

OLA AND THE HULDER

Once there lived in Gudrandsdal a young man named Ola. He was tall and strongly built and the girls of the valley called him handsome. Ola was engaged to Marit, a sweet and lovable lass, who tended to the saeter on the mountain for her father during the summer months. Ola would visit Marit on the saeter Saturday evenings.

One summer's eve when he was on his way up the mountainside and had almost reached the saeter, he heard somebody calling, "Ola, come here! Ola, come here!" The voice sounded like Marit's.

He hurried his steps to catch her, but instead of catching his sweetheart he found himself amongst a herd of the nicest cattle he had ever beheld in his life. He thought the cattle must belong to Marit's saeter, as there were no other seater's within many miles. "Marit will make me a good wife," he said happily. "She certainly keeps her cattle in good shape." Then he called Marit's name but received no answer.

After a moment he heard the same voice call again, but seeming farther away his time. "Ola, I'm here! Come and catch me! Come and catch me!"

Now he ran after the voice. He was going to catch her this time. Marit had played this same trick on him many a time before when he came to visit her on the mountain, and had generally let him find her after she had called to him the second time.

But Marit did not come to Ola this time. Her voice lured him farther and farther away from the saeter, and at length he came to a

place in the forest where he never had been before. What had come over Marit, anyway, that she insisted on fooling him this way? Another thing seemed strange to him, no matter how far he went up the mountain, the herd of cattle moved with him. But of course they also know Marit's voice and followed where she went.

He now began to think that it might be the hulder, who was luring him onward to her home in the mountain. He was on the verge of turning back towards the saeter but then he heard his sweetheart's voice near and so teasingly that he simply had to try and find her. He felt certain he would soon hold her in his arms, as he looked for her behind bushes, trees and other obstructions, but Marit remained invisible.

Ola began to get frightened, for it now began to dawn on him that the fine herd of cattle must be the hulder's. He started to walk briskly in the direction of the saeter, and had gone only a few steps when he heard Marit's voice again, but this time he did not mind; he kept right ahead. The call came again and again pleadingly, but Ola did not stop.

Just then a tall, stately girl with a wonderful, sweet smile came dancing towards him. Ola stood still and drank in the sight of this glorious apparition. His fright had disappeared; this girl who came dancing toward him could be no hulder. She was not afraid to let him see her from the back. The hulder always faced Christian people so they should not see her cow's tail, which always hung below the hem of her dress.

"If I could have a girl like this one to take to the dances," said Ola to himself, "the other young men would certainly envy me."

The girl stopped dancing when she came up to Ola, and she said in the sweetest voice he had ever heard, "Good evening, Ola."

that she looked somewhat large and protruding behind, below the waist. He thought some new style in clothing was the cause of that.

“If you do not want to go home with me,” said the girl, “you must show me the way to the valley.”

Ola was very happy to do so, and before they reached the settlement, they had become engaged. The girl obtained a position on a farm near Ola’s home.

Now Ola was the happiest man in the valley. He was very proud of Guri, his beautiful sweetheart, and nobody could swing his girl as he did at the dance, as Guri was light as a feather.

But there was one thing that worried Ola a great deal. He could never get his sweetheart to attend church. She always had some excuse to stay at home Sundays, and whenever they were out evenings and had to pass the church on their way, she pleaded with Ola to take a roundabout way.

One evening while tarrying outside after coming home from a walk, Ola heard a loud, coarse voice coming from the mountain. “Guri, are you soon coming home with your husband?”

Then Guri shivered from head to foot and ran into the house, forgetting to bid Ola goodnight.

“Guri, come back!” called Ola, but he heard only something like the bellowing of a cow come from the house. Ola ran into the house to look for Guri, but he could not find her. He roused the people of the farm, and they all looked and hunted everywhere, but Guri had disappeared. In the morning they saw her come down the mountainside, disheveled and tired looking. When they asked her where she had been, she said she had been home to her father on the mountain.

Ola was very anxious to marry Guri, and he wanted her to set

an early date. Guri was willing to marry him any time, but when she heard that the banns for their wedding must be announced three Sundays in succession in the church before the ceremony could be performed, she said she would not be married in such a manner. She looked so frightened when banns and the church were mentioned that Ola did not know what to think about her. She wanted him to follow her to her father's home and let him marry them, but Ola would not hear of that. He wanted to be married in a Christian manner and not like gypsies and such raff.

While Ola went to dances and entertainments with Guri, Marit sat home and pined away. Marit's mother was old and wise. She had heard much about the hulder and trolls, and she could tell many a story about what she had seen herself when she was young. That abnormal growth on Guri's back below the waist perhaps meant something, she thought; the more she meditated over this matter, the clearer everything looked to her. Guri must be a hulder, who wanted to lure Ola to her home inside the mountain, where she would keep him forever.

When Saturday came, Marit's mother said, "Marit, tonight you must go to the dance."

"I do not care to go," said Marit. "And futhermore, I have nobody to take me there."

"I will take you," said the mother, "and I promise you that Ola shall take you home from the dance."

"I don't want you to go and make any trouble, mother," said Marit. "It's of no use anyway. Guri is much better looking than I. If you went and said anything to Ola and Guri, I'm sure Ola would never look at me again."

"I shall not say a word to any of them," promised the mother.

“Just put on your best clothes and come along.”

Marit did as her mother told her, but she went sad of heart. She noticed that her mother took along a large pair of shears, which they used for cutting the wool off the sheep, and she wondered what use she intended it for.

When they arrived at the farm where the dance was given, Ola and Guri were already there. It was a warm evening, and therefore the dancing was carried on outside in the field. Ola and Guri were the first couple to begin, and they danced so gracefully and looked so well-suited to each other, that Marit almost cried. Guri had never danced better, thought the people, and they stood around spellbound, letting Ola and Guri have the dancing plan to themselves.

“Come, let us go home, Mother,” said Marit.

But for an answer the mother just walked right up to the dancing couple and pulled out the shears from under her coat. Then, just as Guri had her back turned towards her, Marit’s mother cut Guri’s skirt open in the back, and through the slit a roll of hairy substance could be seen fastened there. Then Marit’s mother made another cut with the shears and a long, hairy cow’s tail unraveled and dropped almost to the ground with its end.

In a twinkling Guri was changed into a black-sided cow, which ran bellowing up the mountainside. Just then they heard a loud, coarse voice from the mountain, “Guri, are you soon coming home with your husband?”

THE HULDER WHO RAN AWAY FROM HER CATTLE

It was high noon, the sun shone brightly, and it felt unusually warm on the mountain. The cattle had been grazing steadily all forenoon, and all were now lying down and chewing their cud. Sixteen year old Einar Bakken, who was tending his herd, sat down then to eat his lunch of black bread, butter and cheese.

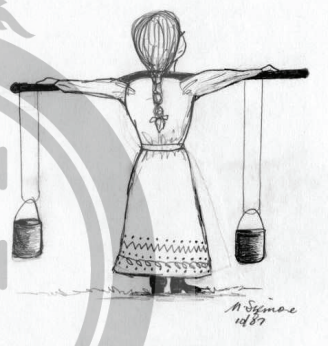
He had just begun to eat when a very pretty young woman came running down the mountainside and asked him whether she could eat her lunch with him. Einar consented cheerfully because it was lonesome on the mountain during the day. He surmised that she was tending cattle on the mountain, the same as he, and therefore said, "Where are your cattle, lassie?"

"They are away up on this mountain."

"How dare you go so far away from the herd?"

"My father is tending to the cattle while I am running around."

Then she sat down by him, and when she opened her lunchbox and spread the things she had in it on its cover, Einar felt ashamed of his own plain food. She had the whitest bread he had ever seen, with thick slices of sausage over the butter. She gave him some of this and insisted on having some of his coarse bread in return. She also offered him one of two nice apples she had, but Einar was so full



that he could not eat any more.

The girl gathered the lunch that was left into her box and said she would save it for the afternoon. Then she leaned her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes

Einar did not approve of this, and therefore moved away from her, which almost made the girl fall over on her side. She then moved after him, and just as she was going to lean her head against his shoulder again, a man's voice from up the mountain, called,

“Ragni, why do you chase after babies? Go and get hold of a grown man.”

The girl looked embarrassed at hearing this call. “Is that your father calling?” asked Einar.

“Yes, but he doesn't mean anything by what he says.”

“I do mean it,” called the same voice more harshly. “I shall get even with you for running away from the cattle.”

The girl got up and said, “Einar, drive your cattle up the mountain and let them graze with mine.”

He wondered how she happened to know his name, as he had never met her before; but anyway he got up, too, and together they chased the herd up the mountain.

They traveled quite a ways up the mountain, and still there were none of the girl's cattle to be seen. She suggested that they sit down and finish what was left of the lunch. But when she took out the things from the box again she had nothing but mud and two large stones.

“Where is the lunch?” asked Einar.

“There,” said the girl, and pointed to the mud and stones.

“That's nothing but mud and stones,” said Einar.

“No, it is white bread with butter and sausage, and two apples,” said the girl.

Then Einar thought he had not looked close enough at first, because now he could see both the bread and apples, and no mud and stones any more.

While they were eating the voice from the mountain called again, "Ragni, if you do not hurry now I shall come after you."

The girl jumped to her feet and began to drive the cattle upward, leaving her lunch box and the two apples on the ground.

"Lassie, you are leaving your lunch box and apples," called Einar after her.

"Never mind, I have others at home," she answered.

He hurried after her, and then saw his herd already mingling with several strange and beautiful cattle.

"Are these your cattle?" he asked.

"Yes, they are my father's," she answered.

Just then he saw one of his own cows pass right through one belonging to the girl. He became very much puzzled, looked closer at some of the other cattle, and noticed that he could see trees and bushes right through them.

"What kind of cattle have you, lassie?" he asked.

"I have the nicest cattle in the world," said the girl.

"It seems to me they are nothing but air," said the boy. "I can see right through them."

Then the voice sounded again, "Ho, ho! Ha, ha! I got even with you, Ragni."

The girl left the boy and hurried up the mountainside calling angrily, "You old grouch, I shall pay you back for this. If you had left things alone I would have had a husband today."

Her cattle had disappeared entirely. Now Einar became frightened. Strange happenings he had neither heard nor seen before.

He hurriedly drove his cattle down to the old grazing grounds. When he passed the spot where the girl had left her lunch box he saw nothing on the ground but two stones and a large piece of rotten bark. Then he knew he had been with a hulder.

