



MIA'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT

On Christmas Eve 1999 Mia, who lived in Kiruna in the north of Sweden, received the Christmas present which led to her disappearance some weeks later. I could say that it led to her death as Mia seems to have disappeared forever. Poor Mia! She was such a happy and pleasant girl. I wish so much that I could rescue her but that is impossible. I am Mia's brother Bosse, and I gave her the Christmas present. I don't believe that God can forgive me for my dreadful mistake. Sometimes, I feel like a murderer even though I am innocent. I couldn't know of course that it would end so tragically.

During the winter, life is dark and sad for us in Kiruna. In the Iron mine it is always dark but in December the mine seems to come up and, like a greedy predator, devours the whole town and drags it down into the darkest pit. People who live in the south of Sweden think we are so happy because we have the midnight sun every summer. They don't think about December when sun fades and dies and it is always night. Last Christmas we were all fed up and blue. Everything was so depressing. In my next life I really hope to be born in the south of Sweden!

I sought consolation by buying some unusual Christmas presents. It is no fun to buy the usual trash in the shops. There was a foreigner on the train to Kiruna's central station whom I happened to meet. He had travelled from Uppsala in the south and only spoke a little bad German; I think he was Polish or Bulgarian. He was some kind of travelling salesman and I thought he said he had been in over two thousand countries. We sat in the waiting room and bargained. He opened his black suitcase and displayed the most bizarre objects. Some were so awful I doubted whether they were saleable. But there were a few fine things and I settled for a small round mirror with a wooden frame and handle. Strangely enough it was really quite cheap and only cost ten crowns but I had to promise to give it to a beautiful girl...so it became Mia's Christmas present. I also bought two

magic wands in black and white, one each for my mother and father. There was nothing wrong with the wands, but the mirror...

The dark December weeks were always difficult for Mia. She cried and wanted beer, but if she got it she cried even more and become confused. Last Christmas went badly for her and every day she talked about suicide. But everything changed on Christmas Eve when she got the mirror and, during the first week with it she was so happy. She had the mirror on her writing table and looked at herself occasionally. When she did this she smiled happily, perhaps because she had discovered she was beautiful. During the second week she began to behave strangely. She could sit looking into the mirror for hours and if you tried to take it from her, she screamed in anguish. Worst was that she begun to bleed. She must hold the mirror, and she told us that if she was prevented she would be dead in one hour. But sometimes she didn't want to hold it. Instead she got angry with it and tried to smash the glass. However, the glass was unbreakable.

Mia begun to sleep with the mirror pressed against her cheek. Her condition was now really bad and the bleeding got worse even if she lost contact with the mirror for a single second. She was no longer beautiful; she looked like a corpse. Despite this, she always wanted to see herself in the mirror and as long as she had contact with it, the bleeding stopped; she didn't have to look. It was obvious that medical care was needed for both her physical and mental condition, but Mum wanted us to wait a few days to see whether her illness would cure itself. If it really was an illness. For my part I really had begun to doubt it.

During the evening of her last day Mia was so weak that Mum decided to ring the hospital. The situation was acute; Mia was dying. However, Mum never reached the phone and neither did I. We both lost consciousness. When I awoke I was lying on the hard floor but Mum luckily fell on a sofa. And Mia had disappeared. The last we saw of her, she was trying to push the mirror into her mouth. Perhaps she wanted to swallow it in a last desperate attempt to escape her horrible fate. Although Mia had gone, the mirror remained. We found it in her bed. You can imagine how we screamed when we saw what had happened; her face seemed to be alive in the glass. We heard her laugh and cry and shout for help. Even her tears were there; they moistened the glass and made it dull. But after a while we saw she had stiffened and she never moved again. All that remained of her was a little round portrait. Life is hard and hopeless in Kiruna. Poor Mia!