

## **Hidden Treasures**



Inghilda Tapio

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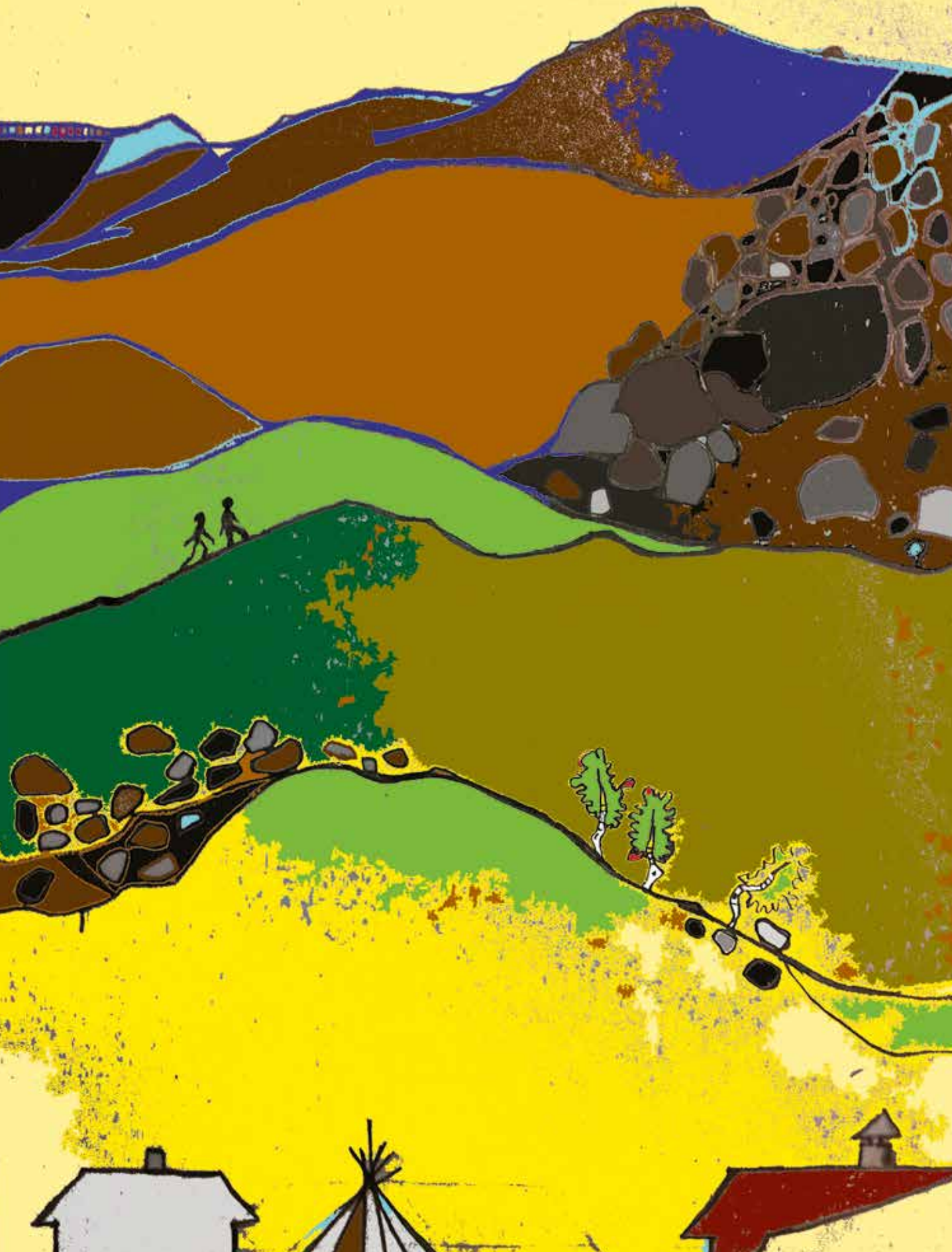
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Summer vacation is coming to an end and there are only a few days before school starts again. Like most summers, Elle and Morten are spending a couple of weeks at their grandparents' house in Abisko. One day, a forbidden area seems more enticing to them than ever. Both their grandmother and grandfather consider it to be quite dangerous and remind the children of this every day.

"Don't ever go to that rocky pit!" they warn them, even though they're constantly talking about scary things and places.

Neither Elle nor Morten has ever asked why they aren't allowed to go there. They've always obeyed everything their grandparents tell them – but now they get it into their heads that they're going to visit this supposedly dangerous place.

Elle and Morten run through the hills, pick berries, and have a campfire. They can often be out and about like this for hours. They've never really been afraid of anything, but now, they're a little bit nervous about going to this forbidden place. Elle talks about it as they make their way there.

"This is no ordinary pit," she says, looking at Morten. "Maybe it's even some kind of animal's den! I get the feeling that there's something out there they're not telling us about." Elle turns to her brother but doesn't wait for a response:

"What if there are things living there that aren't like us humans, or animals we've never seen before?"

Morten laughs.

"Hahaha! You're always coming up with such silly ideas." Morten points at the pit. "Look at it! It's just a regular old pit!"

"Then why would they say it's so dangerous?" Elle asks, but Morten just keeps laughing.

"Haha! Like it's *actually* dangerous!"

Elle suddenly whirls around and looks behind them.

"Shhhh! I think heard something back there," she whispers. Her eyes are big and round. Morten looks around, but he doesn't see or hear anything.







Elle and Morten clear stones and peat away from the pit. Morten starts laughing again.

“Maybe there’s some kind of time machine hidden here,” he says.

“A time machine!” Elle chuckles.

“Maybe it’ll take us back in time somewhere,” Morten says with a smile.

“Hehe,” Elle laughs, squeaking like a lemming since it almost seems like Morten had read her mind.

“Hey, don’t make fun!” Morten says, waving his fist. “Anything could be down there! Anything at all!”

Elle thinks the pit looks like it’s just a shallow little hole. Morten thinks that could be the case, but how can they *really* know until they take a look? He looks at Elle and says:

“Are you ready? Let’s go!” He points and tells Elle to bring him the birch branch that’s lying next to her so he can measure how deep the pit is.

“Holy cow!” he exclaims. “I think it’s pretty deep!”

“No way!” Elle shouts. “Does the branch reach the bottom?”

“Nope,” Morten answers, looking at Elle with wide eyes.

Elle can tell he’s not lying. It seems like the pit was a lot deeper than they’d thought! Elle takes a flashlight out of her pocket and shines it into the rocky crevasse. She’s scared but ignores it. The desire to see what’s down there is only getting stronger and stronger. Morten tells Elle to back up so he can put his feet into the pit.

“Come on!” he shouts to her. “Otherwise you’ll be all by yourself!”

Elle sits down on the edge of the pit and looks around again. She doesn’t see or hear anything. Despite her fear, she puts one foot into the pit – but then she screams and jerks it back out as if she’d set it in a fire. She tries to listen for Morten. Down at the bottom, it sounds like someone or something is moving around.

*Is it narrow down there? Elle wonders. Did he get stuck?* She’s shaky, but steels herself and carefully places her foot back into the pit. She sits there for a moment before she dares to set the other one in as well. Then

she puts the flashlight in between her teeth and supports herself with her hands as she sets her feet down and starts going deeper and deeper.



Morten shouts and it sounds like his voice is echoing in a large room. Elle's feet reach a landing and she drops her arms down as she starts searching for another ledge with one foot. She uses the birch branch to test whether the next ledge is strong enough and slowly makes her way down.

"Get down here!" Morten shouts excitedly.

"Can you see my feet?" Elle wants to be absolutely sure that she's heading toward the same place as Morten.

"I can't see your feet," he replies, "but I can hear you! Keep going!"

When Morten finally catches sight of Elle's feet, he tells her to hop down to the lowest ledge – which is no wider than a plank! Elle does as she's told and falls to the ground with a yelp. Morten catches her. Elle breathes out heavily and sits down.

"Yikes, it's pretty narrow down here!" she says, looking around. "And we're so deep! I was so scared!"

Morten laughs.

"Well, at least we're down here together now. But!" He pauses. "We won't be able to get out the same way. We'll have find find another way out."

"Are you kidding me? How stupid can we be?" Elle is on the verge of tears. "What if we never get out of here?"

"We will, don't worry," Morten comforts her.

He seems pretty confident and scans the cave.

"Besides, this is a pretty nice place, don't you think?" Elle just frowns in response. She's shaking like a leaf as she looks around. She thinks it seems like a scary place, not a nice one – creepy and dark and damp.

"We'll be fine!" Morten assures her again and takes her hand. "Now let's see what we can find! Come on!"





They step into a smaller cave with a low ceiling.

“What do we do now?” Elle sighs. “There’s nothing but rocks as far as the eye can see!” Elle is getting a little irritated now.

“What were you expecting? A castle? This is how it looks inside a mountain!” Morten says, looking around with his headlamp.

He’s also getting a little nervous but doesn’t want Elle to see it. He shines his headlamp around, looking for a path they can follow. Elle laughs at Morten’s joke.

“Ha! Not a castle, I guess, but maybe at least some nice, smooth stones,” she says. “We didn’t need to go underground to see this kind of black rock. We can find those up in the scree! I bet we could even find silver up there!”

“I bet we can find anything at all down here!” Morten exclaims, and Elle just scowls at him.

“This is hopeless!” she sobs, stomping her feet. “We’re so stupid! Idiots!”

“Oh, stop whining! Let’s go check out what’s over there. Maybe there’s a way out if we go further in. Come on,” Morten urges as he moves forward.

The two of them are swallowed up by the darkness.

Elle stays close behind Morten so she doesn’t need to look where she’s going. He shines his headlamp on the ground when the darkness around them seems impenetrable. The path twists and turns, and sometimes it goes up and then back down. It’s hard to walk standing up straight and they can’t see anything besides their feet.

At last, they reach a nice, big cave where they can straighten up properly. Elle smiles and her mood starts to improve. She spots some natural springs.

“There’s silver ore in this mountain. I learned about it at school. It’s fun to learn about things that aren’t that common!”

Morten walks around, taking in everything he sees. He picks a stone off the ground and looks at it – it’s a strange stone that he puts in his pocket. All of a sudden, they hear something. Morten almost feels like there’s someone behind them. Elle is scared and runs over to Morten and hides behind him.

“What was that!” she exclaims.

“Haha!” Morten laughs. “It was probably just some rocks falling, and the shadows are our own! If you don’t stop being so jumpy, I’m going to start calling you a scaredy-cat!”

“Hehe, *you’re* the scaredy cat!” Elle playfully shoves Morten so he almost topples over. He laughs.

Morten picks up a golden rock that seems to have broken loose from the wall. He turns it around in his hand and passes it to Elle.

“Do you think there’s real gold in this thing?” she asks.

“I don’t think so,” Morten replies. “If there were, there’d be a mine here!”

Elle reaches up toward the big, long, cold stalactites and manages to touch one. She likes that kind of thing. She would’ve liked to take one, but Morten won’t allow her to break those beautiful icy fingers. Suddenly, they hear a rock hitting the wall. It echoes. They huddle close to each other, not even daring to breathe. They instinctively feel like someone else is in the room.

Morten starts to *joik*. His song reverberates beautifully in the cave and echoes against the stalactites.

“I haven’t heard this joik before,” Elle says, looking at him.

“It just came to me. It’s this place’s joik!” Morten replies.

“Keep going,” Elle tells him.

And he does. The joik illuminates the dark corners. It follows narrow paths and trickles down small streams, and the stalactites start to look like sparkling stars when Elle shines her flashlight on them. Morten’s joik allows all the beauty of this place to come to light.

“This joik suits this place,” Elle says.

Morten, who hasn’t been much of a joiker before, surprised even himself that the joik just came to him. He now knows that it’s true: emotions awaken a joik.

“Come on, let’s go!” he says. “If we’re gone for too long, Grandma and Grandpa might get worried and call Mom and Dad.”







They joik together happily. Their joyful voices reverberate against the rocky walls. They shout with glee and their own voices reply – but, suddenly, they go quiet when they hear a joik in the distance. They jump and huddle together again. They don't know which direction to go and have to double-check every twist and turn before deciding which way is right. Morten sighs.

“Come on, let's go check out and see if we can see who's joiking over there!” he whispers.

“No way!” Elle protests. She doesn't want to go; nothing good can come of that, she thinks.

“Hmm,” Morten chuckles. “I just got really hungry. Right now I’d even drink milk straight out of that stream!” he says.

“I’m hungry, too,” Elle says. “Come on, let’s get out of here! Stop being so stubborn!”

“I’m never leaving home without a snack again,” Morten replies. “I’ve learned *that* much today!”

“Well, I’m never going to a place where you can’t even walk properly,” Elle replies, lying down to look up at the cave ceiling. Morten looks at her and asks:

“What do you see up there?”

“A starry sky!” Elle says with a serious look on her face.

“The starry sky in the middle of summer! Elle, we have to come back here!” Morten replies.

“We have to get *out* first!” Elle says.

“But we have to explore this place some more,” Morten replies, looking at her.

“You’ll have to get someone else to do that with you!” she replies.

“I thought we weren’t going to tell anybody else about this place?” he asks.

“No, but I think we should leave now,” Elle says. “You know what, Morten?” she adds with a whisper. “I think there’s somebody else in here besides the two of us!”

Morten looks at Elle and nods. He tells her that he’s sensed that almost the whole time but hasn’t dared say anything to her.





“We’re going to be trapped here forever,” Elle groans, starting to sob desperately. She manages to calm down after a while, though; they have to keep going.

“Should we pray?” she asks.

“Our Father!” Morten replies. Elle drops her flashlight and folds her hands. They pray just as their grandparents taught them: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

“Help us, Amen,” Elle adds. “I feel better now,” she says to Morten, reaching for her flashlight behind her. She gasps as it rolls out of reach.

“My flashlight!” she shouts.

“It’s fine, don’t worry! You just keep going and I’ll try to get it,” Morten comforts his sister. Elle snuffles but tries to keep moving as best she can.

“Keep moving and I’ll shine my headlamp so you can see!” Morten shouts.

Elle’s flashlight is shining from far below, between some stones.

“Grandma’s flashlight!” Elle cries out.

“Grandma won’t care about the flashlight as long as you don’t die.”

Morten knows how to comfort his sister, but he also knows he needs to get Grandma’s favorite flashlight back or they won’t be able to find their way out of this place. He tries to reach for the flashlight but his hand is too big to get through the narrow crack. He looks for something that would work better. *Maybe I can take my headlamp apart and use it to get at the flashlight through the crack,* Morten thinks. *But it’s not my headlamp. Grandpa will understand, though ... won’t he? After all, the two of us are in danger here!* Morten tries to move some of the rocks that are in the way. Some of them are so big they can’t be moved with one hand, and it’s far too narrow, anyway.

“Did you get it?” Elle shouts desperately from up ahead.

“I will!” Morten replies. “Don’t worry!”

Poor Morten struggles and struggles and eventually needs to lie down for a bit to catch his breath. This is no simple task. Suddenly, he gets an idea:

“MY BELT! I’ll try that,” he says.

He unfastens his belt and pulls it out of the loops as he thinks of what he'll do next. The flashlight is located quite conveniently on a ledge and is still shining upwards, but there's a big, dark hole right next to it. *If I don't latch around it properly, it might fall even further down*, Morten thinks. It won't be that easy to get it back up. Thoughts swirl through his head.

"Have you still not gotten it?" Elle shouts again. "I don't want to sit around here in the dark anymore!"

"Well, you have to!" Morten is getting annoyed. "Take deep breaths! Joik! Sing!"

Morten breathes a sigh of relief when he hears Elle start to hum. Then she starts to joik. The melody seems quite old, somehow, and he also thinks Elle's voice sounds like an old person's. He has to pause and listen. He catches the tune as well and the two of them joik together for a long time. Elle calms down and Morten adjusts the belt a bit. He makes a snare that he ever so carefully lowers toward the flashlight. He has to be precise. He's going to get Grandma's flashlight back. Morten is feeling positive and believes he'll be able to figure this out on his own.







They hear the sound of another stone striking the wall nearby.

“Now *Njávešeatni* is angry!” Elle whispers. Suddenly, they hear the sound of hearty laughter. They’re surprised that the laughter seems familiar somehow, but they know that otherworldly creatures can mimic anyone they want to.

“Luckily we’re almost back above ground!” Morten says with a sigh of relief. “These creatures can make as much noise as they want! I’m not scared anymore!”

They work to get up and out, one lifting the other. When both of them are on the same ledge, there’s yet another difficult spot to get past – but they work together, and the more they do, the higher they get. Morten says that this part has solid rocks that they can both hold onto and step on.

At long last, they reach the light. They laugh and roll around happily before crouching down to look into the hole they just emerged from. Morten lies down on his back and looks up.

“Ahh, it’s nice to see the sky again!” he says.

Elle looks up at the sky as well.

“It’s nice to see the sky, the grass, the trees, the leaves, and everything there is!”

“No one’s going to believe us if we tell them where we’ve been, and all by ourselves!” Morten says with a smile. Now, they can also hear the sound of *Stuoragorži* rushing past. Small silver streams trickle from the bottom of the waterfall.

“The mountains look like they’re silver and gold!” Elle says with a laugh. “But... what were those strange sounds down there? That joik and that terrible laugh... Who could’ve been down there?”

“Why didn’t we have a phone with us?” Morten exclaims.

“No idea! But phones don’t belong in places like that. They could disturb the underground creatures,” Elle says, squinting happily up at the sun. “Good thing we have the Daughter of the Sun to warm us up!”

“What about the Daughter of the Moon?” Morten laughs.

“Arghhh!” Elle says with a shudder. “Don’t remind me!”

They relax in the sun for a while before getting up to leave. They have to talk about what happened before they get back home. Elle laughs.

Grandma and Grandpa couldn’t even imagine the adventure we’ve been on!” she says.

“Who knows,” Morten shakes his head. No sooner has he said it than they hear gruff laughter. Frightened, they look toward the hole in the ground, where a hand is appearing. Ellen runs away but Morten is frozen to the spot. He sees another hand appear, which is stretching toward something. Morten comes to his senses and takes to his heels, wondering why those hands seemed so familiar.

Morten and Elle head towards home, in too much of a hurry to even look back. But before they can get through the thicket, someone appears out of the blue, practically scaring Elle and Morten to death. They’re in too much of a hurry to see who it is, but they hear a voice say:

“What’s all the hurry?”

They almost fall flat on their faces when they hear the voice. Even though the voice is familiar, it still startles them. Grandpa comes into view and Elle and Morten sprint over to him. They talk over each other, telling him how scared they’ve been. Elle starts to wonder where Grandpa came from all of a sudden.

“I was starting to worry about the underground creatures taking you,” Grandpa chuckles. “So I had to come looking for you. You two haven’t listened to me and your grandmother.” Morten and Elle look at each other, wide-eyed. Had Grandpa been with them down there? He tells them he’d been following them the whole time.

“So you were the one joking down there?” Elle asks.

“What do you think? All I know is that I heard two children who were really good at joking!”

“Grandpa, you scared us half to death!” Morten says seriously.

“Oh, come on!” Grandpa replies with a laugh. “I suppose we’re all pretty hungry now, aren’t we?”

Then they all head back home to Grandma to eat and get cleaned up.