

A same girl's meeting with Dag Hammarskjöld in Sarek

It was a chilly morning in the Sami summer dwelling Lovtak in Sarek and Laila had a knitted red cap on. She was playing by herself, when she caught sight of a man sitting a bit further away also wearing a knitted red cap. She used to befriend mountain hikers. If they had sat down to eat their picknick near the dwelling, she could sometimes say: 'Come, you should really have some coffee "and invite them home to the cot. But this morning her father out getting the reindeer together, and her mother had her hands full with other things.

The man greeted Laila and asked her name and Laila said to him. "Why are you here alone, it is dangerous!" "I like it, I need it," replied the man. They started to talk. The man had many questions about the herbs that grew on the soft carpet of lechen on the mountain. He wanted to know their sami names and how they were used. Laila happily shared what she herself had been taught! The man took up a notebook, and made a few notes. "What are you writing?" Laila asked. "I write down what I've experienced so that I will remember it," replied the man and handed her the book so that she could see for yourself. But Laila could not read yet.

Laila picked a little flower called *Isranunkel* and showed the man. "This is my flower, that has been given to me by my father Jovva. In latin it is called *Ranunculus glacialis*." The name of the *isranunkel* was the first and only Latin that Laila knew. She also read the Sami motto which her father had given her, along with isranunkeln. She could not yet say the words in Swedish, but the man listened carefully and learnt what she said by heart. It was easy for him to learn things by heart.

The friendly mountain hiker made an impression on Laila. When she came home to the cot in the evening she told her pasrents about her new friend. "I like these tourists who come by," she said.

Laila's new companion stayed in the vicinity of the cot for three days. They met many times. Laila took the freshly baked rock cakes and the juice of small mountain flowers in a cup to him. And he cooked fruit soup which he invited her to share. One evening Laila suggested that he move his tent to come closer to the Arctic fox, and he followed her advice. The next morning she was up early and asked her mother for some smoked fish. She had seen her father put out fish to attract the mountain fox. She took the fish to her friend, put it outside the tent and then the two of them lay spying though the tent opening for the fox. Finally it came, lured by the bait. Her friend grabbed his camera and crept closer to photograph. "You can take a picture of it, but you must not touch it, he bites. He has sharp teeth," warned Laila. She particularly appreciated the wakeful mind of her new friend. He saw, he knew, he heard. And then he sang some African children's songs to her and showed her how to dance to them. He engaged in the dance body and soul and his legs were kiking in all directions. Laila could not be still, but jumped up and skipped around like a RUBBER BALL with him. "What do you do?" she asked when they sat down to rest outside the tent. "I work in a large city, called New York, in a big building, to create peace in the world," he explained. "We have big meetings where we discuss what to do to succeed. It is very important that you talk to each other and agree on how to live peacefully."

Before the man continued his hike, he gave Laila a note book full of his writings and drawings. They decided to write to each other. "But I don't spell so well," said Laila. He invited her to come and visit him at his workplace and meet the world's children.

That fall came a letter to Laila from the other side of the Atlantic. When she showed it to her parents they were quite taken aback, because the sender was the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Laila received several letters and wrote herself diligently. But she was too young to travel alone to New York, and her parents were busy with the family's reindeer. They could not come with her.

One winter day a few years later when the family stayed in Jokkmokk Laila's mother Annemarie sent her daughter to buy a newspaper. When Laila came to the store, she saw Dag Hammarskjöld's picture on the storefront with bold headlines that told of his death. She burst into tears and ran home.