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Mio's Kingdom

Written by

Astrid Lindgren

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MIO'S KINGDOM



Astrid Lindgren



Translated by Jill Morgan

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HE TRAVELS BY DAY AND BY NIGHT



Did you listen to the radio on October 15th last year? Did you hear the news about a boy who disappeared? This is what it said:

'Police in Stockholm are searching for a nine-year-old boy missing from his home, at 13 North Street, since 6 p.m. two days ago. Karl Anders Nilsson has light hair and blue eyes. At the time of his disappearance he was wearing brown shorts, a grey sweater, and a small red cap. Anyone with more information on his whereabouts should contact the police.'

Yes, so they said. But no one had information about Karl Anders Nilsson. He simply vanished. No one knows what happened to him. No one knows, except me. For I am Karl Anders Nilsson.

I wish that I could get hold of Ben, and at least tell him everything. I used to play with Ben. He lives on North Street too. His real name is Benjamin, but everyone calls him Ben. And of course no one calls me Karl Anders, they just say Andy.

I mean, they used to say Andy. Now that I've disappeared they don't say anything. It was only Aunt Hulda and Uncle Olaf who called me Karl Anders. Well, Uncle Olaf never actually called me anything. He never spoke to me.

I was Aunt Hulda and Uncle Olaf's foster child. I went to live with them when I was a year old. Before that I lived in the Children's Home. Aunt Hulda found me there. She really wanted a girl, but there weren't any she could have. So she took me, though Uncle Olaf and Aunt Hulda don't like boys. At least not when they become eight or nine years old. They thought I made too much noise in the house, and that I brought in too much mud after I came back from playing in Tegnérlunden Park, and that I left my clothes lying around, and that I talked and laughed too loudly. Aunt Hulda always said it was an unlucky day when I came to their house. Uncle Olaf said nothing . . . Well, sometimes he did say, 'You there, go away! I can't stand the sight of you.'

I spent most of my time at Ben's. His father talked to him all the time and helped him build model aeroplanes, and drew marks on the kitchen door to see how much Ben had grown, and things like that. Ben was allowed to laugh and talk and to leave his clothes lying around as much as he liked. And his father still loved him. All the

boys were welcome to play in Ben's house. No one was allowed to come home with me, because Aunt Hulda said she wouldn't have children running all around. Uncle Olaf agreed. 'We've got as much as we can stand with one troublesome boy,' he said.

Sometimes when I went to bed in the evening, I used to wish that Ben's father was my father too. And I used to wonder who my real father was, and why I couldn't live with him and my real mother instead of being in the Children's Home, or having to stay with Aunt Hulda and Uncle Olaf. Aunt Hulda told me that my mother had died when I was born. 'No one knows who your father was,' she said, 'but it's easy enough to guess that he was a bum.' I hated Aunt Hulda for what she said about my father. Maybe it was true that my mother died when I was born, but I knew that my father wasn't a bum. Sometimes I lay in bed crying for him.

One person was kind to me, Mrs Lundy in the fruit shop. She gave me fruit and sweets, now and then.

Now afterwards, I wonder who Mrs Lundy really was. Because it all started with her on that day in October last year.

That day Aunt Hulda said several times that it was an ill wind which brought me to her house. In the evening, just before before six o'clock, she told me to run down to the bakery on Queen's Road to buy some rolls that she liked. I put on my red cap and raced off.

When I passed the fruit shop Mrs Lundy was standing in the doorway. She touched my chin and looked at

me intently for a while. Then she said, 'Would you like an apple?'

'Yes, thanks,' I said.

She gave me a beautiful red apple that looked awfully good. Then she said, 'Will you put a card in the postbox for me?'

'Yes, I'll be happy to do that,' I said. Then she wrote a few lines on a card and handed it to me.

'Goodbye, Karl Anders Nilsson,' said Mrs Lundy. 'Goodbye, goodbye, Karl Anders Nilsson.'

It sounded so peculiar. She never used to call me anything but Andy.

I hurried to the postbox a block away. Just as I was going to drop the card in, I noticed that it glistened and glowed like fire. Yes, the words that Mrs Lundy had written glowed like fire! I couldn't help reading them. This is what the card said:

To the King,
Farawayland.

The one whom you have long sought is on his way. He travels by day and by night and carries in his hand the sign—the golden apple.

I didn't understand a word of it, but it sent shivers up and down my spine. I quickly dropped the card in the postbox.

Who was travelling by day and by night? Who was

carrying a golden apple in his hand?

Then I caught sight of the apple that Mrs Lundy had given me. And the apple was gold. *It was gold!* In my hand I had a beautiful golden apple!

I nearly burst into tears—not quite, but almost. I felt so alone. I went and sat on a bench in Tegnérlunden Park. No one else was there. Everyone had gone home for dinner. It was almost dark among the trees and it rained a little. But in the houses around the park there were lights everywhere. I could see the light from Ben's window, too. He was sitting inside eating pea soup and pancakes with his mother and father. It seemed to me that behind every lighted window children were at home, together with their mothers and fathers. Only I sat out here in the darkness. Alone. Alone, holding a golden apple that I didn't know what to do with.

I put the apple carefully on the bench beside me and left it there while I thought. There was a street light nearby; the light from it fell on me and on the apple. But the light also fell on something else that was lying on the ground. It was an ordinary bottle, empty of course. Someone had pushed a piece of wood into the neck of it. One of the small children who played in Tegnérlunden Park in the afternoons, I suppose. I picked up the bottle and read the label, which said, 'Stockholm Breweries AB, Pale Ale.' As I sat there and read it, I noticed something moving inside the bottle.

I once borrowed a book called *A Thousand and One Nights* from the library in our neighbourhood; it was about a genie trapped in a bottle. But, of course, that was far away

in Arabia and thousands of years ago, and I don't suppose that genie was in an ordinary bottle. It's probably rare for genies to be in bottles from Stockholm Breweries. But here was one, in any case. It was a genie, mark my words, sitting inside the bottle. I could tell he wanted to get out. He pointed to the wooden peg that blocked the neck of the bottle and looked at me pleadingly. Of course, I wasn't used to genies, so I was almost too scared to pull out the wooden peg. But at last I did, and with a great surge the genie rushed out of the bottle and started to grow very big—so big at last, that he was taller than all the houses around Tegnérlunden Park. That's what genies do, they can shrink so small that they have enough room to fit in a bottle, and in the next blink of an eye they can grow to become as large as a house.

You can't imagine how frightened I was. I trembled from head to foot. Then the genie spoke to me. His voice was a great roar, and I thought at once that Aunt Hulda and Uncle Olaf would hear it; they always thought that I spoke too loudly.

'Child,' the genie said to me, 'you have released me from my prison. Tell me how I may reward you.'

But I didn't want a reward for pulling out a small wooden peg. The genie told me that he had come to Stockholm the night before and had crept into the bottle to sleep. You see, genies can't imagine a better place to sleep than a bottle. But, while he was asleep, someone had blocked the way out. So if I hadn't rescued him, he might've had to stay in the bottle for a thousand years until the wooden peg had rotted away.

'That would not have pleased my lord the king,' said the genie, almost to himself.

Then I gathered my courage and asked, 'Genie, where do you come from?'

He was silent for a moment. Then he said, 'I come from Farawayland.'

He said it so loudly that it rang and thundered in my head, and something in his voice made me long for that place. I felt as if I could not live if I didn't get to go there. I stretched my arms up towards the genie and shouted, 'Take me with you! Oh, take me to Farawayland! Someone is waiting for me there.'

The genie shook his head. But then I held the golden apple out towards him and the genie gave a loud cry. 'You carry the sign in your hand! You're the one that I've come to bring back. You're the one that the king has been searching for for so long!'

He bent down and lifted me up in his arms. Around us were the sound of bells and the roar of thunder as we rose into the air. We left Tegnérlunden Park far below us—the gloomy Park and all the houses where there were lights in the windows and where the children were having dinner with their mothers and fathers. I, Karl Anders Nilsson, soared above, under the stars.

We flew high above the clouds and we travelled faster than lightning and with a roar louder than thunder. Stars and moons and suns sparkled around us. At times all was black as night, and at other times so dazzlingly bright and white that I had to shut my eyes.

'He travels by day and by night,' I whispered to myself. That's what the card had said.

Suddenly the genie stretched out his arm and pointed to something far away—something green that was lying in the clear, blue water and in bright sunshine.

'There you see Farawayland,' said the genie.

We sank down towards the green island.

It was an island swimming in the sea, and in the air was the scent of a thousand roses and lilies and a strange music which was more beautiful than any other music in the world.

Down by the shore stood a huge white palace, and we landed there.

A man came striding along the water's edge. It was *my father the king!* I recognized him as soon as I saw him. I knew he was my father. He opened his arms and I ran straight into them. He held me close for a long time. We didn't say anything. I just kept my arms clasped around his neck as tightly as I could.

Oh, how I wished Aunt Hulda could've seen my father the king, how handsome he was and how his clothes glittered with gold and diamonds. His face was like the face of Ben's father, but more handsome. It was a pity Aunt Hulda couldn't see him. She would've seen that my father was not a bum.

Aunt Hulda was right when she said that my mother died when I was born, and the foolish people at the Children's Home never thought of telling my father the king where I was! He had searched for me for nine long years.

I'm so glad that I've come home at last.

I've been here for quite a long time now. Every day is full of fun. Every evening my father the king comes to my room; we build model aeroplanes and talk to each other.

I'm growing and feel fine here in Farawayland. My father the king marks the kitchen door every month, to see how much I've grown.

'Mio, my son! Goodness, how you've grown again,' he says when he measures me. 'Mio, my son,' he says, and it sounds so warm and comforting. It turns out that my real name isn't Andy at all.

'I searched nine long years for you,' says my father the king. 'I used to lie awake at night saying to myself, "Mio, my son." So I'd know your name well.'

That shows you. Calling me Andy was a mistake, like everything else when I lived on North Street. Now it's all been set right.

I love my father the king, and he loves me.

I wish Ben knew about all this. I think I'll write and tell him about it and I'll put the letter in a bottle. Then I'll put a cork in the bottle and throw it in the blue sea which surrounds Farawayland. When Ben is with his mother and father at their seaside cottage in Vaxholm maybe the bottle will come sailing along just when he's swimming. That would be good. I'd like Ben to know about all the strange things that have happened to me. He could call the police too, and tell them that Karl Anders Nilsson, whose real name is Mio, is safe in Farawayland and all is fine, so fine with his father the king.