

**FROM THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR: *MARI'S HOPE*****An encounter with GOATMAN:**

Mari ducked into the dense woods just ahead of the downpour. She was wet, but not drenched.

When she set out on her rounds that morning clouds cast patches of sullen gray shadows across the vibrant blue fjord. When she was about three years old Mari asked Bjorn why the water kept changing colors. He said the fjord had no color of its own, it reflected the sky. He took her hand and together they walked into the shallows. Even at half-a-meter deep she could count the jewels in the crown on a one-kroner coin resting on the bottom of the clear, clean waters. But when she lifted her eyes to the surface she viewed an unmistakable expanse of blue. Exactly the blue of the fair skies above.

Ever since then she could predict pending weather changes as easily by the water's surface as she could from watching the sky. Even so, the sudden intense downpour caught her by surprise. She sheltered under the arching boughs of an ancient pine, balancing her oilskin pack above her head until the worst was over.

She had only one more stop, at the elders' home further up the trail. Doctor Olsen was right when he said his caseload was more manageable in warm weather, but some ailments required attention in every season. If she could get there in the next half hour she just might finish in time to visit with Odin on her way home.

When the cloudburst eased she bent over her bike to strap her pack on the carrier. A nearby voice froze her in place.

"Stupid, stupid rain! What a mess!"

She recognized the gruff tone of that voice. It was Goatman. Was his patrol in the area? She leaned her bike against the tree trunk and peeked through the drooping branches. Piney-rainwater cascaded down her face, but she didn't make a sound.

Goatman was about ten meters down the road, scraping at his boots with a

stick. They were covered in muck, ankle high. He scraped and stomped, muttering all the while.

She couldn't see or hear the rest of the patrol. What was he doing out there alone, in the middle of a workday?

He scuffed his feet back and forth on the gravel path, flung the stick into the woods, and started walking uphill.

Slowly.

His head extended from his shoulders like a turtle from its shell, swiveling slowly left to right and left again in a wide arc. It reminded Mari of the searchlights near the harbor in Bergen, scouring the night skies for Allied planes on bombing raids.

What was he looking for?

A bird landed on the branch above her, shaking water down the back of her collar. The smallest of gasps escaped before she could stop it.

Goatman's head stopped moving.

She had a legitimate reason for being on the trail, it was early afternoon, so why was she afraid? She could just collect her bike and proceed about her business.

Or not.

She wanted to observe him, find out more about what he was hunting, why he was doing it alone.

While she argued both cases to herself, he resumed his odd scan and inched along the trail.

By the time he was nearly out of sight her legs were falling asleep. She eased herself to her feet and collected her bike and pack.

When she looked back at the trail, he was gone.

She would have to pass him to reach the elders' home. If she built up as much speed as possible on the gravel trail she could fly on by him without a word.

She pushed off and pumped for all she was worth, still tense and concerned about why he was there. The downpour had packed the trail so she gained traction and speed, her tires making less noise than on dry gravel. She eased up

as she approached a bend in the path, planning to accelerate after the turn. That's where he was likely to be, turtling his way along. She hoped to pass him up before he even realized who she was.

But he wasn't there. He was nowhere to be seen, ahead on the trail or in the rough woodlands on either side.

She didn't wait around to investigate but pedaled on at full speed.

She arrived out of breath, as much from anxiety as from exertion.

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The residents were in remarkably sound shape. Sudden weather changes often triggered aches and complaints, but their health was stable and their spirits were high. She tended to her "regulars", made notes about her observations and treatments, and then packed up to go.

Old Arne looked up from his book. "Aren't you waiting for your grandma?"

"Bestemor is here? Where is she?" Mari had been up and down every hall during her check-ups and hadn't seen her anywhere.

"Most likely out in the garden. Take a look." He gestured toward a side door and returned to his reading.

Mari pulled her pack onto her shoulders and stepped outside into bright sunshine. She had been there less than an hour but by then the sky was a cloudless blue dome above. Her grandma was just coming up the steps with the younger Solgren sister, each carrying a basket loaded with fresh produce.

"Ah, little one, I wondered if I'd see you here today. Will you take these to the kitchen for us?" She handed Mari both baskets and added. "After I wash up I'll be leaving. Are you ready to go?"

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Bestemor's humor and company brightened the trail more than the afternoon sun.

"I didn't know you were coming again today," Mari said, walking her bike. "I didn't expect you to make the trip a third time this week."

"Ja, since you are doing laundry again I have more time to visit. And I didn't expect the weather to turn nasty so suddenly. I got there just in time to miss the storm."

She paused to take Mari's elbow and step over a large rut created by the streaming rainwater. "Many of my friends moved here when their homes were confiscated. It's not easy for people to adjust to such sudden changes, especially when they have no real choice in the matter."

Mari nodded. "Ja, I've seen some struggling to adjust. If anyone can cheer them up, you can, but you shouldn't be making this long walk alone. I can tell you the days I'm coming and walk with you there and back."

Her grandma swatted Mari's backside playfully. "I'm not in my second childhood, at least not yet! It will be years before I need you to walk me here the way I walked you to school."

As they neared the bend in the trail where Goatman disappeared, Mari described what she had seen. Bestemor asked many questions about the episode and they took a careful look around the area for some sign of what he was doing and where he had gone.

Her grandma studied the rough undergrowth just off the trail. She questioned Mari about what he had with him and how long he had been there. Her voice had an intensity and focus that left Mari with the uneasy feelings she had when she first saw him.

They explored in silence for a few minutes more, then Bestemor gathered herself and seemed to shake off her concern.

"I wouldn't worry about it." She said. "He's an odd one anyway. I can see why you named him as you did, but I think he is more of a troll. When Hitler says the Germans share our heritage, maybe he's talking about ones like Klein. That little man's sour expression and nasty attitude would fit right into a troll colony, although even a nest of trolls might throw out such a thief and a liar. Do you suppose he was exiled from a troll family and is here in the forest trying to find his home?"

Mari joined in the speculation. "Hitler is always claiming he shares our heritage, that Norway is *his* home. Do you suppose he's an exiled troll, too, and is trying to reclaim his birthplace?"

"He's another sour little man, isn't he? We should examine the posters of him more closely to see if he has a tail."

Sandy Brehl

Mari's Hope outtakes: Goatman in the forest

Their laughter startled birds roosting overhead.

When the trail merged onto the road to town Mari left Bestemor and made her way to the mountain glade to visit Odin.