

89-05-10

Bäste Petten!

Äntligen får du nu lära den ut-
 levande berättelsen om Din far fars mor
 (har jag kor rätt) Mathilda Laurenius ^{Enisks}
 (Larsson) Skrivna o. Sigrid Pester (f. i ^{Enisks} Du far fars systern
^{dottern till} Laurinell) Din far Enisks fester har jag. →
 Mathildas föräldrar vet jag inte sin nyhet
 om annat än att de hade ganska många barn,

Hj. bl. a. min farfar Grael. Vidare till en
son Luft namnet Janne ö en annan Adolf
vilka bägge till ha lämnat landet under den
stora emigrationen till Amerika medio
1800-talet. För Du fram något i Dina
forskningar skulle jag så till stort värde på
att erätta en förteckning. Lycka till ö
Lär gärna av sig om Du kan hjälpa
sig. Med Hälsningar till sig själv ö
Din familj. Wedne gatan 159
Hj. Laurenius 26161 Sandbronan

Holidays with Grandma

My maternal grandmother was a fat woman of commanding aspect with large, brown eyes and a roman nose on which she blew trumpet-like blasts. She had a turbulent temperament and took snuff to soothe her feelings. Because of the snuff she used red paisley handkerchiefs. White handkerchiefs were reserved for weddings and funerals.

When I first remember her, my uncle had taken over the estate and lived in what we called "the big House" with his family, and my grandmother occupied a wing. The Swedish Manor houses are mostly built around a square with the main building centre and two separate wings. Here there was one wing only and then the "Old House", from 1611, opposite the main building which, like grandmother's wing, was of a later date.

Thus grandmother's wing was in the middle and overlooked the square and the gate opposite. As is usual in Sweden her drawing room was on the first floor next door to her bedroom so that she had an uninterrupted view of whatever was going on between the other houses. If anything was not to her liking her window would slam open and she would voice her annoyance in no uncertain manner. This was of course greatly resented by my uncle's wife, Maria, who rightly considered it unwarranted interference in their affairs. Sometimes, however, it was all to the good, as when two cousins, both named Eric, were beating each other up : "For heaven's sake come somebody" she roared, "Eric the town is beating Eric the farm with a big stick !"

When I spent "hols" with grandma I slept in her spare room on the other side of the drawing room. Across the hall was a small room which we called the library but which was really the loo. It did, however, contain masses of books and one could browse among them for hours.

There was a large part of the same building that contained corn stores, pantries and the large stone mangle which was still used for bed linen, etc. Grandma had her bedroom next to the corn store and at one time mice started eating their way in. To frighten them she had a walking stick with which she banged on the wall when they disturbed her. I often heard her banging away during the night. But one night I realised that a very special racket was going on. I jumped out of bed and went into her bedroom. She was sitting on the bed hitting around her with the stick and there was actually a mouse in the room just getting up on her dressing table. With a great roar she brought the stick down in the middle of the dressing table scattering cut-glass bottles and jars all over the room, but she got her mouse !

Grandmother had a tiny housekeeper called Little Tilda to distinguish her from Big Tilda who worked for my Aunt. Big Tilda was a sister of my mother's cook Anna, and a giant.

Little Tilda was a poor relation who had come to grandma after a disastrous marriage which ended in her husband's suicide. Nobody knows what happened but little T. was terribly holy and puritannical and we thought maybe that had something to do with it. We children thought she may have preached hell-fire to him until he went out of his mind ! We also knew that grandma's bullying ways was just what Tilda wanted. The more she suffered the surer she was of salvation. We often wondered what she thought would happen to grandma ! Tilda had a nervous tic that made her shake her head in constant disapproval. I was a great favourite because I liked to read her large illustrated bible. It had very impressive pictures of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in it. I also remember reading some very lurid passages in the Old Testament and it seemed funny to me that all these horrid happenings should be God's word and considered good for me ! However, it was all very interesting.

Tilda and the house-maid slept in a large room next to the kitchen and in the middle of the floor stood an old loom. This was to keep the staff busy during the long, dark winter. In those days all one could do was to read, knit, or weave. So grandma read and knitted and the maids wove - towels, table cloths, curtains, bed spreads and above all rag carpets. All old linen was cut into strips, dyed and woven into strip carpets which were either used as strips or sewn together into squares for large carpets.

There was a roaring kitchen range which consumed quantities of birch wood and kept the two rooms very hot and cosy. In the hall there was an anthracite stove which imparted a glow day and night also to the adjacent dining room. Good heating was essential as the temperature in the winter was arctic. Apart from these two sources, each room had a high glazed stove which could be fired open or shut and stored up heat for many hours. There were enormous cellars under the houses in which, later on, the central heating plant was installed.

When I was about 6 or 7 Aunt Maria quarrelled with grandma, so grandma, together with a younger son, my Uncle Cecil, bought another country house also with a lot of farmland and afterwards I spent my holidays there. This place was called Mosserud, and had the usual big house and two wings. In one wing the farm manager lived and there were odd bedrooms and a dairy. In the other wing there was a corn store and work shops. Then there were stables, barns, cow, pig and hen houses galore. I think that here I spent the happiest days of my childhood. Everybody was too busy to bother about me and I was left entirely to my own devices. As long as I turned up for meals I was allowed to roam at will.

I soon made friends with the coachman, the cow man and the young painter and odd jobs man who was constantly in demand. My grandma had beautiful carriages and horses and it was always my pride when I was allowed on the box with Anders, the coachman, and he let me drive the dappled grey pair to the station to fetch visitors. However, on the home journey Anders took the reins as he said the visitors might be scared to be driven by a small girl !

I was very friendly with the cows because these were not pedigree like the cows my Uncle Eric had. The pedigree cows were wild-eyed and bad-tempered and frankly scared the pants off me. But these were ordinary kindly cows who didn't mind my hanging round their necks. And I loved the calves.

When visitors arrived at Mosserud sometimes a maid would be sent out to look for me. She one day found me with a cow just about to calve. I was acting as midwife with Per the cowman who had just gone to boil some water. So I sent word up to the house that I couldn't come just then. My mother was appalled, but generally she was only too glad as long as I kept out of the way. Later on I found this indifference was due to my brother being on the way and a lot of other troubles, like my father changing his job and the possibility of our moving to Norway. She was never a strong woman and it all got her down. Because of all this I wasn't sent back to school and, instead, a governess appeared on the scene and things got rather more restricted. Afterwards, we (I and later my brother) were saddled with governesses of various types for years.

My best friend at Grandma's house was Carl, the painter, a lonely youth of about 15. I was always hanging around him and helping to mix his paints, sometimes with detriment to the paint! As far as I could gather he was an orphan and hadn't a friend in the world. Grandma's household was a friendly and generous one. So for the mid-day meal all the people who worked around the place came into the large kitchen. Per and Anders and Carl and one or two dairy maids and our own maids had their meal together before the family had theirs. A great deal of bantering and teasing went on but no rude jokes were cracked as they had Tilda's watchful eye on them. I remember being glad for Carl's sake that he had some company. On Sundays he was very lonely, and wandered about in an aimless and desolate way. One Sunday I found him sitting by the hedge just outside the garden and I hopped out and said "Hullo". Then he said he had something to show me and it was a watch. We pored over this watch and examined it inside and out and probably poked the works a bit and we both thought it was the finest watch ever. And think of it: the next day it had stopped and wouldn't go. I had the most awful pangs of conscience thinking perhaps I had mucked it up for him. I really had sleepless nights thinking of that darned watch. In the end I think my father took it and got it mended for him and I have been dead scared of looking at watches ever since. I thought perhaps I was the sort who makes a watch stop when she looks at it!

Mosserud was situated in the middle of open fields sloping down towards a lake. Behind the lake there were hills clad in pine forest. There was about a half a mile of private road and three miles on the main road to get to the station. But no train connected us with my uncle's farm which was about 25 miles away so

we always went by carriage. This meant a day's journey with picnics on the way. If we were a big company we had the charabanc and I sat on the box with Anders. I complained that sitting sideways always made me feel sick! If it was a cold day mother then insisted that I should wear her fur cape because of the draught. This garment made me feel an awful fool and was guaranteed to take away most of my pleasure!

There was a bath house by the lake used rather like the Finnish Sauna and mother made an enormous bathing suit for Grandma, out of two bath towels, to put on when she stepped into the water. This she did with great enjoyment but giving vent to tremendous shrieks and roars if the water was very cold. There was a rumour that youths of a nearby village used to sit behind the bushes on a Saturday afternoon to watch the performance. Well, there was no TV then. It is said that grandma then sent out beaters to clear the woods before she had her dip.

Sigrid Tester f. Lowell