

尼尔斯骑鹅旅行记

[瑞典] 塞尔玛·拉格洛夫 著

[美] 威尔玛·史旺斯顿·霍华德 译



Selma Lagerlöf

*The Wonderful Adventures
of Nils*

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Foreword

Literature masterpieces usually mirror the culture of a country or area in a specific period of time. By reading these masterpieces, we can enjoy the authors' fluent writing styles, vivid and detailed description, which will place us in that specific period's history and culture. For this purpose we present the series of world literature classics to the readers.

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前 言

世界文学名著表现了作者描述的特定时代的文化。阅读这些名著可以领略著者流畅的文笔、逼真的描述、详细的刻画，让读者如同置身当时的历史文化之中。为此，我们将这套精心编辑的“名著典藏”奉献给广大读者。

我们找来了专门研究西方历史、西方文化的专家学者，请教了专业的翻译人员，精心挑选了这些可以代表西方文学的著作，并听取了一些国外专门研究文学的朋友的建议，不删节、不做任何人为改动，严格按照原著的风格，提供原汁原味的西方名著，让读者能享受纯正的英文名著。

随着阅读的展开，你会发现自己的英语水平无形中有了大幅提高，并且对西方历史文化的了解也日益深入广阔。

送您一套经典，让您受益永远！

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. THE BOY | 1 |
| 2. AKKA FROM KEBNEKAISE.....* | 20 |
| 3. THE WONDERFUL JOURNEY OF NILS | 39 |
| 4. GLIMMINGE CASTLE | 61 |
| 5. THE GREAT CRANE DANCE ON KULLABERG | 76 |
| 6. IN RAINY WEATHER..... | 87 |
| 7. THE STAIRWAY WITH THE THREE STEPS..... | 94 |
| 8. BY RONNEBY RIVER..... | 99 |
| 9. KARLSKRONA | 109 |
| 10. THE TRIP TO ÖLAND..... | 119 |
| 11. ÖLAND'S SOUTHERN POINT..... | 124 |
| 12. THE BIG BUTTERFLY | 133 |
| 13. LITTLE KARL'S ISLAND | 138 |
| 14. TWO CITIES | 152 |
| 15. THE LEGEND OF SMÅLAND | 166 |
| 16. THE CROWS..... | 172 |
| 17. THE OLD PEASANT WOMAN | 192 |
| 18. FROM TABERG TO HUSKVARNA | 204 |
| 19. THE BIG BIRD-LAKE | 209 |
| 20. ULVÅSA-LADY | 226 |
| 21. THE HOMESPUN CLOTH..... | 232 |
| 22. THE STORY OF KARR AND GRAYSKIN | 237 |
| 23. THE WIND WITCH | 271 |
| 24. THE BREAKING UP OF THE ICE | 287 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 25. THUMBIETOT AND THE BEARS..... | 292 |
| 26. THE FLOOD..... | 308 |
| 27. DUNFIN | 319 |
| 28. STOCKHOLM | 331 |
| 29. GORGO, THE EAGLE | 345 |
| 30. ON OVER GÄSTRIKLAND | 357 |
| 31. A DAY IN HÄLSINGLAND | 364 |
| 32. IN MEDELPAD..... | 378 |
| 33. A MORNING IN ÅNGERMANLAND | 384 |
| 34. WESTBOTTOM AND LAPLAND | 392 |
| 35. OSA, THE GOOSE GIRL, AND LITTLE MATS | 407 |
| 36. WITH THE LAPLANDERS | 415 |
| 37. OMEWARD BOUND! | 425 |
| 38. LEGENDS FROM HÄRJEDALEN | 429 |
| 39. VERMLAND AND DALSLAND | 440 |
| 40. HE TREASURE ON THE ISLAND | 452 |
| 41. HE JOURNEY TO VEMMINGHÖG | 460 |
| 42. HOME AT LAST | 463 |
| 43. THE PARTING WITH THE WILD GEESE | 474 |

1. THE BOY

THE ELF

Sunday, March twentieth.

ONCE there was a boy. He was – let us say – something like fourteen years old; long and loose jointed and towheaded. He wasn't good for much, that boy. His chief delight was to eat and sleep; and after that – he liked best to make mischief.

It was a Sunday morning and the boy's parents were getting ready to go to church. The boy sat on the edge of the table, in his shirt sleeves, and thought how lucky it was that both father and mother were going away, and the coast would be clear for a couple of hours. "Good! Now I can take down pop's gun and fire off a shot, without anybody's meddling interference," he said to himself.

But it was almost as if father should have guessed the boy's thoughts, for just as he was on the threshold – ready to start – he stopped short, and turned toward the boy: "Since you won't come to church with mother and me," he said, "the least you can do, is to read the service at home. Will you promise to do so?" "Yes," said the boy, "that I can do easy enough." And he thought, of course, that he wouldn't read any more than he felt like reading.

The boy thought that never had he seen his mother so persistent. In a second she was over by the shelf near the fireplace, and took down Luther's Commentary and laid it on the table, in front of the window – opened at the service for the day. She also opened the New Testament,

and placed it beside the Commentary. Finally, she drew up the big arm-chair, which was bought at the parish auction the year before, and which, as a rule, no one but father was permitted to occupy.

The boy sat thinking that his mother was giving herself altogether too much trouble with this spread; for he had no intention of reading more than a page or so. But now, for the second time, it was almost as if his father were able to see right through him. He walked up to the boy, and said in a severe tone: "Now, remember, that you are to read carefully! For when we come back, I shall question you thoroughly; and if you have skipped a single page, it will not go well with you."

"The service is fourteen and a half pages long," said his mother, just as if she wanted to heap up the measure of his misfortune. "You'll have to sit down and begin the reading at once, if you expect to get through with it."

With that they departed. And as the boy stood in the doorway watching them, he thought that he had been caught in a trap. "There they go congratulating themselves, I suppose, in the belief that they've hit upon something so good that I'll be forced to sit and hang over the sermon the whole time that they are away," thought he.

But his father and mother were certainly not congratulating themselves upon anything of the sort; but, on the contrary, they were very much distressed. They were poor farmers, and their place was not much bigger than a garden-plot. When they first moved there, the place couldn't feed more than one pig and a pair of chickens; but they were uncommonly industrious and capable folk – and now they had both cows and geese. Things had turned out very well for them; and they would have gone to church that beautiful morning – satisfied and happy – if they hadn't had their son to think of. Father complained that he was dull and lazy; he had not cared to learn anything at school, and he was such an all-round good-for-nothing, that he could barely be made to tend geese. Mother did not deny that this was true; but she

was most distressed because he was wild and bad; cruel to animals, and ill-willed toward human beings. "May God soften his hard heart, and give him a better disposition!" said the mother, "or else he will be a misfortune, both to himself and to us."

The boy stood for a long time and pondered whether he should read the service or not. Finally, he came to the conclusion that, this time, it was best to be obedient. He seated himself in the easy chair, and began to read. But when he had been rattling away in an undertone for a little while, this mumbling seemed to have a soothing effect upon him – and he began to nod.

It was the most beautiful weather outside! It was only the twentieth of March; but the boy lived in West Vemminghög Township, down in Southern Skåne, where the spring was already in full swing. It was not as yet green, but it was fresh and budding. There was water in all the trenches, and the colt's-foot on the edge of the ditch, was in bloom. All the weeds that grew in among the stones were brown and shiny. The beech-woods in the distance seemed to swell and grow thicker with every second. The skies were high – and a clear blue. The cottage door stood ajar, and the lark's trill could be heard in the room. The hens and geese pattered about in the yard, and the cows, who felt the spring air away in their stalls, lowed their approval every now and then.

The boy read and nodded and fought against drowsiness. "No! I don't want to fall asleep," thought he, "for then I'll not get through with this thing the whole forenoon."

But – somehow – he fell asleep.

He did not know whether he had slept a short while, or a long while; but he was awakened by hearing a slight noise back of him.

On the window-sill, facing the boy, stood a small looking-glass; and almost the entire cottage could be seen in this. As the boy raised his head, he happened to look in the glass; and then he saw that the

cover to his mother's chest had been opened.

His mother owned a great, heavy, iron-bound oak chest, which she permitted no one but herself to open. Here she treasured all the things she had inherited from her mother, and of these she was especially careful. Here lay a couple of old-time peasant dresses, of red homespun cloth, with short bodice and plaited shirt, and a pearl-bedecked breast pin. There were starched white-linen head-dresses, and heavy silver ornaments and chains. Folks don't care to go about dressed like that in these days, and several times his mother had thought of getting rid of the old things; but somehow, she hadn't had the heart to do it.

Now the boy saw distinctly – in the glass – that the chest-lid was open. He could not understand how this had happened, for his mother had closed the chest before she went away. She never would have left that precious chest open when he was at home, alone.

He became low-spirited and apprehensive. He was afraid that a thief had sneaked his way into the cottage. He didn't dare to move; but sat still and stared into the looking-glass.

While he sat there and waited for the thief to make his appearance, he began to wonder what that dark shadow was which fell across the edge of the chest. He looked and looked – and did not want to believe his eyes. But the thing, which at first seemed shadowy, became more and more clear to him; and soon he saw that it was something real. It was no less a thing than an elf who sat there – astride the edge of the chest!

To be sure, the boy had heard stories about elves, but he had never dreamed that they were such tiny creatures. He was no taller than a hand's breadth – this one, who sat on the edge of the chest. He had an old, wrinkled and beardless face, and was dressed in a black frock coat, knee-breeches and a broad-brimmed black hat. He was very trim and smart, with his white laces about the throat and wrist-bands, his

buckled shoes, and the bows on his garters. He had taken from the chest an embroidered piece, and sat and looked at the old-fashioned handiwork with such an air of veneration, that he did not observe the boy had awakened.

The boy was somewhat surprised to see the elf, but, on the other hand, he was not particularly frightened. It was impossible to be afraid of one who was so little. And since the elf was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he neither saw nor heard, the boy thought that it would be great fun to play a trick on him; to push him over into the chest and shut the lid on him, or something of that kind."

But the boy was not so courageous that he dared to touch the elf with his hands, instead he looked around the room for something to poke him with. He let his gaze wander from the sofa to the leaf-table; from the leaf-table to the fireplace. He looked at the kettles, then at the coffee-urn, which stood on a shelf, near the fireplace; on the water bucket near the door; and on the spoons and knives and forks and saucers and plates, which could be seen through the half-open cupboard door. He looked at his father's gun, which hung on the wall, beside the portrait of the Danish royal family, and on the geraniums and fuchsias, which blossomed in the window. And last, he caught sight of an old butterfly-snare that hung on the window frame. He had hardly set eyes on that butterfly-snare, before he reached over and snatched it and jumped up and swung it alongside the edge of the chest. He was himself astonished at the luck he had. He hardly knew how he had managed it – but he had actually snared the elf. The poor little chap lay, head downward, in the bottom of the long snare, and could not free himself.

The first moment the boy hadn't the least idea what he should do with his prize. He was only particular to swing the snare backward and forward, to prevent the elf from getting a foothold and clambering up.

The elf began to speak, and begged, oh! so pitifully, for his freedom. He had brought them good luck – these many years – he said, and deserved better treatment. Now, if the boy would set him free, he would give him an old coin, a silver spoon, and a gold penny, as big as the case on his father's silver watch.

The boy didn't think that this was much of an offer; but it so happened – that after he had gotten the elf in his power, he was afraid of him. He felt that he had entered into an agreement with something weird and uncanny; something which did not belong to his world, and he was only too glad to get rid of the horrid thing.

For this reason he agreed at once to the bargain, and held the snare still, so the elf could crawl out of it. But when the elf was almost out of the snare, the boy happened to think that he ought to have bargained for large estates, and all sorts of good things. He should at least have made this stipulation: that the elf must conjure the sermon into his head. "What a fool I was to let him go!" thought he, and began to shake the snare violently, so the elf would tumble down again.

But the instant the boy did this, he received such a stinging box on the ear, that he thought his head would fly in pieces. He was dashed – first against one wall, then against the other; he sank to the floor, and lay there – senseless.

When he awoke, he was alone in the cottage. The chest-lid was down, and the butterfly-snare hung in its usual place by the window. If he had not felt how the right cheek burned, from that box on the ear, he would have been tempted to believe the whole thing had been a dream. "At any rate, father and mother will be sure to insist that it was nothing else," thought he. "They are not likely to make any allowances for that old sermon, on account of the elf. It's best for me to get at that reading again," thought he.

But as he walked toward the table, he noticed something

remarkable. It couldn't be possible that the cottage had grown. But why was he obliged to take so many more steps than usual to get to the table? And what was the matter with the chair? It looked no bigger than it did a while ago; but now he had to step on the rung first, and then clamber up in order to reach the seat. It was the same thing with the table. He could not look over the top without climbing to the arm of the chair.

"What in all the world is this?" said the boy. "I believe the elf has bewitched both the armchair and the table – and the whole cottage."

The Commentary lay on the table and, to all appearances, it was not changed; but there must have been something queer about that too, for he could not manage to read a single word of it, without actually standing right in the book itself.

He read a couple of lines, and then he chanced to look up. With that, his glance fell on the looking-glass; and then he cried aloud: "Look! There's another one!"

For in the glass he saw plainly a little, little creature who was dressed in a hood and leather breeches.

"Why, that one is dressed exactly like me!" said the boy, and clasped his hands in astonishment. But then he saw that the thing in the mirror did the same thing. Then he began to pull his hair and pinch his arms and swing round; and instantly he did the same thing after him; he, who was seen in the mirror.

The boy ran around the glass several times, to see if there wasn't a little man hidden behind it, but he found no one there; and then he began to shake with terror. For now he understood that the elf had bewitched him, and that the creature whose image he saw in the glass – was he, himself.

THE WILD GEESE

THE boy simply could not make himself believe that he had been transformed into an elf. "It can't be anything but a dream – a queer fancy," thought he. "If I wait a few moments, I'll surely be turned back into a human being again."

He placed himself before the glass and closed his eyes. He opened them again after a couple of minutes, and then expected to find that it had all passed over – but it hadn't. He was – and remained – just as little. In other respects, he was the same as before. The thin, straw-coloured hair; the freckles across his nose; the patches on his leather breeches and the dams on his stockings, were all like themselves, with this exception – that they had become diminished.

No, it would do no good for him to stand still and wait, of this he was certain. He must try something else. And he thought the wisest thing that he could do was to try and find the elf, and make his peace with him.

And while he sought, he cried and prayed and promised everything he could think of. Nevermore would he break his word to anyone; never again would he be naughty; and never, never would he fall asleep again over the sermon. If he might only be a human being once more, he would be such a good and helpful and obedient boy. But no matter how much he promised – it did not help him the least little bit.

Suddenly he remembered that he had heard his mother say, all the tiny folk made their home in the cowsheds; and, at once, he concluded to go there, and see if he couldn't find the elf. It was a lucky thing that the cottage-door stood partly open, for he never could have reached the bolt and opened it; but now he slipped through without any difficulty.

When he came out in the hallway, he looked around for his wooden

shoes; for in the house, to be sure, he had gone about in his stocking-feet. He wondered how he should manage with these big, clumsy wooden shoes; but just then, he saw a pair of tiny shoes on the doorstep. When he observed that the elf had been so thoughtful that he had also bewitched the wooden shoes, he was even more troubled. It was evidently his intention that this affliction should last a long time.

On the wooden board-walk in front of the cottage, hopped a gray sparrow. He had hardly set eyes on the boy before he called out: "Teetee! Teetee! Look at Nils goosey-boy! Look at Thumbietot! Look at Nils Holgersson Thumbietot! "

Instantly, both the geese and the chickens turned and stared at the boy; and then they set up a fearful cackling. "Cock-el-i-coo," crowed the rooster, "good enough for him! Cock-el-i-coo, he has pulled my comb." "Ka, ka, kada, serves him right!" cried the hens; and with that they kept up a continuous cackle. The geese got together in a tight group, stuck their heads together and asked: "Who can have done this? Who can have done this?"

But the strangest thing of all was that the boy understood what they said. He was so astonished, that he stood there as if rooted to the doorstep, and listened. "It must be because I am changed into an elf," said he. "This is probably why I understand bird-talk."

He thought it was unbearable that the hens would not stop saying that it served him right. He threw a stone at them and shouted: "Shut up, you pack!"

But it hadn't occurred to him before, that he was no longer the sort of boy the hens need fear. The whole henyard made a rush for him, and formed a ring around him; then they all cried at once: "Ka, ka, kada, served you right! Ka, ka, kada, served you right!"

The boy tried to get away, but the chickens ran after him and screamed, until he thought he'd lose his hearing. It is more than likely

that he never could have gotten away from them, if the house cat hadn't come along just then. As soon as the chickens saw the cat, they quieted down and pretended to be thinking of nothing else than just to scratch in the earth for worms.

Immediately the boy ran up to the cat. "You dear pussy!" said he, "you must know all the corners and hiding places about here? You'll be a good little kitty and tell me where I can find the elf."

The cat did not reply at once. He seated himself, curled his tail into a graceful ring around his paws – and stared at the boy. It was a large black cat with one white spot on his chest. His fur lay sleek and soft, and shone in the sunlight. The claws were drawn in, and the eyes were a dull gray, with just a little narrow dark streak down the centre. The cat looked thoroughly good-natured and inoffensive.

"I know well enough where the elf lives," he said in a soft voice, "but that doesn't say that I'm going to tell *you* about it."

"Dear pussy, you must tell me where the elf lives!" said the boy. "Can't you see how he has bewitched me?"

The cat opened his eyes a little, so that the green wickedness began to shine forth. He spun round and purred with satisfaction before he replied. "Shall I perhaps help you because you have so often grabbed me by the tail?" he said at last.

Then the boy was furious and forgot entirely how little and helpless he was now. "Oh! I can pull your tail again, I can," said he, and ran toward the cat.

The next instant the cat was so changed that the boy could scarcely believe it was the same animal. Every separate hair on his body stood on end. The back was bent; the legs had become elongated; the claws scraped the ground; the tail had grown thick and short; the ears were laid back; the mouth was frothy; and the eyes were wide open and glistened like sparks of red fire.

The boy didn't want to let himself be scared by a cat, and he took a