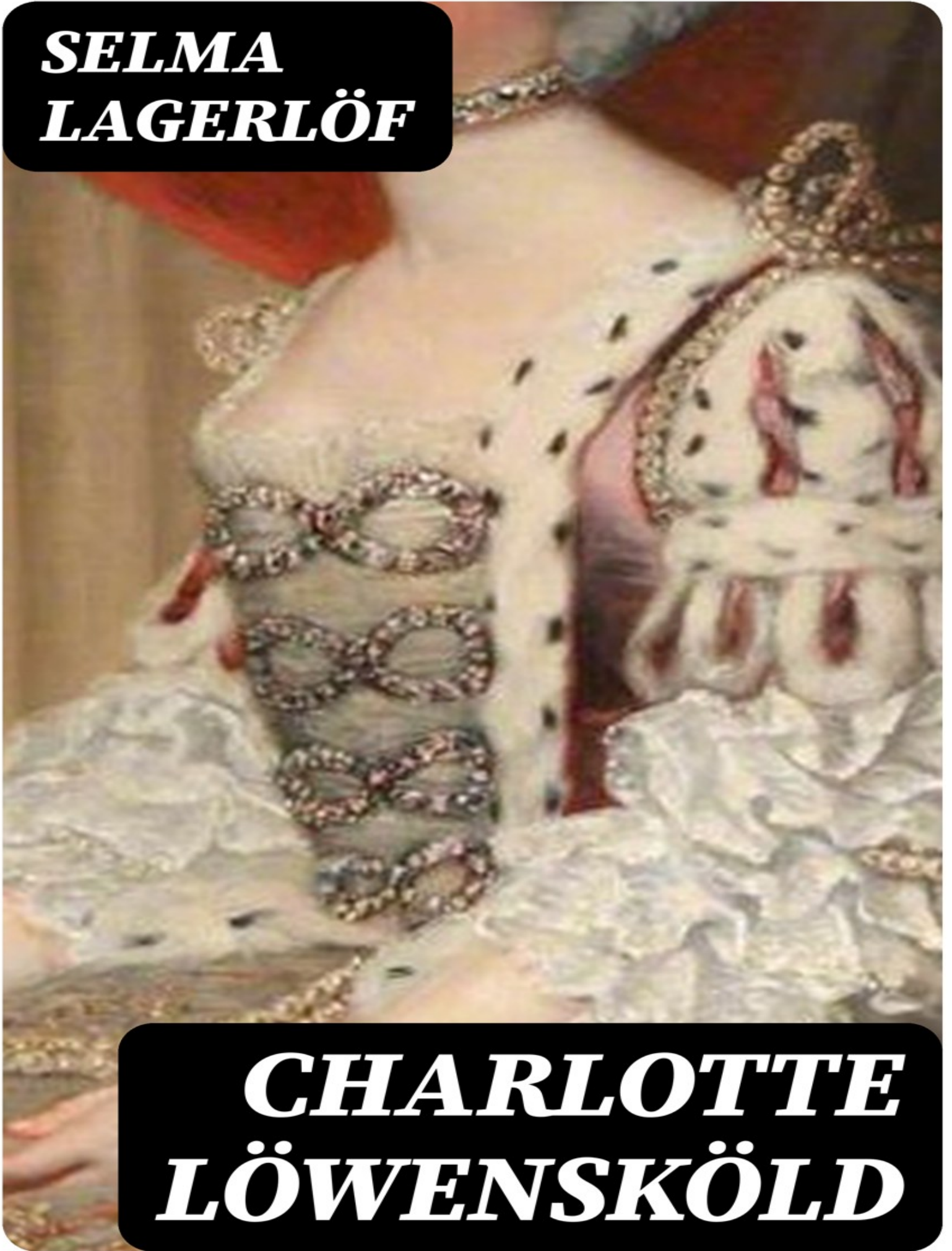


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CHAPTER I

THE BARONESS

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Beata Ekenstedt, born Löwensköld and baroness, was the quintessence of culture and refinement, highly accomplished and delightfully agreeable. She could write verse quite as amusing as Fru Lenngren's.

Though short of stature, she had a good bearing, like all the Löwenskölds, and an interesting face. She said charming things to everyone, and those who had once seen her never forgot her. She had exquisite taste in dress, and her hair was always beautifully arranged. Wherever she appeared, hers was the prettiest brooch, hers the choicest bracelet, hers the most dazzling ring. She had a neat little foot, and, whether it was the fashion or not, she always wore dainty high-heeled shoes of gold brocade.

She lived in the finest house in Karlstad, and it was not wedged in among the jumble of dwellings on a narrow street. Her house stood apart on the shore of the Daläven, and the Baroness from the window of her little cabinet could look right down into the shining river. She used to tell how on clear moonlit nights she had seen the Neckan sitting beneath her window, playing on a golden harp. And no one doubted it. Why should not the River-god, like so many others, serenade the Baroness Ekenstedt?

All the notables who visited Karlstad paid their respects to the Baroness. They were immediately captivated, and

thought it a pity that so adorable a lady should be buried in a small city.

It was said that Bishop Tegnér had written a sonnet to her and that the Crown Prince had declared she had the charm of a Frenchwoman. Even General von Essen, among others of the Court of Gustavus III, had to concede that such perfect dinners as were given by the Baroness Ekenstedt he had never sat down to elsewhere—either as to the viands, the service, or the conversation.

The Baroness had two daughters, Eve and Jaquette. They were pretty and amiable girls who would have been admired almost anywhere. But in Karlstad no one even noticed them; they were completely overshadowed by their mother.

When the girls attended a ball, the young gentlemen all vied with each other for the privilege of dancing with the Baroness, while Eve and Jaquette had to sit as wallflowers. As already mentioned, it was not the Neckan alone who gave serenades outside the Ekenstedt house! But no one ever sang beneath the daughters' windows. Young poets composed madrigals to B. E., but never a strophe to E. E. or J. E. Persons a bit maliciously inclined said that a young lieutenant who had courted little Eve Ekenstedt was coolly dismissed because the Baroness thought he had shown poor taste.

The lady had also a husband. Colonel Ekenstedt was a splendid fellow who would have commanded respect and admiration in any society outside his wife's world. But when seen beside his brilliant spouse, with her lively wit and playful vivaciousness, the Colonel looked like a staid country squire. When he spoke, the guests in his home scarcely

listened; it was almost as if he were not there at all. It cannot be said of the Colonel's wife that she allowed those who swarmed about her any familiarities. Her conduct was unimpeachable. But it never occurred to her mind to draw her husband out of the shadow. She probably thought it suited him best to remain somewhat in the background.

This charming Baroness, this much-fêted lady, had not only a husband and two daughters, she had also a son. The son she adored. He was pushed forward on all occasions. It would not have done for any guest of the Ekenstedt house to overlook or slight him—not if he entertained any hope of being invited there again.

The Baroness, however, had reason to be proud of her son. Karl Arthur was a talented youth with lovable ways and attractive exterior; he had delicate features and large dark eyes. He was not, as other spoiled children, forward and brazen. As a schoolboy, he had never played truant, had never “put up any game” on his teachers. He was of a more romantic turn of mind than either of his sisters. Before his eighth year he had made up neat little rhymes. And he could tell mamma that he too had heard the Neckan play and seen the brownies dance on the meadows of Voxnäs. In fact, in every way, he was his mother's own son.

He filled her heart completely. Yet she could hardly be called a weak mother. At least Karl Arthur had to learn to work. True, his mother held him as something higher than all other beings; and for that very reason it would not have done for him to come home from the gymnasium with anything short of the highest marks. While Karl attended class, the Baroness never invited any of his instructors to

the house. No, it should not be said that he received high marks because he was the son of the Baroness Ekenstedt, who gave such fine dinners. Ah, yes, the Baroness had quality!

Karl Arthur was graduated from the Karlstad Gymnasium with highest honours, as was Eric Gustaf Geijer in his day; and to matriculate at Upsala University was just play for him, as it had been for Geijer. The Baroness had seen the tubby little professor many a time, and had had him as table companion. A markedly gifted man, to be sure; still, she could but think that her Karl Arthur had quite as good a mind; that some day he, too, would be a famous professor who would draw to his lectures Crown Prince Oscar, Governor Järta, Fru Silverstolpe, and all the other notables at Upsala.

Karl Arthur entered the University at the autumn semester, year 1826. All that term, and in fact throughout his college years, he wrote home regularly once a week. Not one of his precious letters was destroyed; his mother kept them all, reading them over again and again. At the Sunday dinners, when the relatives gathered round the board, she would read to them his latest epistle. This she could do with good grace, for these were letters she might well be proud of.

The Baroness surmised that the relatives expected Karl Arthur to be a paragon of all the virtues now that he was on his own, so to speak; and it was a triumph for her to be able to read out to them how he had taken inexpensive lodgings, did his own marketing, and prepared his simple meals; how he arose at five every morning and worked twelve hours a

day. Then, too, there were the many deferential terms employed in his letters, and the fulsome praises bestowed upon his mother. The Baroness quite gratuitously imparted to Provost Sjöberg, who had married an Ekenstedt, and Alderman Ekenstedt, uncle of her husband, and the cousins Stake, who lived in the great house on the square, that Karl Arthur, though now out in the world, still maintained that his mother might have been a poet of the first rank had she not lived solely for her husband and children. Ah, no, she had sought no reward; it had been a voluntary sacrifice. Accustomed as she was to laudation of every sort, her eyes always filled when she read these lines from her darling boy.

But her greatest triumph came just before Christmas, when Karl Arthur wrote that he had not used up all the money his father had given him for his expenses at Upsala, that he still had about half of it left to come home with.

This was most astounding news to the Provost, the Alderman, and the most distant of the cousins Stake. Such a thing, they averred, had never happened before and surely would never happen again. They all agreed that Karl Arthur was a wonder.

It was lonely for the poor Baroness with her boy away at college the greater part of the year; but she had so much joy of his letters she hardly could have wished it to be otherwise. When he had attended a lecture by the famous neo-romantic poet, Atterbom, he would discourse so interestingly on philosophy and poetry. And when such letters came, the Baroness would sit dreaming for hours of the wonderful things her Karl Arthur was going to do. She believed he would outrank even Professor Geijer. Perhaps he

might be as great a man as Karl von Linné, and as world-renowned. Or, why not a great poet?—A second Tegner? Ah, what more delightful entertainment than to revel in one's thoughts!

Karl Arthur always came home for the Christmas and summer holidays; and every time his mother saw him again, she thought he had grown more handsome and manly. In other respects, he had not changed. He showed the old worshipful attitude toward his mother, the usual respect for his father, and teasing, playful way with his sisters.

Sometimes the Baroness felt a trifle impatient, as Karl Arthur, year after year, remained quietly at Upsala, and nothing much happened. Her friends all explained, that since Karl Arthur was to take his Master's examination it would be some time before he was through. She must consider what it meant to pass in all the subjects studied at the University—in astronomy, Hebrew, geometry, and the rest. He couldn't "get by" with less. The Baroness thought it a cruel examination, and so it was; but it couldn't be changed just for the sake of Karl Arthur.

In the late autumn of 1829, when Karl Arthur was in his seventh term at Upsala, he wrote home, to his mother's delight, that he had presented himself for the examination in Latin, which, though not a hard one, was prerequisite to the finals.

Karl Arthur made no to-do of the thing, but only said it would be nice to be through with it. He had never had any difficulty with his Latin; so he had reason to think that all would go well. He also said that this was the last letter his dear parents would receive from him that term. As soon as

he knew the result of the examination, he would leave for home. Without doubt, on the last day of November, he would embrace his parents and his sisters.

No, Karl Arthur had not made any “noise” whatever about his Latin “exam.” And he was glad afterward, for he failed lamentably. The Upsala dons had permitted themselves to “pluck” him, although he had taken highest honours in all his studies at the Karlstad Gymnasium!

He was more surprised than humiliated. He could not see but that his use of the Latin language was quite defensible. To come home as one beaten was certainly exasperating; but undoubtedly his parents—or his mother, at least—would understand that it must have been due to malice of some sort. The Upsala dons wished perhaps to show that they had higher standards than the Karlstad masters, or they may have thought, because he had not elected to take part in any of the seminars, that he had been too sure of himself.

It was several days’ journey from Upsala to Karlstad, and when Karl Arthur drove in through the eastern tollgate at dusk on the thirtieth of November, he had forgotten the whole wretched affair. He was quite pleased with himself for arriving on the very day he had set in his letter. He pictured his mother standing at the salon window watching for him, and his sisters laying the coffee table.

Driving through the narrow, crooked streets of the city, he was in fine spirits, till he glimpsed in the distance the Ekenstedt home. What in the world was going on there? The whole house was lit up like a church on a Christmas morning. Sledges full of fur-clad people skimmed past him—all apparently bound for his home.

“Mother must be giving a party,” he thought with some vexation; for he was tired after his hard journey and wanted to rest. Now he’d have to change his clothes and sit gabbing with the guests until midnight.

Then, all at once, he became uneasy. Perhaps his mother was giving the party for him, to celebrate his Latin triumph.

He ordered the postboy to drive round to the kitchen entrance, and got out there so as to avoid meeting the guests. His mother was immediately notified of his arrival and requested to come to the housekeeper’s room to speak with Karl Arthur.

The Baroness had been on pins and needles lest he should not arrive in time for dinner. She was overjoyed, and came hurrying out to welcome him.

Karl Arthur met his mother with a stern face. He did not notice her outstretched hands and made no move to greet her.

“What have you been up to, Mother?” he asked abruptly. “Why is the whole city invited here to-night?” This time there was no talk of “tender parents,” and Karl Arthur seemed anything but glad to see his mother.

“Well,” said the Baroness, “I thought we ought to celebrate a little now that you have passed that dreadful examination.”

“I suppose it never occurred to you that I might be plucked,” said Karl Arthur; “but such is the case, at all events.”

The Baroness stood dumbfounded. That her son would let himself be beaten had never entered her mind.

“Oh, that in itself is of no significance,” Karl Arthur continued; “but now the whole town will know of it. I dare say all these people have been invited here to celebrate my success.”

The Baroness was utterly crestfallen. She knew the way of the Karlstaders: They no doubt thought diligence and economy admirable things in a student, but these were not enough. They looked for prize awards from the Swedish Academy and brilliant disputations that would make all the old professors turn pale under their beards. They expected clever improvisations at the national festivals and entrée to exclusive literary circles—to Professor Geijer’s, or Governor von Kraemer’s, or Fru Silverstolpe’s. Such things they could appreciate. But thus far Karl Arthur had shown no evidence of having any extraordinary gifts. His mother knew that people thought him lacking in such. And now, when at last he had proved his scholarship, she had felt there would be no harm in making a little ado over it. But this, that Karl Arthur had failed, seemed unbelievable.

“No one really knows anything for certain,” she said; “no one but the home folk. The others have only been told they were to have a pleasant surprise.”

“Then you will have to invent some pleasant surprise for them,” Karl Arthur retorted. “I’m going up to my room and shall not be down to the dinner. Not that I think the Karlstaders will take my failure to heart, but I don’t want their commiseration.”

“What in the world shall I do?” wailed the Baroness.

“That’s for you to decide,” Karl Arthur rapped out. “I’m going upstairs now. The guests need not know that I am at

home.”

But this was too painful! The Baroness, then, was to sit at table and play the amiable hostess with her son up in his room, unhappy and out of temper. She was not to have the pleasure of his company. It was hard on the poor Baroness.

“Dear Karl Arthur, you must come down to dinner! I’ll hit upon something.”

“What will it be, pray?”

“I don’t know. . . . Ah, I have it! You’ll be perfectly satisfied. No one will know that the party had been planned in your honour. Only promise me that you will dress and come down!”

The dinner was a great success. Of all the delightful feasts given at the Ekenstedt home, this was the most memorable.

When the roasts were brought in and the champagne was served, there came a veritable surprise. The Colonel stood up and asked those present to join him in a toast to the happiness and prosperity of his daughter Eve and Lieutenant Sten Arcker, whose engagement he was pleased to announce.

There was general rejoicing.

Lieutenant Arcker was a poor man with no prospects to speak of. They all knew that he had long been daft about Eve Ekenstedt, and because the little Ekenstedt girls so seldom had any admirers, the whole city had been interested in this affair; but everyone had thought, of course, that the Baroness would nip it in the bud.

Afterward it leaked out that the Baroness had allowed Eve and Arcker to become engaged because there had been

some hitch to the surprise she had hoped to give her guests.

But nobody thought any the less of the Baroness for that. On the contrary, people said there was no one who knew so well how to handle an embarrassing and difficult situation as did Beata Ekenstedt.

* * *

The Baroness was one who expected an apology from a person who had offended against her. That little amenity discharged, she heartily forgave everything and was as friendly and trusting as before the breach.

All through the Christmas holidays, she hoped Karl Arthur would ask pardon for speaking so harshly to her the evening of the party. It was quite clear to her that he had forgotten himself in the heat of the moment, but she could not understand why he was so silent about his offence after he had had time for reflection.

But Karl Arthur let the holidays slip by without uttering a word of regret. He enjoyed himself as usual at dinner dances and sleighing parties, and was pleasant and attentive at home. Yet the few words his mother was waiting to hear remained unspoken. Only he and she noticed it, perhaps, but an invisible wall had risen between them which prevented their getting quite close to each other. There was no lack of love or tender expressions on either side, but the thing that separated them and kept them apart had not been removed.

When Karl was back at Upsala, he thought of nothing but to make up for his failure. If the Baroness expected a written apology from him, she was doomed to disappointment. He wrote only of his studies; he was reading Latin with two docents and attending Latin lectures every day. Besides, he had joined a seminar for practice in Latin disputation and oration. He was doing his level best to make good this time.

His letters home were most hopeful, and the Baroness answered them in the same spirit. Nevertheless, she felt anxious for him. He had been rude to his own mother and had made no apology. Now, for that, perhaps, he might be punished.

It was not that the Baroness wished to bring punishment upon her son; she had prayed God not to make note of the slight offence, but to let it be forgotten. She explained to our Lord that it was all her fault. "It was only my foolish vanity; I wanted to shine in the light of his success. It is I who deserve chastisement, and not he." But she continued to search his every letter for the missing words. Not finding them, her uneasiness increased. She had the feeling that it would not go well for Karl Arthur at the examination unless he was assured of her forgiveness.

Then, one day, toward the end of the term, the Baroness announced that she was going to Upsala to visit her good friend Malla Silverstolpe. They had met the previous summer in Kavlås, at the Gyllenhaals, and formed a pleasant friendship. Dear Malla had begged her to come to Upsala in the winter and meet her literary friends.

All Karlstad was surprised that the Baroness would set out upon such a long journey in the middle of the spring

thaw. The Colonel, they thought, should have said no to this; but the Colonel assented, as usual.

She had a dreadful journey, as the Karlstaders had predicted. Several times her coach stuck in the mud and had to be lifted out on poles. Once a spring broke; another time it was the tongue. But the Baroness, frail little body that she was, struggled on bravely and merrily. Innkeepers and hostlers, blacksmiths and farmers she met along the way were ready to lay down their lives for her. They all seemed to know how very necessary it was that she should get to Upsala.

The Baroness, of course, had notified Fru Malla Silverstolpe of her coming, but not Karl Arthur, and she had requested her not to let him know of it, as she wanted to give him a surprise.

At Enköping there was another delay. It was only a few miles more to Upsala, but now a wheel band had come off, and until that had been repaired she could proceed no farther. The Baroness was panic-stricken. She had been such a long time on the way, and the Latin examination might take place at any hour. Her sole object in making this journey was to afford Karl Arthur an opportunity to apologize to her before the examination. She felt in her heart that if this were left undone, no docents or lectures would profit him. He would inevitably fail again.

She could not rest in her room at the inn. Every little while she would run down the stairs and out into the yard to see whether the wheel had come back from the smithy.

On one of these restless excursions, she saw a cart turn into the yard. Beside the driver sat a youth wearing a

student's cap who suddenly jumped from the wagon. Why—she could hardly believe her eyes—it was Karl Arthur!

He rushed up to his mother, seized her hand, and pressed it to his heart, while his beautiful, dreamy child-eyes looked pleadingly into hers.

“Mother!” he cried, “forgive me for my rudeness to you last winter, when you gave that party for me.”

It seemed almost too good to be true.

The Baroness freed her hand, flung her arms around Karl Arthur's neck, and nearly smothered him with kisses. Why he was there, she did not know, but she knew that she had got back her son, and this was the happiest moment of her life.

She drew him into the inn, and explanations followed.

No, there had been no examination as yet; it would take place on the morrow. But in spite of this he had set off for home, only to see her.

“What a madcap you are!” laughed the Baroness. “Did you think to drive to Karlstad and back in a day and a night?”

“No,” he said; “I let everything go by the wind, for I knew this had to be done. It was useless to try until I had your forgiveness. I should only have failed.”

“But, my boy, all that was necessary was the least little word in a letter.”

“This thing has been hanging over me the whole term like some obscure, intangible menace. I have been troubled, have lost confidence in myself without knowing why. But last night it all became clear to me: I had wounded the heart that beats for me so tenderly. I knew that I could not work

with any hope of success until I had made my peace with my mother.”

The Baroness put a hand up to her brimming eyes, and the other went out to her son. “This is wonderful, Karl Arthur,” she said. “Tell me more!”

“Across the hall from me rooms another Värmlander, Pontus Friman by name. He is a Pietist, and doesn’t mingle with the other students; nor had I come in contact with him. But last night I felt impelled to go to his room and tell him how it was with me. ‘I have the dearest little mother in the world,’ I told him. ‘I have hurt her feelings and have not asked her forgiveness. What must I do?’ ”

“And he said——?”

“ ‘Go to your mother at once,’ he said. I told him that that was what I wanted to do above everything; but to-morrow I was to write pro exercitio. Besides, my parents would not approve of my skipping exams. Friman wouldn’t listen. ‘Go at once!’ he repeated. ‘Don’t think of anything now but to make your peace with your mother. God will help you.’ ”

“And you went?”

“Yes, Mother, I went to cast myself at your feet. But I was no sooner seated in the cart than it struck me that I had been inexcusably asinine. I felt strongly tempted to turn back, for I knew, of course, that even if I stayed at Upsala a few days more, your love would pardon all. Well, anyhow, I drove on. And God did help me, for I found you here. I don’t know how you happen to be here, but it must have been He Who sent you.”

Tears poured down the cheeks of both mother and son. For their sake had not a miracle been wrought? They felt

that a kind Providence watched over them, and realized as never before how strong was the love that united them.

For an hour they sat together at the inn, whereupon the Baroness sent Karl Arthur back to Upsala, bidding him greet dear Malla Silverstolpe for her, and say that his mother was not coming to see her this time.

The Baroness did not care to go on to Upsala. The object of the journey had been accomplished. She could go home with her mind at ease, knowing that Karl Arthur would come through the ordeal with flying colours.

* * *

All Karlstad knew that the Baroness was religious. She went to church every Sunday as regularly as the pastor himself, and on weekdays she held a little devotional service, both morning and evening, with all her household. She had her poor, whom she remembered with gifts not only at Christmas but the whole year round. She provided midday meals for a number of needy schoolboys, and always gave a big coffee party to the old women of the poorhouse on Beata Day.

But no one in Karlstad, least of all the Baroness, had any idea it was displeasing to our Lord that she and the Provost, the Alderman, and the eldest of the cousins Stake indulged in a quiet game of boston after dinner on a Sunday. And little did they dream it was sinful of the young ladies and gentlemen who dropped in at the Colonel's on Sunday evenings to take a bit of a whirl in the grand salon. Neither the Baroness nor anyone else in Karlstad had ever heard of

its being a mortal sin to serve a glass of good wine at a feast, or to strike up a table song—often composed by the hostess herself—before draining the glass. Nor were they aware that our Lord would not countenance novel-reading and play-going. The Baroness liked to get up amateur theatricals and appear in them herself. It would have been a veritable sacrifice for her to abandon that pleasure, for she was a born actress. Karlstaders were wont to say that if Fru Torsslow were but half as good an actress as Beata Ekenstedt, it was no wonder the Stockholmers raved so about her.

Karl Arthur had stayed on at Upsala a whole month after having happily passed the bothersome Latin examination. Meantime, he had been much in the company of Pontus Friman. Friman was a strict and zealous adherent of the pietistic cult, and Karl Arthur evidently had imbibed some of his ideas. It was not a case of sudden conversion or spiritual awakening, but it had been enough to make Karl Arthur feel uneasy because of the worldly pleasures and diversions which prevailed in the home.

One can understand that, just then, there was an especially intimate and tender accord between mother and son, so that Karl Arthur talked to his mother quite freely of the things he found objectionable, while she met his wishes in every way possible. Since it grieved him to have her play at cards, she pleaded headache the next Sunday afternoon, and let the Colonel take her place at the card table. Of course, she could not think of depriving the Provost and the Alderman of their usual game.

As Karl Arthur disapproved of dancing, she gave up that pleasure also. To the young folk who came to the house that evening she said that she was getting on in years (she was fifty) and did not care to dance any more. But seeing how disappointed they all looked, she sat down at the piano and played dance music for them until midnight.

Karl Arthur gave her certain books he wished her to read. She accepted them with thanks, and found them rather edifying and constructive. But how could the Baroness be content to read only these solemn, pietistical works? She was a woman of culture and au courant with the world's literature. And one day, when Karl Arthur came upon her unexpectedly, he noticed that under the sacred book she sat reading lay a copy of Byron's Don Juan. He turned away without a word, and she thought it dear of him not to chide her. The next day she put all her secular books into a large packing case and had them removed to the attic.

The Baroness, indeed, tried to be as obliging as she knew how. She was wise as well as gifted, and understood that all this was only a passing zeal with Karl Arthur; that the less he was opposed the sooner he would get over it.

Fortunately, it was summertime and the leading families were out of town, so that there were no social festivities going on. People went in for such simple pastimes as tramping in the woods, rowing on the river, berry-picking, and running-games.

However, toward the end of August, Eve Ekenstedt and her lieutenant were to celebrate their nuptials. Then the Baroness was quite concerned as to how the event would pass off. She had to give them a grand wedding; otherwise

the Karlstaders would again be saying that she had no heart for her daughters.

Happily, her complaisance had a soothing effect upon Karl Arthur. He raised no objections to the proposed twelve-course dinner, or the garnished wedding cake, or the confections; he did not even protest against the wine and other potables ordered from Göteborg. Nor had he anything to say against a wedding at the cathedral and hanging garlands along the streets where the bridal procession was to pass, nor did he mind the magic lanterns, the tar casks, and the fireworks along the river bank. To tell the truth, he took a hand in the preparations; he laboured in the sweat of his brow at binding wreaths and nailing up flags, like any common mortal.

There was one thing, though, on which he stood firm. There must be no dancing at the wedding. This the Baroness promised, pleased to let him have his way in that, since he had been so decent about everything else.

The Colonel and the girls protested a bit; they wondered what they could do with all the beaux and belles, especially the young officers, if they were not allowed to dance all night. The Baroness assured them it would be a jolly evening anyhow. The young people would go out into the garden and listen to the regimental band, watch the rockets rise to heaven, and see the reflection of the pretty coloured lanterns in the waters of the river. What better entertainment could one wish for? Surely, this was a more dignified and fitting way to celebrate a marriage than to hop round on a dance floor! The Colonel and the girls gave in, as always, and the harmony of house remained undisturbed.

On the day of the wedding the arrangements were perfect. The weather was propitious, the ceremony at the church impressive, and the numerous speeches and toasts at the wedding dinner went well. The Baroness had composed a charming marriage song, which was sung at the table, and the Värmland Regimental Band, stationed in the butler's pantry, struck up a march as each course was served. The guests, finding themselves generously regaled, were in festive mood.

But when they had risen from the table and had had their coffee, they were seized with an irresistible desire to dance.

The dinner had started at four o'clock and, well served as it had been by a special staff of butlers and waiters, it was over by seven. It seemed strange that the twelve courses, with the many toasts and fanfares and table songs, should have consumed but three hours! The Baroness had hoped the guests would remain seated at table till eight o'clock, and time to repair to the garden. Of course, there could be no talk of breaking up until midnight, and the guests grew restless as they thought of the long, dull hours before them.

"If only we might dance!" they sighed inwardly. (The Baroness had been thoughtful enough to let them know beforehand that there would be no dancing.) "How shall we amuse ourselves?" they wondered. "It will be dreadfully tiresome to sit and grind out small talk hour after hour."

The young girls looked down at their sheer, light frocks and their white satin slippers. These were meant for dancing. Dressed like that, how could they think of anything else?

The young lieutenants of the Värmland Regiment were in great demand as dancing partners. During the winter season they had to attend so many balls they grew almost weary of dancing; and sometimes it was hard work to get them on to the floor. But all summer they had not been to a big dinner party; they were now thoroughly rested, and ready to dance all night and all day.

Rarely had they seen so many pretty girls as were gathered at this wedding. What kind of party was it, anyway? Fancy! inviting a lot of beaux and belles to the house and not allowing them to dance!

It was not only the young people who felt unhappy; their elders, too, thought it a pity the poor young things could not move about a bit so that they would have something to look at. Here were the best musicians in Värmland, and here, too, was the best ballroom; then, why in the world should one not take a little fling?

That Beata Ekenstedt, with all her amiability, had always been rather selfish, they thought. Because she herself was too old to dance, her young guests must sit about and adorn the walls.

The Baroness saw, heard, felt, and understood that her guests were displeased. Good hostess that she was, and accustomed to seeing everyone happy and gay at her parties, this situation was unspeakably trying. She knew that, next day and for many days thereafter, people would be talking about the Ekenstedt wedding and voting it the most tiresome affair they had ever attended.

To the older people, she made herself as agreeable as possible; she related her best anecdotes, came out with her

wittiest sallies—but all in vain. They were in no mood to listen to her. The biggest old bore of a Fru at the wedding sat thinking to herself, if ever she were lucky enough to marry off a daughter of hers, she'd let the young folks dance, and the old folk, too.

To the younger ones she proposed running-games on the lawn. They simply stared at her. Running-games, forsooth, at a wedding! Had she been other than she was, they would have laughed in her face.

When the fireworks were to be touched off, the gentlemen offered an arm to the ladies for a stroll along the river bank. The young couples just dragged themselves on, hardly raising their eyes enough to follow the soaring rockets. They would accept no substitute for the pleasure they craved.

The harvest moon came rolling up, big and round and red, as if to heighten the brilliant spectacle. A wag remarked that it had swelled up with astonishment at seeing so many handsome young officers and lovely young damsels stand gazing into the river as if contemplating suicide.

Half Karlstad had gathered outside the garden wall to watch the “grand doings”; but seeing the young folk wander about, listless and indifferent, they all said it was the worst wedding they had ever beheld.

The regimental band did its utmost to lighten the gloom; but as the hostess had forbidden the playing of dance music, lest she find it impossible to hold the youths in leash, there were not many numbers on the programme. The same pieces had to be repeated again and again. It cannot be truthfully said that the hours dragged. Time stood still. The

minute hand on all the clocks moved as slowly as the hour hand.

Out on the river, just beyond the Ekenstedt house, lay a couple of big barges, on one of which sat a music-loving sailor rasping out a peasant polka on a squeaky home-made fiddle.

And now all the poor souls who had suffered torment in the Ekenstedt garden brightened. This, at any rate, was dance music! They quickly stole out through the garden gate and, in a moment, were seen whirling round in a country polka on the tarry bottom of a river barge.

The Baroness soon noted the flight and the dancing. It would never do to let the best girls in Karlstad dance on a dirty freight boat. She immediately sent word to her young guests to come back to the house. Colonel's lady though she was, even the youngest subaltern made no move to obey orders.

Then she gave it up as a lost game. She had done all that could be asked to please Karl Arthur; now she would have to save the reputation of the Ekenstedt house. She ordered the band to repair to the grand ballroom and play a contra-dance.

Shortly afterward, the dance-hungry youths came bounding up the stairs. Ah, now there was dancing! It was a ball such as rarely was seen in Karlstad. All who had been waiting and longing for this moment tried to make up for time lost. They glided and whirled, pirouetted and kicked. No one felt tired or indisposed. The plainest and least interesting girl there did not lack a partner.

Nor did the older people merely sit looking on. The joke of it was that the Baroness herself, who had given up dancing and card-playing and had relegated all her worldly books to the attic—even she was on the floor, gliding forward with ease and abandon and looking as young, aye, younger, than the daughter who had stood a bride that day.

The Karlstaders were glad to have back their merry, their charming, their adorable Baroness. The delight was extreme. The night had become enchantingly lovely. In fine, all was as it should be.

But the crowning proof of how contagious was the joy that swept through the rooms was that Karl Arthur himself caught it. All at once it struck him that there was nothing evil or sinful in moving about in time to the music with other young, light-hearted folk. It appeared only natural to him now that youth and health and happiness should take this form of expression. Had he felt as before, that to dance was a sin, he would not have danced. But to-night it all seemed such childish, such harmless amusement.

Just as Karl Arthur was doing his neatest steps in a reel, he happened to glance toward the open salon door.

There appeared a pale face, framed with black hair and black whiskers. And the large mild eyes stared at him in pained amazement.

He stopped in the middle of the dance, thinking, at first, it was an apparition. Then, in a moment, he recognized his friend Pontus Friman, who had promised to pay him a call when passing through Karlstad on his way home.

Karl Arthur instantly quit the dance and hastened to greet the unexpected guest, who without a word led him

down the stairs and out of the house.