

MARGIT SANDEMO

44

A man and a woman are shown in a romantic embrace, kissing. The man is on the left, wearing a dark red shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored denim shirt. They are in a field with trees in the background, and the sun is setting, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall mood is romantic and intimate.

The
LEGEND
of the

ICE PEOPLE

AN EVIL DAY

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Acknowledgement

The legend of the Ice People is dedicated with love and gratitude to the memory of my dear late husband Asbjorn Sandemo, who made my life a fairy tale.

Margit Sandemo

The Ice People - Reviews

‘Margit Sandemo is, simply, quite wonderful.’

- The Guardian

‘Full of convincing characters, well established in time and place, and enlightening ... will get your eyes popping, and quite possibly groins twitching ... these are graphic novels without pictures ... I want to know what happens next.’

- The Times

‘A mixture of myth and legend interwoven with historical events, this is imaginative creation that involves the reader from the first page to the last.’

- Historical Novels Review

‘Loved by the masses, the prolific Margit Sandemo has written over 172 novels to date and is Scandinavia's most widely read author...’

- Scanorama magazine

The Legend of the Ice People

The legend of the Ice People begins many centuries ago with Tengel the Evil. He was ruthless and greedy, and there was only one way to get everything that he wanted: he had to make a pact with the devil. He travelled far into the wilderness and summoned the devil with a magic potion that he had brewed in a pot. Tengel the Evil gained unlimited wealth and power but in exchange, he cursed his own family. One of his descendants in every generation would serve the Devil with evil deeds. When it was done, Tengel buried the pot. If anyone found it, the curse would be broken.

So the curse was passed down through Tengel's descendants, the Ice People. One person in every generation was born with yellow cat's eyes, a sign of the curse, and magical powers which they used to serve the Devil. One day the most powerful of all the cursed Ice People would be born.

This is what the legend says. Nobody knows whether it is true, but in the 16th century, a cursed child of the Ice People was born. He tried to turn evil into good, which is why they called him Tengel the Good. This legend is about his family. Actually, it is mostly about the women in his family – the women who held the fate of the Ice People in their hands.

Chapter 1

Random gusts of wind blew across the mountain, emphasizing the sense of loneliness the group felt as they stood on the steep mountainside. Little Gabriel, whose job it was to record everything he saw, stood looking at his twelve friends. How on earth were they going to manage this? Were they strong enough?

Marco, the magnificent prince of the black halls, looked up, narrow-eyed and thoughtful, at the unpleasant vision above them. It always felt safe having Marco with you. He knew so much, could accomplish so many things, and – most important of all – he was incredibly powerful!

Nataniel, the gentle one. He also had the blood of the black angels flowing in his veins, though not quite to the same extent that Marco did. Nataniel was gentler; he had capabilities they still did not fully understand. Tova had always been a rebel, but in the course of this journey she had grown more gentle and feminine. Gabriel knew perfectly well why. It was thanks to Ian Morahan. They were in love with each other, Gabriel thought childishly. You could see it a mile off.

And Ian ... an outsider, the only one of the group who wasn't a member of the Ice People. But he had managed damn well.

Oh no, it seems I've started swearing, Gabriel thought in alarm. Father wouldn't approve at all.

His gaze shifted to Rune. The mandrake – neither human nor plant. Or perhaps he was both. Gabriel liked Rune, and it was good having him along with them.

And then there was Halkatla. What a wild cat she was! But she was also sweet, very sweet.

They also had Tula with them, because she refused to sit and wait in the Demon's Mountain while the others took part in a whole lot of exciting things. It was easy for Tula not to be afraid. She was no longer alive: she was one of the ancestral spirits of the Ice People. But Gabriel himself was alive, and he was terribly afraid!

Sol was there as well – the witch with the beautiful eyes and roguish laugh. There was really no reason to be afraid so long as she was present.

Ulvhedin: Gabriel grew warm inside. His own guardian, the gigantic, incredibly strong Ulvhedin. Even though he was frightening to look at, he instilled an incredible sense of safety.

Then there was the kind, blue-eyed Linde-Lou, Nataniel's guardian. You would never believe that such a naive, innocent and utterly friendly individual could accomplish anything, but Linde-Lou could. He had proved that many times in the course of this grotesque journey, verging between reality and nightmare.

And then there was Tengel the Good, the core of the Ice People. The one everyone turned to if they were in trouble. The one who was the connecting link between the past and the present.

And the last one to join them, the one whom Tengel the Good had summoned: Inu, the little Taran-gai, whose fur garments almost concealed him so that the only visible parts of him were his blinking peppercorn eyes.

That was everyone. Many of them had such strong, supernatural powers that they ought to be able to handle this latest obstacle that Tengel the Evil had conjured. They had handled so many others, most recently the challenge of Ulvar and Kolgrim, whom they had managed to win over to their side, whereupon Tula had sent her four demons to conceal them from Tengel the Evil's searching gaze.

It was strange, Gabriel thought. Everything was crystal clear in his mind now, even though he ought to have been tired. He registered everything with sharpness and clarity. He was even able to make out what the others were thinking and feeling.

That's because I am to write the whole thing down, he thought, which was true. And I'll start writing the moment I get the opportunity. Scribble down a bunch of indecipherable hieroglyphics in my notebook, which is, incidentally, my third book of this trip. There's always so much happening!

"We're so close to the goal – and yet so far away," Nataniel sighed.

They were standing at the foot of the slopes of the Udgård Mountains. Up there was the entrance to the Valley of the Ice People. But that was also where its guards were. What they saw there were the long-deceased shamans, Kat and Kat-ghil, each squatting down by their own sacrificial bonfire on their own mountaintop.

Despite the strong wind, the smoke rose unnaturally and ominously straight up into the dark-grey sky.

They knew that both Kat and Kat-ghil dealt with dangerous spirits – perhaps Kat-ghil especially. They also had a suspicion that the mountain behind them might be hiding even more of Tengel the Evil's helpers.

"There won't be a moon tonight," Marco observed.

Someone mumbled in agreement. The cloud cover was too dense.

Tengel the Good said slowly, "I'm not certain whether you are entirely aware of what will transpire once you enter the valley?"

"*If* we enter," said Tova.

"Now, now, we don't want any pessimism now. That's the last thing we need."

“I’m sorry, what was it you were about to say?”

“I don’t think it’s ever been mentioned, but once you stricken ones enter the valley you will be on your own. None of us can accompany you after that.”

That piece of information rendered them all speechless. Gabriel got goosebumps.

Tengel the Good explained further: “After Shira reached the source of the water of life, Tengel the Evil tightened his team of guards to an alarming degree. Only those who are living can enter the valley now. He’s mortally afraid of spirits entering it. He is afraid of Shira, of course. There is nothing he can do about Tarjei, as he was placed there so long ago and is so well protected now that the evil can’t harm him. Tarjei has watched the valley for us, as you know. Other than that, there is no one there.”

They couldn’t deny that they felt somewhat small and pale now. They had put far too much trust in their helpers. Gabriel gulped.

“Shira can’t enter either,” continued Tengel the Good. “Not until you have prepared the way for her.”

“So we can’t summon you at all?” Nataniel asked.

“You can, but our magical powers have no effect there. Our evil ancestor focused all his energy on eliminating them.”

“Now wait a minute,” Tula interjected. “My four demons were able to enter and save Heike and myself!”

“That’s right,” said Tengel the Good, looking at her gravely. “And do you realize what they risked for you? They could have been thrown down into the Great Abyss! But the four of them together were able to overpower him, so it all turned out well. But he won’t allow himself to be overpowered again, I can guarantee you that. And now he is for *real!*”

Tula nodded and remained silent.

Once more they looked up towards the sacrificial bonfires. The smoke hovered threateningly above the two peaks. Gabriel almost had a sense of it being Doomsday. He shuddered.

Tengel the Good turned to the latest arrival. "Shouldn't we go up now, Inu?"

"I wouldn't recommend it, honorable Master," answered the little Taran-gai. "At night their spirits are lively and their powers greater."

"But we have the night demons," Nataniel reminded him.

Inu turned his ball-shaped face to him and said, "True, venerable Master. But it is questionable who would emerge victorious from such a battle."

"Then we'll camp here for the night," Marco concluded.

Disheartened, they looked around. It wasn't the most inviting place in the world. Sloping terrain, patches of snow all around. Gabriel thought of his bed at home, and his dog snuggling up close to him ...

Tova thought longingly of a warm and comfortable hotel room.

"Rather this than go up there now," said Nataniel.

The others agreed with him.

"Do you have all four bottles with you?" Sol asked.

"Yes," said Nataniel. "I have mine, Tova has hers, and Marco has his own and Ellen's."

None of them could help noticing the pained look that crossed his face when he mentioned her name.

"It's not good that you have two bottles, Marco," said Tengel the Good.

He looked at the two living individuals who were left, for they were the only ones who could transport Shira's water bottles into the valley.

"Gabriel cannot carry any," said Tengel the Good. "He already has far too much responsibility. You are to record everything

that has happened here, if and when the golden age of peace ever comes, Gabriel. And you, who must therefore be spared from falling into the clutches of the enemy, have already been exposed on two occasions.”

Ulvhedin nodded. “It seems as though they are focusing on the weakest members. I haven’t been able to stop the attacks. They always happen unexpectedly.”

Which left only one living member of the group: Ian Morahan.

“But he hasn’t been initiated,” said Sol.

“No,” said Tengel the Good, “He hasn’t been initiated, nor has he received the blessing and protection of all the forces at the Demon’s Mountain.”

“He hasn’t drunk from the brew that the others were given,” said Ulvhedin. “We can’t expose him to the dangers that lie ahead.”

“What’s more important, he’s an outsider,” said Nataniel.

“No,” said Marco with a small smile. “Ian is no outsider. My friend the black angel healed his body. They can’t do that sort of thing to an ordinary man. Ian is one of us.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sol.

“He is going to be the father of a child of the Ice People.”

Tova’s heart was pounding. She exchanged glances with Ian and it warmed her heart to see the affectionate and tender look he gave her.

“But Ian is unable to protect himself,” she objected with concern.

“He has a guardian, and that’s me,” Tengel the Good assured her.

“Yes, and we gave his aura strength so that it would be like a protective shield around him,” said Nataniel.

“But if we enter the valley, Tengel the Good won’t be with him,” Tova pointed out.

Yet again they heard the sound of flapping leathery wings. Tula's four demons had returned. Gabriel hurriedly took notes.

"How did it go?" she asked, and conferred with them briefly. One of the demons took off again and vanished.

Tula turned back to the group. "Ulvar and Kolgrim have been dropped off in a place where they can't be found. They are well."

Gabriel had no doubts about that. Tula always treated her guests very well.

"But," she said proudly, "I have also managed to achieve something else. My friend Astarot will now fly home and fetch the rest of the brew the others were given. We saved a little in case of an emergency, which I think you can safely call this. He'll be back soon."

Ian Morahan felt his heart pounding with fear. He had long ago come to terms with the fact that he was now in a world that was completely out of the ordinary, with a family the like of which wasn't to be found anywhere on this planet. But now they wanted him to drink a magical potion! Did he really dare? Wouldn't that be the same as saying good-bye to the real world forever? He, who had now been given new life!

But he had only them to thank for the fact that he was still alive today, that he had survived the death sentence he had been facing before meeting them. So he felt an obligation to help them.

Ian Morahan sensed that they were all looking at him. "I'm ready," he said, with a voice he hoped sounded calm and indifferent. Which he wasn't in the least, as Gabriel was able to sense with his new refined ability to read minds.

They smiled and thanked Ian warmly, and at that moment he would have been willing to do anything for them.

Astarot returned and Tula poured the concoction into a small

bowl. First Ian had to take an oath that he would always obey the orders he was given by his superiors. Whereupon Tula handed him the bowl.

It was bitingly cold all around them. The wind pulled and tugged at them and the silence across the plains contributed a solemn kind of mood to the ceremony. Everyone stood devoutly around Ian and watched as the first outsider was allowed to take part in one of the rituals of the Ice People.

The brew was perhaps a little bitter tasting, but it was first and foremost flavoured with various herbs. Ian liked the taste of it; he felt it running down through his throat, and though it might have been his imagination, he felt that it gave him a sense of calm and strength.

When he had consumed the lot he returned the bowl to Tula with the same solemnity that had reigned throughout.

In proper order, they placed their hands on his shoulders and welcomed him to the battle group of the chosen ones. “The A-team,” as Gabriel called them. Inu could barely reach him and Tova was so moved that she wasn’t entirely sure where Ian was standing. And Marco’s eyes glowed so warmly at Ian that he almost felt as though he could have gone to his death for the prince of the black halls.

Then they all waited in suspense. Marco took out a small package that was wrapped in thick material and fastened securely with a heavy cord. Ian took it and it was as though a shock went through him. It ran up his arms and spread through his entire body. His fingers sensed the shape of a small amphora-like bottle in the package, which could almost be concealed in his hand.

Ian Morahan would never forget that moment. It was perhaps the most gripping event of the entire strange journey to the Valley of the Ice People.

Everyone gave a great sigh of relief.

“That was certainly very beautiful,” said Sol. “But what do we do now? How do we get past those two monsters up there? I know you’re going to set up camp here, but what can the rest of us do in the meantime?”

Little Inu bowed, his hands stuck deep in his fur-covered sleeves. “Most honorable lady spirit with the beautiful eyes, it is not advisable that you do anything. The highly esteemed Targenor is busy gathering all the troops from the Demon’s Mountain. They are close by, and he and I have reached the conclusion that Kat and Kat-ghil and their spirits are the business of us, the Taran-gai. So all our shamans will together be attacking our two evil ancestors.”

“Very well,” murmured Tengel the Good.

“But not now,” said Inu. “At daybreak, when their spirits fade and pale, we will make an attempt. But they are very strong.”

“And you are very courageous,” smiled Marco, moved. “Would you like any of us to join you?”

Inu’s eyes ran across the group and paused at young Gabriel.

“This attack will be a great feat on the part of us shamans. We would appreciate having the narrator with us so that he can record our achievement for future generations.”

Tengel the Good nodded solemnly. “The battle at dawn must not be forgotten. Gabriel will join us and you, Ulvhedin, will watch over the boy’s life, won't you?”

“I will,” promised Ulvhedin, just as solemnly.

Gabriel sighed audibly. He noticed that Tova and Nataniel were observing him with concern, but they had no objections to the proposal.

I have a job to do, he thought bravely. I must try to register every tiny detail so that the memory of the courageous little Taran-gai will go down in history.

He sat down by himself and selected a suitable pen. For a moment he sat and pondered how he was going to formulate what he intended to say. In English you would typically start out by saying “To Whom It May Concern”, but he couldn’t think of an appropriate translation for those words. Finally he came up with, “To Whomsoever Finds These Books.”

He knew perfectly well that they might not return alive from the task before them. It was a heartrending thought, so tragic that he began to sniff a little. If anyone in the distant future were to come out to the mountains and find his dead body they would also discover the diaries where they could read the whole story. The story of how the spirits of the Ice People and the Taran-gai helped save the world from Tengel the Evil. It would be all right for people to know about it by then. Afterwards. Yes, because if humans managed to climb up there it would mean that humanity *had* been saved. For the sake of the rest of the world Gabriel and his brave friends had di- ... suffered death. That was how to say it.

He wiped his nose.

“We weren’t many,” he wrote. “There was Marco, of the black angels, and Nataniel who was also partly descended from them, and Tova who was one of the stricken and Ian, who was Irish, and me. My name is Gabriel Gard of the Ice People and I am twelve years old. I have been selected to write this chronicle, which may suddenly stop because I have been killed ...”

No, he was writing too much about himself now, that wouldn’t do.

He wrote all of this neatly on the front page of the book. He would have liked to mention many more names but there wasn’t enough room. Rune. And Halkatla. But he would talk about them in the books, so it would probably be all right.

The others called to him, and he got to his feet, staggering.

They settled down for the night. It wasn't easy finding a comfortable place to sleep on the cold slope, but they had brought thin waterproof capes with them and warm clothes to wrap themselves in.

Gabriel lay awake listening to the sounds of the night. Only he, Tova, Ian and Marco had settled down to sleep: the others were keeping watch. He saw Ulvhedin's brooding figure sitting just across from him, together with Tengel the Good and Sol. The others sat further off, talking quietly. Gabriel could discern Rune's and Halkatla's voices among them.

He had a suspicion that Marco wasn't sleeping, that he didn't need to rest, but that he wanted to demonstrate that he was of equal status as the mortals by lying down to sleep.

The wind howled mournfully over the hills around them. At one point, Gabriel heard a scream that went right through him and he looked up in alarm, as did Marco.

The scream came from one of the mountaintops. It was prolonged and frightening and it didn't belong to the animal world. Nor did it belong to the human world. It came from an "ill-starred" spirit: that was the best way Gabriel in his sleepy state could put it.

It was all so unreal. Kat and Kat-ghil were spirits, and there were many other spirits surrounding them.

This fact made Gabriel giggle excitedly. But he stifled his giggling under his blanket so as not to provoke the spirits unnecessarily.

Had he managed to write everything down now? His fear of not performing his duty properly settled at the very pit of his stomach. But it wasn't easy figuring out what was missing. He was doing his very best, he knew, and anyway it was much too dark now to continue writing. In order to help his recollection along for the following day he wrote: "Howl in the night." But

he wasn't sure whether he had written the words on the paper or on the blanket.

Then he must have slept. It was probably the security of knowing that everyone was there that allowed him to do so. He thought he heard a distant, wild-sounding laughter coming from the mountaintops, but that laughter could just as well have been something he dreamt.

Once during the night he half-woke, and not knowing whether he was awake or still dreaming he thought he noticed bustling and stirring about him, there were so many there. He saw flashes of alarmed faces running past him and heard whispering voices giving each other orders.

He recognized several of the faces. Trond's, for example: wasn't he one of those who were to lead the main force? And Targenor and Dida. And wasn't the place teeming with demons?

Then a terrible scream from the depths could be heard right near him. And in his dream, or whatever it was he was experiencing, it was clear that they were under attack. Because even though Tova still lay sleeping, Marco was no longer lying next to him.

Tula's four demons fluttered past his head, battling someone whose name he didn't know. He heard yelping and deep growling from the throats of predators and understood that the wolves of the black angels were in action. But then suddenly Marco was standing above him and swept his hand down over Gabriel's eyes in a single motion.

"Sleep, Gabriel, sleep," said Marco's comforting voice, and after that Gabriel couldn't remember any more.

Chapter 2

Someone gently shook him awake.

“Venerable boy with the ability to draw symbols,” said Inu in a respectful voice. “Morning is approaching and it will soon be time to leave.”

Gabriel was immediately wide awake. Tova and Nataniel were still asleep and he got up very quietly so as not to wake them. He felt extremely privileged.

A cold morning light covered the slope. He shuddered and knew that his face looked frozen, with an early morning pallor. He was unable to display more enthusiasm. A little hot food and drink would have helped, but they didn't have any.

No, this simply wouldn't do! He couldn't have such spineless thoughts if he was a chosen one!

Marco stood close by him, with an impenetrable look on his face. Rune and Halkatla were busy dragging a couple of dark-clad men over to a grave nearby.

“Then what I dreamt was true!” Gabriel whispered. “Who were they?”

“A couple of Tengel the Evil's living criminals who were dumb enough to take part in a battle between spiritual beings. They were actually the only ones who suffered. Apart from them, it was so evenly fought that our enemies soon retreated. It was just an attempt on their part to frighten us. We weren't too impressed,” said Marco, smiling crookedly.

He went up to the boy and placed his beautiful hands on Gabriel's shoulders.

“You have an unpleasant task before you,” he said with warmth in his voice. “But Ulvhedin is watching over you, and all

of Taran-gai's shamans have promised to keep an eye on you, so nothing will happen to you that might upset your mother Karine or your father. Write down as much as you can, but just in a few words that you can rework later on. It's important that you include everything, especially for the sake of the losing party."

Gabriel had been so absorbed with the men being dragged away that he hadn't noticed what was behind him. He turned around and caught sight of a big group of short, black-clad shamans who were ready to be off. Alongside them stood Sarmik the Wolf, their leader. And with him his two sons, Orin and Vassar.

And Mar was there too with his mighty bow. The sight of him reassured Gabriel.

From what he had gathered, one of the shamans was Tun-sij, but he couldn't figure out which one she was because, just as they had been at the Demon's Mountain, they were all dressed alike. Their faces were concealed behind a grid of thick black cords that hung down from their wide, hat-like headdresses.

He was so moved he felt his throat constricting. There was something so exceptionally magnificent and heartrending about this chance to observe a tribe of people who had become extinct long ago and whom no one knew anything about now. And that he was allowed to hand down his knowledge about them to future generations.

They all bowed to Gabriel and he returned their greeting in the same way.

He didn't find their politeness silly: in fact, he liked it. Western civilizations could actually learn something from it. It created respect and thoughtfulness among people. It was a good custom, Gabriel thought.

It was still nighttime when the big group started making its

way up the mountain. The foggy veil of daybreak had clothed the slopes and they could no longer see their horrible ancestors waiting up there. But the Taran-gai carried on with renewed energy. They seemed to know where they were going.

Soon, Gabriel's companions on his journey to Norway had disappeared in the fog below them. He wished he had at least had Nataniel and Marco with him, but Ulvhedin's presence gave him some sense of safety. The great giant was like a tower compared to the little Taran-gai, many of whom were smaller than Gabriel.

They walked in silence. The climb was so strenuous that Gabriel didn't have the energy to talk.

Shocked, he realized all at once that he was the only living person among them. It was a walk among spirits!

But that wasn't what it felt like. They were all friends. It was a good feeling.

One of the shamans sidled up to him. "Are you afraid, Gabriel?"

He recognized Tun-sij's voice. "No, not very."

"You're going to record all this, aren't you?"

"Yes," Gabriel answered. "I've already written a lot down in my notebook. And I have more notebooks with me."

"That's good. You know that we are an extinct people. I want people to know about us, so that we don't disappear into thin air and lose our place in history. Let this, our last battle, be remembered by the people of the future world!"

Gabriel was moved by her words. "I will," he said with a grainy voice. "But no more harm can come to you, can it? Since you're all dead, I mean?"

"My little friend," said Tun-sij sadly. "As noble people of the Ice People we have been very privileged, we shamans of Taran-gai. We have escaped having to go to Shama's black gardens. But the