

Chapter 1

Anyone who listens to the wind can hear many things in its sighs and whispers. In good times the sounds of joyous longing and love can perhaps be detected, or wistful memories of past pleasures. In bad times, the sounds of anger, fury, fearfulness or remorse can seem to declare themselves too, with equal force. But never had any wind seemed to moan with such bitter remorse as in 1633, the year misery came to Gråstensholm.

At Linden Allée, the son of Silje and Tengel, known as Are of the Ice People, listened to its droning whine as it swept through the tops of the linden trees. He was apprehensive because of the turn of events concerning Kolgrim Meiden, the first-born son of Are's nephew Tarald. Kolgrim had arrived in the world in 1621 in horrifying circumstances that had resulted in the death of his mother Sunniva, Tarald's first wife. The rest of the family had been fearful from the outset that Kolgrim might be carrying the feared curse of the Ice People, which had been handed down by their ancient ancestor, Tengel the Evil One. But as he grew up, Kolgrim's personality had seemed to change for the better and these fears had generally lessened. Then a single careless word from Tarald was all it

had taken to release the full rage of Kolgrim's inherently evil powers.

It had been Kolgrim's secret intention not to take advantage of the open and innocent kind-heartedness that everyone at Gråstensholm showed him until he was a few years older. All the members of his immediate and wider family had taken great care to show him only love and attention while he was growing up, in the hope that they could prevent any possible evil power taking hold. This had meant that his needs were mostly taken care of and he had therefore been content to wait. But suddenly now a torrent of emotion – pent up deep inside him for so long – had been released.

In 1633 he had become twelve years old and he was an attractive boy in his own special way, but his amber-tinted eyes, which met any person's gaze with childlike innocence, would change as soon as their back was turned. His look would become cold and scornful, and with calculating sidelong glances, he would watch and measure every move.

'You cowardly little wretches,' they seemed to say. 'I am strong, far stronger than any one of you – stronger than all of you. I am pleasant only as long as it serves my purpose. But once I am old enough to look after myself, beware each and every one!'

Kolgrim, like all the accursed children of the Ice People, was a very insular character, but he never regarded loneliness as something negative. Quite the contrary, he gladly sought solitude, believing that it increased his powers.

Much had been happening at that time in the world beyond Norway's peaceful frontiers. The Thirty Years' War still dragged on, although the Swedish King, Gustavus II Adolphus, had led his army to a brilliant victory over Tilly at Breitenfeld in 1631. King Gustavus was killed the following year at Lützen, where his massed armies did, however,

succeed in crushing the might of the combined forces of Generals Wallenstein and Pappenheim. Tilly was fatally wounded at the Battle of Lech, also in 1632, and a couple of years later Wallenstein would be murdered by his own troops. Yet the fighting went on and on.

Other Swedish generals had now entered the fray on the Protestant side; Lennart Torstensson, Johan Banér and Hans Christoffer von Königsmarck would all make their names in this unending war. King Christian IV of Denmark had finally freed himself from his morganatic wife Kirsten Munk, following the birth of their last daughter, Dorotea, when it emerged that there might have been some doubt about the child's parentage. Mistress Kirsten had also tried to mix vile compounds into the King's food and she had commissioned small drawings depicting him as a figure of fun, questioning his manhood. This had finally been too much for Christian and he had expressly said he hoped she would 'suffer at the hands of a thousand devils' and had forbade her to see any of their children, although this seemed not to worry her unduly.

Nobody knows what her mother, Ellen Marsvin, had to say to her wayward daughter once their lucrative association with the King was ended, but in any event, she continued to put on a brave face in adversity.

Insult was added to injury, however, for both ladies when Christian IV took a new lover – their very own lady-in-waiting, Vibeke Kruse, who was the epitome of vulgarity and simple-mindedness. She did however bear him a remarkable son, Ulrik Christian Gyldenlöve, who grew up to be a far better warrior than his father ever was.

The King had betrothed his daughter, Leonora Christine to Corfitz Ulfeldt, an ambitious young nobleman, when she was only nine years old. There was, however, one unintended benefit from this – the removal of the tyrannical royal

housekeeper who had ruled the domestic scene at Court with a rod of iron. She had continued her ill treatment of the children unopposed and, on one occasion, she had beaten Leonora Christine so severely that the girl was unable to sit down for several weeks. In fact, the injuries were so bad that she continued to suffer from them for the rest of her life. Inevitably, Leonora had told Corfitz what had happened and at long last the housekeeper's brutal rule over the children was brought to an end, once and for all. On the King's express instructions, she was summarily dismissed and never served at Court again.

The King's eldest daughter by Kirsten Munk, the unfortunate Anna Catherine, did not enjoy a long or happy life. Her betrothed, Frans Rantzau, of whom she had been so proud, died in 1632. The young buck was with the King at Rosenborg Castle, celebrating his appointment to Chancellor, and was foolishly determined to match Christian's consumption of wine, glass for glass. Rantzau became so drunk that he fell from the castle wall, hit his head on a stone and drowned in the moat. Anna Catherine became gravely ill shortly afterwards. Some said that she was overcome with grief, others that it was the pox. She requested that the Countess Paladin should attend her and Cecilie Meiden of the Ice People duly left her five-year-old twins at Gabrielshus and set off for Court again.

Meanwhile the storm was continuing to brew over Gråstensholm.

Tarald Meiden, Cecilie's brother, had never been known for his astuteness, and it was as he sat eating luncheon with his wife Yrja, his two sons and his mother and father, one summer's day in 1633, that he uttered the fatal words that were to trigger the terrible change in his son Kolgrim.

'I received worrying news from Tarjei today,' he announced casually, referring to the eldest of Are's three sons, who had

distinguished himself as a brilliant doctor at an early age. The conversation up to that moment had only been of trivial matters, and this statement caused his parents to look sharply at him.

‘You did?’ said Liv to her son. ‘Why so? I thought Tarjei had sought a position in Erfurt, to work with a scholar or some erudite man, as his assistant. What did he say?’

‘He said he was dealing with a terrible outbreak of plague. A pox! And he is troubled that he, like so many others, will be infected.’

‘Oh, yes! I have heard it said that the smallpox is horribly dangerous,’ said Yrja.

‘Tarjei is too good to be taken by any pox,’ replied Tarald’s father, Dag Meiden. ‘But why does he write to you about it?’

‘He asked me to look after the Ice People’s secret hoard of magic and sorcery – but only if something were to happen to him, that is. He told me he would write a final letter describing the hiding-place and that he wanted Mattias to inherit them in due course.’

Almost before her son had finished speaking, Liv, horrified at the significance of his words, pretended to have a violent choking fit and this alerted Tarald instantly to his indiscretion. Kolgrim, who was seated opposite his grandmother, glanced furiously round the table, a dangerous amber glow showing briefly in his eyes.

‘Of course he must have everything with him in Germany, you understand,’ Tarald added, belatedly trying to save the conversation. ‘I’m sure of that.’

‘What secrets are you talking about?’ asked his younger son Mattias, speaking with the wide-eyed innocence of any eight-year-old. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘I’ll tell you all about it when you’re grown up,’ muttered Tarald hastily. ‘It’s not important to go into it now.’

The answer seemed to satisfy the boy. He was not inquisitive. If father said it, then so be it, was his attitude. But this was not so with Kolgrim. What he had heard had sparked off a burning rage inside him. His parents and grandparents were keeping something from him. The secrets of the Ice People! And why was Mattias to have them? Wasn't he, Kolgrim, the eldest of the two half-brothers?

All through that day, the fury etched itself deeper and deeper into his soul. There was something he had not been told! Was the secret knowledge only with Tarjei? Oh, no – he had seen how Grandmama Liv had tried to warn his father about his indiscretion, so he was almost certain that Tarjei did not have the precious things with him. No, they must be somewhere at Linden Allée!

All the effort Tarjei had put into keeping secret the existence of the Ice People's treasures had now been undone. Tarjei had heeded Tengel's warning to him as the newborn Kolgrim lay in his cradle. 'Never, ever permit that child to touch any of them!' he had said. 'He must not have even the smallest herb! And teach him nothing – not one word!'

Now, in his hour of need, with his own life possibly in danger, Tarjei had turned to his cousin Tarald, the father of the two half-brothers. Yet in many ways, Tarald was the worst person he could possibly have chosen because, despite having taken on the role of responsible family man, he had always demonstrated a remarkable inability to think before speaking. Now, because of him, Kolgrim had heard things he never should have heard, and unlike his father, he was enormously sharp-witted in his own evil way.

He had to find out more, but who should he ask? Certainly not Grandpapa or Grandmama, because they were not easily fooled. Father, for his part, was too weak and he would never go against his own parents. Stupid Yrja, his stepmother and mother of

Mattias, would not know anything, he would swear to that. After a lot of thought, his intuition told him that he should approach the one member of the family who was not too clever, but not too stupid either. Consequently, the next morning found him wandering nonchalantly into the yard at Linden Allée.

‘Hello there!’ called Are pleasantly on catching sight of him. ‘Out for a stroll, are you?’

‘Yes, I want Brand to mend something for me. He is very strong.’

‘And am I not strong enough, then?’

‘Not like Brand.’

Are laughed, ‘Do you hear that, Meta? I am of no use any more!’

Meta simply shook her head. She had grown thin and tetchy over the years and age did not become her. She complained of stomach pains all the time and had never stopped grieving for Trond, who had been her favourite son. As Kolgrim walked off, her glance followed him anxiously.

‘I can’t say why, Are, but that lad always sends shivers down my spine.’

‘What foolishness! He has come on in leaps and bounds!’

‘You might think so,’ she mumbled. ‘I’m not so sure.’

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A short while later Kolgrim found Brand tending a field of peas. They exchanged pleasantries for a short while, then without any warning, Kolgrim asked him bluntly: ‘Have you ever seen the Ice People’s secret treasures?’

Brand walked a few steps to the edge of the field and sat down, deep in thought. Now twenty-four years old, he was the

size of a bear and moved with the same lumbering gait. He and Matilda had had no more children since the birth of their son Andreas, but the lad was the image of his father and grandfather Are, and a boy to be proud of.

‘No, I have never seen the treasure,’ replied Brand. ‘I think my brother Tarjei is the one who has it.’

Sitting beside his father’s youngest cousin, Kolgrim looked tiny and much like a cunning little lizard.

‘What exactly is in the treasure?’ Kolgrim asked.

‘Have you never heard the story?’

‘Only bits of it. I don’t know why everyone else is allowed to hear the story but me.’

It was common knowledge that the family had been careful about saying too much to Kolgrim about the Ice People and, after a moment’s thought, Brand sniffed and took a deep breath. ‘Trond and I always felt that you had been treated unfairly, Kolgrim. You more than anybody, ought to know the saga of the Ice People.’

‘I think so too,’ agreed Kolgrim, his bottom lip quivering. He really managed to look unhappy and ready to burst into tears. ‘I have heard about Tengel the Evil, of course, as well as your grandfather Tengel the Good and my grandmother Sol, who was able to do magic. But I don’t know anything more than that.’

So, there and then, Brand told him everything about all the accursed members of their clan and, as Kolgrim listened, his eyes grew wider and wider. But not for one moment did he see himself as cursed. In his view, he had been chosen!

‘Did Tengel the Evil really go and seek out Satan?’ he asked at last. ‘If so, where did he go?’

‘Nobody knows.’

‘Then what did he do?’

‘He placed all the magical herbs and objects he possessed

into a great kettle and boiled them up to brew a potion more terrible than any man could ever imagine. Tengel the Evil knew many things – that you can be sure of!’

‘Did he drink it?’

‘Who knows? Maybe, maybe not. In any event, he would have uttered spells over it – to conjure forth the one with goat’s feet, you understand – and it is said that he was successful, although Grandpapa Tengel didn’t believe it. He said it was just a family peculiarity, you know, that some of us have catlike-eyes and special powers that normal people do not share – but still, I wonder. I always wonder!’

‘What?’

‘If what they say is true. I think Satan himself might be a part of it all.’

‘Jeesus!’

‘You must not speak like that,’ Brand admonished him. ‘And well you know it!’

Brand continued what he knew of the story for a minute or two more, then added in conclusion: ‘And ultimately it is said that one of Tengel’s heirs will become the greatest sorcerer the world has ever seen.’

‘That is me – that is me!’ thought Kolgrim excitedly; for now he knew he must be one of the ‘chosen’, as he wanted them to be called. He felt he had known it for a long time – just one glance in the mirror had told him so. And Tengel the Evil must have drunk from the devil’s potion, that was another thing of which he was sure. And one day he would do the same – if only he knew where to do it, and how.

‘Has Tarjei taken the treasure with him to wherever he is now?’ Kolgrim asked Brand at last.

‘To Erfurt? No, Trond did not think so,’ replied Brand. ‘And, oh yes, Trond was also one of the accursed, did you know that?’

No, Kolgrim had never heard that before. If only he had known when Trond was alive – then the pair of them would have become incredibly powerful. Together, he thought, they would have been invincible!

Brand had been quiet for a few moments. Remembering his dead brother had made him feel sad, but suddenly he snapped out of his reverie.

‘In among the treasures,’ he whispered excitedly, ‘they say there is a mandrake!’

Kolgrim knew about these sorts of magic herbs; indeed, he already knew far more than anybody ever imagined and all such things held immense daily interest for him. His head was filled with every detail and he was always thinking about them. Poor Brand, on the other hand, was altogether too trusting to understand the stature and significance of what he had planted in Kolgrim’s black little soul.

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Kolgrim’s first deceit, after learning the truth from Brand, was to feign a fever one Sunday, so that he could remain at home when everyone else was attending church. As soon as they had all left their homes, he ran down to Linden Allée and searched quickly through the house and the outbuildings. He found nothing in this first search, but he did not waste one minute of the long church service and continued looking around a second time. Eventually, however, he had to slink away when he heard the servant folk coming back. He had concentrated most of all on the old part of the house, but nowhere could he find any treasure. Disappointed and in a furious rage, he returned reluctantly to his ‘sickbed’.

The town of Erfurt was so far away that he had no idea where it was and, however much he might wish it, making such a journey just to hold a knife to the throat of the treacherous Tarjei was impossible. But there was something else he could do, and it was something he had wanted to do for years. He could be free of his rival. The one person who stood between him and so many things, now challenged him for the most coveted prize of all: the practical wizardry of the Ice People. He would soon show them all what happened to those who offended him.

With these thoughts in mind, Kolgrim laid his plans with painstaking precision. He may have vaguely remembered the fairy-tales that Cecilie used to tell him, about the Great Troll who became upset when small trolls did things to hurt their younger siblings and – whatever his reasons were – he decided against a straightforward killing. There were other, more subtle ways, he told himself – and one day in July he begged to be allowed to go with his grandfather to Christiania. He took with him all the coins he had saved and kept hidden over the years; these were only small amounts of money that he had been variously given by well-meaning family and friends – but now at last he had a use for them.

While his grandfather was busy on his various errands, Kolgrim visited a stall outside a silversmith's workshop and bought a nice brooch that would go well with a lady's traditional costume. Having bought it, however, he showed it to nobody and during the days that followed, he made further preparations. On one occasion, without a word to anyone, he went riding for several hours, searching out locations and routes, and as he rode, he listened to the fearful moan of the wind in the treetops, all the time grinning cruelly to himself.

The next evening, satisfied that he had everything in place, he made his next move. As the two half-brothers lay in their

beds in the room they still shared, Kolgrim whispered to little Mattias: ‘Have you ever seen fish dancing?’

‘No,’ answered the gullible young Mattias. ‘Can fish dance?’

‘Of course they can! Would you like to see?’

Naturally, Mattias said he would.

‘But they are in a magical place,’ whispered Kolgrim secretively. ‘And they only come out at a certain time. We shall have to creep up on them – but nobody else must know about it.’

‘Not even Mother?’ asked Mattias thoughtfully.

‘No, not Mother – of course not! That would spoil everything, don’t you see?’

His little brother nodded. ‘Yes, of course.’

‘Then I shall take you with me to the place where they dance – but not tomorrow, they won’t be there then. It will be the day after. I shall ride out early to make sure it is the right day and you can meet me at the edge of the forest by the great oak tree where we have sometimes been together. Let us say nine o’clock, shall we? Do you know the numbers on the clock?’

‘No, but I can ask Papa.’

‘No, silly, that is what you must not do! Look, when the maids clear away after breakfast – that is when you sneak away. But remember, no one must see you. We will not be gone for long, so nobody will find out.’

‘I shall do as you say,’ the good-natured Mattias assured him.

The next morning Kolgrim approached his father and asked casually: ‘May I ride into Christiania tomorrow, Papa? When we were last there I saw a fine brooch at a silversmith’s stall and I should like to buy it for Grandmama Liv. She can wear it to church on the Feast of Saint Olaf. She will look so pretty.’

Kolgrim had no interest whatsoever in the church. There were times when he had to attend, but for the most part, he seemed always to have a more or less plausible reason to stay at home. Tarald, however, was touched by his son's seeming selflessness.

‘But surely you cannot have money for that?’ he said.

‘Yes, I’ve saved up,’ replied Kolgrim, smiling proudly.

‘My goodness, you have been clever! But you ought not to ride all that way alone. Maybe I should take time to go with you.’

‘Father, I am twelve years old! You know that I am a very good horseman. And I know that I should watch out for robbers and swindlers.’

Tarald knew all this was true, but although he gave his permission for Kolgrim to go, it was with some reluctance.

So it was that, early the following day, Kolgrim waved farewell to his concerned parents and set off towards Christiania. But as soon as he was out of sight of the Gråstensholm farms, he left the road and rode on down hidden paths and byways, making his way around the parish in a large semicircle. Some time later, sitting astride his horse by the great oak, he watched as a little figure trotted across the fields to reach their meeting-place on time. As he waited, an icy calmness settled over Kolgrim's heart.

‘I made it,’ panted Mattias on arrival. ‘Nobody saw me, but I was worried because they said you had gone to Christiania. I thought you might not be here.’ Then with a frown, he added: ‘But I didn’t like fibbing to Mother.’

‘Did she say something, then?’ asked Kolgrim harshly.

‘No, but not saying something is almost like telling a fib.’

Kolgrim had never been burdened with such scruples, so he did not understand the younger boy's feelings at all. Less still did he care for his stepmother, Yrja, who had always

painstakingly tried to show him the same love as she had for her own son.

‘We will be gone such a short while that they will notice nothing,’ said Kolgrim firmly. ‘Now climb up behind me.’

It took a little effort, but as soon as Mattias was clinging on behind him, Kolgrim turned the horse and spurred him forward. Like all younger brothers, Mattias worshipped his older sibling. He was the hero, the one who could do anything and who knew everything. Although Kolgrim responded to this adulation with a modicum of pride, more often he regarded it with abject contempt.

As they rode through the forest, Mattias said happily: ‘This is exciting! I did not go to sleep at all last night.’

‘Excellent,’ thought Kolgrim, another ugly smile appearing on his face. ‘That’s exactly what I had hoped.’

‘I’ve brought some food for us,’ continued the little one in the same excited voice. ‘We can eat it later, can’t we?’

‘You did what!’ Kolgrim’s voice was like an explosion. ‘Did anyone see you?’

‘No, I sneaked into the scullery when nobody was there.’

Kolgrim relaxed, ‘Good! Yes, we might get hungry.’

For a while, they rode along in silence through the green-dappled shadows of the forest, two young brothers apparently idyllically happy amidst the wonders of nature.

Then at one point, Mattias whispered in Kolgrim’s ear. ‘Listen to the wind in the leaves. It sounds sad and beautiful at the same time – just like the requiem in church.’

‘A requiem? What’s that?’ asked Kolgrim, who was unfamiliar with the peculiarities of religious rituals.

‘It’s a service for the dead.’

‘Most apt,’ thought his elder brother, grinning again to himself, as he guided the horse carefully forward through the trees, along the path he had carefully reconnoitred days before.

‘It’s a very long way, isn’t it?’ Mattias said a little while later. ‘How much further is it?’

‘We shall soon be there,’ promised Kolgrim. ‘It won’t be long now.’

But they rode on deeper and deeper into the forest for a long time, without any sign appearing of where they were headed.

Finally, Mattias said: ‘Please don’t be angry, Kolgrim, but my bottom is starting to hurt from this long ride. Can we have a rest?’

Kolgrim ignored this plaintive request. His heart was starting to race with excitement and he spurred the horse on a little faster. ‘Don’t worry,’ he told his young brother, ‘we’re nearly there!’

They were by now following a path so overgrown and green that it was barely distinguishable from the forest floor all around them. It had clearly not seen many footfalls that summer and if Mattias had noticed any random sign of hoof-prints, he would never have connected them in his mind with Kolgrim’s mysterious absence from home a few days earlier. They crossed small clearings, some edged with rotting raspberry canes, and once or twice they passed little groups of long-abandoned cottages huddled together. At last, the trees began to thin and open countryside appeared in front of them again. The wooded areas now consisted predominantly of oaks, but as they moved on, these were replaced by aspens and alders, which Mattias could see were growing along the edges of a broad stretch of water.

‘Is this where we will see the fishes dancing?’ he asked eagerly.

Kolgrim did not reply, but rode on in silence until he turned the horse’s head towards the shore and urged it down a narrow path that led to a small jetty jutting out from the land. There he dismounted and helped his brother to the ground.

‘Ooh! Look, out there – that’s the sea, isn’t it?’ exclaimed Mattias.

Far out, between rocky outcrops and islands, he could see a great body of blue water glittering in the hazy sunshine.

‘Of course it’s the sea. This is a fjord – that’s the only place where the fishes dance. They’re called dolphins and they are very big. Come on! I’ve got a boat.’

‘Have you?’ Mattias stared at him wide-eyed, as he tied the horse to a tree. ‘Where?’

Kolgrim pointed to a small rowing boat, moored close by, which was almost concealed beneath overhanging trees. ‘Over there, look.’

He had been very thorough in his planning and knew that the little boat was seldom used. Leading the way along the jetty, he helped Mattias jump aboard. Then he cast off and began rowing directly away from land, knowing that the curtain of overgrown alders along the shore would prevent whoever owned the boat from seeing them.

The oars splashed rhythmically and Mattias at first leaned over the side, watching the small whirlpools left in their wake. Kolgrim was not hurrying and, as he continued to pull slowly and calmly on the oars, his tired young brother settled himself down in the stern, his eyelids growing heavy.

‘You rest your eyes a little if you feel like it,’ said Kolgrim in a low hypnotic voice. ‘It’s a long way out. I’ll wake you when there’s something to see.’

Mattias nodded drowsily, made himself more comfortable and let his eyes fall closed. When they reached the headland beyond which the fjord widened towards the open sea, Kolgrim quietly shipped the oars and let the boat drift towards a small beach. He made sure his brother was still sleeping soundly, then he gently slid both oars into the water and watched them drift away. Climbing soundlessly onto the shore,

he stepped round to the bow, leaned on it and pushed hard, sending the little boat back into deeper water.

He had counted on the retreating tide helping him and he watched the little boat drift steadily out to sea, just as he had planned. There was still no sound or sign of any movement on board. After watching it for a few moments longer, with a grim smile of satisfaction spreading across his young face, Kolgrim turned and ran as fast as he could along the beach and round the rocky shoreline back towards the jetty where his horse was waiting. To justify his evil deed, he repeated to himself, over and over again, as he ran: 'I have not killed him. No, I have not killed him.'

Were his childhood memories of Cecilie's tales, about how the 'Great Troll' judged the deeds and misdeeds of small boys, coming back to him?

Perhaps – it seemed unlikely that there could be any other explanation for Kolgrim's carefully planned 'humane' elimination of his troublesome little brother.

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Later that afternoon, Kolgrim arrived back home to find his family and the servants of the house in turmoil. All looked pale and anxious, and there was a great hurrying and scurrying everywhere.

'Kolgrim, have you seen Mattias?' Liv asked him in a frantic voice as soon as she saw him.

Kolgrim jumped down from his horse, clutching a small package in his hand. 'Mattias? No, I've been in Christiania all day.'

'But what about early this morning?'

‘He was still sleeping when I left,’ replied Kolgrim, his face a picture of innocence.

‘No, he was at breakfast with us,’ broke in Tarald. ‘He disappeared after that – Kolgrim had been long gone by then.’

Yrja’s face looked like a death mask, her distraught expression unchanging, her skin pale and drawn.

‘But Mattias took some food with him,’ she said, ‘enough for two. I’m sure he did!’

‘How can you be sure?’ asked Tarald.

‘Because of the way Mattias always leaves the knife in the butter pats – and he took bread, cheese and meat for two people at least.’

‘Where is Grandpapa?’ wondered Kolgrim.

‘Still out looking,’ Liv told him, with deep anxiety showing in her eyes. ‘We’ve been out all day searching, all of us!’

Yrja’s face hardened and she grabbed hold of Kolgrim. ‘You know where he is,’ she yelled. ‘I can see it in your face, you know where he is, don’t you?’

Tarald pushed himself between them. ‘Yrja, my dear! You shouldn’t treat Kolgrim so harshly.’

Yrja struggled to contain her feelings, but the panic she had been hiding all through that day had now taken hold of her. ‘I know him,’ she shrieked, ‘I know that innocent look! He has done something with Mattias; I know it ... I just know it!’

By now, Kolgrim’s eyes were brimming with the tears of the unjustly accused. ‘But I have only been in Christiania,’ he sniffed. ‘I went to buy a gift for Grandmama. Look!’ He unfolded the paper package in his hand to reveal the shining silver brooch.

‘Oh, Kolgrim!’ said Liv, filled suddenly with emotion. ‘How sweet of you! You must forgive Yrja – a mother cannot always think clearly when something has happened to her child.’

Yrja was choking and sobbing uncontrollably. ‘The only good thing I ever did with ... my life ... was to bring ... my little Mattias into this world. He cannot be lost! He cannot be ... gone!’

‘Nor is he lost,’ Tarald comforted her. ‘He will be home again before nightfall, you’ll see.’

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But Mattias did not come home – that night or the next day or the day after that. Sorrow lay heavy over Gråstensholm and Yrja could be heard calling out Mattias’ name, round the clock. Everybody lost count of the number of times she rushed back and forth through the forest, searching and crying without cease.

When she managed to sleep, which was rare, she would still wake in the middle of the night panic-stricken, and cry out: ‘He needs me! He is all alone and he needs me!’ And she would wander off once more at daybreak, walking again in circles through the forest and woodlands, asking in the cottages, searching, searching, always searching.

Liv lost her serene, happy attitude to life and her sorrow turned her hair grey within days. Dag had not been in the best of health before Mattias disappeared, but now he became ever more frail. Tarald’s fingernails were bitten to the quick. Whilst he did not often allow the despair he was suffering to show, when he was alone he would go to Mattias’ room, pacing to and fro, touching all his forsaken things – and sob until his whole body ached. There was not a person of the parish who had not helped in the search for the fine little lad from Gråstensholm. Everyone missed him and shared the family’s sadness.

One day by chance Kolgrim laughed at something insignificant and Yrja immediately flew at him in a fury. She grabbed him bodily and began shaking him for all she was worth.

‘It makes you happy, doesn’t it?’ she screamed, her voice razor-sharp. ‘You’re happy to be rid of your brother, so that you can inherit everything!’

She had no idea how close to the truth she was; her only mistake was in not knowing what it was Kolgrim wanted to inherit. In his turn, Kolgrim was overcome with a burning hatred.

‘Let me be, you damned old woman!’ he whispered, his eyes turning bright yellow. Then his voice changed to a spiteful snarl. ‘Now we see you for what you really are! You have never cared about me, only about the sweet little child that you gave birth to!’

Shocked very deeply, Liv spoke sharply to her elder grandson. ‘That’s utter foolishness, Kolgrim! No motherless child could ever have been shown as much love as you have here. We have overwhelmed you with our affection, every one of us – from your grandfather, the notary, to the youngest stable boy. We have shown you love and fondness at all times and pampered you. Why, Grandpapa and I even begged for your life when you were newborn and thought to be too ... injured ... to survive. We wanted you then and we cared for you, Yrja as well! I doubt that your poor dear mother, Sunniva, could have given you greater love. That is something you ought to remember.’

Her outburst over, Yrja had come quickly to her senses. ‘Forgive me, Kolgrim,’ she said, ‘I am so distressed I no longer know what I am saying.’

‘Oh, go to hell!’ he hissed, so that only she could hear him, and without saying anything further, he stormed off.

Liv was so filled with foreboding that she composed a letter to Cecilie. She described their deep despair and told her how they were still clinging to a faint hope that perhaps Mattias might still be alive; how he might be lost or lying somewhere injured and in need of help, and how they feared he might not be found until it was too late. She ended her letter by saying: ‘Can you come home please, as soon as possible, dearest Cecilie. We have strong misgivings about Kolgrim and believe he might know something. You are the only person who has ever managed to tame him. Please come home to us! Our beloved little Mattias has now been gone for five long weeks and Yrja is beginning to lose her reason. Father and I cannot stand this torment any longer.’

Cecilie had only recently returned home to Gabrielshus from attending Anna Catherine at Court as she lay on her deathbed and, more than anything else, needed to rest in the company of her small family. She soon decided, however, that she must travel urgently back to Norway.

‘And no, Alexander,’ she told her concerned husband, ‘I shall not take the twins with me, not to Gråstensholm. I too, am certain that Kolgrim is behind this. Never will I allow Gabriella or Tancred to fall victim to his predatory gaze!’

‘But surely he would never try to harm them, would he?’ asked Alexander in alarm. ‘Do you really think he might?’

‘Kolgrim was very attached to me, as you know – and he thinks I betrayed him when I had children of my own. And I have always doubted the sincerity of his apparent goodwill towards Mattias. So rest assured, no matter how much I wish it, I shall never take our little ones back to my home. Papa and Mama have been here to see them, as has Tarjei. But the rest of my family have never met Tancred and Gabriella, and it is all because of Kolgrim.’

‘I think you are possibly being a little unfair on the lad,’

said Alexander, ‘but then you know him better than I do. We shall have to wait until the next time. I do hope you find Mattias! He was such a fine young chap.’

Cecilie sighed deeply. ‘If only we had Grandpapa Tengel to help us! Or Sol. They had always seemed to have the gift for finding lost folk. Mind you, Sol would probably have sided with Kolgrim, as he is her grandchild. Well, I will stay with them one week, but after that I will have to rest. It took a lot out of me, being with the Princess during her final days – and now Mattias, dear little Mattias has somehow disappeared!’

When Cecilie arrived at Gråstensholm a week later, she was horrified to discover for herself at first hand how the grief and worry had affected everybody. On the very day she arrived, she took Kolgrim aside and spoke quietly to him, but she was dismayed to find that she no longer had his confidence. Besides, it was immediately clear to her that he was much more interested in something else, something that he obviously considered much more important – and minor matters like Mattias did not concern him.

‘When will Tarjei be coming?’ was almost the first thing that he asked her.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Cecilie. ‘But he has not been home for a long time, so it will probably be soon. Do you like Tarjei?’

Kolgrim’s eyes darted around the room. Inside his head, he was thinking: ‘Tarjei? What use is he? It is the things he owns that interest me.’ But out loud, he said with a feigned enthusiasm: ‘Oh yes, I like him very much! Tarjei is so wise.’

Later that day Cecilie sought out her mother and asked to speak to her in private. With a very serious expression on her face, she took her mother’s hand.

‘The boy knows something, I am sure of it. But he is far too difficult to control just now – I cannot reach him. I shall keep trying for the rest of my stay here. But I can promise nothing.’

Liv Meiden stared at her daughter for a long while in a horrified silence. ‘This is like our worst nightmares come true,’ she whispered at last with a tearful sob. ‘It is like living in a dreadful dream. I keep hoping we will all wake up and find it isn’t true – but I know that won’t happen.’

Cecilie nodded, close to tears herself. ‘I have never known Kolgrim’s expression to be so unyielding. For that reason alone I am certain that he knows more than he’s prepared to tell.’

Although Cecilie stayed at Gråstensholm as promised, for a whole week, she was unable to make any headway with Kolgrim and all the constant and continued searching for Mattias also proved to be in vain. Very reluctantly after seven days, she left her distracted and grieving family to return to her twins and Alexander at Gabrielshus and summer at Gråstensholm and Linden Allée dragged on into the most miserable autumn for them all.

The only family member who remained calm and unaffected by events was Kolgrim himself. He settled down quietly to wait for Tarjei to come home, confident now that he was the only true heir to those things that were worth more to him than all the gold on earth.