

# THE CHRISTMAS STAR



ALTA HALVERSON SEYMOUR





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BOOKS FROM PURPLE HOUSE PRESS

*A Grandma for Christmas* (Norway)

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*The Christmas Camera* (Sweden)

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*The Tangled Skein*  
*When the Dikes Broke*



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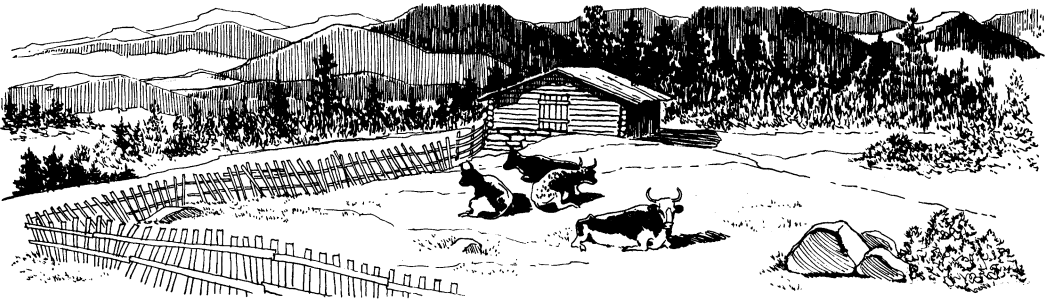
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## CHAPTER 1

“OH, MOTHER, I hear Uncle Jens’s folks are going up the mountain to the saeter tomorrow. Can I go along this time, do you suppose?” Arne’s tongue was flying as he burst into the kitchen, and his blue eyes looked eagerly around for his mother.

No one was in sight but his grandmother, busy with her mixing bowl at the kitchen table. “Where’s Mother, Besta?” he asked. “Cousin Bergel just told me they’re going to take the cows and goats up the mountain tomorrow. Do you know who all are going? Do you suppose I can—”

“For goodness’ sake, boy, you go on like a spinning wheel! It must be that red hair of yours that drives you along so fast. Just be quiet a minute, will you? I can only answer five or six questions at a time. Your mother and sister Margret are over helping Aunt Tina get things ready for the trip tomorrow.”

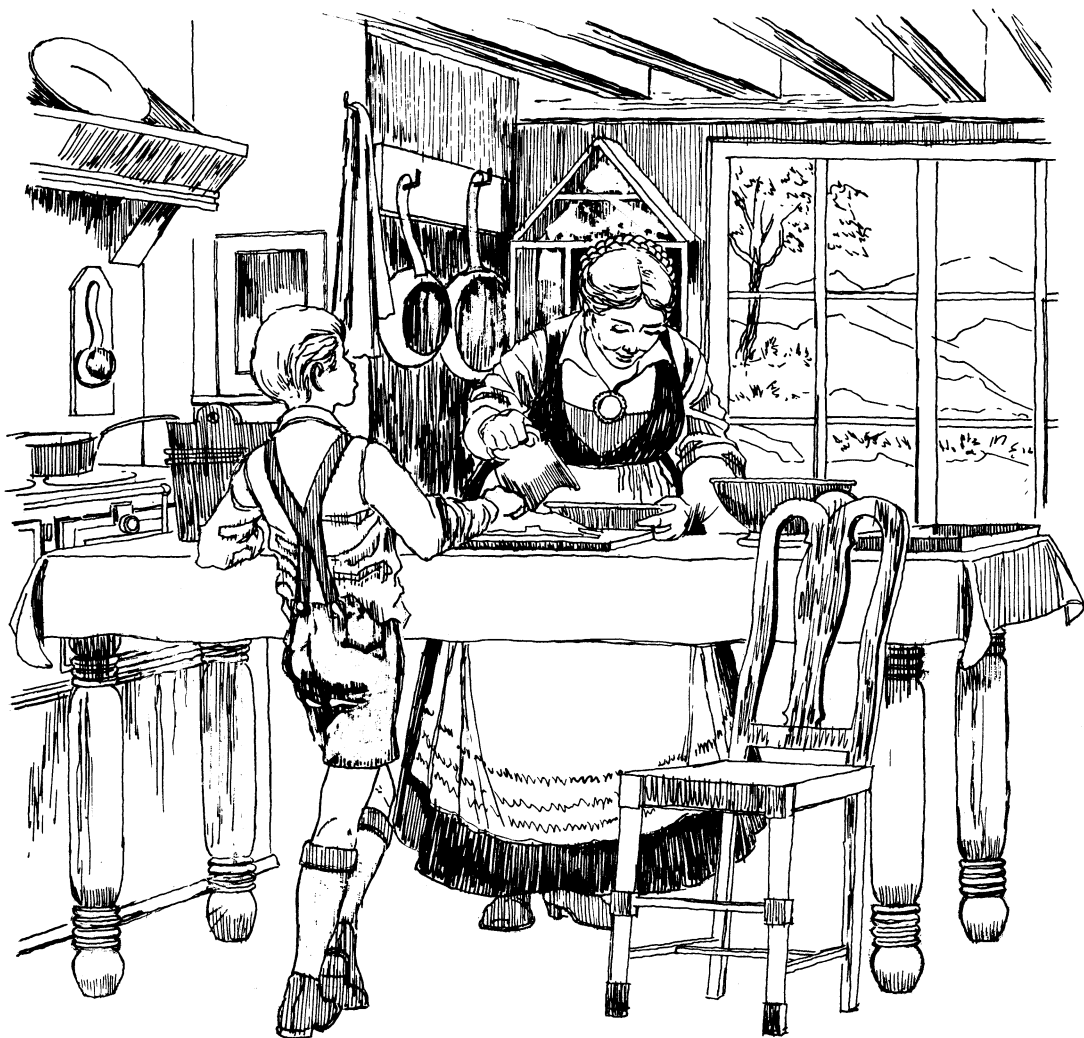
“They’re going, then! Oh, I hope I get to go too. I think I will, don’t you?” Arne helped himself to a bit of cookie dough from the sticky yellow mass on his grandmother’s floured board, looking warily at her out of the corner of his eye. Her hand was quick, and he might get a sharp rap on the knuckles.

But he didn’t this time. She merely moved her board away from him and began adding flour to the dough. “Such a boy!” she exclaimed. “It would be a rest to me if your mother let you stay up on the mountain all summer.”

Arne knew she didn’t mean that. The two were the best of friends. Grandmother Dalen, whom everyone called Besta as a shortened form of the dignified Norwegian *bedstemor*, seemed to enjoy his tricks and teasing. She had even been heard to say, when she didn’t know Arne was around, “I like naughty boys.” Then she had caught sight of him and added briskly, “They give you something to work on.”

Now she nipped off a piece of dough and molded it into a soft long roll which she deftly tied into a bowknot. She filled her pan with rows of similar bowknots and slipped it into the hot oven.

“Who’s going, Besta, do you know?” asked Arne, watching the cookies with interest but wishing she



would hurry and answer his questions. “I just wish we had a saeter of our own.”

“Lots of use your father would have for such a thing!” scoffed Besta.

Arne’s father was in the fish-packing business and owned just enough land to grow a little hay and keep a

cow or two and some goats. But Uncle Jens was a real farmer; and, like most farmers in Norway, he had his own skyland pastures high in the mountain valleys where the grass grew green and lush. These were called saeters, and each had its little cabin where some of the daughters of the family spent their summers. The girls milked the cows and goats which were taken from the home farm to be pastured up there, made the cheese, and churned the butter. Arne thought some of the best fun of the summer was at the saeter. The day of moving up there was especially jolly.

“Cousin Signe will have to go, of course,” he said, “and Bergel, I suppose.”

“Yes, Bergel’s old enough to help this year—almost as old as you. She’s eleven now. Your sister Margret will take our own cows and goats up and tend to them. And of course Uncle Jens and Aunt Tina and little Knut will take the housekeeping things and help get the girls settled. And Cousin Evert—”

“And me—did they say I’m going?” Arne asked eagerly, as she paused.

Besta was something the shape of one of her own butterballs, but that did not keep her from moving fast, or talking fast either, as a rule. Now, however, she seemed intent on her work, and when she answered she



spoke almost reluctantly. “I haven’t heard anything about you going, Arne. I did hear your father say he needed some extra help baling *lutfisk*. He said he was glad school is out so you can help.”

“Baling *lutfisk!*” said Arne despairingly. He had done that before, plenty of times, especially when father had a shipment he wanted to get off in a hurry. “That’s such a tiresome job, and so smelly! Do I have to stay home for that stuff?”

“You like *lutfisk* as well as anyone when it comes to the table,” Besta reminded him. “Don’t you know how good it is, with melted butter or nice milk gravy?”

Arne knew that well enough, but he certainly did not relish the idea of staying home from the first saeter trip of the summer to bale *lutfisk*. Part of the work connected with *lutfisk* was all right. It was fun to help unload the big cod from the fishing boats, to watch the men expertly split and clean the fish and spread them to dry. Ole Berg, the old fisherman who was father’s right-hand man, had showed Arne how it was done, and even let him help.

Father thought Arne was a little young to handle the big, sharp knives, but Ole said the boy was very quick with his hands. So Herr Dalen gave his son a good Norwegian hunting knife with a silver handle shaped like a horse’s

head and a neat leather sheath which fitted on his belt. Arne was very proud of it and put it to good use under Ole's directions. But baling those bundles of dried fish was a very different matter. And certainly tomorrow was no day to spend on the packing-house dock at a tedious job like that. Then a hopeful thought struck him, and he asked, "Well, then, is Gustav going to help bale *lutfisk* too?"

His big brother Gustav was at home just now between voyages to sea—Gustav, who was going to be a ship's captain some day. He would sail as first mate the very next time the steamer *Laks* came to port here in Nordheim on its way up the fjord.

"What's that about Gustav?" called out a big voice; and a tall, dark-eyed young man with curly black hair came into the kitchen. "Oh, good for you, Besta! You're making *kringler!* Are those for the trip to the saeter?"

"Are you going to the saeter too, Gustav?" cried Arne accusingly. "And I have to stay home and bale smelly old *lutfisk!*"

Disappointment swept over him. It was worse than ever if Gustav was going and he couldn't. There was a lump in his throat, and it seemed to him he could hardly breathe. All spring he had been looking forward



Far out to sea, the freighter *Stjerne*, fought the storm bravely. At home in the little Norwegian fishing village of Nordheim, twelve-year-old Arne and his family waited and prayed. It was the Christmas season, and the *Stjerne* was the Christmas ship this year, bearing Yuletide gifts and other good things for the village.

But more important than the gifts, the *Stjerne* carried her gallant crew, and Arne's brother Gustav, her first mate. How Arne does his part to help bring the ship safely into port makes a thrilling tale.

A charming family read aloud, good all year round. Illustrated by Frank Nicholas.

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