

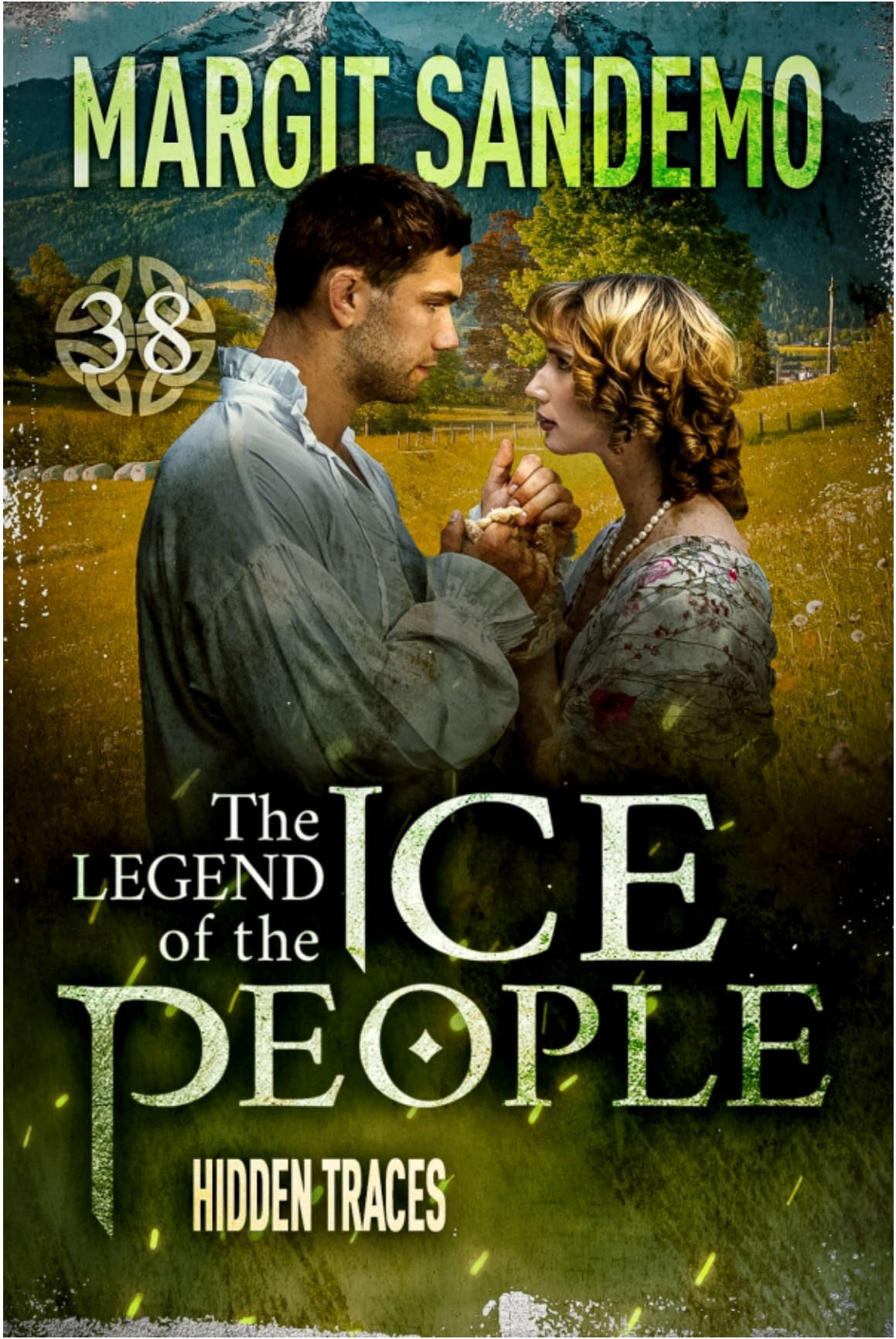
MARGIT SANDEMO

38

The
LEGEND
of the

ICE PEOPLE

HIDDEN TRACES

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. The woman is on the right, wearing a floral-patterned dress and a pearl necklace. They appear to be holding hands or a small object together. The background features rolling green hills and distant mountains under a blue sky. The overall scene is romantic and historical.

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The
LEGEND
of the
ICE
PEOPLE
HIDDEN TRACES

Hidden Traces

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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 Dolomites, 9 March 1939:

Snow was falling softly and heavily over the mountainous border regions between Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia, as if it wanted winter to last a little longer. It was night, and everything was calm up there in the little village, with its quiet, narrow streets where only a few lighted windows disturbed the darkness.

The silence was broken by rapid, stumbling steps along the street, gasping, jerking breaths tearing at exhausted lungs, and the doorbell ringing like crazy.

The drowsy doctor opened the door and a man virtually fell in over the threshold. He was a well-known, drunken tramp. His eyes showed that he was terrified as he held onto the doctor.

“I’ve seen ... seen ...”

The doctor shook him. “Well? What have you seen? White elephants?”

The man shook his head; he couldn’t get a word over his lips. “It came walking ... No, not walking ... it *floated* along, in an upright position ... It didn’t see me; it simply disappeared in the driving snow ... northwards ... towards ... Leaving ... a *stench* ...”

The doctor was irritated. “*What* did you see?”

But the man had lost his thread and was merely burbling unintelligibly. “Delirium? Never had it. Haven’t drunk much ... just a bit ...”

Then he suddenly collapsed in the doctor’s arms. His worn old brain had given in to the shock.

A wooded slope in the Jura, north of Ingolstadt, 10 March.

Crows ...

Crows and ravens had been circling excitedly over a certain spot in the forest all day long. Their agitated shrieks irritated the local population, who finally got a few men to look into the matter. They reached the spot up on the mountainside at dusk. By then, the shrieks had ceased, but they found a lot of dead birds around an old tree in the forest. There was no clue to what could have caused this massacre of crows and ravens – nothing but a sharp, repulsive smell that very nearly suffocated the men. Autopsies of the birds showed no sign of poisoning. The man who performed the autopsy guessed that the birds had died from paralysis of the heart. Birds can easily die when they are terrified.

Magdeburg, 11 March

Late in the evening, a young couple were driving out into the countryside. They stopped the car on a side road, and sat close to each other in the darkness. Their tender words were meant just for each other.

Suddenly, the girl stiffened. “Did you see that?”

“What?”

“There ... no, there ...!”

“What on earth was *that*?”

The girl screamed, throwing herself hysterically at the boy. He extricated himself and started the car. They drove back to the town at very high speed and stopped at the police station. Their explanation was vague and incoherent. “We don’t *know* what it was, but it was like a swift shadow. It didn’t move like a human being, but it wasn’t an animal. But it was so dark that it could have been anything. And then that *stench*!”

They shuddered as if the memory made them nauseous. “No,

we won't be going back to that place – never, ever! It moved downwards ... Straight ahead.”

The police could discover nothing. A patrol car found no traces. Nothing but a vague, obnoxious smell, which seemed to stretch north and south like a belt.

Some miles to the north, a dead woman lay at the roadside. She had been on her way home after a party. Her face was a stiffened grimace of horror, her eyes wide open, under the falling snow.

They didn't find her until a week later.

Tengel the Evil was out and about again.

The Ice People were in a mood of virtual panic. The clan's scourge had vanished from his resting place.

Twenty-five years had passed since he had last emerged from his secret abode in the Postojna Cave. Twenty-five good years for the Ice People, during which they had been allowed to live free of the threat he posed.

But as the years went by, Imre and the Wanderer knew that Tengel's deep hibernation was slowly beginning to loosen its grip once more. The Wanderer became more vigilant – nevertheless, Tengel the Evil escaped him at the decisive moment. The sly ancestor was able to trick his guard and divert his thoughts.

It was a disaster that he was now appearing openly. Nataniel, who was destined to fight against him, was still only a child. It was the ancestors' wish that when Nataniel grew up he would go to the Valley of the Ice People and find the spot where Tengel the Evil had buried the vessel containing the water of evil. Then Shira was to neutralize it with her clear water. This was the only way that they could crush Tengel's power. It wouldn't be an easy task for the boy, even if he had strong helpers. Tengel

the Evil would watch over his treasure like a dragon watching over its gold. And he had his allies, most of them unknown to the Ice People.

Nataniel couldn't go to the valley yet. After all, he was only six years old: it would be suicide, and all hope would be shattered for the clan and the whole world.

But the world knew nothing about this. The struggle of the Ice People was taking place quietly. After all, no third party could do anything; it would just have meant pulling others with them into the disaster if they sought assistance from elsewhere.

The situation was desperate for those with responsibility – the ancestors of the Ice People. Far too often during the past century, flutes had almost managed to wake Tengel the Evil from his slumber, and although Shira and the Wanderer had managed to drive him back each time, he *had* gathered strength from the half-played signals. He gained a little more strength each time, most noticeably the last time he had woken up. He had slowly revived *by himself*, even though his awakening could never be complete that way.

Something decisive must have occurred. Some person somewhere in the world must have played his tune, the cursed melody or signal that was to awaken him.

Now he had vanished. The Wanderer and his friends set about tracking him down.

From 1938 to 1939, the governments of Europe were strangely lax and idle with regard to Germany and Hitler and his party. He had been allowed to annexe Austria under the pretext that the many Germans who lived there wanted to be united with the Fatherland. The same happened with the Sudeten Germans in the part of Bohemia that belonged to Czechoslovakia.

It was true that there was some grumbling in places, and

England, France and other countries were puzzled, but that was all. Perhaps knives were sharpened here and there, and a more watchful eye kept on dozing regiments. This was precisely what contributed to the wakening of Tengel the Evil in a quite unexpected and even slightly amusing way.

The signal that was to call him back to life from his slumber had to be played on a flute tuned by trolls, and it was a special and extremely peculiar tune.

However, the original flute – his own – had been lost. Shira had destroyed it after it very nearly ruined Heike. Tula had also nearly woken him up when she came across a flute, but it had not been correctly tuned. Shira had destroyed that flute too. With the help of Tengel the Evil, Ulvar had come across a flute that could have been used, but he had accidentally let it be burnt.

Then an eccentric Spaniard happened to play some bars of Tengel's atonal melody on a concert flute, and *that* had been disastrous. The Ice People's evil ancestor had woken up – somewhat sluggishly and incompletely because most of the melody was missing, but he had slipped away – and had managed to start World War I before the Wanderer forced him back into hibernation with the notes of his small flute.

That was the last the world had heard of Tengel the Evil, twenty-five years ago.

Actually, what woke him this time was slightly ridiculous.

It was supposed to be a flute, but ... well, it was a kind of flute

...

A Scottish regiment had a colonel at that time who was very fond of battles. In Hitler's transactions he saw the chance of going to war. Taking part in high-level military discussions in Great Britain, he was eager to speed up proceedings. Obviously, this moustachioed colonel, who was such a big noise in

Germany, ought to be stopped. But the rest of the council called for careful handling. A war would be disastrous for all parties.

The colonel returned to Scotland, bitter and disappointed. There he began to arm his regiment for a possible war. They would certainly turn up with sharp bayonets when required!

In his regiment there was a bagpipe player. This man, whom the others in the regiment simply called Mac, practised diligently because he was new to military music and wanted to make a good impression.

He wasn't allowed to practise at home because his wife had forbidden it. She wasn't quite as fond of bagpipes as he was. So he would walk out on the moor every evening and play for the grouse, the rabbits and the sunset.

He played beautifully. The music lent a special atmosphere to the open space.

On 8 March 1939, he was out as usual. The moor looked soft and endless in the dusk, and his lamenting tones sounded over the landscape.

Mac was so carried away that he began to improvise. For quite some time, he tried to produce new sounds – perhaps not as beautiful any longer – until ...

What was that?

He shuddered. He repeated the last theme. There was no meaning nor melody in it, it merely glided through the notes of an atonal scale, but ...

He heard something! Something in the wind that swept through the heather.

Was it an echo? Like an echo in the wind?

It was as if it said: *“Play! Go on! Begin again, and then continue!”*

Mac was filled with an incredible anxiety. It was as if a cruelty beyond any reckoning welled up from the earth around him

and enveloped him.

His lips trembled as he put them to the mouthpiece of the bagpipes again. Mac was so terrified that he felt dizzy, he lost control and urine trickled wet and hot down his leg as he tried to find the same melody once more. It wasn't so easy because it hadn't been any particular melody, and thoughts whirled around in his head. He couldn't concentrate. Whoever or whatever this evil entity was, it was becoming impatient and really angry. Mac must continue to play the melody. But how? Nobody could answer his question.

Something deep inside him commanded him to run away as fast as possible, but he couldn't. He stood rooted to the spot. He was somewhat unsteady on his feet, and the wind was on his back ... or was it just cold shivers down his spine?

Mac moaned in despair as he tried to fumble his way. The evil force was furious; Mac was clearly doing the wrong thing. Then he tried to work his way back to the original theme once more, but it was gone. It had been too complicated, too vague, and he was unable to remember because he was in a panic.

The echo roared in the wind: "*Play, you clumsy fool, play!*"

Mac was sweating, he was terrified, tears were rolling down his cheeks. Only pathetic, chaotically confusing sounds came from the bagpipes.

An immense, inhuman power threw him to the ground. The blow was so hard that Mac lost consciousness.

When he awoke, he remembered nothing of what had happened.

But Tengel the Evil was awake. He was gathering strength in his den deep in the Postojna Cave in Yugoslavia.

That so-and-so, who had played snatches of his wake-up signal! And on quite the wrong instrument at that! Why couldn't he

have used a flute, when that was the correct procedure? Idiot!
All humans were idiots!

Why, oh, why, could nobody do it properly? Now he was half awake, better than the last time, but not enough. He still couldn't seize control of the world.

Or could he?

Surely he could do something?

His well-developed senses felt their way.

The Ice People?

His thoughts drifted to Linden Avenue.

Everything was calm there. He could feel Benedikte's presence, but she was old and stupidly good. He didn't need to trouble himself with her. But ...

He tried to sniff the air. There was something new. A new stricken member? Or ... several?

Danger! His vibrating senses signalled danger.

But ... there was nothing at Linden Avenue. Everything in the atmosphere there told him that they were hiding secrets from him.

Tengel the Evil was livid. *What* were they hiding? Or who?

He was certainly going to find the answer to that.

He must be on his way to Linden Avenue! Immediately!

The Valley of the Ice People ...?

His thoughts moved on, northwards. They found the Valley.

No, everything was quiet there, as he knew, of course. During his hibernation, he had often sent his thoughts there and found that everything was fine. Perhaps the Ice People had given up the Valley by now, after so many unfortunate attempts. He thought that he didn't have to fear the Ice People any more. His own treacherous descendants.

All he had was a vague sense of unease that a new danger had arisen. Somebody who wasn't in the Valley or at Linden

Avenue.

He would have to go out in the open.

His guard – Tengel the Evil hissed in disgust – had just been here to make his usual inspection and wouldn't be back for a while.

Tengel the Evil got up without any difficulty. This boded well. But he knew that he hadn't reached his full strength yet. The instrument had been wrong, the signal only in snatches and incomplete.

Well, all this was good news, but the problem was how he would manage to hide himself from the Wanderer – and that damned woman with her vessel of frighteningly clear water. Oh, he really *hated* her! Such a young brat, walking into the grottos leading to the sources of life – and *reaching* them! He didn't get it; he couldn't fathom how that had happened. He had been in deep slumber and hadn't discovered the danger until it was too late.

His greatest enemy – wasn't her name Shira? – was her.

If there weren't several of them ...? He was very unsure about that and shuddered because he feared an unknown entity among the Ice People. There was someone who had thwarted his plans time and again, although that person must be dead by now. Then there was this new thing. There was a great danger there. And a lesser one?

Tengel the Evil growled in despair. They were hiding one or several from him. They would really have to pay for that! He would wipe out every single one of them, slowly and with terrible suffering for them ...

Tengel the Evil had got to his feet and was walking the halls. The huge Postojna Cave was calm. All the tourists had left for the day.

His plan was to get to Linden Avenue as quickly as possible,

but he felt despair at not having regained his full strength. Nevertheless, it was much greater than last time, so he went confidently on his way, gliding a little above the earth at a good speed, in his customary manner.

Dusk fell, and then evening. He rushed through deserted regions, more by coincidence than as a conscious act. Tengel the Evil didn't care for people, whether they saw him or not.

A drunken man saw him in the mountainous Dolomite region. That didn't matter. Tengel smiled wryly: a cold smile in which there was no empathy, no joy, no humour. Only icy, malicious glee and tart triumph.

His journey continued northwards. Everything went well, and he felt that he was gaining strength. He stopped in a forest somewhere in order to make a more careful plan, but a flock of crows and ravens disturbed him so that he had to get up and frighten them away. Most of them died of fright. His horrible smile appeared once more. No, he hadn't lost his power!

Somewhere farther north, he passed a strange vehicle without a horse. Two people were sitting in that shiny object. Tengel the Evil had seen such vehicles in his questing thoughts in recent years. He had seen many strange things that he didn't understand, though this was something he didn't want to admit, of course.

Then he had bumped into a woman. Goodness, she had screamed and screamed! He had hissed at her and she had collapsed, dead.

Splendid!

But then ...

Tengel the Evil followed only his instinct, he didn't consider geographical names. He had no idea that he was in Germany, not far from Berlin.

He heard something happening there. With his sharpened

instincts, he could hear what was going on many miles away, and what he picked up pleased him. So much, in fact, that he changed course and made a small detour to hear and see more of it.

Nevertheless, he was concerned. His power wasn't as great as he would have wished. Things moved sluggishly and there was resistance every time he wanted to take action. Besides, how was he to hide from the Wanderer in the long run? He had tried to make himself invisible to that woman, but he hadn't succeeded. He wasn't sufficiently strong, he wasn't complete, and it irritated him, making him almost angry.

Why, oh why couldn't that clumsy fool with the strange musical instrument play his signal properly? Why was it never played correctly and properly?

Tengel the Great didn't deserve to be treated so shamefully.

How was he to erase his traces so that the Wanderer and the others couldn't find him?

The Wanderer was searching.

Tengel the Evil was easy to follow. The stench he left behind him lay like a sickening streak in the air. Perhaps it wasn't just the smell of a dried-up being that had been lying in the earth for six and a half centuries, although it hardly smelt of roses and lily of the valley. No, it was probably the stench of pure evil that was left in the grass and trees as he swept past.

The Wanderer found the place where Tengel the Evil had stopped to rest. He saw all the dead birds. He also found the dead woman before anybody else had seen her.

Immediately after that the Wanderer discovered that Tengel was no longer setting his bearings on Linden Avenue or the Valley of the Ice People.

He had turned eastwards, because he had something else in

mind.

The Wanderer conveyed this news to Tengel the Good and his helpers.

Then he followed after the evil ancestor.

Tengel the Evil had hidden himself high up in a small recess next to a stage. He was in a huge stadium, and the entire place was crowded with people.

They shouted “*Sieg Heil!*” and gestured with their arms towards the stage.

A funny-looking, short man was standing there, shouting a lot of wonderful, hateful words. Tengel the Evil heard phrases like “*Die Juden*” and “*Lebensraum*”. Words meant nothing to him, but he could read thoughts like an open book. This little man had thoughts that pretty much matched his own. A craving for power, ruthlessness ...

Small men – be they physically or mentally small – can cast very long shadows.

A couple of uniformed men walked past below Tengel’s recess, and he pulled himself further inside. One complained about a bad smell. No, not just bad, said the other man, this terrible smell was acrid, pungent: phew, they had never experienced anything like it.

Stuck-up show-offs, Tengel snorted to himself.

He concentrated on the speaker once more, and on the men who stood right behind him.

He wasn’t all that interested in the speaker. He was too stupid, too unschooled and too ridiculous with his silly hair and clothes. A puffed-up nonentity, boastful and empty. Then there was a big, fat chap in a uniform with a lot of gongs. Tengel’s thick lips curled in disgust. There was a short, thin devil trying to look dignified. He had a sharp brain but was ludicrous.

But then ...

Tengel liked the ones over there much better. Those standing a bit farther away. A tall officer with a moustache and glass lenses in front of his eyes. Wonderfully cold and cynical by nature.

That one ...?

No, Tengel the Evil had caught sight of another man, standing close to the tall officer. A younger, more elegant man, frosty, almost inhumanly ruthless – that was the impression Tengel received as he explored the man's emotional life. Cruel, but perhaps not cruel enough. Yet.

A new, deadly smile of contentment showed on Tengel's face. He liked that man! And he immediately set about finding out more about the young man with the sharp features. The short, ridiculous man was handing out distinctions. One after another was called forward to receive more medals. Most importantly, his young man was called forward. His name was Reinhard Heydrich and he had done very well in the police corps or something like that: Tengel waved away the empty talk. But that man was worth consideration. Tengel understood that if he got the right help, that man would be powerful.

The meeting was over, and all those on the podium marched past Tengel's lofty hiding-place. The creature followed them with a wry smile full of disgust, high above all this earthly trash.

There came his man ...

The Wanderer reached Berlin the day after the world heard the news, in all its horror.

German troops had moved into Prague; Czechoslovakia was no longer a free nation.

World War II threatened like a shadow on the horizon.

The Wanderer followed Tengel the Evil's tracks to a sports stadium in Berlin. There they were so clear that the Wanderer had never known anything like it. He was dumbfounded.

But now the situation was grave: Tengel the Evil had managed to hide himself completely. He had vanished without a trace.

The possibilities were extremely frightening.

Chapter 2

Vetle Volden's three children had each turned out differently. In 1939, Mari was seventeen, Jonathan fifteen and Karine thirteen. On the surface, all three seemed well adjusted. But this was because all three, especially the two girls, were good at hiding their thoughts and emotions.

Mari, the older of the two girls, was the more outgoing.

She had cursed her name a thousand times. "Malin and Mali," she would fume. "Marit and Mari. Don't the Ice People have any imagination? Nobody knows who you're talking about, they have to try and remember who Mari is. I'm *me*, and I'm a very important person in this context."

"Yes, in *your* context," Jonathan would answer, because they teased each other incessantly.

Mari had a compulsion to avoid unpleasantness. She wanted to be liked by all, and for everyone to like one another. Above all, she hated it when people were cross and grumpy. Listening to people quarrelling made her feel sick, and to be told that somebody disliked her was unbearable. She couldn't stand listening to suffering of any kind, and siding with one party in a dispute would have been unthinkable: it would mean the other party would be cross with her.

No one could live like that. But Mari tried.

This was why she was considered superficial and giggly; she laughed at everything, often in the wrong places, and she tried to smooth over any signs of annoyance or enmity among her school friends as soon as she detected them. If that wasn't possible, she would run away with a cheerful joke.

Mari wanted to be friends with everybody. This was why she