

Childhood Journey

Recollections of Finland in the Fifties, where life was round , like an earth-clad potato.

I lived with my small, plump grandmother, on a farm, which lay on a bare, windy plain, where unpainted wooden houses and out-houses lay, sprinkled along dirt-roads.

It smelt of earth, manure, puddles of mud, saunas, hay and sun-ripe tomatoes.✓

Everything was well-used, drained of colour, faded. And the rattling of pails of dented zinc was constantly heard.

We had relatives in Sweden. Sometimes parcels arrived, which contained toys of such bright, shining colours, that they almost took your breath away.

In the summer-time, Swedish ladies visited us. The newspaper in the privy was then exchanged for bought tissue-paper.

The ladies looked so fragile and enchanting, as if they had come from Fairyland, where everything is lovely and pleasant. Surely you ate only cream-cakes, wore high-heeled shoes and never needed to carry a zinc pail there?✓

Once upon a time.....

When I was almost seven years old and the Swedish ladies were visiting us, I was asked if I would like to go to Sweden.

What.....?

Me.....?

"Yes" I answered, without really understanding what I had said yes to.

When all my belongings were being packed, I began to understand that this was no question of a holiday trip. I realized, with horror, that I was to leave for ever.

My lips were frozen, I couldn't say "I have misunderstood everything"

With my large black suitcase and my heart in my mouth, I watched my secure world shrink through the rear window of a Volkswagen.✓

I was to live with a Swedish lady.

The year was 1960.

In Sweden almost everything was oblong, like a tube of caviar. No pails. Water came from a tap. You could flush away and out and down, although you lived on the second floor. Formica tables, because it was practical. Rectangular vases for a single rose, because it was fashionable. TV-thermos, cake recipe from the radio, inflatable mattresses.

Perhaps my memories will touch yours.