



ONE LONG LONELY EVENING

For the first time in her life Linnea, who was ten years old had to spend the whole evening alone at home as her parents had been invited to the world-famous Nobel celebrations in Stockholm. Linnea herself was not invited and her father thought she ought to understand that it was nothing for children. Anyway, sooner or later she must learn to be alone occasionally. However, she knew that the royal family would be there and she very much wanted to meet the Queen. This time it was impossible.

“My life won’t be any adventure!” She exclaimed in anger.

But she would regret saying that, as somebody from the other side of the grave heard her.

The moment for her parent’s departure was approaching and even though she could see that her mother was stressed, she tugged furiously at her evening dress like a whining small child. Suddenly her mother let out a loud howl which almost knocked Linnea down: “Get lost, you damned brat! Go into your room and stay there!”

Linnea thought that was how the blast wave from a bomb felt, but half a minute later came the usual apology: “Forgive me darling for shouting at you!”

Her mother was terrible sometimes, but she always begged forgiveness afterwards. She could have put her “forgive me darling etc” on a tape recorder!

“Have a good time when we are away!” Said her father. “Don’t forget there is food in the refrigerator and ice cream in the freezer. What a wonderful evening it will be!”

Her father was the most intense egoist in the world. He thought everybody was happy just when he was happy and he was so disappointed every time he discovered that he was wrong.

The outer door slammed to and was locked from the outside. The long hours of loneliness began.

“Yes, what a good time I shall have!” Said Linnea to herself.

She hadn’t been so near to tears for ages. If she only had a friend to go to on such an evening, but she hadn’t been so long in Uppsala and she didn’t know anybody well enough.

After one hour by herself sitting curled up on her bed with her chin resting on her knees, a feeling of terror seemed to come out of the darkest corners and she thought that somebody was watching her. It was a strange, unexplainable feeling that she was no longer alone.

In panic she ran to the outer door and tested the handle. It was locked, so nobody could have come in that way. Afterwards she checked the windows. They were all closed, but the feeling that she was being watched became stranger. She turned round to see whether there was some monster lurking behind her, but there wasn’t.

Linnea felt that she ought to do something about this. It wasn't possible to go to her neighbor and anyway there might have been some horrible monster waiting on the stairs. She decided to lock herself in the bathroom and wait until her parents returned. She dragged in a mattress, quilt and pillow and locked the door from the inside.

A maniac with an axe could, of course, have broken through the door and in this case she could only scream and hope that somebody would hear her.

A dripping tap irritated her, but the worst was that she felt more watched than ever; the monster was with her in the bathroom or so it felt. She looked in the bath: nothing. She looked in the toilet and there she thought an eye looked up at her. She screamed to high heaven, but it was only a towel holder, which one of her parents had accidentally dropped.

It took her a while to calm down. Then she looked in the mirror and became increasingly convinced that a monster was in the glass itself! Perhaps it had been there for several years just waiting for the first chance to catch her! She screamed for her parents as though they could hear her far away in Stockholm!

She was losing her balance. It was hopeless. She knew that there were no monsters, but perhaps there was just this one. The long loneliness of the evening was no loneliness! She had the company of some sort of monster and then she heard its hoarse voice say her name: "Linnea, come to me, darling. I have come to you!"

She knew the voice well. Perhaps she had heard it in a nightmare. She still sat in the bathroom hoping that the locked door would protect her. The voice faded away slowly, but it left her in a state of fear so strong that she thought she would die. This was not imagination. She had heard her own name.

Somebody began to pull and tear at the door and she yelled: "Help, can nobody help me?"

"But it's only me!" Exclaimed the voice.

Then she realized that it was her own grandmother. Her dear grandmother had come and she helped her take the mattress back to her bed. Then she tucked her up and sat with her the whole evening, white and pale but with a kind look in her old bloodshot eyes and a smile in the wrinkled corners of her mouth.

However, she still didn't feel safe. It felt unpleasant to have her grandmother by the bedside with her cold hand on her cheek. She liked her grandmother but everything was so uncanny and felt wrong. Perhaps it was because she was so silent or because the bedside lamp shone with such a pale green light.

Suddenly Linnea remembered with a shock that she had recently attended her grandmother's funeral.