sort of parlor, which Armfelt had chosen as his office, conference room and bedroom. Armfelt looked up from his work table, and got to his feet. "Reinholt!" he said, and the two generals met in the middle of the room to shake hands. "What news?"

"Word has arrived from Stockholm. Belatedly. "Lieutenant Ågård has delivered it in writing: our new prince consort has finally seen fit to inform us."

Prince consort! Then... Armfelt seemed stunned; though the news had hardly been concealed. What had been needed, and lacking, was verification. At de la Barre's

announcement, the young lieutenant had stepped forward and extended the letter. Armfelt took it, his eyes scanning quickly, then read it again more carefully before raising his gaze to the courier. "Thank you, lieutenant. Have you anything else for me? No? Then have the corporal of the guard direct you to the unattached officers billet."

The two generals watched him leave, before Armfelt spoke again. "This house has ears." He gestured toward the living room. "Pastor Lobes and his household would understand most of what we say in Swedish."

And both knew that French wasn't suitable. Like Armfelt, and despite his French surname, de la Barre's French had been learned as a young soldier of fortune, and he used it less certainly even than Armfelt. Also, while he felt a closeness with Finland, his Finnish too was limited, and Pastor Lobes, would understand most of whatever Swedish he overheard.

And earlier, Lobes, like Pastor Muus, had harangued his congregations, at Holtålen and Singsås, to resist the Swedes in every way possible. Thus de la Barre had held the pastor under harsh arrest at Røros, and only the day before had sent him back to Holtålen under guard. Neither of the two generals trusted the churchman or his avid ears, so Armfelt replied in the Baltic German both old warriors had grown up with.

"November 30! If only we'd gotten this sooner—even three or four days ago—I'd have marched south to Røros, then east into Sweden from there. All on roads! But there was the king's command, and my pledge to him."

"You avoided a blood bath, Karl Gustaf. If you'd assaulted Trondheim, you'd have lost hundreds of men—a thousand or more I do not doubt—probably to no avail. His Majesty himself failed twice at Christiania, and returned to Sweden to replace his losses."

That much de la Barre said in broken Finnish.

The commander nodded, looking back... *If the initial crossing of the Stjørdal had succeeded... If the road into Norway had not been so abominable... If it hadn't been a famine year in Sweden...* He cut it short. Honest self review was instructive, but in self-flagellation lay ruin.

It was de la Barre who broke the brief silence. "The kingdom is exhausted, overburdened by war and enemies... It is our place to proceed as best we can, and trust

in God. He will show us when we're wrong."

Armfelt nodded, not greatly cheered.

"How is our friend Idman doing?" asked de la Barre.

"It is his nature to suffer when anyone around him does. And there is much suffering here. It goes with war."

De la Barre narrowly avoided chuckling. He was not fond of pain—his or anyone else's—but he could find humor in self-inflicted suffering. "Ah. And what of our ever-sour Pastor Falck?" he asked.

"I prefer my afflictions to his. Nothing pleases him. Nothing *can* please him. I would not add to his problems."

Yours have been greater, Karl Gustaf, de la Barre thought, but you are a man of greater character. "We must count our blessings," he said. "There is, after all, little snow. Now if the cold moderates... We're overdue for easier weather."

For nearly an hour more they talked, then broke for supper. Afterward they talked again, this time about marching the rear guard over Bukkhammeren into Tydalen, whence most of the army had preceded them. Then de la Barre was guided to his own billet, and Armfelt lay down on a padded bench for a few hours, before starting over Bukkhammeren himself, to pick up the reins of his command in Tydalen. In the morning, de la Barre would lead the rear guard across.



Pastor Lobes had sat barely out of sight, eavesdropping. And understanding more than they'd imagined. As a young man he'd attended the Cathedral School in Bergen, and been exposed to the Plattdeutsch of the large German commercial enclave in the city. But his command of it was limited, his vocabulary restricted largely to the mundane and the commercial, and at any rate the German spoken in Bergen differed markedly from the generals' Baltisches Deutsch. He was aware, though, that finally the two generals accepted that their king was dead. And apparently they intended to leave Norway. But beyond that, he had little sure sense of what they'd said.

It was an aggravation, but meanwhile he'd be glad to see them leave, and trusted God to punish them.

Chapter 32

Vectors Gather in Tydalen

The sleigh lurched, throwing the sleeping Anders Henrik Ramsay against the arm of his general. The boy did not waken. Both were heavily bundled against the cold, but the wind of their passage bit cruelly the general's bony cheeks.

The earlier ground blizzard had died, and on Bukkhammeren the snow was widely tracked now, for de la Barre and his rear guard had not yet left Holtålen, in the Gaula valley. The general's gaze moved to a reddish glow in the northeast; presumably the beacon fire he'd ordered built to guide the rearguard, and de la Barre's mounted detachment, on this the fourth day of Christmas. Presumably, hopefully a beacon; several farmsteads had been burned in the Gaula Valley, at least in part where local people resisted foragers. Some of it was said to be a reaction to murders of Swedish and Finnish soldiers. In any case it led to further killings on both sides, and surely it did not please God. He'd had men punished for it, though given the circumstances he'd had no one executed.

He thanked God his troops were hardened by peasant life. And military discipline, of course. He'd seen regiments of German mercenaries, mostly townsmen, who in summer uniforms would have died in droves on the fjeld in winter. As it stood, incomplete musters had suggested some 200 lost and presumed dead in the Bukkhammeren crossing.

And you, Karl Gustaf, he asked himself, without your bearskin and this sleigh, how would you have fared, crossing here? Twenty years ago maybe, when you were in your prime....

His driver was a Jämtlander somewhat familiar with the fjeld between the Gaula and Nea valleys. The two of them, general and teamster, had examined his map, and plotted a course that would take him farther east than most of the army. For now it was east he would lead his men, back into Sweden. Meanwhile the regiments were

dispersed all along the upper Nea from Hilmo to Ås, to facilitate foraging.

The bitter cold continued, but the wind had died, which had improved morale. The farmhouses were filled to the doorjambs with soldiers, crowding the farm families into their lofts. And in haysheds and haylofts, whatever hay had been spared by foragers was riddled with sleeping Finns and Swedes, dug in for warmth. But even so, by the time the rearguard had crossed over Bukkhammeren, most of the soldiers slept huddled around fires in the snow. Rugs had been stripped from farmhouse floors, converted into blankets, sleeveless cloaks, even crude caps. And where no firewood was left, doorsteps and pole fences had been chopped up for fuel. Destruction of buildings, though, had been forbidden on pain of death. Destruction of bridges was also forbidden now; even with the river frozen, bridges were useful for carts and wagons.

Foraging was intensive. Thus Matts, and an old cattle-drive companion, Axel Jonsson i Övergård (who wasn't as husky as he had once been) worked in a fragrant cloud of dust and chaff, loading hay onto a freight sleigh, Axel pitching down from atop the mow, Matts on the sleigh building the load. They worked faster than they might have, for this farm was well west on the road to Selbu, at the edge of Swedish control. A sergeant galloped up on horseback. "That's enough for that load!" he shouted. "Tromp her down and tie her! Norwegian soldiers are coming!"

Axel jumped down onto the load, and the two boys tromped hay furiously. With their help, the teamster hastily tied it down, then scrambled aboard the left-hand horse, barked an order, and thumped the beast's ribs with a heel.²⁹ Then they started off down the narrow road, the boys ducking, avoiding the occasional branch from roadside trees that snatched away tufts of hay. At the river road, the teamster turned east, lashing the haunches of his team, the sleigh careening as it went.



The farmer-commanders of the "Norwegian soldiers" clapped one another on the shoulder and laughed, then hiked down the slope to pick up "their squad," a collection of red clothes and table cloths draped on saplings back among the trees. "Did you ever

²⁹ In the armies of Karl XII, teamsters mostly rode on the back of the left-hand wheel horse.

see a load of hay move that fast before?"

"Never! Never! And they take more than hay with them. The story will spread: 'the woods are full of Norwegian soldiers!' Give the thieving Swedes something to think about."

A man in farmer clothes rode trotting west down the road on a sturdy, short-legged fjord horse, a pale blue-gray animal scarcely taller than a pony. Rode holding a small boy in front of the saddle. On his right, a side ridge came down almost to the river. There, beneath the ice, the current was swift and turbulent, the ice unsafe. The road curved right, and as the horseman rounded it, a squad of blue-jacketed soldiers, with bayonets fixed, blocked the way.

"Halt!" cried one, a sergeant, and the rider halted his horse. A soldier moved to grasp the bridle, while the sergeant stepped up to the rider. "Where are you going with that fine horse?"

His accent marked the sergeant as Finnish, though his Swedish was understandable.

"To the church at Floren," the farmer said. "My wife died, and I'm taking our son to his uncle, the pastor there. He'll take care of him."

"You will need to get down now. Here. I'll take the boy." The sergeant reached up. The farmer kissed the child's face and told him everything would be all right, before obediently handing him to the stranger—then abruptly brought forth a riding crop from his cloak and slashed the horse's flank! The animal reared, knocking down the soldier who'd been holding the bridle, and as the forehooves bit the frozen road, two muskets boomed almost as one. The farmer pitched from the saddle, hitting the hoof- and sleigh-packed snow, and lay still. Someone swore: "Yeesus Rist," the oath a soft lament, a verbalized exhalation. The sergeant had unconsciously turned the child's face against his jacket, to spare him the sight of his father, dead twice over, his head a ruin, his torn aorta reddening the snow where he lay. "Kalle!" he said roughly in Finnish, "cover him with somethng." He turned his head, looking back over his shoulder. The horse stood not 10 meters away, short-legged but powerful, its hide twitching as if pestered by flies.

"You! Uuno! See if that horse will let you ride him. Then bring the chaplain. He'll know what to do."

He held the boy out at arm's length now, to look at him more carefully, still shielding him from the sight of his father. Two, three years old at most, he guessed. His own youngest, back in the refugee camp at Gävle, had been not much smaller at two. Meanwhile Uuno got on the farmer's horse, which accepted him, and rode off eastward.

Uuno was back in half an hour, with Bishop Idman riding behind him; Idman had been talking with their regimental chaplain when Unno reported what had happened. Meanwhile, with no blanket to cover the dead farmer, and no one willing to give up his jacket, the soldiers had used their tricorns to cover the body with snow. Uno and another soldier who knew Swedish were kneeling in the snow with the boy in front of them. The private had cut a brass button from his jacket and given it to the boy, telling him it was Swedish gold, showing him how to breath on it and polish it on his coat. Then Idman led the sergeant to one side, speaking Finnish.

"What does the child know of what happened here?" he asked.

"Seemingly nothing. His father handed him over to me before trying to bolt. And as soon as the shooting happened, I held him to me so he couldn't see. But...who knows for sure? He seems all right."

"Why was the man shot?"

"We were ordered to stop any Norwegian who came along, and decide whether they should be arrested." He gestured with his head toward the snow-covered hump. "He looked all right, said his wife had died, and that he was taking the child to the pastor at Floren. But I'd heard that the priests around here are rabble rousers, so I decided I'd better hold the guy and send for the ensign to talk to him. Then I reached up to take the boy, so the man could get down more easily from the horse, and he handed him to me. That's when he brought out his crop and slashed his horse with it.

The chaplain winced.

"Ahti was holding the bridle, and the horse reared and knocked him down, and two of the men shot." The sergeant shrugged. "The *norjalainen* was dead before he hit the ground."

"Was there no other way? Couldn't they have shot the horse instead?"

Again the sergeant shrugged. "A shame to shoot a good horse. Besides, I think the man planned to join the partisans. That's why he tried to break away." It occurred to the sergeant then that perhaps the farmer's wife hadn't died; that the man might simply have brought the boy as part of a cover story. If so, it hadn't worked.

Meanwhile Idman went over to the child and his soldier-playmate. "What's the child's name?" he asked Uuno in Finnish.

"His father called him Jens, pastor."

Soberly Idman looked down at the little boy, who seemed not to be in shock. "Do you think he knows what happened to his father?"

"I don't think so, pastor."

Idman turned his tongue to Swedish now, and spoke to the little boy. "Jens, tell me your uncle's name."

"Onkel Torleif."

"Does he have another name?"

The child looked puzzled. "Kaale calls him Morfar."

A maternal uncle then, if Kaale was Jens's cousin. "Jens," he said, "I am going to take you to Floren, where Onkel Torleif lives."

The small face brightened, "Will pappa come with us?"

The question cut like a knife. "Maybe later." The words came out before he thought, and once said could not be taken back. *You lied, Nils*, Idman told himself, and hoped earnestly that God was not seriously offended.



Idman and Jens encountered no one on the road till west of Hilmo, another small clustering of mountain farms. There the invaders, after plundering the farms, had pulled back eastward. Now uniformed Norwegian militia stopped the chaplain. In his conspicuously Swedish uniform, Idman felt seriously at risk, but there he was. One of the men who stopped them took him and the boy to a small cabin and ordered them inside. At the sight of Idman's Swedish uniform, a bored sergeant got scowling to his feet.

"This Swede rode up to us with the child, headed for Floren on horseback," the guard told him. "Said the boy's mother had died, and he'd promised the father he'd...

hell, I'll let him tell you."

Once more Idman recited his story, again leaving out the father's death, not because he feared to tell them, but because of the little boy listening. He also omitted being the army's bishop. In truth he was only a simple chaplain, acting as bishop, an unofficial role for which he felt inadequate.

The sergeant's scowl had faded to a frown. "Then...why did the farmer give the child to you? Why didn't he bring him himself?"

It seemed to Nils Idman that some lying demon had taken over his tongue. "Major Ortman wanted to question him about certain things that had gone on at Aune, and that he should be held in custody. Then the father said, 'but what of my son?', so I volunteered."

The sergeant shook his head, not in disbelief but in disapproval of such convoluted thinking. Meanwhile Idman cringed inwardly at the extent of his dishonesty. There was no Major Ortman; that too was a lie. What must God think of him now? In fact, though Idman wasn't consciously aware of it, his impulse had been to avoid putting false words in the mouth of an actual person.

The sergeant's frown cleared in decision. "Take the boy to Vigman's," he told the road guard. "Tell them what the situation is, and that they are to take the boy in until Pastor Einersen can be notified in Floren. You can never tell. Einersen *could be* the uncle; his name *is* Torleif. "

"Yes, sergeant."

"As for the horse, we'll keep it as partial payment for all the horses the Swedes have stolen from us."

For the first time, the guard smiled. Grinned. "Yes, sergeant!"



Returning eastward, Idman walked a long 3 km—very long in riding boots—to the first Swedish outpost, where the only horse was the sergeant's. By that time it was getting dark again, but instead of borrowing the horse, Idman walked another 3 km to where some Finns were roasting a dismembered lamb over an open fire. An ensign invited him to join them, and sent a soldier on horseback to bring a horse for the bishop.

Meanwhile, as they ate, the ensign weaseled the story out of Idman—the lies went

unmentioned—and it seeped throughout the battalion, slanted as a tale of a selfless chaplain putting himself at risk to bring a small orphan child to his Norwegian uncle. An approximate truth, but Idman was embarrassed by it.

It was the 3rd Day of Christmas when Lars Olofsson Skoogh suggested a one-man mission to Sergeant Major Wallmo. North of the river, he explained, on the slopes above the valley farms, were occasional small bench farms. Farms on the wrong side of the river to have been found by the swarms of soldiers straggling down from Bukkhammeren. Farms that afterward might easily be missed in foraging. And he proposed to scout them out, then lead a foraging force to them.

Lars knew, and the sergeant major knew, there was at least one company of Norwegian militia, ski troops, hanging about in the valley east of Selbu—they'd already harassed foragers. And even a scout wearing farmer clothing and on skis, if accosted, would be recognized at once as an imposter—unless, of course, he spoke the Trondish lingo convincingly.

Even Lars might fail questioning by a suspicious local militiaman—his previous two years in Norway had been off west around Klæbu—but he didn't point that out. He had a backstory that it seemed to him would disarm suspicion.

The sergeant major told him to do it.

The proposal was honest, as far as it went. But Lars's old, now renewed, private agenda was nagging him—to find Signe again. Of course, Signe's in-laws had been suspicious, and he couldn't be sure she'd be willing anyway, but it seemed to him he had to try. And if he could just *find* her, let her know he still wanted to marry her, then he could come back after things had settled down.

Meanwhile he'd be serving his regiment, and might reasonably hope to find a pair of skis for Matts, and get him back to Sweden alive. Matts, the little brother he'd never had—the one he'd gotten along with. And crossing the fjeld into Jämtland might easily cost more lives than Bukkhammeren had; depending on the weather. And Handöl, let alone Duved, was a lot farther to hike, and the terrain more difficult.

So with a requisition from the sergeant major, Lars went to Supply and drew a

precious pair of skis. Then, in the small smoke house / brew house, where he and some 15 others of headquarters company were billeted, he unrolled the farmer clothes he'd used on Longström assignments.



The next morning, as soon as daylight was adequate, he strode off westward down the river road, over one shoulder carrying the wide, heavy, 7-foot-long skis, and a single pole of about the same length. Carried them, rather than wearing them, because in the valley bottom, the snow was shallow and heavily trampled.

Mostly, along there, the road was bordered by farm fields, so his gaze was on the forest border beyond it, watching for indications of a cart road entering the forest. Before long a foraging team came up on him from behind, four 2-horse carts with some 30 men, commanded by a lieutenant on horseback. The lieutenant looked down at him from the saddle. "Halt!" the man barked. "Where are you going?"

Lars stopped, and answered in his best church Swedish, "Sir, I'm scouting for farms not yet found, so we can forage them, sir."

The lieutenant blinked at what was unquestionably Swedish spoken with Jämtish tones. "Indeed? By whose orders?"

"Sir, I am Corporal Lars Olofsson Skoogh of Headquarters Company, Jämtland's regiment, sir, until lately attached to Captain Longström's company as a guide and interpreter. I was given my orders by Regimental Sergeant Major Wallmo, sir." He handed him the order.

The lieutenant read, frowned, and handed the order back. He might outrank Wallmo, but he had no authority, nor any reason, really, to interfere in the sergeant major's business. Which at any rate was the colonel's business once removed. So. "You are out of uniform, corporal."

"I am indeed, sir. I will be traveling alone, away from the road, and there are Norwegian ski patrols in the forest."

One of Longström's people. And it made sense, though it might not keep the fellow alive for long. "Very well, corporal. Proceed. And good luck to you."

A half hour later, Lars spotted what he was looking for, though he nearly missed it. About 3 meters wide, and on the far side of a 70-yard-wide field, the cart road did not

show itself plainly, but slanted into the forest at an angle, the better to climb the steep slope. Leaving the river road, Lars crossed the field and disappeared into the forest. This low on the slope, even in the shade, the snow was shallow enough that climbing was better done with the skis on his shoulder than on his feet.

On the cart road, the snow was untracked, the grade moderate and unblocked with blowdowns, and the surface more level, side to side, than a pack trail. Besides, here in the valley, pack trails to summer dairies tended to follow tributaries, while this one slanted gradually up along the mountainside. To Lars it looked promising.

As he trudged up the slope, he considered how he might best ask someone if they knew of a woman named Signe Andersdatter Øks, and how he might find her. If nothing else, it could provide an excuse for his being there. He could say her brother had asked him to look for her. Not that it helped his morale—it wasn't very convincing—but he needed some kind of answer if he was questioned. And the only alternative he could see was the truth: that he'd been sweet on her.

After perhaps half an hour, the road opened onto a field—a cleared bench some 150 meters wide and 600 or 800 long, holding two small farms. He slipped his toes into the toe straps and approached the nearest farmstead on skis. There were no tracks, even old, or other signs of occupation, but he pushed open the door of the cabin. It held an old Danish prayer book, a few sticks of firewood, and a single broken ski, child-size. Otherwise not even kitchenware. In the cow and sheep sheds, and the small stable, the manure had dried out. The storage sheds were empty, and the hay shed mostly so—less than half a load—apparently the farmer had sold what they'd held. He imagined the man being called to Trondheim with his militia company, and taking his family.

On approaching the other farm, a half kilometer west, he saw thin smoke curling from the chimney, and closer up, footpaths trodden in the snow among the buildings. Unless the harvest and livestock had been hidden before the snow fell, it should still be on the site. Should he simply mark the place in his memory, or go knock on the door? If nothing else, he might find skis for Matts here. He could stash them somewhere. There was a riverside farm not far from where the cart road began. At night it would be occupied by soldiers, but for today he could cache the skis in a back fence corner.

So he went to the cabin—the loose dry snow was virtually silent—took off his skis

and leaned them beside the stoop, then unslung his carbine.



After chores, and a breakfast of porridge and cheese, Signe Andersdatter had fallen asleep. She'd slept a lot these past few days, since the Swedes had arrived in the valley. She'd learned of their coming by distant gunshots two nights in a row. Had gone out onto the stoop and seen the glow of a large beacon fire on the upper slope across the valley. A burning building, she guessed. The sight had chilled her blood. So she'd packed her knapsack with necessities, to flee to the summer dairy. Then had stayed, instead. If she fled, she'd leave tracks, and they'd follow her; find the food hidden there weeks earlier when the Swedes had crossed the Stjørdalselv.

She was many miles from Klæbu, her parents' home, and some distance from her late husband's. When Øks was called to Trondheim, she'd refused to go with him, but she knew her parents wouldn't take her back, and her husband, as punishment for her refusal, had hired her out to work for his in-laws, an unusual and degrading thing to do. And Sveirre Eriksøn had groped her when his wife was out. Life had seemed without hope. So when word had come that Captain Hendrick Kittelsøn Øks had died of a plague that killed many in Trondheim, it felt as if a heavy weight had been lifted from her. She'd run off then, hopefully to stay with her eldest brother, Bent, at Hestligård, well away from Sveirre Eriksøn.

When the Swedes had moved south from Leiren, Bent and his wife Bjørg, and their neighbor, had carted most of their grain up to the summer dairy, to be safe, and buried it in the hay. Meanwhile Signed agreed to stay behind to take care of the cattle of both farms, and they'd been gathered together at her brother's, where she could care for them, feed and milk them. She would not return to her parents, nor would Bent urge her to. He'd grown up in the same household, and while he'd sometimes criticized her, more often he'd backed her, even shielded her.

Now she lived from day to day, hoping the Swedes wouldn't find their way there.



She jerked upright out of sleep, disoriented. Sunlight through the window told her it was daylight, and her sharp ears that the front door was opening. Intruders! She was on her feet at once, then heard a male voice—speaking Norwegian, not Swedish.

"Hello! Is anyone home?"

She stepped hesitantly to the door of her room. And stared out. "Lars? Is it truly you?"

His jaw dropped. "*Kjære Gud! Signe!*"

For just a moment they stood unmoving, then rushed into each other's arms.



Afterward they stayed under the covers for the warmth. And talked, briefly asking and answering questions. Her next older brother Jørgen, Lars's old shipmate, had returned to sea after their father had driven Lars out. She'd married to escape her parents, and Herr Øks, if less sour than her father, was even more overbearing. Meanwhile Bent, her eldest brother, had met Bjørg, a young widow from Aune, who'd inherited this farm....

It occurred to Lars how fortunate he was to have been brought up by *his* parents. In that household he'd been the difficult one, the one who'd thought only of himself, he told her. Told her also how grateful he was that she loved him. And how strong-willed she'd been! How easy it would have been for her to just give up.

That comment seemed to still their pillow talk. Then, "what will we do now?" she asked, and he told her what he'd planned, which led to more planning. Bent's cattle were doomed, of course. Lars would volunteer to lead the foraging party, and because the farm was occupied—by Signe, who would play the role of farmwife—there would be *some* payment for the livestock, including the neighbors', which were now in Bent's barn. Skis, being personal property and not part of the farm, were exempt from taking, but to make sure, Lars would take them with him on his way back to camp, and conceal them in the snow by the trail.

Then there was more love play, and Lars did not leave till near midday.

Erik Stenfors was no longer 1st Sergeant of Longström's Company. With Captain Longström's death, his company lost its heart, its core identity, its formal existence, with its men parceled out partly to Duved, partly to Stene Skans, with only a squad—a squad and the 1st sergeant—remaining with Armfelt's headquarters company. After reporting

Longström's death, Stenfors, born Kivikoski, had become almost clinically morose. At times he'd spend hours throwing his heavy knife at trees, the blade slamming deeply enough into the wood that it took a powerful arm and hand to withdraw it. It would have split a man's breastbone and stuck in the spine.

When Armfelt's headquarters had been at Holtålen, the possibility of a Norwegian abduction or assassination attempt had been brought up, and Armfelt, having heard of Stenfors's condition, reassigned him as his senior bodyguard. Something of a fatalist, the general gave little attention to his own safety, but he'd come to think highly of the 1st sergeant, and thought the assignment might renew the man.

Thus, when Colonel Jungh told Armfelt the story of Idman and the Norwegian orphan, Erkki had been on hand, and heard it all. It stunned the hardened cynic, who went to the privacy of the farmstead's privy and silently wept for the first time he could remember. After he'd wept himself out, he sat shocked, his mind fixed on a single thought: *I did not weep for the captain, when he was killed, though I have grieved all these weeks since. But here I have wept for a priest I barely know, a priest and a little child...and a good outcome!*

At that the tears came again, but this time for only half a minute. Then he roughly wiped them on a sleeve, and that was the end of it..

Meanwhile his depression seemed gone.

It was New Years eve, by Sweden's old-time calendar, and the whole army had gathered along the valley between Tydal and Østby—ready to set out for Sweden in the morning. It remained bitterly cold. Another cruel night, for men without shelter, though with no wind, God be praised. In and near the forest's edge, bonfires flickered and snapped, hundreds of them, surrounded by dark figures wrapped in blankets, many leaning against each other. Tomorrow they'd march; start before dawn. Two days would take them to the settlement of Handöl, they'd been told. Two days to Handöl.

Mostly they were not talking. Those who did, talked about the king's death, and what it might mean, but none of it with any heart. In their packs, each man had newly issued rations—the product of diligent foraging—enough to take them to Handöl, then

on to Duved Skans, and at least some of them sat planning and replanning how he'd apportion them through the four days. They'd come so far, and their thin legs were tough, tough. Those who'd gotten this far were tough enough to last to Duved, they told themselves. Tough legs; tough legs, and in Handöl, maybe even rest in an *eldhus*, a heated room, for the first arrivals.

There were more than soldiers in the firelight. Most of the locals had fled to summer dairies on the margins of the fjeld, but some had stayed behind, mainly the aged and infirm. Thus a few old men, wearing fur coats, fur-lined boots, ear-lapper caps, thick woolen or fur mittens, stood or ambled about mostly in twos or threes, murmuring quietly among themselves. One of them, though, went from fire to fire, asking if any of the soldiers were from Åre or Undersåker in Jämtland. Finally he found what he was looking for.

"I'm from Åre."

"Do you know Per Jonson Tunga?"

"I'm one of his grandsons. Do you know him?"

"He was one of my mother's younger brothers.

"If you're the son of old Aunt Lisbet, then you're my grampa's cousin!"

"That's right. I'm Staffa, born and raised in Åre, but when I was young, I came here to work. I married a woman at Østbyhaugen and never went back." The old man paused, as if considering, then said, "If you get home, say hello to your grampa for me. I think he'll remember me."

If you get home. The young Jämtlander's bleary eyes met the old man's. "Tomorrow morning," said young Per, "after the moon rises, we start over the fjeld. How do you think it will go for us?"

The old man's reply was measured. "If you have skis and warm clothes, it should go well enough." Again his eyes scanned the famished soldiers, finding no sign of either. "Take my advice, young Per. Keep away from the bare heights. Follow the Ena River through the birchwood, to where it flows into Ånn Lake. From there you'll be able to see Handöl."

Then old Staffa turned his back and walked slowly away.³⁰

³⁰ I ran into this story, with minor variations, in a number of sources.

Commander-in-chief can be a lonely job, especially in a desperate situation with morale dismal and discipline fraying. Actually, discipline had held up well, compared to that of Lewenhaupt's army at Lesnaya, 11 years earlier, of which stories were told. And Lewenhaupt had been one of Sweden's most honored generals.

Meanwhile Armfelt was Armfelt. By nature he was more than patient and persistent. He was tough, durable. Stoic. And experienced with tragedy and failure—he'd seen so much of them during the long stubborn defense of Finland. And finally there was his Pietism.

His tended to be a lonely job. On his last night at Holtålen, Armfelt had lowered his warrior psyche for a talk with de la Barre. And it had helped. But on the eve of departing Østby with his ragged, famished, freezing army, he felt need for a gentler soul to commune with...



Chaplain Nils Idman, acting bishop of the Army of Jämtland, was not averse to a bedtime drink. And when now Master Sergeant Kivikoski knocked with the general's invitation, Idman had anticipated brandy, the general's favorite and his own—a drink to savor. But when he sat down on the bench in Armfelt's room, the bottle on the table between them was of the local, farm-distilled whiskey. It was inevitable. His brandy supply was exhausted, like so much else. The general poured, then raised his glass. The pastor raised his in turn, and they drank, to Finland and to Sweden, the whiskey scalding their throats.

"What do you think of our prospects on the crossing?" Karl Gustaf asked.

Asked in Finnish, for Idman understood little if any German, and here again, in a Norwegian border household, Swedish provided no privacy.

"God has provided a severe test for the army," Idman answered. *So many tests!* "But however many die, it seems to me they will see God's glory. They have earned it."

The general nodded. "Most were born into hardship, have lived and fought in hardship, and will die in hardship now or later. I have not the power to change any of

it, though it's been my Christian duty to try. I take solace in knowing I have striven always to ease it, but...I wish it were otherwise."

He sipped again. "I sent Hammarskjöld with 20 men on plundered skis, to mark the way. But first they must find the way. And I have guides—and hostages!—locked up to lead us, but who knows if they can be relied on? One might hope they'll be glad just to be rid of us. I would; God knows I would. But we have not endeared ourselves to the Trønder. I'm surprised they showed us such forbearance as they have, sometimes at risk to themselves."

Idman nodded. "They are cousins to the Swedes."

"Yet how many times the two have fought."

"And how many times married!"

The general chuckled. "Married couples sometimes squabble."

The touch of levity was too faint to persist; it sagged and died. "Pray for us," Armfelt said. "Pray for us, pastor, for you are, I believe, the nearest of us all to God."

Idman nodded, not in agreement but in acquiescence, then stood, gestured, and moved away from the table so there was no barrier between them. Then both men, face to face, lowered themselves to their knees, and the churchman began with the default prayer, the most powerful, the most concise, the least needy in the Christian repertoire: "Our Father who art in heaven," he began, the general echoing. Followed that with an impromptu prayer that addressed the difficulties of the crossing without dwelling on them. Finally closing with "*Herren är min herde*—The Lord is my shepherd..." a psalm of trust, and the one in which he found the greatest solace.

When that was done, he got to his feet, the general following more slowly, for his knees were older. They shook hands then, and the chaplain left. The general finished both their drinks, put the stopper back in the bottle, and lay down on his bed fully clothed, wearing even his boots, for Erkki would waken him in just a few hours. Then a slender moon would rise, and he'd ride out spurless in his sleigh again.

PART SIX

CLIMAX

Chapter 33

Departures

Lars shook Matts awake, and he sat up. "Come, Matts, it's time." The words were barely whispered, barely breathed, and inside the small, crowded shed (plundered of its grain), it was almost as black as Satan's heart. But not quite, because the open door had let in enough starlight, reflected from the snow, to tell where the door was. Lars had warned him of an early waking, and to be ready to leave at once. Secretly; no one was to know. No one.

Matts' knapsack served also as his pillow. He rose to his knees, wadded his blanket into it, gripped the shoulder straps, and crawled after Lars to the open door. Inside, the entire surviving membership of Headquarters Company's civilian labor force had radiated enough heat to make a very real difference in the enclosed temperature, but outside was bitter cold. Matts wished he could stay inside till spring.

Outside he stood up, closed the door, and shouldered his pack. "We need to hurry," Lars murmured. "I don't have farmer clothes for you, so we need to be off the road as soon as possible. Within an hour there'll be troops on the river road, going east, and wondering why a Swede in uniform is going west. With a Norwegian farmer!" And if we run into Norwegian ski troops, it will be worse.

They hurried, Lars carrying his skis, and speaking almost not at all. After a bit they crossed a narrow farm field to the forest, to walk west along its edge, where they might conceal themselves if someone came along the road. Shortly they came to what Matts thought must be a trail to a summer dairy, with tracks of carts, horses and men, who'd gone there foraging. There they left the field for the trail, which slanted gradually up the slope. Once in the forest, had it not been for the snow, they couldn't have seen a thing. But Lars seemed unworried, so Matts stopped worrying too.

It was cold enough that even the exertion didn't make Matts feel warm. They followed the tracks for quite a long while. Then, up ahead, they saw where the road left the forest. Just before they reached it, Lars stopped where a spruce had fallen beside the road, and began to dig under its branches. After a moment he drew forth a ski, then another, then a ski pole, and handed them to Matts, who put on the skis.

Then they skied into a field, long and narrow—it seemed to Matts partly meadow, partly clearing. There were two farmsteads there. It looked as if one man on horseback had ridden to the first, the rest to the farthest. It was the farthest Lars started for. When they got there, they took off their skis and leaned them by the door. Lars didn't even knock, just raised the latch and pulled. Inside was far darker than outdoors, despite snowlight through a window, and embers glowing in the fireplace. "Good day to you," Lars said in Norwegian, not very loudly, and someone sat up in a drawbed.

"Good day." The answering voice was a woman's. Sleepy. She got to her feet.

"Signe," Lars told her, "I have brought Matts with me, as I said I would. He's been my good friend, my brother, since Duved skans."

Lars's old sweetheart, Matts realized, and felt suddenly shy. Lars hadn't told him about this. And like Lars and himself, she seemed dressed for the day.

"Hello, Matts," she said, and the cheer in her voice lightened him. "If you are Lars's friend, you are my friend also."

"And you are mine," Matts found himself saying. It occurred to him this might work out well.

Signe took a candle from the table and held it to an ember, lighting it, then took some split pine from a box and built up the fire. It was already notably warmer inside than out; structures of well-fitted logs retain heat well. As the fresh pine took fire, he felt its radiant warmth almost at once. He wondered if they'd stay here awhile, perhaps till daylight.

"Should we hurry?" Signe asked. "Could you be followed?"

"I doubt it very much. The army has mustered in the fields and woods close around Østby and Ås, and plans to start over the flank of Øyfjellet as soon as the moon rises. The rear guard will follow about midday. It's a long trek to Handöl, about 60 or 70 km, and they don't want to spend more than one night under the stars."

Under the stars! On the field there'd be no fences or gates or foot bridges to break up for firewood. Tomorrow night would be the worst night the army had lived through, even in Finland, Matts did not doubt.

They did hurry though, stopping only long enough for a breakfast of porridge and flatbread, the porridge warm from the kettle. Each of them added flatbread and butter to their knapsacks, and some of the salt beef the army had left Signe. And just as important, some well-worn but serviceable winter clothes belonging to Bent and Bjørg. The ensign who'd commanded the forage troop was a veteran of the frightful plundering of Lithuania, during the Russian campaign, and been nagged by a guilty conscience ever since. And when your victims speak a language you pretty much understand, as these Norwegians did, it was easier to relent a bit. Especially when the victim is a pretty young woman (a widow perhaps?) waiting for "her father and mother to arrive back from Floren," where they'd gone to tend a new grandson after a difficult birth.

It was such a commonplace tale, the ensign hadn't doubted for a second.



The three fugitives left in iron-cold moonlight. Lars carried the major load—Signe's blanket, his own military gear, a short-handled army axe, a wagon tarp, and a coil of stout cord. Because of his occasional assignments with Longström's company, he'd long-since exchanged his musket for a carbine. Matts carried his own gear, including of course his blanket, and the food from Signe's stash. She went unencumbered; she hadn't undergone the severe exertions Lars and Matts were used to.

A clock, had there been one in the cabin, would have read about 8:15 local time.³¹ EN16 The first pale wash of dawn would show itself shortly. The army would already be on the march east from Østby. The sun would rise somewhat past nine. A fugitive trio, and an army, both crossing their separate Rubicons.

³¹ There was no "standard time." Clocks were generally set by local "sun time," and would continue to be until the late 18 hundreds.

Chapter 34 Onto the Fjeld

Before the fugitives left the farmhouse, Lars had Matts dress in some of Bent's old clothes, which were much warmer and in better condition than Matts' army castoffs. With scissors, needle and thread, Signe made hurried, rough and ready adjustments before the change. And now they were in less danger from an encounter with Emahusen's troops, or local partisans. His army clothes they dropped into the privy pit.

Lars had an army map, issued to him on his first mission with Longström's folk. The trail they set out on, in the brittle predawn cold, more or less paralleled a creek that Signe called Lødølja. For a time they could hear a waterfall clattering in its icy gorge, but no one suggested they visit it.

After a time, their trail was joined by another, also to a summer dairy, with tracks of numerous skiers. It seemed to the three fugitives that those would be Major Emahusen's company. So the three stopped to rest, and agree on a new backstory to explain their presence and activity, in case they were stopped.

The story they opted for was as simple and close to the truth as they dared: Lars's mother, they'd decided, was a Trond who'd married a Swede from Ånn. Who, when he inherited the farm there, moved back to Ånn with his pregnant wife. Thus Lars's birthplace remained Ånn. As a youth he'd gone to sea, and arriving back at Trondheim, had gone to Klæbu with a shipmate. There, in this newly-cooked reality, he'd met and this time married Signe (who is obviously Norwegian). Then, on a visit to see his parents at Ånn, he'd been conscripted into Jämtland's regiment. Arriving in Tydalen with Armfelt's army, he'd found Signe again. By that time Karl XII was dead, and morale and discipline were unraveling, so it seemed safe to desert, in order to take Signe out of the country with him. As for Matts—he was a conscripted 15-year-old

civilian laborer from Värmland, disaffected by foraging duty. Which he regarded as sinful in the sight of God.

The story was mostly true, and what wasn't would hopefully seem believable, even to Emahusen.

Before midday they passed the summer dairy. No smoke issued from the chimney. Inspection showed it had been used but not plundered. Soon afterward, the ski tracks turned west near the inflow of the Røja toward Gammelvoll Lake, and the fugitives relaxed somewhat. Now they were skiing virgin snow again, Lars breaking trail. He kept close to the forest edge—coarse mountain birches with occasional stunted spruce—which protected them somewhat from a freshening breeze.

Matts hoped this would not be another windy day like the one on Bukkhammeren. Lars knew where they were, at least approximately; he pointed out a high mountain to the north—Fongen he called it—and another to the southeast, Øyfjellet, which he said the army would cross. "Not over the bare mountain," he added, "there'd be no point in that. Over the northwest route—below the steeps and down a creek to Essand Lake."

Matts wondered if they'd be able to see some of the soldiers along the way. *As long as they don't see us*, he thought.

Almost every step has been uphill, Armfelt told himself. At first through a mosaic of mountain meadows—bog in summer, he supposed—with mountain birch woodlands and scattered clumps of poor spruce. The air remained bitterly cold. He'd prayed, literally, for warmer weather; the whole army had. *What a blessing that would be*, he thought, then chided himself. *Don't put ideas into Satan's mind, Karl Gustaf; you might regret it. Or was that thought from Satan?*

He rode in his sleigh, ahead of the reverberating kettle drums, accompanied in turn by the constant burr of snare drums farther back down the column. Von Gertten rode his horse immediately behind his general's sleigh, and ahead of the kettle drummer. Behind the drummer rode Poponen with the hostages trailing: two women and five captive Norwegian dragoons, assurance against treachery. Asleep beside Armfelt slumped Anders Henrik, beneath a great bearskin blanket, his head rolling with each

lurch. The horse kept to an easy walk. The whole column followed his two Norwegian guides, who trudged through snow not halfway to their knees.

His principle guide, Lars Bersvendsen, was tall, rugged, somewhat older than the general, and knew the terrain like the palm of his hand. *He'll make it if anyone does*, Armfelt told himself, *and with the two women along, he'll hardly play us false*. Still he wished they'd been able to find the man's wife, to bring as one of his hostages. Or a grandchild. Only then might he feel completely confident.

They emerged from the birch woodlands onto the open mountain slope, and now the general felt the wind, not strong, but cutting nonetheless, with here and there brief swirls of sharp dry snow riding a gust. He scanned the sky—clear, blue. Some distance ahead, Øyfjellet's north shoulder crested, a crest that climbed more steeply southward. Before long they'd be able to see the lake, it seemed to him.



Lars Bersvendsen knew exactly where he was, and it was not the best trail. That was off north a ways, lower and less laborious. Not that he wanted to lead these damn Swedes to their death. Just get them out of Norway. But the easiest way ran past a summer dairy, where folks had managed to stash grain, and enough cattle to breed up more when spring came. If the Swedes laid hands on it, they'd gobble it up like a swarm of locusts.

Bersvendsen trudged on, not looking back again till he stood on the minor crest they'd been climbing. Another, higher crest lay ahead. Then he turned. The general's sleigh was some 50 meters behind, and behind it, the army in a column of twos, following his tracks. *I wonder what they'd do if I turned uphill now, toward the peak*.

The question was rhetorical: they'd follow him for a bit, then see through it.

He wouldn't though. His strong legs were tiring. *You're getting old, Lars*, he told himself. *You're 72; you've lost a lot in the last few years*. Then a strong gust struck him, and his eyes sharpened. Off northwest, a great snowplume was blowing off Fongen, blurring the lesser heights around it—and putting a different face on this expedition. Taking a deep breath, Lars Bersvendsen trudged on now toward the next rise.

Some minutes later the army stopped to rest, and Master Sergeant Erik Stenfors turned in his saddle to look back. The wind had strengthened further, and—"General!"

he called, voice suddenly urgent. Armfelt turned, his eyes following Errki's long arm, which pointed westward. Over the coastal hills, dark clouds, a high bank of them, lined the horizon. Storm! "Bersvendsen!" the general called, also pointing now. His guide turned, peered, then started back toward the sleigh.

"I see it, general; a dangerous storm, maybe an hour away. We need to get down among the trees again. Back to Østby."

Armfelt frowned. Back to Østby? Where they'd soon eat up what rations they had, leaving them to start over again through deeper snow, with nothing to eat on the march. He shook his head. "No, we'll continue. Trust in God."

"Then send the women back."

"No. they continue with us. Without them, I do not trust you to guide us truly."

For a moment it seemed Bersvendsen might argue, but instead he nodded, and led the army angling downslope now toward Essand Lake.



Within 30 minutes, the wind sounded like a mighty pipe organ, and while a muted sun still shone in the south, wind-blown snow was stinging any exposed skin. Again the general called to Bersvendsen. "Farmer!" He shouted to be heard above the wind. "What do you think now?"

"We are in trouble, general. I think if you send the women back now, they can make it to Østby safely."

The general shook his head without speaking. Twenty minutes later, the snow arrived, driving densely. Armfelt called to von Gertten. "Free the women," he shouted. "We'll do without them. But keep the dragoons." He glanced at Bersvendsen. "Do not play me false, farmer."

"I shall not, general," and the Norwegian meant it.

The provost marshal spoke to the female hostages, who had not been manacled. They turned back, to disappear into the cutting whiteness, their heavy woolen skirts and coats pressed tightly against them by the wind.

It was late morning when the three fugitives reached the inflow of a lesser creek,

and turned roughly eastward on it, up a shallow draw.

Signe didn't comment. During her short stay with Bent and Bjørg, she hadn't been beyond the dairy meadows before, and this was unfamiliar territory. It was still birch woodland, but without spruce here. The growing breeze was crosswise to the draw, which spared them from most of it. If Lars was right, this creek would take them more or less east, then south to Essand Lake. From which the way to Handöl should be easy to keep, if not so easy to travel.



Some three kilometers farther, the three fugitives came to a Lapp hut, a truncated cone, snow covered, built of peat sods. It had a crude door—a reindeer-skin panel laced to a stout birch pole that held it shut. Nearby were lengths of crooked mountain birch poles cut for fuel, and stacked on end to dry.

Lars opened the door, and they went in. It was gloomy inside, lit only by daylight through the smokehole in the roof. There was a fireplace in the middle of the floor, with a thin skiff of snow that had blown in through the smoke hole. To one side lay a stack of wild hay, for bedding, to another a small pile of firewood, with birchbark, split kindling, and tied twists of dry grass. Lars laid a fire, took out his tinder box, struck a spark and nursed it into flame. "We'll rest here," he said, "warm ourselves, and eat something before we go on."

Lars and Matts had tender gums from incipient scurvy, but their bellies overruled the discomfort of chewing. As they ate, they became aware that the wind had strengthened—they could hear it moaning, and sometimes it snapped at the smoke hole—so Lars went outside to look around. A minute later he came back in with some short lengths of birch in his arms, to report that outside it looked like Bukkhammeren with a difference: not only was it windy; it had begun to snow. Heavily. "We'd better bring in more wood," he said. "We may be here awhile."

A rusty cookpot lay near the fire, and while Lars and Matts chopped up and brought in more wood, Signe took the old pot outside, and grubbed around till she found a loose rock. This she put in the bottom, then packed the pot with snow, put the lid on it, and set it on the fire. They'd not only have water to drink, but she could make a stew of salt beef, flatbread, and the army's dried peas.



When anyone went out to relieve themselves that night, they could hear the wind blowing over the Sink Creek Crags to the south, and mighty Blåhammeren to the north. Sonorous, like a church organ, an intimidating sound. They could not help thinking what it must sound like to the army, on the exposed fjeld, or the lake ice. Sometime during the night it stopped snowing, but the killer wind still hooted. It seemed to Lars this was far worse than Bukkhammeren, and he decided to outwait the storm. At sunup the sky remained overcast, and while the wind had eased a bit, it still blew seriously. Snow fell as occasional flurries. In their draw it lay thigh deep now. Thank God for the skis.

The fugitives didn't talk much. Signe wondered aloud if perhaps the army had turned back to Østby. Lars answered only that he didn't think so. It seemed to Matts that Lars was right; there was little left to eat along the Ena. Meanwhile it remained *cold*. Lars sent off a prayer of thanks to the Lapps who'd built their little refuge. It was the first time he could remember actually praying.

Meanwhile they ate sparingly. All three fugitives were sore from skiing, less in the thighs than in arms, shoulders and torso from the hard labor of poling uphill. From time to time Lars swung his arms about and marched in place, trying to work out the soreness. Signe and Matts tried it too. It didn't seem to help much, and it hurt, but Lars repeated it from time to time, and they followed his example.

The second night it snowed some more, heavily at times, and the icy wind still blew. Meanwhile the fugitives had shelter, a fire, warm food—and hope. And Bent and Bjørg's old clothes. And skis! But the army? He didn't bring up the subject.

Instead, once more, Lars prayed.

Chapter 35

Bitter Trek

Essand Lake was surrounded by high, rugged, exposed country, but in winter the lake ice formed an easy travel surface. And into Essand, from the east out of Sweden, flowed Fish River, with its tributary, North Fish Creek, its headwaters a bog with a skein of pools, in which other small creeks had their roots. One of them, called Arnenjukke by the Lapps, led north into the Ena River. And once the fugitives reached the Ena, they'd need only to follow it northward, then eastward, many winding miles to Lake Ånn. And from there, at the Ena's mouth, Handöl would be in sight, nearby to the south.

At the Lapp hut, the fourth day dawned to a light wind, and the snow had stopped falling. "Time to move on," Lars said. He chopped more wood, which Matts carried inside. Signe stripped outer bark from a birch trunk, to provide kindling. They would leave the hut more or less as they'd found it, ready for travelers in trouble.

Then, their tenant duties done, they gathered their few things and set off painfully southeastward up the creek; their soreness, in torso, arms and shoulders, was less than it had been, but they still hurt. And they still had food enough to take them through the day; longer if they skimped. Before long, Matts spotted a ptarmigan, feeding on buds in the top of a birch, and urged Lars to shoot it. Lars declined. "The shot would likelier attract Major Emahusen than hit the bird. Better the creature die of old age!"

Matts realized Lars's thinking was correct. After a bit they crossed the low divide between North Sink Creek and Big Sink Creek—Lars even knew their names!—and followed the latter southward, keeping mainly to the creek ice, where their skis didn't sink as deeply in the snow. This was country which Lars knew well, from his fur-hunting days, and his time with the Lapps, and he felt sure of himself now.

Off to the south, through the sparse stand of mountain birch, they could glimpse Essand Lake, spread below the long easy slope down which the creek led them. At one point, where the view opened, Lars stopped, to examine the lake more carefully.

"What are you looking at?" Matts asked. The only movement he could see was a single riderless horse, minute in the distance.

"I am looking for men. Stragglers; men who got lost in the storm. Or maybe Emahusen and his company."

"What is that horse doing out there? Is it part of the army, do you think?"

"Probably."

"Are we going down there?"

"Down to the edge, probably. We may follow the edge on the ice then, where we'll be harder to see against the brush on the shore." Lars shifted his gaze to Signe. "I don't know where the army is; in Sweden I hope." He shrugged. "Or Emahusen either. Hopefully back in Tydalen."

They continued along the creek then, keeping largely on the ice, till they came to a broad hump in the snow. They knew at once what it was, because a musket barrel stuck out of it. It was Lars who approached it, and brushed away snow with a mittened hand. Bodies. Five of them in a close circle, sitting frozen, toppled against each other. He turned to Matts and Signe, shrugged and stepped around the cluster. Matts appeared as if in shock, Signe as if in pain. A short distance farther they found four more bodies, but didn't stop until they reached the lake ice. There Lars squatted on his skis, the others following his example.

"I don't think we need to worry about meeting the army. It's passed here. I think those"—he gestured back in the direction they'd just come from—"those must have gotten lost and built a fire, then froze sitting around it."

He looked around, squinting against the glare of sun on snow. Along the lake shore was a dense growth of low brush—tundra birch and willow—largely buried by snow. Skiing in it was effectively impossible, a result of tangled stems and their burden of snow; snow which could not settle, and had no real surface.

Snow had drifted a bit along the lakeshore, so Lars skirted it a few meters out. Sixty or seventy meters further they came to another, somewhat larger heap of

bodies, and soon another; Lars didn't pause to count the dead. On the lake itself, the snow had clearly been disturbed, even though afterward, the wind and further snowfall had considerably smoothed it.

Meanwhile the near calm had passed, replaced by a cutting breeze, fortunately at their backs. Meanwhile they saw more horses, some with saddles but no riders. Horses standing on the ice, browsing the tips of the brush along the shore; they trotted away as the skiers approached. The snow on the ice had a wind slab, and the skiers made good progress. They saw many more bodies, mostly in groups, and twice an officer or cavalryman lying on his side, knees bent and apart, hips slightly flexed. "Froze to death in the saddle," Lars said, "and fell off."

Now they met the tracks of other, numerous skiers, from the south. Tracks no older than yesterday's, Lars thought, and detailed Matts to watch for distant skiers.

Not all the horses were browsing. Some lay frozen on the snow-covered ice. At least one had been heavily, crudely hacked up for meat.

Actually, by the time the army reached the lake, there'd no longer been a single main stream of men, no long column of twos following the drummers. The booming storm had swallowed the drumming, and the dense swirling snow disoriented the soldiers. There was little but the pressing wind and the back of the man ahead to steer by. And the slope, downhill, downhill. The wind swirled and gusted, the slope changed in gradient and direction, and sometimes the man ahead of you disappeared or went down.

Thus even on the army's first night on the march, separate streams had formed, diverging in the blinding howling blizzard, each spilling out human trickles and dribbles as it went. Once they reached the lake ice, there was longer any downhill; all that kept them from trudging in circles was the wind, which provided some sense of direction. When finally exhaustion dictated rest, the general ordered camp to be made along the north shore from Sink Bay to Djupholm Bay.

There was no real firewood on the lakeside, only green willows and tundra birch—withe, switches, more bark than wood—richer in frozen water than in heat. When someone, fingers numb and fumbling, found some dead withes and

somehow succeeded in igniting them, the product was smoke and fumes. Men filched from the fodder sleighs, and nursed the tiny fires with hay, or whatever else came to hand, and burned their musket stocks for heat. Some men wandered inland from the shore, hunting mountain birches—real trees with dead branches to harvest—and in the darkness and swirling blizzard, spent the night where they were, huddled by tiny fitful fires, or perhaps no fire at all, freezing from the feet up, from the fingers inward. When camp was broken in the thin dawnlight, the astonishing thing was that so many men stood up, shedding the snow that had mounded on heads and shoulders, and marched again.

Without drums. To wield drumsticks requires fingers that will hold them.

Soon after finding the second dead rider, the fugitives reached Djupholm Bay. Lars had intended to ski to the head of the bay, then up the Djupholm River past Remsli Crag, then hook eastward south of Brushfield Mountain to the Ena River. It was the most direct and easiest route, the one he'd assumed the army would take. And judging from the snow, many had, at least partly within the last day or so, for it was not greatly smoothed by wind and snowfall. But more recently, perhaps that morning, a number of skiers had followed it, coming up from the south. A squad, Lars thought.

Matts looked at him. "Lars," he said, "if we meet them, I won't say a word. You can tell them I'm mute. Feebleminded."

Lars surprised Matts: he grinned. Signe smiled too now—and he cuffed Matts lightly on a shoulder. "I don't think it will come to that, little brother. We'll see. I think God is looking after us. So far we've been blessed." He looked at Signe then. "Surely I have been."

Then he turned away from the Djupholm, skiing south in the tracks of the north-bound, presumably Norwegian detachment, and no longer holding to the shore. As they went, the three refugees encountered more and more bodies, of men singly and in groups, and horses frozen and down, with and without riders. Like trail markers. Few of the horses had been butchered, none thoroughly. When Matts and Signe squatted on their skis, resting, Lars took his camp ax and hacked off some more meat. Frozen as it

was, it was almost like chopping ice.

The fugitives stayed with the tracks, which after half an hour or so left the ice, climbing onto a low, slender peninsula that jutted well out into the lake. At the top, perhaps 30 yards above the lake ice, Lars stopped. From there, they had a good view of the lake on the south side. The ski tracks they'd been following had angled in from the east, which puzzled him briefly. But these skiers seemed no threat; they were well off north now, their distance increasing by the minute. It looked as if they'd come not from Norway, but from Sweden. He wondered what that meant, then shrugged it off.

Turning to his companions, he gestured. "The lake is ringed with mountains," he said. There are only a few places to cross them readily, especially eastward, and you have to know where they are. And where rock cairns have been stacked, to mark the harder places, they'll be buried in snow now."

He pointed toward the southeast corner of the cove ahead of them. "That's where we're going. When we left the Lapp hut, I thought to go north up Djupholm Bay and River. It's the shortest route to Handöl, and on skis it's not too hard. But with ski troops up there, that's too dangerous, so I turned south. We'll leave the lake about there," he said pointing, "where Fish Creek flows out of those high peaks."

Matts' and Signe's eyes followed Lars's pointing mitten. The massif he indicated was truly formidable—high, steep, deadly-looking. It seemed beyond climbing on skis. Beyond climbing at all, plastered with snow as it was.

"About three kilometers up Fish Creek, it divides into a south fork and a north fork. We'll take the north fork. The south dead-ends in a bowl a goat couldn't climb out of, but the north fork isn't bad at all.

"That fork splits too, more than once, but we'll keep to the largest. When it gets too small—when there isn't a 'largest' any longer..." He paused, looking backward in time, then went on. "When there's no longer a largest, we take the left fork. Its headwaters flow from a bog with a skein of pools on the divide. From the divide, another small creek flows, which will take us beyond the peaks, north to the Ena River, the Arnenjukke, the Lapps call it. And the Ena will take us to Ånn Lake, where I grew up. Grew up rowing, pulling in seins and set-lines..." He grinned. "I always preferred fishing and hunting to farming."

Matts' attention had jumped ahead. "So. We're almost to Handöl?"

Lars shook his head. "No, good friend, when we reach the Ena, we'll still have many kilometers to ski on the river. But at least the way is plain there, and we'll be able to see Handöl from the mouth of the Ena. And it seems that Emahusen has already decided on the north route, leaving the south to us."

Unless Emahusen turns east later. Then he'll be on the Ena well ahead of us, and downstream. But then if we meet, we'll be well inside Sweden, and he may not be interested in taking us into custody. Who knows? You must wait, Lars, he told himself. Wait, watch, and trust.

As they got to their feet again to move on, Signe paused beside him. "Lars," she murmured quietly, "you are a good man and a good teacher. You will be a fine father when the time comes."



Back on the lake again, the fugitives found no more bodies; they seemed out of the main streams of the march now. Although by their tracks, some of the army had also gone up Fish Creek. While from the overlying tracks of the ski troops, *they* had come down it. Or...could they be Swedish troops from Duved, and not Norwegians at all? *Wait Lars, he told himself again. Wait and see.*

As things stood, either might still prove troublesome.



For the first few kilometers, the Fish Creek route went well. But it had begun to snow again, at times heavily, and they almost missed the opening of the North Fork, which was concealed by a slender islet. It was Signe who alerted Lars to it, seemingly by intuition. He'd known about the islet, but had simply failed to spot it. Like the slope above the overlooked North Fork, the islet was overgrown with mountain birch, and blended in. But otherwise the hike was uneventful. They encountered some corpses, seemingly dead before the ski troops came down from above; there was no sign they'd been disturbed. Meanwhile the fugitives had no further difficulty navigating the course, though in a few places they removed their skis and clambered.

Now they were on open fjeld, and Lars kept an eye sharp for another Lapp hut he remembered. "If we're lucky," he said, "there may be some dried blocks of peat in it, that

we can use for a fire."

It occurred to Matts that he wasn't particularly cold. Had skiing upslope and wearing Bent's old clothes kept him warm? Maybe the weather was easing a little. But meanwhile he was very hungry, tiring badly, and thinking about the horse meat he carried in his pack. Frozen horsemeat would be harder to chew than dry beef, and he wondered if he could chew it with his gums so tender. But it seemed to him he could.

The sun was hidden not only by a mountain now, but by clouds and falling snow again, but it was still daylight. Lars, as a result of his strength with his ski pole, and his intense focus, had pulled 50 or so yards ahead of Matts. Signe was a few strides behind Matts when Lars's voice called back: "I see it, just a little way ahead." He looked back, slowing briefly. "We sleep under a roof again tonight," he said, then speeded up.

The other two, keeping to their own pace, saw Lars lift aside the reindeer-hide door flap, start in, then back out. "What is it?" Signe called. Lars, instead of answering, ducked back in again. When Matts and Signe came up, Matts peered cautiously into the gloomy interior. Lars had gotten out his fire-starting kit, struck a spark into the punk and was blowing gently on it. Matts stepped aside to let Signe enter first. "Lars is starting a fire," he said, then heard her gasp, and followed her inside.

At his first peek, Matts had missed the two uniformed corpses slumped against one wall, open eyes unseeing. Lars ignored them now. The Lapps here were as reliable in their housekeeping as those on Sink Creek: they'd left dry fuel, but the two visitors, dead now, hadn't succeeded in lighting any of it. By the light through the smoke hole, Matts saw another tinder pouch and flint on the dirt floor beside one of the corpses. The man's fingertips had turned black from frost, and had refused his bidding.

The peat block Lars worked with wasn't as dry as it appeared, but he broke it up and got it burning. It gave off enough heat to be appreciated, and smoked more than enough. Here again was a pile of wild hay, and a rusty iron pot which Signe took outside and scrubbed with snow. Then she packed some snow inside it, with the frozen horsemeat, put the lid on, and put it on the fire.

Only then did she bring up the matter of the two dead soldiers. "I don't want to spend the night under the same roof with them," she said. "They would give me nightmares."

Lars got to his feet. "Matts," he said, "help me carry them out."

"Do you think they would care? Being put outside?"

Lars raised an eyebrow. "They're dead."

"But their souls may not like that."

"Hundreds of us lie dead outside," Lars pointed out patiently. "On the ice, on the field... And you yourself have helped carry dead men from the *sjukhus* in camp. Even from your tent, you told me."

Matts' forehead wrinkled with thought. "But the chaplain prayed over them."

"Ah. Of course. So. As your corporal, I—uh—detail you to pray for their souls. Say something to solace them. We'll take them outside after that. If we keep them in here with us, they'll start to thaw, and that would not be good."

Signe made a face. Matts looked very serious. "I don't know their names," he said at last. "And what if they are Finns? They might not understand me."

That brought a frown to Lars's face, too.

"Their souls are with the Holy Spirit now," Signe put in. "They will understand." She too stood up. "I will start," she said. "Each of us will say something." She turned to the corpses. "You *drenge* lived hard lives, serving God and king. Now you have died on the mountain, and unless you were sufficiently wicked, your souls will rest eternally with God. I don't think you did anything bad enough you'll go to Hell. And you don't need those bodies any longer; you do not need to suffer with them anymore. We would like to put them outside the hut so they do not disturb our sleep. Amen." She turned to Matts. "Now you."

Matts gathered himself, and looked down at the frozen corpses. "I don't think your souls will go to Hell, either. Not many Swedes deserve to go there, so you don't have much to worry about. And the Finns I knew best—Captain Longström, Lieutenant Fågelsund, the 1st sergeant—were very good people. I...and when you get to Heaven, say hello for me to my friend Jössi Ekblad, who died at Levanger. People mostly didn't like him very well, but..." Matts intended to say that Ekblad did the best he could, but by then tears were streaking his dirty face, and he couldn't talk anymore.

Lars stepped into the breach. "I don't know much about Heaven, but I don't suppose it gets very cold there, or too hot either... I wish you well in all things..."

Putting you outside shouldn't cause you any pain, because you're already dead, and you can go to Heaven if you aren't there already." He paused and looked aside at Signe and Matts. "I think we should say the Lord's Prayer together now." He bowed his head, and after a moment began: "*Fader Vår, som är i himlen...*"

It didn't much fit their particular circumstances, but Matts and Signe joined in as a matter of reverence. When they'd finished, Lars and Matts lugged the two bodies outside and set them carefully in the snow against the wall. Lars thought of closing their eyes, but didn't; the lids were probably frozen open anyway. So they simply hurried back inside and tied the door flap shut behind them.

It took awhile for the water to boil, and the meat to thaw and half cook, but soldiers and cooks are experienced at waiting. After they'd eaten, the three of them lay bunched together on the wild hay, sharing their blankets to conserve body heat, and none of them stayed awake long. The last thought that drifted through Matts' mind was of Pål Eriksson, who'd died of pneumonia at Duved skans. It seemed to him now he'd thought too harshly of Pål, so he sent a silent postscript to the two frozen soldiers: *And say hello also to my friend Pål Eriksson for me.*



They broke their fast by firelight, the next day, with more horse meat, and were on the trail at earliest dawn. Within seconds, Matts' nose hairs had frozen; he could feel them stiffen, tugging on his nasal membranes. He'd wondered aloud, then, if they should move the corpses back inside, but Signe said it would do them no good, and outside they might at least feel the sunlight. Matts thought then of the ravens, who were sure to spot them, but frozen hard as they were, even a raven's strong beak would be blunted, so he let be.

The wind was bitter and cutting, and enough new snow had fallen and blown, overnight, that the tracks of the earlier skiers had been nearly eradicated. But the previous day's skiing, the horse meat, and another night of decent rest, had left only a shadow of their previous soreness. And the mild climb soon warmed them, especially Lars, who again broke trail. Before long they reached the string of bog pools on the divide, then started down the long moderate slope, coasting, almost solely without riding the pole.

They reached the Ena a little before sunup, the sky daytime blue and crystal clear, the moisture frozen out of it. Except for their two friends of the evening before, they hadn't seen a body yet that day, though they might have overlooked one or two, snow-covered. Or a few. On the Ena they found tracks going upstream, not downstream, and not on skis. Lars wondered what that was about—and others more recent going down. The slope was so slight, you couldn't tell by looking, but he knew from experience that left was north, downstream, so he led off left. They were in a canyon now, and out of the worst of the increasing wind, but judging by his ski pole, the snow here was crotch deep—and skis a blessing.

"But it's still a long way?" Matts asked.

"We can be at Handöl by nightfall if we keep going," Lars told him.



They might have missed the next body, except it had fallen headfirst from a saddle, and the booted feet were sticking out of the snow. After that a few others, as if they'd gone down marching, maybe died on their feet. There could have been other bodies unnoticed, but still... Lars was encouraged, and credited protection from the wind. As if the wind and blinding snow on the open lake ice had been the chief killer. Before long they came to the mouth of a sizable stream that came down from the east. There were half-buried ski tracks on the ice of the side stream, but Matts couldn't tell which way they'd been going, up the sidestream or down. Lars paused to examine them.

"Is that another way to Handöl," Matts asked.

"Yes, and shorter, probably, but it requires some climbing, and it's more exposed. We're better off staying on the Ena."

They continued northward then, until after a few miles they began to encounter more bodies, mostly in groups. One large group, a dozen perhaps, lay in a heap, looking somehow newer than the others. A single skier had veered over to them, and it appeared as if...Matts spoke hesitantly: "It looks as if someone pushed them over. As if they were dead standing up, and..."

Lars grimaced. "And they all fell over together. Yes, I think that's what happened." He looked around. Signe looked stunned. Dead standing up? From where she stood, she could see a dozen other groups mostly covered by snow; a camp site then. There

were a number of dead horses, and pieces of several sleighs that appeared to have been chopped up for firewood. At one point they stopped briefly, and while Matts and Signe rested, Lars, with their camp ax, hacked more meat from the haunch of a dead horse.

A few other horses, still alive, browsed twig ends along the shores, filling hungry bellies with shredded, largely indigestible brushwood. For some distance they skied through a landscape of death. "They camped along here," Lars said. "From the amount of snow on most of them, probably on the second night. Camped on Essand Lake the first night, then marched up the Djupholm the next day and over the pass between Remsli Crag and Brushfield Mountain. The way we'd have come yesterday, if it hadn't been for the ski tracks. They must have been in terrible shape when they made camp here. The walking dead."



That was just the beginning. For a few kilometers there was site after site like that: hundreds on hundreds of dead, mostly in clusters and low mounds. There were also abandoned freight sleighs, some with horses dead in the traces, some with horses gone. Some with the driver upright on the seat, frozen stiff—as if his feet had frozen, then his legs, his hips, perhaps finally to die when the frost reached his internal organs.

Yet clearly not all had died. Tracks told of more than a few who had worked their way down the steep slope walling the canyon on the west. And the snow on the ice was considerably trampled; tracks of the living winding among the corpses sprawled or humped in the snow. And enough tracks of horses to indicate that cavalry and officers had survived better than foot soldiers, though God only knew what shape their feet were in. Here and there, more recent tracks came down to the river ice as if the men who'd made them had spent three nights on Essand Lake and the fjeld above it—and were still walking! Trudging—staggering perhaps—on dead and frozen feet.

Before long they saw three living men, the first for days, in the birchwoods near the inflow of the river Rangla, where a clump of stunted spruce had somehow established, offering fine dry branchwood for starting a fire. So they'd tried, but none had had gloves, and with their fingers frozen, been unable to strike sparks. If they'd had muskets, they might have struck a spark into powder, but... Only one, a sergeant, spoke much Swedish. Their platoon had gotten confused in the storm the first night, he said,

had wandered on the ice of Essand Lake, then followed a small stream upward and gotten seriously lost on a mountain where they'd spent another night. "Or maybe two," he said. The next dawn they'd seen the sun rise, orienting them, and staggered eastward, men falling and rising, ever fewer. Finally five had spent still another night together, this time in a rock wind-shelter (made perhaps by Jämtlanders crossing to jobs or to kinfolk in Norway). They'd managed to start a fire in front of it, then packed themselves into the tiny 3-sided shelter, burning their two remaining musket stocks for fuel. After the fire burned out, four of the five had trudged on through the drifts, reached the Ena, and started in the direction they hoped was downstream. These three believed themselves all that remained of their platoon, and clearly were too exhausted to go farther.

Lars started the fire for them, while Matts and Signe gathered more branchwood, and built it up. Lars told them to follow the river to where it flowed into a large lake. From there they would see Handöl. There should be beacon fires there, he told them.

Then the fugitives left. "Do you think they'll make it?" Matts asked, sounding dubious.

"I don't think so. You saw their hands; more than just their fingers have turned black. And their feet must be as bad. But who knows?"

It occurred to Lars he should feel guilty at his good fortune—he was alive, warmly dressed, his feet and hands not suffering; he'd eaten that day, was on skis, had Signe and Matts with him—and should reach Handöl alive and well. As for his squad, he didn't know if any of them still lived. But who would have benefited if he'd died with them?

So the seedling of guilt failed to strike root.



They continued northward, the dead less concentrated now. Birchwoods were frequent there, and in places spruce, with dead branches—fuelwood! Occasionally they passed small groups of survivors trudging through the snow, which continued to fall, though the wind had nearly quit. They passed the great elbow of the Ena, where the river turned eastward toward Ånn Lake. Despite the dead branchwood, they saw no fires. The soldiers who still lived continued pushing, persisting, wading through the

snow toward Handöl. Handöl, their grail, their salvation. To stop, it seemed, would be to die.

Dusk began to settle, the fugitives' stomachs grumbling now, and Signe, who hadn't been toughened by months on the march, was slowing seriously in spite of herself. Lars, who'd begun looking back frequently, slowed to accommodate her, and began to think of stopping for the night.

Ahead they saw a group of perhaps 15 men plodding along, in greatcoats and gloves—gloves! that was unusual—not actually in formation, but in a semblance of order, led by an officer on foot, in riding boots. Lars skirted them as widely as the river allowed, for these men retained their muskets; they were still army, not rabble. As the fugitives skied past them, the officer, in the distinctive Swedish of Finland's Österbotten—Ostrobothnia—ordered his platoon to halt. And to order arms! Then he called to the fugitives to halt.

They halted.

"Who are you, and where are you going?"

"We are spies who've been working in Trondheim," Lars called back. "We are going to Duved to report to General Armfelt. Or to Lieutenant Stensund of Longström's company, if the general isn't there." Then he muttered to Matts and Signe—"let's go now," and the three continued down the river, Lars alert to another possible order to halt. It didn't come, and in two or three more minutes they were out of sight around a bend..

A couple of kilometers farther along, someone else called to them, and Lars angled off to investigate. On a fallen tree sat a soldier, with a corpse slumped beside him. Both wore tricorns, the brims cut, and rags wrapped over them to protect their ears. Their cheeks were marked with the black of frost injury. "Shoot me," said the soldier. Lars backed away, then the soldier raised a *bare foot* clear of the snow. Seemingly he'd removed his shoe to inspect his foot; it was black, may have been frozen before they ever left Østby. "Shoot me," he repeated.

"No," Lars husked. "Close your eyes and trust God to take you. It will be soon. I do not want to meet him with your murder on my conscience, and you do not want to meet him with self-murder on yours."

The soldier stared a moment, then nodded, and closed his eyes. The trio skied on, seldom speaking, continually encountering more dead.



At dusk they came upon a large, powerfully built soldier trudging slowly through the snow. Over one big shoulder he carried a comrade who was almost surely dead. The man stopped and dropped to his knees as if to rest, but without putting down his burden. As the fugitives drew even with him, Lars paused, telling the man his friend was dead, and that if he left him, he might himself make it to Handöl. "He would want you to live," Lars said. Beseeched. "If you leave him, you can be there by daybreak, and he will be glad."

The big soldier didn't look at him—seemed not to know he was there. He wore one cavalry glove. The other hand was bare and probably frozen solid; his fingertips were black, his mind gone. There seemed nothing to be done for him. The three skied on. At their last backward glance, the man was on his feet again, still carrying his burden.

"Lars," Matts said, "why won't he leave the dead man?"

For a moment, Lars was unable to speak, his jaw muscles bunching. "Probably they were best friends," he said at last. "Or brothers. Or maybe the dead man had saved his life sometime."

It was mid-afternoon now, the long northern dusk thickening gradually. In one small area they saw several sleds, and a field gun stuck in a deep drift. A field gun! The sight sent a flash of hot rage through Lars, that faded into thought. How useless! How many men had exhausted their reserves to bring it so far? There were dead horses there, too, with meat sliced from their flanks before they'd frozen. Two sleighs had been broken up, and cookfires built. Not everyone who'd gotten that far had stayed. Lars went to work with his camp ax again, and before they went on, he and Matts each had the upper front leg of a horse tied to his pack.

Shortly the river doubled back, divided by a wooded island. Lars took the right-hand branch, and when the river turned left again—this time heading sharply back westward, he took off his skis and climbed the bank, then helped Signe up. Matts made it on his own. "Here we leave the river awhile." Lars said. "When I was no older than you, Matts, I blazed a trail through here, to shorten the distance. A lot. It goes through

forest—birch with considerable spruce—thick enough the wind can't get at us, and we can have a fire without anyone seeing it from the river. When we come to a good place, we can roast some meat, and finally we'll have some use of the tarp I've carried so far; I'll set up a lean-to, facing the fire. We can camp a few hours, rest, get some sleep."

They skied a kilometer farther—it was more strenuous than skiing on the river, and Signe was used up—then Lars said "here; this will do." More than trees cut off view of the river now; a low hill intervened. Matts and Signe tramped a place for fire and shelter, and began to break off dead spruce branches for fuel. Lars cut straight birch saplings to frame the lean-to, secured them with cord, and tied on the wagon tarp, then foraged up some tall dry spruce saplings for firewood. In 20 minutes they were roasting horse meat over the fire, and ate their fill.

Chapter 36

A Homecoming

Lars took the first watch, sitting by the fire with his carbine in his lap, dozing off and on, and keeping the fire fed. It wasn't nearly as warm as the Lapp huts, but it kept them alive. Heat, radiated by the fire, was reflected by the tarp down onto the sleepers. After an uncertain period, he wakened Signe to replace him. After some time she wakened Matts, who also dozed while watching, to eventually waken Lars. The wood was nearly used up. After a bit, Lars decided it was time to leave, and roused the others.

Before leaving, they gathered more wood, built up the fire, roasted / scorched more horsemeat, and ate. Then banked the fire with three larger chunks, in the unlikely case that someone else came along. And skied off eastward, hours before dawn paled the sky. Before long they came to the Ena again, and crossed the neck of a sharp meander. "We'll stay on the ice now," Lars said, "until we can see the Handöl River. Or Lake Ånn. It should be two or three hours."

Again they saw men hiking through the snow, two, three, several together, and only twice men alone. They did not see the Finnish lieutenant and his short platoon again. Lars decided they'd passed in the night, kept going by their coats and gloves, and their leader's iron will and example. In fact, they were seeing more living than dead now, as if the survivors knew they neared their destination.

Finally the birchwoods gave way to broad marshes, with cattails, and enclaves of tattered reed grass as tall as two men, their upper leaves hanging like pennants. And now, not so far to the southeast, they saw the ruddy glow of a beacon fire, beckoning those weary soldiers who'd gotten that far. Briefly Lars paused—for just a moment his thoughts elsewhere than on Handöl—then skied on. Soon, ahead in the east, they could see Lake Ånn, a great tract of snow-covered ice, and close ahead, he knew that beneath that ice, the Handöl River flowed into the Ena. While glorious overhead, "the

Winter Road," the Milky Way, arched across the sky, stunningly beautiful, humbling and uplifting both at once. Lars stopped in his tracks. Signe skied up to stand beside him, and found his mittened hand with hers. All three fugitives stared upward in awe.

"We've made it," Matts breathed.

"Yes," Lars murmured, "we've made it."



They had and they hadn't. Though even Lars—who had an idea of what the conditions would be, must be, at Handöl—even Lars felt the relief, the release, the sense of successful completion. But...he turned to Matts.

"Friend," he said, "Handöl is not the place for us. We must go elsewhere."

Matts stared at him.

"There are only three farms at Handöl. Every shed, every hay stack will already be filled with men. Not one in 50 will be in a heated place, and God knows what they eat. If anything."

Matts looked stricken. "But...it's our *duty* to report." Suddenly he was swept away with words. "It's all right that we crossed the fjeld alone; others did, too, finding their own way. But now we should report to Sergeant Major Wallmo!"

That was not a response Lars had expected, and he gathered his thoughts to reply. But before he could speak, a strong-lunged voice called. "Hallå!" Their gazes turned quickly southward toward it. A soldier in a fur coat skied toward them from a lesser channel of the Handöl's delta. "Have you come from across the mountains?"

"We have," Lars called back.

The man drew nearer, his gaze captured by their ragtag civilian clothing, and Signe's obvious gender. "Who are you?"

"I am Corporal Lars Olofsson Skoogh, from Ånn, and this is laborer Matts Karlsson i Stentorp. We are of Headquarters Company, Jämtland's Regiment." He gestured then at Signe. "And this is my betrothed, Signe Andersdatter, from before the war, whom I thought never to see again. She got clothes for us, and skis."

"From Ånn you say! Good! Wonderful! Handöl is a place of death, a butchering house. A madhouse! I've been posted to send the more able-bodied on. Sleighs are expected from Duved later today with food and blankets, but for now there is nothing

at Handöl to eat, nor any place to sleep except the snow. Men are dying like flies there, and the surgeons are working without sleep, cutting off frozen limbs. Horses are gnawing the walls, for God's sake! If you are from Ånn, as you say, continue there, for God's sake and your own. There is someone there who will tell you what you must do. Or if there isn't, go on to Duved. It's a beehive there...."



They crossed the north end of Ånn Lake, following the tracks of freight sleighs bound for Handöl, tracks of men on horseback, and a few on foot or skis, some westbound for Handöl, others presumably for Duved. When they passed the north end of Spruce Island, dawn was paling the sky. By then they'd met three sleighs, one laden with barrels and blankets, and two with hay—a pitifully small quantity compared to the need. Most of the tracks turned eastward then, toward Fen Creek, a shortcut to Duved. But some veered north. *Soldiers, Jämtlanders like myself*, Lars thought, *seeking shelter at Ånn settlement.*

It was, of course, the tracks to Ånn that Lars chose.

As usual in the north, in early times the Skoogh farm had no yard trees—in the forest were trees enough and more—but there were abundant firewood poles stacked on end in the yard, while the hops patch formed a miniature forest of slender branchless poles near the house. Smoke rose thinly from the chimneys of dwelling, guest house, wash house and smoke house, and there were tracks of men in and out. And of at least one horse. Certainly not his father's horse, Lars thought, for when he'd last visited, the summer past, their horse had already been confiscated by the army, and his brother was dragging up firewood with their remaining ox.

Lars took off his skis and leaned them by the door, Signe and Matts following his example. Then he knocked, somehow hesitant, as if halfway expecting rejection. As he'd rejected his parents, a few years before. After a moment, the door opened, and his father peered out.

And stared, his lips forming a single silent syllable: *Lars.*

"Hello, father." Lars gestured then at Signe and Matts. "Signe is my betrothed, and Matts my best friend in the army. We crossed the mountains out of Norway."

He shrugged then. His father looked old. Defeated. More so than the Norwegian

farmers Lars had helped plunder, men who at least had anger to fuel them. After a moment, Lars spoke on. "We are on our way to Duved. We stopped here to rest, and to see how you are doing."

His father's head jerked, more a tic than an invitation to enter, but he stepped back to make way for them, and closed the door after they'd entered, Lars first, followed by Signe and Matts, bringing their skis with them. His mother had heard, and stared as they came in. "Oh Lars," she said, "oh Lars, my son, my son." Her lips began to tremble. "I feared you had died." Her hand gestured at blanketed soldiers lying on the straw-covered plank floor. Then her face crumpled, her shoulders began to shake, and the tears flowed. "Oh my son, my son," she said again, and stepping quickly, embraced him.

He took her in his arms, patting her back gently, his own tears silent at first. "I am back," he husked then, "and God willing, I will not leave again for long."

Olof Hjalmarsson Skoogh shed his own tears then, also silent. And not of relief, it seemed to Lars, nor of love for his wayward eldest son, but in silent empathy with his wife. When she had wept herself out, they sat down with their eldest, and talked. The king was dead, and it seemed the war might be over, but Russians and Cossacks still occupied Finland, and harried the Swedish coast. And the Danes had risen again. And the Army of Jämtland—which included most of what was left of the army of Finland—had been destroyed by God's weather. So who could know what the future held?

"Is there an officer here?" Lars asked. "Someone in charge?"

A sergeant, his father said, had been posted at Nergård, to forward the trickle of refugees to Duved, and make whatever on-site decisions were necessary.

"Ah. Matts and I need to talk with him. I am still a soldier." Now Lars was facing the facts of life in Sweden again, and what it would take to live life there as a husband and father. He'd have to conform, adjust, make decisions differently than before. "Meanwhile I'd like to leave Signe with you," he went on. "And as soon as I can, I must talk with the pastor at Duved, to arrange our marriage."

But so far as he knew, Sweden was still at war. And who knew what the queen and her German husband would order.

"We must pray," he said, "and go about life as best we can."

It was something he'd never expected to say. Or to think. But he *would* pray, he realized. For to pray and proceed was their only hope.

Meanwhile they would rest that day; have some porridge, and fish soup. (Even as he thought it, his brother Ivar was out tending fish traps. Cold work—wet, cold, and familiar. With a warm home at day's end.)



The next day, Lars and Matts departed for Duved Skans, leaving Signe at Ånn, to help Lovisa Jonsdotter Skoogh care for the overflow of collapsed, exhausted soldiers.

Duved Skans too was packed with men, the fittest of those who'd made it to Handöl. Mostly cavalry and officers, men who'd had gloves, and hadn't bucked the drifts on foot. And the few Jämtlander infantry who'd begun the crossing strong enough, and had enough sense of the terrain between Østby and Handöl. And perhaps managed to liberate some Norwegian mittens. Sergeant Major Wallmo was there, and not terribly surprised to see Lars, and Matts with him. He didn't mention their having been AWOL, for they were able-bodied and willing to serve. Matts was assigned to the jam-packed hospital as an orderly again, and Lars to driving supply sleighs to and from Handöl. Not for a week did Lars find a chance to visit the pastor at Duved, and arrange to be married. Meanwhile Matts was more than busy. Amputees arrived daily in hospital sleighs—mostly men with lesser amputations: toes, fingertips, heels, perhaps a foot or hand—hopefully to heal enough to discharge and send home. That or to linger a bit and die.

PART SEVEN
AFTERWARD

Aftermaths

At the end of 1718, the vectors of disaster had finally merged—royal ambitions in the courts of Stockholm and Moscow, Copenhagen and Potsdam, even Hanover and London! In Fennoscandia, those vectors included famine, war, occupation, and a ragged, worn-out Finnish-Swedish army. And on the Trøndelag coast, moisture-laden marine air overriding a bitter arctic airmass.

On January 1, by the Julian calendar, it arrived howling and snarling on the mountains. On the 3rd, the army, what was left of it, began straggling into the tiny backwoods settlement of Handöl; three hardscrabble farms scratched out of the wilderness. No road, no town, no farm implement dealership. No reception unit waiting with field hospitals, field kitchens. Just starvation, privation, dismemberment and death. It was, after all, 1719, when kings, "ordained by God," ruled with absolute authority, or nearly enough.

And CNN did not arrive to show and tell the world what happened there.

On the evening of January 3, General Armfelt arrived in his sleigh, leading a shrunken advance force. Then Handöl's inhabitants (you could have counted them on your fingers and toes) built beacon fires, and sent what horsedrawn sleighs they had, on rescue missions, while Armfelt sent mounted, frostbitten couriers to Frisenheim, in Duved, to send a relief force.

On the 4th and 5th days, most of the remaining survivors arrived, though others, lost in the mountains, would straggle in days—even weeks!—later. A contingent of the rearguard, entirely cavalry, had left Østby on the evening of January 1. They were soon beaten back by the storm's overwhelming violence. They took shelter in the birch forest, arriving back at Østby the next morning. On January 4, with the storm much reduced, they started off again—and most arrived at Handöl *on the evening of the same day!*

Word spread slowly. Chaplain Nils Idman preached a vivid, blood-chilling sermon in the church at Frösö, recounting the Death March. He was a sensitive soul who'd been dragged through a bitter, icy hell, and his sermon reflects it. A few years later, after the Russians had left Finland, the sermon would be published, and circulated widely in Finland and Sweden.

Of those who left Østby on New Years morning, 2,300 would never reach Handöl Settlement, or any other haven, or hoped for haven, on earth. Their bones lay on the mountains, or on the bottom of Lake Essand, or the Ena. The boundary commission, in 1742, reported seeing hundreds of skulls on the ground, obscured by the dense low growth of tundra sedges, heath and grass.

Of those who reached Handöl, most found no place to shelter. Everything with a roof was soon filled wall to wall, and in heated rooms, men died like flies. Frozen men with no shelter pulled down rail fences and ripped up barn floors, burning them for warming fires. The army's barber-surgeons sawed off hundreds of frozen legs and arms, hands and feet. *Some 600 men who reached Handöl settlement died there, many no doubt of amputation shock or gangrene. and were buried in a mass grave; 451 survivors were discharged for lesser amputations—toes, heels, fingers—and left to find their way home any way they could. Even their general bore frost scars on his face.*

Other multiple graves, of a dozen, or a half dozen, are marked by monuments along the roads—men who'd survived the fjell, and Handöl, and the hospital at Duved, but not the marches homeward.

Of Jämtland's regiment alone, 80 died that winter *after getting home!*

And with the coming of spring? Swedish folklore tells of Finns crutching eastward down spring's muddy roads, helped by more able-bodied comrades, toward refugee camps where the broad Baltic Sea still lay between them and home.

As for the civilian populations? In Trøndelag, numerous districts had been largely stripped of food and livestock, and suffering abounded, and death. While in Jämtland? In the first quarter of 1719, 54 parishioners died in rural Åre parish alone, compared to 13 during the entire famine year of 1718, and only 5 in 1720. All of which only hints at the widows, orphans, and elderly dependents who'd lost able-bodied providers.

Åre's hugely popular ski resort still lay centuries in the future. In 1719, you could

not buy hamburgers on the top of the mountain, and skis were workaday transportation, not an art form or sport.)

A romantic era, the age of kings. Fortunately, *Homo sapiens* is resilient.

Finland would remain occupied by a Russian army till after the Treaty of Nystad in 1721. And even then, its recovery was slowed by depopulation over 21 years of mobilization, war, occupation, and debility.

Epilog

It was Liljendal, Finland, in late October 1736, and breezy. The last of the birch and aspen leaves shifted listlessly on the ground around a small chapel, a structure of lumber sawn by the general's own mill at Porlom's rapids, and painted white. The road was frozen now, hard enough to bear wheeled traffic.

A sizable assemblage of farm folk—tenant farmers, laborers, house girls and others employed there—had emerged from the chapel, each black-clad in their formal Sunday best. The service they'd just attended had been for them more than for anyone else, and several had taken advantage of the opportunity to express publically their esteem of the old general. Now, bare headed, they stood soberly waiting. Six more men emerged, pallbearers, two in blue and yellow Karoliner uniforms, the others in somber black. The two tallest led, to more easily keep the casket level as they eased it down the chapel steps. Behind the casket came two men wearing black Lutheran clerical robes, and somber features. One seemed young for his graying hair. The other looked older than his years—he approached 60. His cheekbones were frost-scarred, and he was treated with deference.

Smoothly, surely, and with sober care, the pallbearers loaded the casket into the waiting, plain black hearse. Of the two men in uniform, the tallest, wearing master sergeant's insignia, was aging but still strong. For nearly 15 years he'd been the general's majordomo on the farm. The other man in uniform, the general's eldest son, was a captain, and in charge. Like the captain, the non-uniformed pallbearers were the general's adult sons. Other, younger sons followed, one with their mother on his right arm. Two preadolescents—a son recently turned 12, and a daughter aged 10—brought up the rear.

(Their mother had birthed 20, but 8 did not reach adulthood.)

No public tears had flowed from any of them. A week had passed since the

general's death, and theirs was a stoic, non-demonstrative culture. Except for the captain, the family would ride to Isnäs behind the hearse. Master Sergeant Erkki Kivikoski, who would drive the horses harnessed to it, swung his long form onto the driver's seat, to wait for Captain Armfelt's order. Which was not quickly forthcoming, for Gustav Armfelt and his mother were deep in conversation with the two clerics.



It was Erkki Kivikoski's nature to live in the now, and he was seldom given to reminiscence, but the general's death had affected him, and the memorial service had prodded a wound, a question from 18 years earlier—what kind of memorial service had Captain Longström had, if any? And for that matter, those thousands who'd died on the fjeld, or in sickhouses, or on the road?

From there, Erkki's thoughts went to his last conversation with the general. Who was well aware he was dying, and had been quietly, stoically reviewing his past. "The storm on the fjeld," he'd said, "was the worst calamity ever visited on the army. Or on the kingdom."

The words taken Erkki entirely by surprise; they were unrelated to what they'd been talking about—some ongoing issue of the farm. His time in the university at Turku had been brief, and his free-lance reading, of history or of anything else, non-existent. But he'd heard other soldiers talk about the disastrous campaign into Russia, and its huge cost in Swedish and Finnish lives. A cost far greater than on the fjelds. Something that crossed Erkki's mind then, but that he hadn't mentioned to the old general, whom he'd long respected.

Respect. The highest emotion he recognized, for it had never occurred to the old 1st sergeant that he could—and had—loved.

But the tired old hazel eyes had sought and captured his own pale blue eyes, and as if knowing Erkki's mind, the general had added: "True, our losses in Russia were much greater. But they were at the hands of the Russians, while our losses on the fjeld...were at the hands of God. Whom in our ignorance and pride, we had offended greatly. We are all sinners, dependent on his mercy."

Most of the time Erkki didn't believe in God, but occasionally he did, at least somewhat. In a manner of speaking. And thinking now of the general's words, he

wondered if it could possibly be that the death march *was* God's punishment laid on Sweden and Finland...

The remembrance had been fleeting. Interrupted. For now Captain Armfelt was helping his widowed mother onto her side saddle. When she was settled in place, he swung onto his own horse, rode to the head of the cortege, and signaled. Erkki spoke to the horses, flipped the reins lightly on their haunches, and the small procession started down the frozen dirt road toward the general's Isnäs farm.

The next weeks would be committed to completing the widow's household move. Erkki was very good at managing such matters. He'd leave the priests to sort out the business of God's retribution, if there was such a thing...

Curtain Call

And finally, what of others we came to know in our story? We already learned, in the prolog, something of the adult **Anders Henrik Ramsay**, who'd been Armfelt's 11-year-old pistol bearer. His fictional letter to the general, dated 17 years after the death march, summarizes biographical material from Svante Hedin's *Armfeldt's fältåg mot Trondheim 1718–1719*. My fictionalized portrayal of Anders as an 11-year-old grew in part from Hedin's biosketch depicting the adult Anders as eventually politically prominent, physically intimidating, eventually very rich—and reputedly the most litigious man in Finland!

In depicting him, I factored information from Eirik Hornborg's biography of the general (*Karolinen Armfelt och kampen om Finland under Stora nordiska kriget*), and on the wartime circumstances of the Ramsay family while Anders was a child. Hard hard years!



Hedin's brief biographical sketches included several officers on Armfelt's staff, and I found a great deal more about them in Hornborg's scholarly *Karolinen Armfelt*, with its index. (Also I checked with friend Google, sustainer of authors, which provided further insights.)



Here, in the prolog and epilog, we visited the general in his final year. But what of his life overall? As the title figure of this story, what more might be said of him?

Hornborg's *Karolinen Armfelt* provided a wealth of information about **Karl Gustaf Armfelt**, from the cradle to the grave. His much younger wife, **Lovisa Aminoff Armfelt**, presented him with 20 children, of which, judging from their listing in the family bible, 12 survived their father. After 1721's Treaty of Nystad, the Armfelts returned to Finland, and the large farm granted him as a general. But there seems to have been few "survivor benefits" for the families of military officers in that era, and much of his energy, though by no means all, Armfelt invested in the purchase and management of farm estates, providing legacies for his numerous sons and daughters.

He seems to have been a humane landlord. The nearest parish church to the settlement at Liljendal was at Pernå, 10 kilometers distant on a road seasonally impassable to carriages and wagons. So Armfelt built a chapel on his farm, and hired a young Pietist Lutheran priest from Germany as its pastor. This offended the incumbent priest at Pernå, who took legal steps to close down the unauthorized competition. But Armfelt talked the diocese into approving his clearly beneficial arrangement, and as his imported German pastor had learned enough Swedish to preach in it, the chapel became the church home of Liljendal's farmfolk. (Swedish remained the local language when I was there in 1992.)

Armfelt's farm at Liljendal was the setting for the fictional events in both the prolog and the epilog. Over a span of nearly 200 years, the house would burn down several times—not unusual for that era. To be rebuilt on the same foundation—until the fire of 1927, after which it was not rebuilt. I have stood on the foundation, to look out over a landscape of fen and forest much as I portrayed it for 1735.

As for his generalship: Armfelt has been criticized for not following the demands of his impetuous and impatient king. Had he done this or that, had he attacked headlong as the king ordered...who can know? But we do know that Karl XII himself, despite all his victories, his authority and charisma, had failed in the south of Norway—been stopped, driven out, regrouped, returned—and finally died.

Eirik Hornborg, Armfelt's biographer and it seems to me admirer, suggested

that Armfelt, and Sweden and Finland's other generals, overlooked the potentials of guerrilla warfare in such widely forested land. But in an era of royal absolutism and scarcely diluted ruthlessness, a whole province could be largely depopulated for the sin of resistance to the royal will. (Gustav Vasa's devastation of Småland's people, 175 years previous, for that very sin, is a Scandinavian example.) And Peter the Great, Finland's conqueror and occupier, had demonstrated that same royal ruthlessness in Russia, against those whose resistance persisted in the face of the royal will. How, then, might he have punished Finland?

With sufficient incentive, an aristocracy sufficiently united and well led, *might* bring down a royal despot (and replace him with another). Even a league of wealthy merchants might (though they'd probably use financial weapons backed by hired mercenary regiments). But a persistent guerrilla effort would likeliest have foundered on the reef of (Church supported) royal terrorism of the peasants, the people on whom a guerrilla would have depended for sustenance.

Simply, the time of successful guerrilla warfare in Europe had not yet come.



Hedin describes the character and personality of **Johan Henrik Frisenheim** in some detail. Hornborg also has much to say about Frisenheim. Who also received a lot of very favorable attention from Boberg & Maijström; among other things, they quoted frequently from his letters and dispatches. He was a class act, very resourceful, creative, and honorable, and was rewarded with honors and admiration.

Like Armfelt, he was a pietist Lutheran. Unlike Armfelt, he was colorful.



Turning to my fictional characters, **Lars Olofsson Skoogh** married **Signe Andersdatter** in February 1719, and throughout his later years led a relatively uneventful life. His interest in the Sami people (Lapps) continued, however, and fishing and fur hunting remained a seasonal part of his life. He and Signe raised five children to adulthood.



Matts Karlsson i Stentorp returned to Värmland after the war, and discovered that both his mother and grandfather had died. Their small tenant farm was in other hands, and his pregnant sister was married to a squatter. Matts then took service before the mast, and a year later found himself in New Sweden, in the American colony of New Jersey. There he apprenticed himself to a printer, became a printer and publisher himself, and in time served several terms in the Maryland House of Burgesses. As an elderly burgess, he played an active political role in the American Revolution, and the infant republic that grew out of it. He seldom spoke of his youthful wartime experiences to his children.

(and finally)
Qualifications and Caveats

Nearly 300 years have passed since Karl Gustaf Armfelt marched his army into Norway, and the world has changed enormously. Also, most of the people who have written about the campaign have lived most or all their all their lives in Scandinavia, absorbing the landscape, cultures and history through their skin, so to speak. Cultural osmosis! I have not, and I do not doubt it shows.

My principal qualifications, on the other hand, were my long experience as a novelist, and my dedication to writing this story. I read Swedish haltingly, and Norwegian more so. In my 84 years, I have spent only four weeks in Scandinavia. And have actually hiked only a little of the Armfelt campaign trail (although I was a youth of 65 then). But with a research ecologist's eye, I have visited enough of Trøndelag's and Jämtland's backcountry, including some fjeld trails, to get a strong sense of it.

Quite a bit of Trøndelag and Jämtland remains semi-wild, and except for the *much* improved roads, not greatly changed from the early 1700s. Most of their forest today is commercially managed, but growing very largely the same tree species in the same combinations, providing a substantial sense of what those forests must have looked like 300 years ago. On the other hand, significant areas have been urbanized, and I have been left to imagine what those locales might have looked like in Armfelt's time.

Written and pictorial histories have been essential to my writing this at all, of course, but I'm a novelist, not a historian, and in synthesizing scenes and events, I've relied importantly on my imagination, asking myself how they might have done this and that,

I'm probably better suited for the task than are most modern American novelists. I spent quite a bit of my teenage summers working as a day laborer on farms in southern Michigan—1938-1943—on land whose features were formed by the growth, the occupation and melting and draining of the great Pleistocene ice sheets, much like those that covered Fennoskandia. And for five months between graduating from high school in 1944 and being inducted into the army, I lived and worked as a "hired man"—a non-indentured version of a *dräng*, or *trenki*—in an era when hand labor was still the core, a central reality, of farm life. I have forked hay, milked cows, shocked grain, held pigs for castration, and rolled or lifted rocks onto "stoneboats" for removal from a field. I've cut firewood, split out fence posts. And after the war I cut thousands and thousands of trees into 2.54-meter lengths for pulpwood, with handsaw and ax, mostly in Minnesota, along the Canadian border. Cut and carried and piled them by hand, in sizes not unlike those cut for corduroy roads—*kavelbror*—by Armfelt's Finns and Swedes. And I've spent more than a little time in saunas.

My later, academic background helped, too. After a 20-week course in vocational agriculture, I took five years of forest management, where I learned a great deal about wildland ecology before it became a crusade. Then, after two years experience in preparing timber harvests in northern Wisconsin, I spent 7 more years earning a doctorate in plant ecology, and had 17 years of research experience, mostly in the mountain forests of Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. This involved courses in biology, climatology, geology, and soil science (with some attention given to paleoecology), basically the dynamics of terrestrial ecology. My mentors in ecology included Professors Alton A. Lindsey, Egolfs V. Bakuzis, and all too briefly, Myron L. (Bud) Heinselman. Beautiful men, each of them. I was blessed.

Also very helpful, I read carefully Hugo Sjörs's *Nordisk Växtgeografi*—the plant geography of Fennoskandia—a major coverage of Fennoskandian wildland ecology.

My long experience in the mountains of the western United States also provided basic understandings. Colorado, Idaho, and the high ranges of the Southwest, do not equate with Jämtland and Trøndelag, but even the differences provide insights.

As for cold: the coldest day I ever experienced was in 1948, a deadly still -52° Fahrenheit one Minnesota morning (-47° Celsius), with an afternoon high of -26° F (-32

C°). And we worked that day, in the forest and on the log landing, as we worked six days a week all winter. But not in worn-out summer clothes. Everything we wore was thick and woolen, from our heavy Mackinaw jackets to long underwear, with felt insoles and thick woolen stockings in our boots, warm earlapper caps, thick woolen mittens inside leather shells, and abundant fats in our abundant diet.



Details were the tough part. History books hold a great wealth of information, but tend to be seriously short on the details of *how* things were done, how they looked and sounded, felt and smelled. Thus we're told the Jämtland regiment did a lot of work improving the road to Skalstuga, but not much on what or how. A lot of it can be dealt with by artful dodging, but some detail is needed to make things seem real. Thus I found myself filling in the gaps by creative judgment—from what I did know, and how it seemed to me it would have been done. I did a *lot* of that. As for my gaps in what things looked like—my limited time in Trøndelag and Jämtland helped greatly, but a stack of large-scale topographic/vegetation maps were every bit as helpful.

And *hugely* important, in a Stockholm bookstore I found a richly illustrated book, *Karoliner*, about the armies of Karls XI and XII, father and son, warrior kings of Sweden, written by Alf Åberg, one of Sweden's premiere historians. And profusely illustrated by Göte Göransson, a master artist of matters military. Especially of peasant soldiers. Their good work is devoutly appreciated.



Now for some confessions: on one occasion I took a major liberty. Insofar as they dealt with it at all, my sources agreed on how the pontoon bridge was built over the Nidelven (river) at Jonsplatsen, though without details. I wonder though if perhaps one of them came up with it and others simply repeated him. Whatever; I could not convince myself it was done that way. Nor recreate the process in my imagination; it never worked for me. The seeming importance of the bridge, the limited time (no chance for a second try), the uncertainties, and the cost of failure all seemed too great. Thus although I regard my sources highly, on this matter I couldn't accept it.

So I researched the military construction of pontoon bridges in that era—it gibed

nicely with Göransson's illustration of bridging the Dünafloden³²—and I had Armfelt's engineers do it that way.

There was also the question of Captain Lars Hammarskiöld's marksmanship at the same bridge crossing. Rifled weapons were supposedly being built in Germany in the 1500s (!), so I've had Hammarskiöld in possession of a Saxon rifle as a suitable explanation of his long-range sharpshooting.



Another liberty—in August 1718, Commissary General Frisenheim, Governor Hamilton, and Adjutant Hård arrived at Duved a few days apart. Armfelt needed to brief each of them. So in Chapter 12, for story-telling convenience and a bit of drama, I had them arrive in one day, with Armfelt briefing them all in a single session.

³² Alf Åberg & Göte Göransson, *Karoliner*, page 98-99. Bra böcker, Höganäs 1976.

Random ClosingComments

In the exchange between Peter Longström and Pastor Mus, the "facts" I had Longström voicing here were not entirely true, though in my scenario Longström believed them. Like most rumors floated by governments, they were meant to strengthen the government's position, at home or abroad. In European affairs, the Russian tsar was a pragmatist, and willing to return most of Finland. Which in fact he did, three years later; Russia already had a surfeit of wild forest. While King Karl was holding out for a Finland that would include Viborg and Åland. It is doubtful he even imagined Peter handing back Ingria and the Karelian Isthmus, which were the keys to St. Petersburg, the tsar's new capital on the Baltic.

As for the howitzers lost in the bog— no one apparently saw them for more than 200 years, until a timber cutter, Gustaf Blixt, claimed to have spotted their muzzles, like tree stumps, sticking out of the boggy ground. Later efforts to revisit and verify the site were balked by two primary difficulties: when a large area is logged, the various cutters' strips can be virtually impossible to identify afterward; and records of who cut what strips are not recorded. But Blixt described the approximate location.

I ran across this information in a book titled *Död på fjället* ("Dead on the Fjeld"), a symposium published as a memorial to the Army of Jämtland on the 250th anniversary of its ultimate sacrifice. It was edited and published by Sven Cronholm, Östersund, Jämtland, 1968, 183 pp. hardcover. The specific article, pp 133-138, is titled "Blixts Kanon," written by Sven Cronholm. I followed his description on a large scale topographic map, and sited the location as described in the article.

The term "peasant" is often taken as pejorative, and the peasant has been thought of as inferior. Now, however, the stereotypical peasant of the 1600s and 1700s no longer

exists, certainly in Europe, thanks to emigration, public education, literacy, and mass communication, and the term is seldom heard except in historical contexts. So what I have to say here will be in the past tense. Thus: peasants did not match nobility, or the gentry, in "manners," "propriety," "grooming" and literacy. Also they tended to be superstitious, and remarkably ignorant of the wider world.

But in basic character—honesty, kindness, responsibility, curiosity, tenacity and the like—they matched up well. On the plus side, they were very “handy,” very *resourceful*, able to do and make all sorts of things with whatever came to hand. When they needed something, usually they made it themselves. Of necessity.

Some were more adept than others, of course. There were, for example, specialists in building with logs—men expert in squaring facing surfaces, and fitting interlocking corners. Any peasant could build a log shed, but to build a dwelling that kept out winter's cold drafts and summer's rain storms with minimal caulking, required more skill.

Thus in the armies of Karl XII, engineering officers found an abundance of building skills among their peasant troops. All they had to do was tell them, or show them, what was wanted.

Thank you for your attention.

John Dalmas
Dublin, Ohio
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