

be best if he started off by sowing barley ... a stone hit the ploughshare and he stopped the horse. It wasn't a very big stone, so he was able to lift it easily to the edge of the field.

Andreas decided to take a break. He climbed to the top of a ridge so that he could look out over the village. He sat down on a boulder with his arms wrapped around his knees.

Linden Avenue looked fine from here. The buildings were well-kept. His Mum and Dad and Granddad still worked on the farm and made it a point of honour to keep everything in the best possible state. Although Linden Avenue was not one of the biggest farms in the parish, it was still regarded as an estate.

Graastensholm looked just as good. Better, of course, because it was grander, but this was only for as long as Tarald and Yrja and Liv were still able to manage it. How things would turn out when young Mattias Meiden took over was difficult to say. Mattias was a physician by profession and could do nothing else. But if he could get a good farmer to manage it all, then it would be all right!

Mattias hadn't married either and he was now thirty years old. Just thinking of Mattias made Andreas smile. It would be almost wrong of Mattias to marry and belong to one person. He seemed to belong to all of humanity. Marriage might tie him down so that he

wouldn't have the time to care for others.

But these were selfish thoughts on Andreas' part. After all, Mattias should also have the chance to experience the close love and devotion of a caring relationship, even though it didn't seem that he missed being married.

Andreas happened to gaze at a small, miserable hovel at the edge of the forest not far from where he sat. He shivered. He knew that this was where the Night Man lived with his daughter. At that moment he caught sight of a woman on her way to the outhouse. Then she was gone. That must be Hilde. Andreas had never seen her close-up. She had always stayed out there, ignored by

everybody.

He remembered many years ago when the young people in the parish would meet during the bright midsummer evenings to dance in the forest. Hilde was a silent figure who kept close to the trees – at a far distance from the happy, noisy throng. You only saw the Night Man's daughter as a silhouette. If anybody got too close and tried to tease or mock her, she would immediately disappear into the shadows of the forest, not to return for the rest of that night. Just like everybody else in those days, he had laughed at the strange girl. He felt a pang of guilt. He was older now and understood more.

The whole village lay calmly in the grey light down below. The church looked like it was in a slightly tumbledown state. The vicar had mentioned that the church tower needed to be repaired this year, but the congregation had turned a deaf ear because the farmers couldn't afford to pay for anything like that. However, sooner or later the job *had* to be done if the tower was not to collapse.

He caught a glimpse of the roof on Gabriella and Kaleb's farm. They and Eli now had an orphanage there. They had never had children other than their one stillborn daughter, but they had adopted Eli and no parents could have been more devoted to their child than