

A man and a woman in historical attire are shown in profile, facing each other in a lush green field. The man is on the left, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt with a ruffled collar. The woman is on the right, wearing a grey floral dress and a pearl necklace. They appear to be holding hands or a small object together. In the background, there are rolling green hills and a large, snow-capped mountain range under a blue sky. The overall scene is romantic and historical.

MARGIT SANDEMO

41

The
LEGEND
of the

ICE PEOPLE

DEMON'S MOUNTAIN



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The Demon's Mountain

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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

The light was really extraordinary on that spring evening, 30 April 1960.

Walpurgis Night, the night of the witches!

In Norway, that event is now a thing of the past. But in Sweden and Germany and several other Northern European countries, the old rituals are still kept. This is the evening on which the Swedes light bonfires, in the same way that the Norwegians do on Midsummer's Eve. Not many modern Swedes recall that these fires were traditionally lit to keep witches away. Because Walpurgis Night was a dangerous night.

On that night in 1960, the area around Linden Avenue was unbelievably serene. The sky was a soft blue, though in the west it flamed from blood-red to pale yellow.

So calm, so very calm ...

A signal could be heard far away in the distance.

A crisp sound, as from a brass pipe. Only two tones, the second one a whole tone higher than the first, dying out slowly. The signal was repeated three times.

Benedikte of the Ice People was just about to go to bed for the night. She was getting on for ninety, though she could have passed for seventy.

She was sitting on the edge of her bed, and had just placed her toe against her other heel to push off her shoe, when she vaguely noticed the signals. She was curious and walked over to the window.

She couldn't see very far because of the new houses that had been built on the plain in the old parish of Gråstensholm, but she saw the red sky of sunset, and she quivered with a sense of

doom.

All of a sudden, she knew that she wasn't alone in the room. She turned around.

There stood Heike, her guardian spirit among her ancestors. "Dress up warmly, Benedikte! We'll be travelling far tonight!" She was startled. Was it now that ...?

The tall Heike smiled. "No, your time isn't up yet. Gand has summoned all of us."

She merely nodded with the dignity that was typical of her. "I'll be ready. Will everyone in the house be coming?"

"All those who were born members of the Ice People will be coming. All the living and many, many others. As Dida put it: 'Tonight, the line between the living and the dead will be erased.'"

"And Sander?" Benedikte asked quietly.

Heike gave her a regretful look. "No, not Sander. He wasn't of our blood."

"I understand. Perhaps it's just as well. After all, I'm so old. I suppose I'm slightly vain," she said with a smile.

"Yes. Come out when you're ready."

When he had left the room, Benedikte searched feverishly in her wardrobe. She wanted to be nicely and warmly dressed this evening. Could she wear this pearl-grey dress? Yes, she certainly could.

When she was ready, dressed in her best cloak and with her straight hair carefully and neatly brushed, she went into the hall.

André and Mali had been sitting in the living room. It was that time of the evening when they couldn't bring themselves to get up and go to bed but just sat there, encouraging each other: "Well, we'd better be off to bed, don't you think?" without moving from the spot. Not a bad state of mind to be in.

Then, all of a sudden, somebody was standing on their Persian carpet.

They started. André regarded the dark, handsome man, who came from a century when men really dressed like men, to their very best advantage.

“Dominic?” he asked in wonder.

The stranger bowed with a jolly smile. “You’re quite right. I’m to be Mali’s helper in the time to come, and I’ve come to fetch both of you to a meeting of all the sons and daughters of the Ice People.”

“We’re ready. But don’t I have a special protector?” André asked.

“Because you’ll be an important figure, you’ll have a strong protector. That’s what Gand told me. But he didn’t say who it is. My task was just to fetch the two of you.”

André hesitated. “Perhaps it would be best for my old mother to stay at home.”

Said he, who was getting on for seventy.

Dominic smiled. “I think Benedikte would be very hurt if she were left behind. Besides, we need her. Her forte is that she’s able to read the history of an object merely by holding it in her hand.”

Mali broke in: “She certainly hasn’t made very much use of that trait.”

Dominic turned his beautiful eyes on her. There was a yellow glint in them. “Benedikte decided to live an ordinary life. But different, more difficult times, are drawing near.”

“So we gather,” replied Mali. “Our hour of destiny has come, hasn’t it?”

“Yes, we have to take up the battle now.”

André and Mali looked at one another.

“We’re joining you,” was their calm answer.

Benedikte was waiting in the hall with Heike, whom everybody greeted graciously.

“We have strong helpers,” said André to his mother. “However, there’s something that doesn’t quite make sense to me. Why has Nataniel, who’s the most exposed of us all, only been given Linde-Lou as his protector?”

Heike turned to him. “Dear André, has it never occurred to you who Linde-Lou is?”

“No, he ...”

“He belongs to the black angels! Above all, he’s Lucifer’s *grandson!*”

André stopped. “Yes, of course! Heaven help anyone who tries to hurt Nataniel!”

“Exactly!” Heike smiled.

They went out onto the yard in the still evening. Nobody said anything as André locked the door after them, leaving Linden Avenue deserted. Because now they were the only three who lived there, and Mali was the youngest of them. She was sixty-six.

One day, they hoped that Tova would take over the place. But they doubted that she would ever get married.

Vetle had many grandchildren. Hopefully, one of them or their children would add to the clan at old Linden Avenue.

If the Ice People survived ...

It was now or never.

The avenue was enveloped in a haze, which they all thought was strange because it was a clear day and the stars were beginning to twinkle in the sky. When they entered the avenue they couldn’t see the end of it, because the fog was so dense.

It was cold as well. Benedikte shivered and was glad that, after all, she had put on an old jacket over her fine dress.

“Ugh, I feel the cold on my back,” muttered Mali.

Benedikte knew what she meant. It wasn't just the raw cold ... Thank goodness that Heike and Dominic were with them. You could sense that Mali and André were trying to hide their unease, which was close to anxiety.

Benedikte took a deep breath before she went deeper into the fog.

“VETLE!”

Vetle Volden had heard that voice once before. He had been fourteen at the time and alone in the house. Now he was fifty-eight, and much water had run under the bridge since then.

He could never forget the deep, almost hollow voice that called so uncompromisingly.

He looked up and saw the Wanderer standing there. The Wanderer in the Darkness, whose life was an enigma. He who had been a contemporary of Tengel the Evil.

Vetle's friend and protector, just as he had been Heike's. Now Heike was a protector.

“Yes?” said Vetle. This time, he wasn't frightened.

“The time has come,” said the Wanderer. “The Ice People are to be gathered tonight. Your wife has gone to bed and she will sleep soundly. So will your daughter-in-law, Lisbeth, and your sons-in-law, Ole Jørgen and Joakim, in their homes. They're not to know anything about this meeting. But your son Jonathan, and his three children – Finn, Ole and Gro – are to come. They have been summoned.”

“The children are so young! They're only twelve, thirteen and fourteen years old.”

“You weren't much older yourself when you left on a far more dangerous journey. Nothing will happen to your grandchildren; they can't be safer than they will be tonight. And you do want them to be told about this?”

“Of course. What about my other children and grandchildren? Have they also been summoned?”

“Of course.”

“Mari lives so far away.”

The Wanderer smiled his tough smile, which Vetle could only sense within his cowl.

“Mari and her children will find the way. They will be accompanied, just like all the others. I’ve summoned Jonathan and his children myself, because they won’t be given their protectors until later. Let’s be on our way!”

Vetle took a moment to go into the bedroom and kiss his sleeping wife, Hanne, on the forehead. Then he went outside.

They were gathered in the yard of Vetle’s house in the cool spring evening: Jonathan and his three children, Finn, Ole and Gro. For a change, the three children were quiet and a bit serious with excitement.

Then the Wanderer signalled that they were to follow him.

Finn was baffled. “Where on earth does this fog come from? It’s only *here* out on the road in front of our gate.”

The Wanderer said wryly: “Let’s just get going; everything is as it should be.”

They entered the fog with great trepidation, and everything else around them disappeared. The whole world was gone; everything was just a light, white blanket.

“I should have put on my winter clothes,” muttered Gro, who was the only female member of the group. “It’s icy cold.”

“Now, now. Don’t exaggerate,” said Jonathan softly.

I wonder who will be my helper, Finn thought. This will be exciting! Grandfather has a very fine one, and Dad will be given just as great a protector, because he said so when he fetched us, this strange man who’s walking ahead of us. Ugh, I feel a shiver down my spine. It’s as if all the hair on my body is standing on

end.

“The ground is so hard,” said Ole. “It rings when you walk on it!”

Finn said: “I can’t see it at all. I can’t even see my own feet!”

“Ugh, it’s ever so spooky,” said Gro, creeping closer to her father.

“I think it’s fun,” said Finn, but his voice was trembling slightly.

Nataniel was visiting his mother and wasn’t surprised when Linde-Lou suddenly appeared in the doorway, smiling shyly.

“Well,” said Nataniel to his guest, after putting the remains of supper in the fridge. “Has the time come?”

“Yes,” Linde-Lou replied. “I’ve made your father sleep ...”

Nataniel could feel his heart beginning to beat harder and quicker. Now things were beginning in earnest – above all for him, but also for the others.

“Mum ...?”

“She’s in the living room.”

They went through.

Christa wasn’t alone. She was talking with a dark man with slanted eyes, high cheekbones and an intelligent expression. An exceptionally strong personality. You sensed that immediately.

He turned to Nataniel. “I’m Tarjei, your mother’s guardian.”

Nataniel greeted him respectfully. This was his predecessor, the one who had been meant to fight Tengel the Evil, but whose role had been thwarted.

“How long ... will we be away?” Christa asked him cautiously.

“Don’t worry about that,” replied Tarjei. “Ordinary time on earth stops tonight. You’ll be back by tomorrow morning, even if this night may seem to last several days and nights.”

She smiled uneasily in response.

Christa and Linde-Lou, those two who once loved each other with the world's most hopeless love, looked at one another for a few, painful seconds. She was beginning to show signs that she had turned fifty whereas he ... he was just as young and guileless as he had been then, more than thirty years ago.

Nevertheless, Christa couldn't help feeling some ties vibrating between them. Nothing ugly, nothing impure, just an incredible understanding and sincerity. And a sadness that cut right through her soul with searing strength.

"We're coming," she said quietly.

Outside, there was a strange, restrained atmosphere of ... tension? Bafflement? Anxiety? No, not anxiety. Anticipation. The distant signals had died out long ago. This evening, the world was serene.

They couldn't see anything because a heavy fog had settled over the courtyard, and the two mortals assumed that this fog lay over the entire parish.

This wasn't the case.

Linde-Lou and Tarjei led them into the fog, and it made their skin feel icy cold. Without a word they followed the two men, even though they were very puzzled: at the thickness of the fog and the cold, at their steps that sounded hollow on the ground when they ought not to have been audible.

Neither Christa nor Nataniel asked about anything. They trusted their guides.

My son, Christa thought. My dear son, you're the one who must take the lead in this unknown struggle that awaits us.

Gand woke Tova. She had gone to bed early that evening, and was woken by somebody gently stroking her cheek.

It used to be her mother or father that caressed her so tenderly and gently. When she saw that it was Gand she reacted

unexpectedly, because she had no control of her emotions in his presence.

“What the hell are you doing?” she hissed, blushing. “Why are you here, what’s happened?”

Gand smiled, but his eyes had a serious look in them. “We’re gathering now, and you know that this is very important.”

Tova was so eager that she wanted to rush out of bed straightaway and get dressed, but she thought better of it. Her short nightdress wasn’t suitable to be seen in, especially not when men were present, and least of all the idolized Gand.

“You could at least ...” she said hotly, but then stopped herself. She needed to behave with dignity because this was an important occasion. “Will my parents be joining us?”

“Rikard, your father, is a member of the Ice People so he has already been brought here. He and Trond are waiting outside. But your mother is sleeping soundly. I’ve seen to it that she won’t notice anything until you’re back home again. Now I’ll wait outside with the others, so you can get dressed in peace and quiet. Put some warm clothes on: we’ll be away all night and the cold might be a challenge.”

She didn’t dare to ask where they would be going. It wouldn’t have made any difference. Jonathan’s children had tried to ask the Wanderer, but he hadn’t given them an answer.

When Tova was standing on the steps outside, she said: “Ugh, I don’t like this thick fog. It’s nasty. It must have come down very suddenly ...”

She avoided looking in Gand’s direction, because he was so irresistibly charming and what could she offer him in return? After all, she wasn’t even able to answer him sensibly.

It was asking too much, when you also had to conceal your agonizing emotions.

Far up in Trøndelag, Ingrid, the red-haired witch, collected Mari and her five children. Mari was probably the most remote member of the Ice People. She had settled down as a farmer's wife and mother, and she was satisfied with that. Her daily concerns – her children and how they were to make ends meet – were sufficient for her. There was always something to worry about. She didn't often mention that she was related to the Ice People: that was something that she wanted to keep to herself.

She asked Ingrid many times what this was all about, but she never got an exhaustive reply. Only that all the blood relations of the Ice People were to be gathered in order to discuss the struggle against Tengel the Evil.

Mari bit her lip. Her five children were now grown up. Christel was already eighteen and her youngest boy was fourteen. She had relented after Ingrid assured her that nothing bad would happen to any of them. She was the only member of the clan who had had misgivings. Her children, on the other hand, were enthusiastic. Previously, they had listened with delight when Grandpa Vetle had told them about the Ice People, and they were proud to belong to this family.

Christel was probably the only one of the children who was slightly apprehensive. All this was certainly exciting, but she was only the half-sister of the other children. She was Abel Gard's grandchild. She didn't think that all this business of spirits and demons and Tengel the Evil sounded quite right. She wasn't sure what God would think about it all. Besides, she had a boyfriend and was afraid of losing him if she was away for too long. After all, they didn't know what would happen.

The second oldest daughter was seventeen, and probably just as keen on boys as her mother, Mari, had been when she was young.

Mari had once complained that the Ice People lacked

imagination because they had children called Mari and Matti, Mali and Malin in the family. So she had baptised her second daughter Mariana. As if that was more distinctive.

Mariana gazed with admiration at Ingrid, the beautiful witch, and remarked on her wild, curly hair. Almost like Rita Hayworth. She would have loved to copy it. If only she had red curly hair ... Her own was just medium blonde, straight and thin.

Sigh!

Mari looked at her husband, who was sound asleep. His mouth was slightly open and he was snoring lightly. She bent down to stroke his cheek, sincerely afraid that she wouldn't return to him. He was fond of her! This was the simple reason why he was worth all the love in the world!

Mari had always had a slightly twisted view of love.

Her three boys were so excited at what was about to happen that they were hardly able to get dressed. But at last they were all ready to leave, and Ingrid smiled her deadly, slightly devilish smile and invited them to follow her.

They left their sleeping father, the farmer Ole Jørgen, and walked into the thick fog surrounding the medium-sized farm in Trøndelag.

God, what am I doing? thought Mari, and she prayed to the Lord and meant it.

Soon their shoes were clattering with a metallic sound on the invisible earth. The children looked enquiringly and somewhat fearfully at each other. The main road had never sounded like that!

Mari, who had been unsure of herself all her life, turned around to seek support from Ole Jørgen, but she could no longer see the safe farm. She felt that the earth was opening up before her feet. They were enveloped in wet, raw fog, and the beautiful

woman with swaying hips who was leading the way could just as well have been an elf. Mari had to grit her teeth in order not to scream and run away. She had the children to think of, and they didn't seem to want to turn back.

They flocked around her so that she tripped on their heels.

This is death, she thought. We're dead, all of us; perhaps we've been poisoned by carbon monoxide, and now we're on our way to the land of the dead. Oh, poor Ole Jørgen, when he wakes up, all his loved ones will be dead.

At that moment, Ingrid turned towards them and gave them a comforting smile. "Take it easy, we'll soon be out of the fog."

Mari wasn't so sure that she wanted to see what was under them and around them once they reached their destination – wherever that was.

Ellen Skogsrud had recently returned from Western Norway. She hadn't dared to get in touch with Nataniel. All the time, she worried that he would find another girl.

Nataniel went about with the same sense of unease. There were so many men in the world and Ellen was such a charming girl.

She was sitting with her parents on their little balcony, admiring the sunset, when Villemo appeared. She came walking through the open door from the living room.

They got to their feet, shocked. Ellen's mother immediately thought they were being burgled, but why was this beautiful woman dressed in such unusual clothes?

Ellen and her father, Knut, immediately understood that this must be one of the Ice People's ancestors. But who? And why were they, of all people, receiving a visit? Their small family that had lived on the fringe of the clan for so many centuries!

Knut, who had studied all the legends of the ancestors very

carefully, said: "Welcome. Are you Ingrid or Villemo?"

The young woman smiled. "Villemo. I have come to borrow Ellen for a little while."

Knut felt the disappointment like a heavy burden. But at that very moment, another woman appeared. She walked slowly up to them. Now they sensed that they were standing facing someone they should bow to. Suddenly, they found themselves greeting the woman as if she were a queen!

She was certainly a fantastic sight! Tall, dark-haired, dressed completely in black and with a dignity the like of which they had never seen before. And yet ... the strangest thing of all was that, although they could see every single detail clear as day, she was so diffuse. So Knut concluded that she must have lived many centuries ago.

He was deeply moved. "Welcome, Dida," he said, "The woman from mysterious ancient times. I never expected to meet you of all people!"

She smiled, and her voice sounded strangely remote. "It's you that I've been specially chosen to protect. You had such an unhappy childhood under the tyranny of your father, Erling Skogsrud."

Knut's eyes filled with tears. "Me? I have Dida herself as my protector?"

Dida chuckled. "Well, yes," she said teasingly. To tell you the truth, it isn't because you'll be in any particular danger of attack by Tengel the Evil. On the contrary. I don't think he knows much about your existence. No, the reason is rather that I'm one of those who will be most in the line of fire, which is why I've accepted an easy job as a protector. Just like the Wanderer, who is Vetle's helper. Vetle isn't in any particular danger either."

Knut felt a bit embarrassed. "I see. Nevertheless, I'm deeply

grateful.”

Villemo interrupted: “I can tell you that neither Sol nor Tengel the Good have been given anyone to protect. The same goes for Shira and Mar. That’s simply because they won’t have the time!”

Then the three living members of the Ice People understood the seriousness of the struggle that lay ahead.

Knut and Ellen were ready to leave.

The gravity of the situation had dawned on Ellen’s mother, who said nervously: “They ... will be back, won’t they?” Over time, she had learnt to accept her husband’s strange family legacy.

“Of course they’ll be back,” Dida smiled. Then she gave Mrs Skogsrud a serious look. “Now you must go to bed. When you wake up, they’ll be here again.”

“Very well,” said Ellen’s mother and went into the bedroom.

“She won’t be able to remember this,” Villemo told the others. “She’ll fall asleep as soon as she puts her head on the pillow.”

“Will we be walking a long way?” Knut asked Dida.

“Long – and short. But you must all dress sensibly because the spring night is cold.”

“Will ... Nataniel be there?” Ellen wanted to know:

“Of course. I’m sure he’ll be happy to see you. But you two need to be very careful. The dangers are lurking.”

“I know,” Ellen replied.

“Then follow us,” said Dida.

They did so without another word.

The last to be collected were Karine and her young son, Gabriel. Karine was insignificant in this context, but Gabriel had been chosen to be the observer of the drama that would inevitably take place after the nocturnal meeting was over.

But the boy didn’t know that yet. The twelve-year-old had

already gone to bed when Karine came in and shook him. Like all the others who had been fetched, he suddenly felt completely bright, alert and ready for a new dawn. Nobody had registered any fatigue at all, despite the fact that it was so late in the evening.

His mother seemed overwrought, and a man was standing behind her. Gabriel blinked in order to see better. He was an enormous man, and goodness, how he looked! He resembled a savage. Gabriel had to look away.

“Gabriel, this is Ulvhedin. He’s to be your protector in the time to come.”

Gabriel thought that it was very practical to have this man with him instead of against him. He had heard about Ulvhedin. Gabriel gave him a cautious and tentative smile, a bit stiff. It must have looked very stupid indeed.

Ulvhedin smiled back. Gabriel wouldn’t have said that it was a gentle expression ...

Karine laid out the boy’s finest and warmest clothes, and he noticed that her hands were shaking. Then the two adults left the room. Gabriel was so nervous that he fumbled several times before he got his trousers on. Perhaps he had better stay at home. The dog might need him ...

They were waiting in the hall and there was another man with them. A young, blond man with yellow-green eyes. Gabriel greeted him politely. He said that his name was Niklas and he was to look after Gabriel’s mother in the time to come. It was good to know that somebody was going to take care of her. He looked about for his father, Joakim, but he was nowhere to be seen.

It was quite chilly outside, but the wonderful scents of spring hung in the air: garden bonfires, damp earth and new grass. Gabriel looked about. He was surprised. He wasn’t used to

being out so late at night. Dad wasn't there but he didn't dare to ask why. He could just about figure that out. Dad wasn't one of the Ice People. He was a Gard. Many members of the Ice People were related to the Gards: Christa, Nataniel, Karine, and Gabriel himself. And Christel. Her mother, Mari, had had a relationship with Abel's son, Josef. He was Christel's real father, even though he had never cared for her. Uncle Josef was stupid.

Ulvhedin took Gabriel by the hand. That hand seemed dangerous. Big and raw and terribly awe-inspiring. Not at all like his father's. Definitely not.

Gabriel forgot that he was a big boy of twelve. Suddenly, he was seven years old and about to begin school. Could he bring his dog? No, that might not be such a good idea.

How strange! Where had that fog come from? It lay like a blanket over the gate and the road beyond.

What a good thing that his mother was there as well. Gabriel wouldn't have dared to go on his own. Not with a spirit who had been dead for two hundred years. Mum didn't seem afraid, even if her guardian spirit was at least as old. Perhaps she was just pretending to be calm. For Gabriel's sake.

Perhaps it was no spirit at all? The hand that held his seemed pretty ordinary. Not warm – far from it, actually – but with a firm grip. It seemed alive!

What was it Ulvhedin had just said? “Tonight, the line between the living and the dead will be erased.”

Gabriel shuddered. That sounded frightening. Let's hope it didn't mean that he was supposed to be dead. He mustn't appear cowardly. He mustn't show that what he wanted most of all was to hide with his good, familiar, old human father. Joakim.

Then Gabriel remembered that he too was a member of the Ice People, and that was something to be proud of. Uncle Nataniel