

## 13. Run! As Fast As You Can!

Still moving quietly so as not to wake her sister, Annemarie sped down the stairs and through the kitchen door. Her foot caught the loose step and she faltered for a moment, righting herself, then dashed across the ground to the place where her mother lay.

"Mama!" she called desperately, "Mama!"

"Shhh," Mama said, raising her head. "I'm all right!"

"But, Mama," Annemarie asked, kneeling beside her, "what's wrong? What happened?"

Her mother pulled herself to a sitting position. She winced in pain. "I'm all right, really. Don't worry. And the Rosens are with Henrik. That's the important thing."

She smiled a little, though her face was drawn with pain and she bit her lip, the smile fading. "We got there quite quickly, even though it was still so dark and it was difficult for the Rosens, not knowing the path. Henrik was there waiting, on the boat, and he took them aboard and down below so quickly to the cabin that they were invisible in an instant. He said the others were already there; Peter got them there safely, too.

"So I turned and hurried home. I was so anxious to get back to

you girls. I should have been more careful." Talking softly, she brushed some grass and dirt from her hands.

"Can you believe it? I was very nearly here—well, maybe just halfway—when I tripped over a root and went sprawling."

Mama sighed. "So clumsy," she said, as if she were scolding herself. "I'm afraid my ankle is broken, Annemarie. Thank goodness it is nothing worse. An ankle mends. And I am home, and the Rosens are with Henrik.

"You should have seen me, Annemarie," she said, shaking her head with a wry look. "Your proper mama, crawling inch by inch! I probably looked like a drunkard!"

She reached for Annemarie's arm. "Here, let me lean on you. I think if you support me on this side, I can make my way up to the house. Goodness, what a clumsy fool I am! Here, let me put my arm over your shoulders. You're such a good, strong, brave girl. Now—very slowly. There."

Mama's face was white with pain. Annemarie could see it even through the faint light of the approaching dawn. She hobbled, leaning heavily on her daughter, pausing again and again, toward the house.

"When we get inside, I'll have a cup of tea and then we'll call the doctor. I'll tell him that I fell on the stairs. You'll have to help me

wash away the grass and twigs. Here, Annemarie, let me rest for a minute."

They had reached the house, and Mama sank down to the steps and sat. She took several deep breaths.

Annemarie sat beside her and held her hand. "Mama, I was so worried when you didn't come back."

Mama nodded. "I knew you would be. I thought of you, worrying, as I dragged myself along. But here I am—safe with you, now. Everything is fine. What time is it?"

"It must be four-thirty, or close to it."

"They will sail soon." Mama turned her head and gazed across the meadow to the sea and the vast sky above it. There were no stars now, only the gray, pale sky, with pinkness at its border. "Soon they will be safe, too."

Annemarie relaxed. She stroked her mother's hand and looked down at the discolored, swollen ankle.

"Mama, what is this?" she asked suddenly, reaching into the grass at the foot of the steps.

Mama looked. She gasped. "Oh, my God," she said.

Annemarie picked it up. She recognized it now, knew what it

was. It was the packet that Peter had given to Mr. Rosen.

"Mr. Rosen tripped on the step, remember? It must have fallen from his pocket. We'll have to save it and give it back to Peter." Annemarie handed it to her mother. "Do you know what it is?"

Her mother didn't answer. Her face was stricken. She looked at the path and down at her ankle.

"It's important, isn't it, Mama? It was for Uncle Henrik. I remember Peter said it was very important. I heard him tell Mr. Rosen."

Her mother tried to stand, but fell back against the steps with a groan. "My God," she murmured again. "It may all have been for nothing."

Annemarie took the packet from her mother's hand and stood. "I will take it," she said. "I know the way, and it's almost light now. I can run like the wind."

Mama spoke quickly, her voice tense. "Annemarie, go into the house and get the small basket on the table. Quickly, quickly. Put an apple into it, and some cheese. Put this packet underneath; do you understand? *Hurry.*"

Annemarie did instantly as she was told. The basket. The packet, at the bottom. She covered it with a napkin. Then some wrapped cheese. An apple. She glanced around the kitchen, saw

some bread, and added that. The little basket was full. She took it to where her mother was.

"You must run to the boat. If anyone should stop you—"

"Who would stop me?"

"Annemarie, you understand how dangerous this is. If any soldiers see you, if they stop you, you must pretend to be nothing more than a little girl. A silly, empty-headed little girl, taking lunch to a fisherman, a foolish uncle who forgot his bread and cheese."

"Mama, what *is* it in the bottom?"

But her mother still didn't answer the question. "*Go*," she said firmly. "Go right now. And *run!* As fast as you can!"

Annemarie kissed her mother quickly, grabbed the basket from her mother's lap, turned, and ran toward the path.

## 14. On the Dark Path

Only now, entering the woods on the footpath, did Annemarie realize how cold the dawn was. She had watched and helped, earlier, as the others donned sweaters, jackets, and coats; and she had peered into the night, following them with her eyes, as they moved silently off, bulky in their garments, blankets in their arms.

But she wore only a light sweater over her cotton dress. Though the October day, later, would be warmed by sunlight, now it was gray, chilly, and damp. She shivered.

The path curved, and she could no longer look behind her and see the clearing with the farmhouse outlined against the pale sky and the lightening meadow beyond. Now there were only the dark woods ahead; underfoot, the path, latticed with thick roots hidden under the fallen leaves, was invisible. She felt her way with her feet, trying not to stumble.

The handle of the straw basket scratched her arm through her sweater. She shifted it and tried to run.

She thought of a story she had often told to Kirsti as they cuddled in bed at night.

"Once upon a time there was a little girl," she told herself silently, "who had a beautiful red cloak. Her mother had made it for her.

"She wore it so often that everyone called her Little Red Riding-Hood."

Kirsti would always interrupt there. "Why was it called a red riding hood?" Kirsti would ask. "Why didn't they just call her Little Red-Cloak?"

"Well, it had a hood that covered her head. She had beautiful curls, like you, Kirsti. Maybe someday Mama will make you a coat with a hood to cover your curls and keep you warm."

"But why," Kirsti would ask, "was it a *riding* hood? Was she riding a horse?"

"Maybe she had a horse that she rode sometimes. But not in this story. Now stop interrupting every minute."

Annemarie smiled, feeling her way through the dark, remembering how Kirsti always interrupted stories to ask questions. Often she just wanted to make the story last longer.

The story continued. "One day the little girl's mother said, 'I want you to take a basket of food to your grandmother. She is sick in bed. Come, let me tie your red cloak.'"

"The grandmother lived deep in the woods, didn't she?" Kirsti would ask. "In the dangerous woods, where wolves lived."

Annemarie heard a small noise—a squirrel perhaps, or a rabbit, scampering nearby. She paused, stood still on the path, and smiled again. Kirsti would have been frightened. She would have grabbed Annemarie's hand and said, "A wolf!" But Annemarie knew that these woods were not like the woods in the story. There were no wolves or bears or tigers, none of the beasts that populated Kirsti's vivid imagination. She hurried on.

Still, they were very dark, these woods. Annemarie had never followed this path in the dark before. She had told her mother she would run. And she tried.

Here the path turned. She knew the turning well, though it seemed different in the dark. If she turned to the left, it would take her to the road, out where it would be lighter, wider, more traveled. But more dangerous, too. Someone could see her on the road. At this time of the dawn, other fishermen would be on the road, hurrying to their boats for the long day at sea. And there might be soldiers.

She turned to the right and headed deeper into the woods. It was why Mama and Peter had needed to guide those who were strangers here—the Rosens and the others. A wrong turn would have taken them into danger.

"So little Red Riding-Hood carried the basket of food and hurried along through the woods. It was a lovely morning, and birds were singing. Little Red Riding-Hood sang, too, as she walked."

Sometimes she changed that part of the story, telling it to Kirsti. Sometimes it was raining, or even snowing, in the woods. Sometimes it was evening, with long, frightening shadows, so that Kirsti, listening, would snuggle closer and wrap her arms around Annemarie. But now, telling it to herself, she wanted sunlight and bird song.

Here the path widened and flattened; it was the place where the woods opened on one side and the path curved beside a meadow at the edge of the sea. Here she could run, and she did. Here, in daylight, there would be cows in the meadow, and on summer afternoons Annemarie would always stop by the fence and hold out handfuls of grass, which the curious cows would take with their rough tongues.

Here, her mother had told her, Mama would always stop, too, as a child walking to school. Her dog, Trofast, would wriggle under the fence and run about in the meadow, barking excitedly, trying to chase the cows, who always ignored him.

The meadow was empty now, and colorless in the half light. She could hear the churning sea beyond, and see the wash of daylight to the east, over Sweden. She ran as fast as she could, searching with her eyes for the place ahead where the path would re-enter the woods in its final segment, which led to town.

Here. The bushes were overgrown and it was difficult to see the path here. But she found the entrance, beside the high blueberry

bushes—how often she had stopped here, in late summer, to pick a handful of the sweet berries! Her hands and mouth would be blue afterward; Mama always laughed when she came home.

Now it was dark again, as the trees and bushes closed around her, and she had to move more slowly, though she still tried to run.

Annemarie thought of Mama: her ankle so swollen, and her face so pained. She hoped Mama had called the doctor by now. The local doctor was an old man, brusque and businesslike, though with kind eyes. He had come to the farmhouse several times during the summers of the past, his battered car noisy on the dirt road; he had come once when Kirsti, a tiny baby then, had been sick and wailing with an earache. And he had come when Lise had spilled hot grease, cooking breakfast, and burned her hand.

Annemarie turned again as the path divided once more. The left fork would take her directly to the village; it was the way they had come from the train, and the way Mama had walked to school as a girl. But Annemarie turned to the right, heading now toward the harborside, where the fishing boats lay at anchor. She had often come this way before, too, sometimes at the end of the afternoon, to pick out the *Ingeborg*, Uncle Henrik's boat, from the many returning, and to watch him and his helpers unload the day's catch of slippery, shimmering herring still flopping in their containers.

Even now, with the boats in the harbor ahead empty of fish, preparing to leave for the day's fishing, she could smell the oily, salty

scent of herring, which always remained in the air here.

It wasn't far now, and it was getting lighter. She ran almost as fast as she had run at school, in the Friday footraces. Almost as fast as she had run down the Copenhagen sidewalk on the day that the soldier had stopped her with his call of "*Halte!*"

Annemarie continued the story in her head. "Suddenly, as Little Red Riding-Hood walked through the woods, she heard a noise. She heard a rustling in the bushes."

"A wolf," Kirsti would always say, shivering with fearful delight. "I know it's going to be the wolf!"

Annemarie always tried to prolong this part, to build up the suspense and tantalize her sister. "She didn't know *what* it was. She stopped on the path and listened. Something was following her, in the bushes. Little Red Riding-Hood was very, very, *very* frightened."

She would stop, would stay silent for a moment, and beside her in the bed she could feel Kirsti holding her breath.

"Then," Annemarie would go on, in a low, dread-filled voice, "she heard *a grow!*"

Annemarie stopped, suddenly, and stood still on the path. There was a turn immediately ahead. Beyond it, she knew, as soon as she rounded the turn, she would see the landscape open to the sea. The

woods would be behind her there, and ahead of her would be the harbor, the docks, and the countless fishing boats. Very soon it would be noisy there, with engines starting, fishermen calling to one another, and gulls crying.

But she had heard something else. She heard bushes rustling ahead. She heard footsteps. And—she was certain it was not her imagination—she heard a low growl.

Cautiously, she took a step forward. And another. She approached the turn in the path, and the noises continued.

Then they were there, in front of her. Four armed soldiers. With them, straining at taut leashes, were two large dogs, their eyes glittering, their lips curled.