

The Children of Happiness

A story of Facts and some Fiction



Translated by Christina Carling

1799 Skåne, Vanås castle



Vanås castle

LITTLE HANS felt lonely and frightened. He was waiting for a surprise in his nursery. It was his sixth birthday and he had received a beautiful rocking-horse with a tail of real horsehair for a birthday present. The horse was rather worn, because it had

been used by several children before him, by his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather. The sad part of it was that Hans' mother was long since dead and his father had more important things to do than spending time with his son. It was Alma, his nurse who had made a

birthday-cake for him. If he waited patiently in his room there would soon be a nice surprise for him.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door. Alma entered, accompanied by a smiling gentleman, dressed in black with a funny sort of cap on his head.

– This is Abbé Mongez, she said.

– He has come to teach you French.

Alma left the room. The man in black came up to Hans, looked deeply into his eyes, saying:

– Moi, je suis M.Mongez, et vous?
pointing at Hans.

Somewhat puzzled, Hans said after a while:

– Moi, Hans Wachtmeister. M. Mongez smiled, repeating what he had said about himself, until Hans said:

– Moi, je suis Hans Wachtmeister.

In this way their friendship started, lighting up the young boy's life. He began to long for M.Mongez' visits. The world outside the nursery opened up to him and he came to love the French language. Gone were the feelings of loneliness and anxiousness.

1828, Blekinge, Johannishus



Johannishus

THE COLD STRUCK Carin Gustafsdotter's face as she closed the door of the cottage. It was after midnight and the icy March wind made her shudder. Pressed tightly against her chest was a bundle, neatly tied together,

containing her new-born baby. Moonlight guided her as she hurried towards the manor. It was the most impressive building in Blekinge and reminded people of a French estate rather than of the solid brick buildings common in the area. The coun-

tess of the estate had been widowed shortly before giving birth to a little daughter, posthumously. The fact that she was a girl created a problem, since the estate was entailed and could only be inherited by a male heir.

An inquiry from the manager of the estate addressed to Carin and her husband Jöns put the parents in a quandary. – Could the farmer and his wife exchange their new-born boy for the little girl at the manor?

The manager had reassured them that the farmer and his wife would be properly compensated for the exchange. The parents realized that the proposal could not be declined. Carin had decided to hand

over their son to the countess herself.

The wooden footbridge across the Listerby river could be hazardous. She slackened her pace. Then she followed the long avenue with the knotty oaks, leading up to the manor. As it grew in size before her eyes among the trees, the building looked both impressive and intimidating in its grandeur. This was the place where her little boy would grow up. The manager opened the gates and the heavy oak door of the building. Carin was ushered into the great hall. With a hug of her bundle, she handed over her son to a wet-nurse.

– The little girl will be delivered to you later, the manager whispered.