

SAMPO LAPPALAINEN

A Finnish Tale

Sakari Topelious
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Translated by
Jaana Virkki

Once there was a Lapp man and a Lapp woman. They lived in a place called Ailigas in the depths of Lappland, by the river of Tenojoki. It is a desert but majestic land: and in the opinion of the Lapp and his wife, nowhere in the world was the snow so white, the stars so brilliant and the northern lights so great as in Ailigas. There they had made their hut.

They had a little boy called Sampo, which in Lappland means luck. Actually, the boy had not yet been christened because, back then, the nearest minister was 200 kilometers away. "Next year we will go to the minister and have the boy christened," the father would always say. But each next year one thing or another prevented them from going, the journey was never made and the boy never christened. "I will have no peace until the boy is christened," the mother said. "The wolves will eat him up in the mountains some day. Or he may run across the Hiisi's reinder with the golden horns, and may God save anyone who hasn't been christened then!"

Sampo heard these words and thought about a reinder with golden horns. "It must be a very handsome reinder," he thought. "I wish I could ride it to the Rastegaise sometime!" The Rastegaise is a high, majestic mountain some 50-60 kilometers away and can be seen from Ailigas.

"Dear little Sampo, don't you ever go to Rastegaise for there lives Hiisi, the great King of the Mountain who eats whole reindeer in one bite and swallows little boys as if they were mosquitoes!" said his mother. When Sampo heard that, he looked very thoughtful, but said nothing. To himself he said: "It would be really fantastic to see that creature, the king of the mountain, once —but only from a distance!"

Three or four weeks had passed since Christmas but Lappland remained in total darkness. There was no difference between morning, day and evening: it was always night and the moon shone, the northern lights burned and the stars were permanently bright. Sampo was getting bored. He had not seen the sun in such a long time that he had almost forgotten what it looked like; and if someone spoke about summer Sampo could only remember that mosquitoes were wild then and almost ate him up. As far as Sampo was concerned, summer need not come at all if he could only have more light, enough light to be able to ski well.

One day at midday (though it was dark) the Lapp man said: "Come here so you can see something!" Sampo crawled from the hut and carefully observed the south, where his father was pointing. He saw a narrow red ribbon above the horizon. "Do you know what that is!" the father asked. "A Southern Fire," said the boy. He knew all about the cardinal points and that the northern lights, the Northern Fire, could not be seen towards the south. "No, it isn't," the said said. "It is the messenger of the sun. Tomorrow or the day after we may see the sun itself. See how the red light shines on the peak of the Rastegaise."

Sampo turned and saw how the snow that covered the peak of the Rastegaise, which he had not been able to discern in a long time, was colored red. And he immediately remembered his temptation to see the king of the mountains from a distance. Sampo thought about the matter the whole of the day and half of the night. He should have been sleeping but he could not. And as he thought and thought, he slowly crawled out from between his reindeer skins and out the door of the hut. He took his own reindeer and sleigh, riding very fast towards the wide, deserted snow field. "I will only ride a little distance towards the Rastegaise," he thought. And so he went, across the frozen river and up the other side of Tenojoki, and there he was already, in the kingdom of Norway, for Tenojoki is a frontier river.

But what happened? On one of the curves, the sleigh turned over and Sampo fell off into the snow. The reindeer felt nothing and kept running, while Sampo had his mouth so full of snow he could not call out. And there he sat, alone in the snow, on the dark desert mountain of Lappland. It felt strange and frightening to see the black shadow of the Rastegaise right in front of him: the domain of the King of the Mountain. Sitting there and crying was no use whatsoever, as the tears froze and fell like peas on the boy's little fur coat. "So much for crying, then," thought Sampo, and he got up and started to run to keep warm. He began to ascend the mountainside and had not gone very far when he heard soft steps behind him, and soon a big furry wolf ran beside him. "Who are you, young man

stepping on the snow?" he asked. "I am Sampo Lappalainen, who are you?" "I am the master wolf of all the wolves of the King," the animal answered, "and I am running through the mountains inviting his people to the great Sun Fair. As you are going in the same direction, you can ride on my back." "What is the Sun Fair?" asked Sampo. "Don't you know? When darkness has reigned over Lapland for such a long winter, the first sign of the sun is greeted with a Sun Fair. All the animals and gnomes of the north meet on the Rastegaise that day, and no one can harm others while it lasts. You are very lucky, Sampo, for if it wasn't so I would already have eaten you." "Does this rule apply also to the King?" asked Sampo. "Of course. One hour before dawn one hour after sunset, the king will not dare touch a hair of your head. But take care of yourself when the time is over." By now they had reached the top of the mountain where a strange sight awaited them. The great King of the Mountain sat on his cloud-high throne, staring over the mountains and valleys into the darkness of the night. He had a hat made of white snowclouds, his eyes resembled the full moon when it rises behind a forest; his nose was like a mountain peak and his mouth a valley: his beard was made of icicles; his arms were wider than a tree trunk, his legs and feet like a ski-jump and his wide coat as snowy as a hill. Around the King there sat millions of mountain gnomes and creatures, so tiny that their steps on the snow were no bigger than those of the squirrel. They had come from all around to adore the sun. But suddenly the King spoke: "We are here to celebrate an old tradition, but today it will be different. The sun will not appear for the sun has died. The sun has lost its light and from now on the whole world will adore me, the King of everlasting winter and night!" "You are lying, lying terribly!" yelled Sampo. "I have seen the messenger of the sun on the horizon, and the sun is not dead. May your beard melt when we reach midsummer day!" These words angered the King so much that he forgot the rule and lifted his long arm to smash Sampo Lappalainen. But in that instant, the northern lights paled and a red ribbon appeared in the sky, shining exactly on the king's face. And so, the golden circle of the sun rose slowly and majestically above the horizon, lighting up the mountains and deserts, the snow, the valleys, the gnomes, creatures and animals, as well as brave little Sampo Lappalainen. The snow shone and the sun reflected its light in everyone's eyes and hearts. Even those who had been the happiest about the death of the sun, now greeted it with great joy. But the first hour had almost come to its end and as Sampo hastily looked around he saw the reindeer with the golden horns right beside him. He jumped on its back and they fled down the mountainside. As they ran, Sampo again asked: "Is that thunder I

hear behind us?" "No," the trembling reindeer said, "it is the King himself who stomps after us so. Only if we reach the minister's house on the shore of Inari Lake may we be saved; the King of the Mountain has no dominion over the Christians." And the minute they reached the minister's house and locked the door, the King already thundered beyond it: "Open this door! There is a child inside who has not been christened, and all pagans belong to me!" The minister in all haste took a cup of water and baptized Sampo into Christianity, only then opening the door to the King, saying: "You, King of the Winter and the Night, may now go away as this child belongs to you no longer." And the King's anger was no great that he exploded, disintegrating into the greatest snowstorm ever seen. As morning finally came, sunshine melted the snow but the King had disappeared; nobody knows for sure but it is thought that he still lives and reigns on the Rastegaise.

Sampo Lappalainen thanked the minister, and borrowed a sleigh from him. Pulled by the reindeer with the golden horns, they drove to his father's house in Ailigas where his return met with great joy. And how Sampo later became a great man is another story too long to be told now.