



## CHAPTER ONE

### *The hole in the hedge*

**O**n the first afternoon of the summer holidays, Lena and I made a ropeway between our houses. Lena, as usual, had to be the first to try it. She clambered boldly up onto the window ledge, took hold of the rope with both hands and swung her two bare feet in a knot around it. It looked dreadfully dangerous. I held my breath as she pulled herself across towards her house, further and further away from the window. Lena is almost nine years old, and not as strong as

those who are a bit bigger. About halfway, her feet slipped down from the rope with a small “ritsch” sound, and suddenly she was dangling by just her hands between the upstairs floors of the two houses. My heart began to pound really fast.

“Uh-oh,” said Lena.

“Keep going!” I yelled.

I was told that it was not as easy to keep going as it might look to someone staring from the window.

“Hang on then! I’ll save you!”

My hands started to sweat while I was thinking. I hoped that Lena’s hands were dry. What if she lost her grip and fell straight down from a two-storey height? That was when I came up with the idea of the mattress.

So while Lena held on as best as she could, I heaved the mattress off Mum and Dad’s bed, shoved it onto the landing, threw it down the stairs, pushed it into the downstairs corridor,

opened the front door, kicked it down the doorsteps and dragged it out into the garden. It was a really heavy mattress. On the way I knocked down a picture of my great-great-grandmother, which smashed. Still, it was better that she was broken than Lena.

When I finally came out into the garden, I could see from the grimaces Lena was making that she was close to falling.

“Trille, you slowcoach!” she huffed angrily. Her black pigtails were waving in the wind all the way up there. I acted as if I hadn’t heard. She was hanging right over the hedge. I had no choice but to put the mattress there, on top of the hedge.

And then Lena Lid could finally let go, coming tumbling down from the sky like an overripe apple. She landed with a soft crack. Two of the branches in the hedge snapped instantly.

I collapsed on the lawn, relieved, while I watched Lena in the demolished hedge, scrambling furiously between the branches and the fitted sheet.

“That was your fault, Trille, you stupid smoked haddock,” she said, getting up uninjured.

It was hardly my fault, I thought, but I didn’t say so. I was just glad she was alive. As usual.





## CHAPTER TWO

### ***Trille lad and the little lass from next door***

**W**e are in the same class, Lena and I. Lena is the only girl. Luckily it was the summer holidays, otherwise Lena was so fed up with school that she would have fallen into a coma and “popped her clogs”, as she puts it.

“Actually, you could’ve popped your clogs when you fell if there hadn’t been a mattress underneath you,” I said to her later that evening, when we were back outside looking at the hole in the hedge. Lena

doubted that. She thought she would have got concussion at the most, and she's had that before. Twice.

But I still wonder what would have happened if she had fallen down without a mattress there. It would have been awful if she had kicked the bucket. I wouldn't have Lena any more. She's my best friend, even if she is a girl. I have never told her. I don't dare, as I don't know if I am *her* best friend. Sometimes I think I am, and sometimes I think I'm not. It depends. But I do wonder about it. Especially when things happen like she falls down from ropeways onto mattresses that I have put there; then I think I would like her to tell me that I am her best friend. She doesn't need to say it loudly or anything. She could just say it hidden behind a cough. But she never does. Sometimes it seems that Lena has a heart of stone.

As well as her heart of stone, Lena has green eyes and seven freckles on her nose. She is thin.

Grandpa sometimes says that she eats like a horse and looks like a bicycle. Everyone beats her at arm-wrestling. But Lena says that's because everyone cheats. As for me, I look normal, I think, with light hair and a dimple on one side. It's my name that isn't normal, but that can't be seen on the outside. Mum and Dad named me Theobald Rodrik. They regretted it afterwards. It's not a good idea to give a small baby such a big name. But what's done is done. I've now been called Theobald Rodrik Danielsen Yttergård for nine years. That's quite a while. It's my whole life. Luckily everyone calls me Trille, so I don't really bother about it, apart from when Lena sometimes asks:

“What is it you're called again, Trille?”

Then I answer, “Theobald Rodrik.”

And then Lena laughs long and hard. Sometimes she slaps her thigh too.

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The hedge that Lena and I made a hole in marks the boundary between our gardens. The small, white house on one side is where Lena lives with her mother. They don't have a dad in their home, though Lena thinks there would be plenty of space for one if they tidied up the cellar a bit. The big, orange house on the other side is where I live. We have three floors plus an attic, because there are so many people in my family: Mum, Dad, Minda, who's 14, Magnus, who's 13, me, 9, and Krølla, 3. Plus Grandpa, Dad's dad, who has a flat in the basement. That's just enough people to keep under control, says Mum. When Lena comes over it's a little too many, and then things get chaotic.

Today Lena thought it would be a good idea to go into my kitchen to see if anyone had decided to have some coffee and biscuits.

Grandpa had. Every now and then he comes up the stairs from the basement to have a cup of



coffee. Grandpa is thin and wrinkly, and has wispy hair. He is the best grown-up I know.

Grandpa kicked off his wooden shoes and stuck his hands in his boiler-suit pockets. He always wears a boiler suit, my grandpa.

“Well, if it isn’t Trille lad, and the little lass from next door,” he said, bowing. “It looks like we’ve come on the same mission.”

Mum was in the living room reading the newspaper. She hadn’t noticed that we’d come in. That’s because it’s entirely normal for Lena and Grandpa to be in our kitchen, even though neither of them lives here. They just pop in. Lena visits so often that she’s almost her own neighbour.

Grandpa picked up a torch that was lying on the kitchen worktop and crept up on Mum.

“Hands up!” he shouted, pretending that the torch was a pistol. “Stand and deliver! Your coffee or your life, Lady Kari.”

“And biscuits!” Lena added, just to make sure.

Lena, Grandpa and I, we get coffee and biscuits almost whenever we want. Mum isn’t capable of saying no. At least not when we ask for it nicely. And certainly not when her life is threatened with a torch.

We’re a nice bunch, I thought, as the four of us sat around the kitchen table eating biscuits and messing around. Mum had been pretty cross about the ropeway, but now she was smiling again, and suddenly she asked if Lena and I were looking forward to being Midsummer bride and groom.

Lena stopped her munching. “This year as well? Are you planning to marry the two of us to death?”

“No,” Mum protested, she was not planning to marry us to death, but Lena cut her off, saying that was exactly what she was doing.

“You’re trying to finish us off! We refuse to do it,” she insisted, without asking me first. But that

was OK. I had a good mind to refuse to do it as well. It's always Lena and me who have to dress up as the traditional Midsummer bride and groom.

"It's no good asking us, Mum," I said. "Can't we do something else?"

Mum didn't have a chance to say another word before Lena made a dramatic suggestion: she and I could make the witch to put on the bonfire. I was stunned. But then I felt happy. Minda and Magnus made the Midsummer witch every year. It was only fair to let Lena and me have a try for once. Lena begged and pleaded, and then shook Mum's hand while jumping up and down.

"Let Trille lad and the little lass make the witch. Another bride and groom will turn up," said Grandpa.

And that's how Lena and I got our first witch-making assignment. It will most likely be our last too.

