

# The Mines at Falun

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*One bright, sunny July day,  
everyone had gathered at the  
roadstead in Göteborg.*

A rich East-Indiaman, happily home from foreign lands, lay at anchor in the harbour. Its long pennants, its Swedish flags, streamed out gaily, and hundreds of boats and skiffs, filled with jubilant sailors, raced hither and thither across the mirror-bright waters, while the cannon of the Masthuggetorg thundered their greetings over the wide sea. The gentlemen of the East India Company paced up and down the harbour calculating, with pleased expressions, the rich gains their valiant undertakings were bringing them and how Göteborg was flourishing more and more with every year that passed. Everyone thus regarded the said gentlemen with warm approval, for it was their profits which gave life and strength to the whole town.

The crew of the East-Indiaman – they numbered close on 150 men – came on shore and set about their Hönsning – the feast celebrated by a ship's company on such occasions and often lasting several days. Performers in wonderful gay costumes appeared with fiddles, pipes, oboes and drums, while others sang all kinds of merry songs in time to them. They were followed by the sailors, two by two; some wore gaily beribboned jackets and hats and waved fluttering pennants, others danced and leaped about, and the laughing and rejoicing echoed far and wide. Thus the happy procession wound its way across the dockyard and through the suburbs to the Haga district, where there was to be feasting and drinking. Now the finest drink flowed in rivers, and flagon after flagon was emptied; as always happens when sailors return home from long journeys, they were soon joined by the local ladies, dancing began and all grew ever louder and wilder.

Only one solitary sailor, a slim, handsome youth hardly twenty years old, had slipped away from the din and had sat alone outside on a bench which stood close to the door of the tavern. Two sailors came up to him, and one of them called out loudly, with a laugh: 'Elis Fröbom! Elis Fröbom! Are you playing the fool again and sulking out here? Listen, Elis, if you stay away from our Hönsning, you had better stay away from the ship too! You will never be a sailor the way you are going. You have courage enough and are plucky when there's danger, but you can't drink and would rather keep your ducats in your pocket than spend them. Drink, lad! or the trolls will get you!'

Elis Fröbom leaped up hastily from the bench, gave the sailors a fiery glance, took a glass filled to the brim with brandy and emptied it in a single gulp. Then he said: 'You see, Joens, I can drink as well as any of you, and whether I am a good seaman, the Captain can decide. Now shut your trap and be off. What I'm doing out here has nothing to do with you!'

'Now, now,' Joens replied, 'I know you are a Neriker and that they are all gloomy and melancholy and don't really like the sailor's life! Well, wait there, Elis, and I'll send someone out to you who will soon get you off that bench.'

Before long a girl came out of the inn and sat next to the melancholy youth. Her whole appearance betrayed the occupation to which she had sacrificed herself, but it had not yet destroyed her beauty, and a quiet grief lay in the glance of her dark eyes.

'Elis!' she said, 'don't you want to share in the joy of your comrades? Aren't you happy to have braved the perils of the sea and to be home again?'

The girl spoke in a quiet voice and put an arm around the youth. As if awakened from a dream, Elis looked into the girl's eyes, took her hand and pressed it to his breast. 'Ah,' he began at length, as if coming to himself, 'alas, I no longer know joy or happiness. At least, I cannot share in the revels of my comrades. Go back inside, my dear child, and enjoy yourself; leave me out here, I would only spoil your pleasure. But wait! I like you and would want you to think well of me when I am again at sea.'

So saying, he took two shining ducats from his pocket, drew forth from his jacket an East Indian kerchief and gave them to the girl. Bright tears welled up in her eyes; she rose, placed the ducats on the bench and said: 'You shall keep your ducats – they only make me sad – but I will wear the beautiful kerchief for you as a memento, and you will certainly not find me next year if you hold your Hönsning here in Haga.'

With that the girl slipped away, not back into the tavern but across the street, with her hands pressed to her face.

Elis again sank back into his gloomy daydreaming, and as the noise in the inn grew louder and more riotous, he cried: 'Oh, if only I were lying at the bottom of the sea – for in life there is no one with whom I can be happy!'

A rough, deep voice said close behind him: 'You must have had bad luck indeed, young man, if you are wishing for death when your life is only just beginning.'

Elis looked round and beheld an old miner leaning against the wooden wall of the tavern with his arms folded and looking down at him with a serious, penetrating glance.

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The longer he gazed at the old man, the more it seemed to him as though a friend was coming to meet him in his desolate loneliness; he pulled himself together and told of how his father, a fine steersman, had been lost in a storm at sea, how his two brothers had been killed in battle and service. For he had been destined to be a sailor from the first and had thought himself fortunate in being taken on by the East India Company. Profits this time had been higher than ever before, and every sailor had received a large sum in addition to his pay, so that, his pockets full of ducats, he had run home joyfully to the cottage where his mother lived. But strange faces had peered at him through the windows, and a young woman who had finally opened the door to him had told him in cold, rough tones that his mother had been dead for three months and that he could collect from the town hall the little of her property that was left after the burial had been paid for. The death of his mother had broken his heart: he felt abandoned by the whole world, as if dashed on a barren reef, helpless and wretched. His whole life at sea seemed to him a pointless drifting; yes, when he considered that his mother had died alone and comfortless, it seemed to him dreadful that he should have gone to sea at all instead of staying at home to care for her. His comrades had dragged him to the Hönsning, and he had believed that the rioting and drinking would ease his pain, but, instead of that, it seemed to him as if all the veins in his chest were bursting and he must bleed to death.

'Soon,' said the old miner, 'you will be back at sea again, Elis, and then your pain will pass. Old people die, that is something that does not change; and your mother has left behind only a hard, wearisome life.'

'Alas!' replied Elis. 'That no one believes how I suffer, that I am considered foolish, that is what is driving me out of this world. I cannot go to sea again, the life disgusts me. In former times my heart leaped when the ship, sails spread like stately wings, rode out the sea and the waves splashed and roared and the wind whistled through the rigging. Then I was happy to cheer with my comrades on deck and then – during my watch in the quiet darkness of the night – I would think about the homeward journey and my dear mother and how happy she would be when I again returned. Ha! then I could rejoice at the Hönsning, when I had poured ducats into my mother's lap, when I had given her kerchiefs and all kinds of other rare goods from far-off lands; when her eyes had lit up for joy, when she had clasped her hands together with pleasure and joy, when she had brought out the best ale she had been saving for me, when I spent my evenings sitting with her and telling her of the strange people I had met, of their customs and habits, of all the strange things which had happened to me on the long voyage. She took great pleasure in all this and told me again of the wonderful voyages my father used to make to the far north, and many dreadful sailors' tales which I had heard a hundred times and which I still could not hear enough. Oh, who will give me such joy again? No, never back to sea! What should I do among men who would only mock me, and how could I take pleasure in work which would seem to me only wearisome labour?'

'I am listening to you with pleasure, young man,' said the old man as Elis fell silent, 'just as I have been observing with pleasure your whole behaviour over the past couple of hours without your being aware of me. Everything you have done, all you have said, shows that you have a deep, introspective, pious, childlike disposition, and Heaven could not have conferred a finer gift upon you. But the life of a sailor is not the life for you. How should you, a melancholy-inclined Neriker – I can tell you are one – how should you be suited to the unsettled life of the sea? You would do well to give it up for ever. But you won't want to sit doing nothing. Take my advice: go to Falun and become a miner. You are young, hale and hearty, and would soon be a skilful pitman, then a hewer, then a foreman, and so on upwards. You have a good sum in your pockets; invest it, earn some more; you will soon own a home of your own and have shares in the mine. Take my advice: become a miner!'

Elis Fröbom was almost terrified by the old man's words. 'What are you advising me to do?' he cried. 'Am I to leave the beautiful earth and the sunlit sky and go down into the dreadful depths and burrow like a mole, grubbing for ores and minerals, for the sake of vile profit?'

'People despise what they want to know nothing about!' the old man cried angrily. 'Vile profit! As if the horrors perpetrated on the face of the earth by trade and commerce were nobler than the work of the miner, whose indefatigable industry opens up nature's most secret treasurehouses. You speak of vile profit, Elis Fröbom! – well, something higher than that might be involved. If the blind mole burrows by blind instinct, it may be that the eyes of man acquire more penetrating sight in the deepest depths of the earth, until they can recognize in the wonderful stones they find a reflection of that which is hidden above the clouds. You know nothing about mining, Elis; let me tell you about it.'

With these words, the old man sat on the bench next to Elis and began to describe in detail and the

liveliest colours how things were done in a mine. He came to the mines at Falun, in which, he said, he had worked since his early youth; he described the huge crater with its blackish brown walls to be found there; he spoke of its immeasurable wealth of precious stones. His speech grew more and more lively, his eyes brighter and brighter. He wandered through the galleries as though along the paths of a magic garden. The rocks came to life, the fossils stirred, the pyroxenite and almandine sparkled in the light of the lamps – the rock-crystals glowed and flickered.

Elis listened intently; the old man's strange way of speaking of these subterranean wonders as if he were standing in the midst of them gripped his whole being. He felt as though his chest were constricted and it seemed to him that he was already in the depths with the old man and that a powerful magic was keeping him there, so that he would never again look on the light of day. Yet it seemed to him too as if the old man had revealed to him a new and unfamiliar world in which he nonetheless belonged and whose magic had been known to him from earliest boyhood in strange, secret presentiments.

'I have shown you all the splendour of a situation which nature really intended you for,' the old man said at last. 'Take counsel with yourself and then do as your spirit bids you!'

With that he rose quickly from the bench and walked away, without another word and without even looking back, and soon disappeared from sight.

In the meantime, the tavern had grown quiet: the power of beer and brandy had triumphed. Many of the seamen had slipped away with their girls; others lay in the corners and snored. Elis, who could no longer return to his usual shelter, asked for and obtained a tiny room in which to sleep.

Hardly had he stretched out on his bed, worn out and weary as he was, when dreams touched him with their wings. It seemed as if he were floating in a ship under full sail on a mirror-bright sea with a vault of dark clouds above him. Yet as he looked down into the water, he realized that what he had taken for the sea was a solid transparent sparkling mass into whose shimmering light the whole ship dissolved away, so that he was standing on a crystalline floor and above him was a vault of glittering black rock. It was this which he had at first taken for clouds. Propelled by an unknown power, he took a step forward, but at that instant everything around him stirred, and there arose from the ground like rippling waves strange flowers and plants of flashing metal whose blossoms and leaves climbed upwards from the profoundest depths and twined themselves about one another. The ground was so clear that Elis could distinguish the roots of the plants, but soon, his gaze penetrating even deeper, he saw at the very bottom countless lovely maidens embracing one another with white shining arms; it was from their hearts that the roots, the flowers and plants shot up; and whenever the maidens smiled, a sweet, melodious sound echoed through the vault and the strange metallic flowers climbed higher. An indescribable feeling

of pain and pleasure seized the youth, a world of love, yearning and passionate desire rose up in his soul.

'Down – I will come down to you!' he cried, and threw himself on to the crystal ground with outstretched arms. But it gave beneath him, and he found himself floating as if in shimmering air.

'Well, Elis Fröbom, how do you like this grandeur?' a voice called loudly to him. Elis became aware of the old miner, but as he looked at him, he began to grow into a giant figure made of molten ore. Before he had time to be terrified, a burst of light broke from the depths within which Elis beheld the face of a huge woman. He felt the rising ecstasy in his breast turn into annihilating fear. The old man had laid hold of him and cried: 'Take care, Elis Fröbom, that is the Queen.'

Involuntarily he turned his head and saw the stars of the night sky shining through a crack in the vaulting. A gentle voice called his name in a tone of inconsolable sorrow. It was his mother's voice. He thought he could see her above him – but it was a beautiful young woman who stretched her hand down to him through the vaulting and called his name.

'Lift me up,' he cried to the old man. 'I belong to the upper world and its friendly sky.'

'Take care!' said the old man. 'Take care, Fröbom! Be true to the Queen, to whom you have yielded.'

As the youth then looked down again into the stern face of the mighty woman, he felt his being dissolve into the shining rock. He screamed out in unspeakable terror and awoke from the dream, its joy and horror still echoing deep within his soul.

When he had pulled himself together with difficulty, Elis said to himself: 'It must have been a dream. But the old miner told me so many things about the splendour of the underground world that my whole head is still full of it. Never in my life have I felt as I do now. Perhaps I am still dreaming. No, no – I am only sick. Out into the open air! The fresh sea breeze will cure me.'

He rose quickly and ran down to the harbour, where the Hönsning was again starting up. But he soon realized that all the enjoyment was passing him by, that he could keep his mind on nothing, that presentiments and desires to which he could not put a name flitted through his soul. He thought sadly of his dead mother; then it seemed to him that he desired to meet once more the girl who had spoken to him so kindly the previous evening, but he feared that even if the girl should step out of this or that alleyway, it would turn out to be the old miner, who filled him

with fear, though he could not really say why. And yet he would have dearly loved the old man to tell him more about the wonders of the mines.

Driven hither and thither by all these thoughts, he gazed down into the water. It seemed to him as if the silver waves were stiffening into a sparkling light, into which the great ships were dissolving, as if the dark clouds drawing across the bright sky were sinking down and forming a rocky vault. He was again in his dream, he again gazed into the face of the mighty woman and the fear and passionate longing again seized hold of him.

His comrades shook him out of his daydreams and he had to go along with them. But now it was as if an unknown voice was whispering incessantly in his ear: 'Why are you still here? Away! Away! Your home is in the mines at Falun. There you will find all the splendour of which you dreamed. Away, away to Falun!'

For three days Elis Fröbom wandered the streets of Göteborg, pursued by the strange images of his dream, incessantly admonished by the unknown voice. On the fourth day, he stood at the gate through which led the road to Gefle. A large man was passing through in front of him. Elis thought he recognized the old

miner and, drawn irresistibly, hurried after him without being able to catch up. Tirelessly, he went on and on. Elis knew clearly that he was on the road to Falun, and this reassured him, for it seemed to him that the voice of Destiny had spoken through the old miner and was now leading him on. And indeed, several times, especially when the way was uncertain, he saw the old man step out of a ravine, out of thick undergrowth, out of the dark rock, and walk on in front of him, then quickly disappear again.

At length, after many wearisome days of walking, Elis saw in the distance two great lakes, between which there rose a thick fog. As he climbed further and further up the rising ground to the west, he distinguished amid the smoke a number of towers and black roofs. The old man stood giganticly before him and pointed with outstretched arm towards the fog, then disappeared again amid the rocks.

'It is Falun!' cried Elis. 'It is Falun, the goal of my journey!'

He was right: for people coming up behind him confirmed that there, between the Runn and Warpann lakes, lay the town of Falun, and told him he was climbing the Guffrisberg, where the entrance to the mine was to be found.

Elis Fröbom went forward in good heart, but when he stood before the great chasm of Hell, his blood froze in his veins. As is well known, the great opencast working of the Falun ore mine is twelve hundred feet long, six hundred feet wide and a hundred and eighty feet deep. The blackish-brown side walls begin for the most part vertically, then level off about half way down through the tremendous deposits of rubble and debris. Among these, and in the side walls, there could be seen the props of old shafts: strong, thick tree trunks laid one against the other and fitted together at the ends, in the manner of a log-cabin. No tree, no blade of grass grew in the barren, rocky chasm, but jagged cliffs and boulders towered up in strange forms, some like gigantic animals turned to stone, some like colossal humans. In the abyss there lay in wild confusion rocks, slag, burnt-up ore, and an everlasting choking sulphurous haze rose out of the depths, as if a hellish brew were being cooked whose vapours poisoned all nature. You could well believe it was here that Dante climbed down and gazed into the Inferno, with all its inconsolable torment and all its horror.

As Elis gazed down into the enormous crater, there came into his mind what an old steersman had told him long ago. He had imagined, as he had been lying in a fever, that under him an immeasurable chasm had opened, so that he saw all the monsters of the deep struggling among the rocks until, with opened jaws, they stiffened into death. Such a vision, the old sailor had said, signified an early death amid the waves – and in fact he had soon afterwards fallen from the deck into the sea and disappeared. Elis remembered this now, for the chasm did indeed resemble the seabed when the waves have rolled back, and the black rock and blueish-red ore slag looked like horrific monsters stretching out their hideous arms towards him. It happened that several miners were at that moment climbing up out of the depths: with their dark pit-clothes and their black, scorched faces, they resembled hideous fiends wearily making their way

out of the earth to the surface.

Elis felt a sense of profound dread and – what never happens to the sailor – was seized by a fit of giddiness: it seemed to him as though invisible hands were drawing him down into the abyss. He closed his eyes and ran a few steps; only when he was away from the pithead and climbing down the Guffrisberg again and gazing up at the bright sunlit sky did the fear of that dreadful sight leave him. He breathed freely again and cried from the very bottom of his soul: 'Oh, Lord of my life, what are all the terrors of the sea against the horror which lives within these desolate rocky chasms? Let the storm rage, let the black clouds dip in the foaming waves, soon the majestic sun will shine again and before its friendly countenance the wild tumult will be stilled; but down there its eye never penetrates the black cavern, and no fresh spring breeze

quickens the heart. No, never can I be one of you, you black earthworms; never could I live your dismal life!'

Elis intended to stay the night in Falun and then make his way back to Göteborg early the following morning. When he reached the market-place, which is called the Helsing-torget, he found a crowd gathered. A long procession of miners dressed in finery, with miner's lamps in their hands and musicians leading the way, had just stopped before an imposing house. A tall, thin man of middle years stepped out and looked about him with a smile; in the freeness of his manner, in the open brow, in the dark-blue shining eyes, you could recognize at once the true lowlander. The miners formed a circle around him and shook him by the hand in turn; he had a friendly word for everyone. On inquiring, Elis learned that the man was Pehrson Dahlsjö, senior foreman and owner of a fine Bergsfråse at Sotra-Kopparberg. Bergfråse are lands let out for copper and silver mining in Sweden. The owners of such lands have shares in the mines and are responsible for their operation.

Elis was further informed that the Bergthing – the sitting of the court – had ended that day; the miners were now paying a round of visits to the mine-master, the works supervisor and the guild officials, and would everywhere be hospitably entertained.

As he regarded these handsome people, with their frank, friendly faces, Elis forgot the earthworms in the great funnel: the gaiety which started up afresh as Pehrson Dahlsjö stepped out and spread through

the whole circle was

something different from the wild jubilation of the Hönsning. The way in which these miners celebrated made a deep impression on the quiet, serious Elis. He felt indescribably happy and could hardly hold back tears of emotion when some of the younger men began an old song whose simple melody, penetrating the soul and heart, praised the blessings of mining.

As the song ended, Pehrson Dahlsjö opened the doors of his house and the miners filed in. Elis followed involuntarily, stood on the threshold and viewed the spacious hall in which the miners were taking their places on benches. A splendid banquet was spread out.

Now the door opposite him opened, and a beautiful young woman entered in festive dress. Tall and slim, with her dark hair arranged in plaits on the crown of her head and a neat bodice fastened with brooches, she was the very picture of blossoming youth. All the miners rose and a murmur ran through the room: 'Ulla Dahlsjö! Ulla Dahlsjö! How God blessed our brave guildsman with such an angelic child!'

The eyes of even the most aged miners sparkled as Ulla offered them all her hand in friendly greeting. Then she brought out silver tankards, filled them with the excellent ale that is brewed in Falun and handed them to the guests. Her face was suffused with innocent beauty, and as Elis gazed upon her it seemed as if a flash of lightning had struck through him and enkindled all the passion, love and ardour locked up inside him. It was Ulla Dahlsjö who had proffered him her hand in that fateful dream; he now believed he divined the meaning of that dream and, forgetful of the old miner, lauded the fate that had drawn him to Falun.

But then, standing as he was on the threshold, he felt a neglected stranger, miserable, disconsolate and deserted, and wished he had died before he had looked on Ulla Dahlsjö, for now he would surely pine away with love and longing. He could not take his eyes from the lovely girl, and as she passed close to him, he spoke her name in a quiet, tremulous voice. Ulla looked around and beheld poor Elis, who, his face burning scarlet, stood transfixed, with downcast eyes, incapable of another word.

Ulla went up to him, and said with a sweet smile: 'You must be a stranger, dear friend! I can tell from your sailor's dress! Well – why are you standing on the threshold? Come in and enjoy yourself with

us!'

With that she took him by the hand, led him into the hall and handed him a full tankard of ale. 'Drink,' she said. 'Drink, my dear friend, and believe yourself welcome!'

To Elis it seemed as if he was in a paradisaical dream from which he would soon awake to a feeling of inexpressible misery. He emptied the tankard mechanically. At that moment Pehrson Dahlsjö came over to him and, after shaking him by the hand, asked whence he had come and what had brought him to Falun. Elis felt the warmth of the ale in all his veins and, looking Pehrson in the eye, he recounted how, the son of a sailor, he had been at sea since childhood; how, returned from the East Indies, he had found his mother no longer of this earth; how he now felt utterly abandoned in the world; how the wild life of the sea had now become completely repugnant to him; how his inner inclinations were driving him towards mining; and how here in Falun he would make every endeavour to find work as a pitman. This last statement – so completely contrary to all he had resolved only a short while before – came out quite involuntarily, but it seemed to him as though he could not have said anything different, as though he had expressed his innermost desire, of which he had not until that moment been aware.

Pehrson Dahlsjö regarded the youth with a grave expression, as if he wanted to see right into him, then said: 'I would not like to think that you had lightly abandoned your former profession, or that you had not weighed all the toil and discomfort of mining before deciding to devote yourself to it. It is an ancient belief with us that the mighty elements in which the miner boldly rules will destroy him if he does not

exert his whole being to assert his mastery over them, if he leaves room in his mind for other thoughts which diminish the strength he must exert combined on his work in earth and fire. But if you are sufficiently sure of your inner calling, then you have arrived at the right time. We are short of workers. If you would like to, you may stay here with me and then go tomorrow morning with the foreman, who will instruct you in the work.'

Elis's heart leapt at Pehrson Dahlsjö's words. He thought no more of his horror at the fearful Hell-mouth into which he had gazed: that he would now see the beautiful Ulla every day, that he would be living under the same roof as her, filled him with joy and delight; he gave way to the most delicious hopes.

Pehrson Dahlsjö announced to the miners that a new young pitman had just joined them and introduced Elis Fröbom. They all seemed to approve of the robust youth who, with his slim and powerful build, seemed

born to be a miner and would no doubt not be lacking in industriousness and piety. One of the miners, already advanced in years, approached him and shook him heartily by the hand; he said he was head foreman at Pehrson Dahlsjö's pit and that he would make it his business to instruct Elis in everything he should know. Elis had to sit beside him, and even while they were still drinking the old man began to tell him what his first duties would be. Elis then recalled the old miner, from Göteborg and, strangely enough, could repeat almost all the old man had told him.

The head foreman cried out in astonishment. 'How did you come to know all that?' he exclaimed. 'Now, indeed, you can hardly fail; you will surely become the best pitman we have.'

The lovely Ulla, passing among the guests and filling their glasses, often glanced at Elis. Now, she said, he was no longer a stranger but belonged with them. No longer the treacherous sea – no, Falun with its ore-laden mountains would be his home! A whole Heaven of bliss opened up to the young man at Ulla's words. It was noted that she liked to linger near him, and Pehrson Dahlsjö too regarded him with visible pleasure.

But Elis's heart nonetheless pounded when he again stood at the smouldering crater and, enveloped in his miner's suit and with the heavy iron-shod boots on his feet, he clambered with the foreman down into the deep shaft. Hot fumes seemed to choke him, the miner's lamp flickered in the biting winds which blew through the endless depths. Deeper and deeper they went, descending finally on iron ladders scarcely a foot wide. Elis soon realized that all the climbing he had learned as a sailor would be of no help to him here, but at last they stood in the deepest shaft, and the foreman assigned to Elis the work

he was to do there.

Elis thought of the lovely Ulla; he saw her hovering over him like an angel of light and he forgot all his fear of the abyss and all his labour was as nothing. It was now firmly fixed in his soul that only when he had, with all his courage and all the effort he was capable of, come to devote himself wholly to Pehrson Dahlsjö's mine, might he realize one day perhaps his sweetest hope – and so it happened that in an unbelievably short time he was the equal of even the most skilled miner.

Pehrson Dahlsjö grew fonder and fonder of the industrious Elis with every day that passed, and he often told him frankly that he had gained in him not so much a new workman as a new son. And that Ulla felt a strong affection for him became more and more evident: often when the work he was leaving to do had anything dangerous about it, she would plead with him, with tears in her eyes, to take the greatest care of himself; and when he returned safe and sound, she would run to meet him and always had the finest ale or

a fine meal ready for him. Elis's heart beat with joy when Pehrson Dahlsjö one day told him that, as he had brought with him a good sum of money, he could hardly fail in due course to become part-owner of a mine and that when that happened no mine-owner at Falun could possibly refuse him if he were to ask for the hand of his daughter. Elis would now have liked to have said how unspeakably in love he was with Ulla and how all his future hopes depended on his possessing her, but he was restrained by an unconquerable shyness and even more by the doubts which assailed him as to whether Ulla loved him in return.

It happened that Elis was one day working in one of the deepest shafts, where the sulphurous smoke made it hard for him to see his way, when he heard coming from an even deeper region of the mine a sound as of someone tapping with a little hammer. But since no work was ever done in the shafts that involved this kind of hammering, and as he also knew that no one but he had descended this far on that day, he wondered very much what the sound could mean and so put down his tools and listened to the hollow tapping, which seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly he was aware of a dark shadow close beside him and, as a blast of air bore away the sulphurous smoke, he recognized the old miner of Göteborg.

'God speed you!' the old miner cried. 'God speed you, Elis, down here among the rocks! Well,

how do you like the life, fellow worker?'

Elis was about to ask him by what strange path he had got down into the mine, but the miner at that moment struck the rock so violent a blow with his hammer that sparks of fire flashed all around and the sound echoed in the shaft like distant thunder; then he said in a terrible voice: 'There is a glorious trap-vein here, but you, you base rogue, can see nothing but an end hardly thicker than a straw. Down here you are a blind mole who will never find favour with the Prince of Metals; and up above, capable of nothing, you set traps for the Mine King in vain. Hal you seek to win the daughter of Pehrson Dahlsjö for your wife, so you work down here without true love of the work. Take care, false traitor, that the Prince of Metals whom you mock does not seize you and hurl you down, so that your limbs shatter on the sharp rocks. And Ulla will never be your wife, I tell you that!'

Elis felt anger well up in him at the old man's insolent words. 'What are you doing here,' he cried, 'in my master Pehrson Dahlsjö's mine, in which I am working with all my strength and as it is my calling to do? Be off with you the way you came, or we shall see who first gets his brains knocked out!' Thereupon he confronted the old man and raised high the huge miner's hammer he had been working with. The old man laughed mockingly and, to Elis's horror, slipped up the narrow ladder with the agility of a squirrel and vanished

into the dark crevices above.

Elis felt weak in every limb, could no longer work and came back to the surface. When the old head foreman saw him, he cried: 'In God's name, what has happened to you, Elis? You look as pale as death! Is it the sulphur, which you are not yet used to? Drink this, my boy, it will do you good.'

Elis took a deep draught of brandy from the bottle the head foreman handed him; then, his strength restored, he told of all that had just happened down in the mine and of how he had first met the old miner back in Göteborg.

The head foreman listened quietly, then, shaking his head in a thoughtful fashion, said: 'The man you met was old Torbern, and I now see that what we tell of him here is something more than a fable. Over a hundred years ago there lived here in Falun a miner named Torbern. He is supposed to have been one of the first to make mining flourish in Falun, and in his day the amount of ore they got out was much greater than it is now. At that time no

one understood mining as well as Torbern did and, deeply learned in the subject, he was in charge of the whole undertaking. As if he were endowed with special powers, the richest veins seemed to open up to him of their own accord, and since he had neither wife nor child – he was a gloomy kind of man and had no regular dwelling-place either – he spent almost all his time working in the darkness of the mine, so that it could hardly fail to be said of him that he was in league with the hidden powers which rule in the womb of the earth. Torbern used ceaselessly to admonish the other miners that ill fortune would befall them if they worked the mine without having within them a true love of the precious stones and metals they dug out, but no one paid him any heed, and, inspired only by greed, they drove the shafts further and further into the ground, until at last, on St John's Day in the year 1687, it finally gave way and produced the tremendous crater you see now. The mine was wrecked, and it was only with great effort and great skill that they were able to sink new shafts. Of Torbern there was nothing to be seen or heard, and it seemed that, working in the mine when the collapse took place, he had been buried alive.

'Soon afterwards, as the work of reconstruction was beginning to get really under way, the miners declared they had seen Torbern down in the shafts and that he had pointed out to them the best veins of rock. Others had seen him wandering about up on the crater, sometimes lamenting, sometimes raging in anger. And there were young men who came here as you did, saying an old miner had urged them to take up mining and had directed them hither; it always happened when we were short of workmen.

'If it was really old Torbern you had a dispute with in the shaft, and if he spoke of a glorious trap-vein, then we can be sure there

is a rich vein of ore down there, and tomorrow we shall go and look for it.'

When, his mind in a state of confusion, Elis entered Pehrson Dahlsjö's house, Ulla failed to come hurrying to greet him as she usually did: she was sitting with downcast eyes and, as Elis believed, tear-stained cheeks beside an elegant young man who was holding her hand in his and trying to entertain her with conversation, though she did not appear to be paying much attention to him. Elis was disturbed by this sight, but Pehrson Dahlsjö drew him into another room and began: 'Now, Elis, you will soon be able to demonstrate your love and loyalty to me; I have always treated you as my son, now you will become my son in reality. The man you see in my house is the wealthy merchant Eric Olavsen, from Göteborg. I shall give him my daughter's

## 'Farewell now my beloved Ulla. I shall soon return.'

hand in marriage, as he has desired; he will return with her to Göteborg, and you will remain here alone with me, Elis, my only support in my old age. You do not speak, Elis? – you are growing pale. I hope you do not dislike my decision, or that, now my daughter is to leave me, you will leave me too! But I hear Herr Olavsen calling my name – I must go in! – and with that Pehrson went back into the other room.

Elis felt as though he were being torn to pieces by a thousand glowing pincers. He could not speak, he could not weep. In wild despair he ran out of the house to the great opening of the mine. If the crater had presented a fearful spectacle by day, now by the light of the moon it seemed as though countless hideous monsters spawned from Hell were writhing together down there on the smouldering floor and reaching upwards with their claws to prey on human kind.

'Torbern! Torbern!' Elis cried in a fearful voice that re-echoed among the desolate gorges. 'Torbern! Here I am! You were right: I was a base rogue to give way to foolish hopes up here on the surface! It is down there that my treasure lies, my life, my all! Torbern! Climb down with me, show me the richest veins and I will dig and bore and labour and behold the light of day no more! Torbern! Torbern! Climb down with me!' He took out his tinder-box, lit his lamp and clambered down into the crevice he had travelled through the previous day, but the old man did not appear. When he reached the deepest shaft, he beheld – to his amazement – the rich trap-vein of which the old man had spoken; yet as he gazed upon the wonderful vein of ore it was as though a blinding light filled the whole shaft and the walls grew as transparent as pure crystal. That fateful dream in Göteborg returned to him: he beheld the glorious metal trees and shrubs standing in paradisaical fields, with fiery flashing jewels hanging from them like fruit; he saw the young girls, he saw the noble face of the mighty Queen. She seized hold on him, drew him down, pressed him to her breast – a beam of heat transfixed him, and all he was aware of was of floating among the waves of a blue transparent sparkling mist.

'Elis Fröbom! Elis Fröbom!' – a voice called down loudly, and the reflection of a torch fell into the shaft. It was Pehrson Dahlsjö, who had come with the foreman to look for the youth, whom they had last seen running towards the mine as if out of his mind. They found him standing as though turned to stone, his face pressed against the cold wall of the shaft.

'What are you doing down here at night?' Pehrson cried to him. 'Pull yourself together and come back to the top with us; who knows what good news there may be for you up there!'

In profound silence Elis climbed back up, in profound silence he followed Pehrson Dahlsjö, who reprimanded him severely for having placed himself in such danger.

Morning had dawned by the time they reached the house. Ulla ran to Elis with a loud cry and threw herself on to his breast. Pehrson said to him: 'What a fool you are! Do you suppose I have not long been aware that you are in love with Ulla and that it is only for her sake that you labour so zealously in the mine? Do you suppose I have not long been aware that Ulla loves you from the depths of her heart? Could I desire a better son-in-law than an industrious and pious miner – than you, my dear Elis? It was your silence that annoyed and upset me.'

'But did we ourselves know how much we loved one another?' Ulla interposed.

'Be that as it may,' Pehrson went on, 'I was annoyed that Elis did not speak openly and honestly to me of his love, and because I wanted to test your feelings, I arranged that little scene with Herr Olavsen. What an effect it had on you! You foolish fellow, Herr Olavsen has been married for years, and to you, Elis, I give my daughter for wife – for I repeat that I could not wish for a better son-in-law.'

Elis wept for joy – the turn of events was so unexpected that he was almost afraid he was dreaming again.

At Pehrson's command the miners assembled at midday for a joyful feast. Ulla had dressed herself in her finest clothes and looked more charming than ever, so that all who were there cried time and again: 'Oh, what a glorious bride our valiant Elis has won for himself! May Heaven bless them both in their piety and virtue!'

Elis's pale countenance was still filled with the terrors of the night just gone, and he often sat staring before him as if far away from everything around him.

'What is it, my Elis?' Ulla asked. Elis pressed her to his breast and said: 'Yes, yes – you are really mine and now everything is well!'

But in the midst of all his joy it sometimes seemed to him as though he was suddenly gripped by an ice-cold hand and a dark voice said: 'Is winning Ulla now the highest thing you know? You poor fool – have you not beheld the countenance of the Queen?'

He was almost overwhelmed by an indescribable fear and tormented by the idea that one of the miners would suddenly rise up gigantically before him, reveal himself as Torbern and admonish him in terrible tones to remember the subterranean realm of metals and precious stones to which he had surrendered himself. Yet he still could not see why the spectral old man should be so hostile towards him, nor why his work in the mine should have anything to do with his love for Ulla. Pehrson could not fail to notice how disturbed and distracted Elis was, but attributed it to the shock he had had and to his nocturnal flight to the mine. Not so Ulla: seized with a secret presentiment, she begged Elis to tell her what terrible thing had happened to him that was tearing him away from her. Elis felt as if his chest were bursting asunder. He struggled in vain to tell his beloved of the wonderful vision that had come to him in the depths: it was as though an unknown power were closing his mouth, as though the fear inspiring face of the Queen were rising up within him and as though everything would turn to stone about him, as at the glance of Medusa, if he spoke her name. All the splendour that had filled him with supreme delight down in the depths of the mine now seemed to him an Inferno of insupportable torments, disguised so as to lure him to destruction.

Pehrson demanded that Elis should stay at home for a few days to recover from the sickness into which he appeared to have fallen; and in this time Ulla's love banished from his mind all recollection of his fateful adventure in the mine. Elis recovered his faith in his good fortune and believed no evil power could ever lay hands on it again.

When he once more descended into the mine, everything seemed different to him: the richest veins lay open before him, he worked with redoubled zeal, he forgot everything – and when he again came to the surface he had forcibly to direct his thoughts to Pehrson Dahlsjö and even to his Ulla. He felt himself split into two: the better half, his real being, descended with him into the bowels of the earth and reposed in the arms of the Queen, while in Falun all was dull and gloomy. If Ulla spoke of her love and of how happy they would be living together, he began to speak of the splendours of the depths, of the immeasurably rich

treasure which lay hidden there, and became so confused and incomprehensible that the poor child was seized with fear and anguish and could not imagine how Elis had suddenly become so utterly changed. The youth ceaselessly declared to the foreman, and to Pehrson himself, how he had discovered the most ore-laden veins, and when they then found nothing but hollow rock he laughed mockingly and maintained that he alone knew how to read the secret signs, the meaningful inscriptions the hand of the Queen had inscribed on the rocky crevices, and that it was sufficient to understand these signs without also bringing forth what they proclaimed. The aged foreman gazed sadly at Elis as, with wildly blazing eyes, he spoke of the paradise which shone in the womb of the earth.

'Alas,' he whispered softly into Pehrson's ear, 'it is the wicked Torbern who has done this to the poor boy!'

'Do not believe such miner's fables, old man,' Pehrson replied. 'Love has turned the deep-thinking Neriker's head, that is all. Once we get the wedding over with, we shall hear no more of these trap-veins and treasures and paradises under the earth.'

The day of the wedding at last arrived. A few days before, Elis had become more silent and withdrawn than ever, but never had he evidenced so much love for Ulla: he refused to leave her side for a moment and ceased to go to the mine or even, so it seemed, to think about his life as a miner – for he ceased to speak of the subterranean realm at all. Ulla was filled with joy; all her fears that the powers under the earth of which she had heard might lure her Elis to his destruction had vanished away. And Pehrson, too, said to the foreman with a smile: 'You see, Elis was only lightheaded with love for my Ulla!'

Early on the morning of the wedding day – it was St John's Day – Elis knocked gently on the door of his bride's room. She opened it – and started back in alarm as she saw him, clad already in festive dress, deathly pale, dark fire darting from his eyes.

'I only want to say, my dearly beloved Ulla,' he began, 'that we now stand close to the summit of all human happiness. Last night all was revealed to me. Down in the mine there lies, encased in metals and minerals, the pink sparkling almandine on which is engraved the record of our life, which you have to receive from me as a wedding gift. It is more lovely than the most glorious blood-red carbuncle, and when, united in true love, we gaze into the light that streams from it we shall behold how our inner being is intertwined with the wondrous branches which rise up out of the heart of the Queen at the mid-point of the earth. All that is needed is that I should bring this stone up to the light of day, and that I shall now do. Farewell now, my beloved Ulla. I shall soon return.'

With hot tears, Ulla pleaded with her lover to desist from this visionary undertaking, which she felt would end only in great ill-fortune; but Elis assured her that he would never know another quiet hour until he possessed that stone and that there was no danger at all involved in getting it. He pressed his bride warmly to his breast and departed.

The guests were assembled to conduct the bridal pair to the Koppaberg Church, where the betrothal was to take place after a service. A whole host of dainty maidens who were, according to the custom of the country, to precede the bride as her bridesmaids, were laughing and joking around Ulla; the musicians were tuning their instruments and practising a cheerful wedding march. It was already nearly midday – but still Elis had not arrived. Then a group of miners suddenly came running up, fear and terror inscribed in their pallid faces, and told how a fearful landslide had just overwhelmed the quarry in which Dahlsjö's mine was situated. 'Elis – my Elis, you are gone – gone!' Ulla screamed, and fell down as though dead. It was only now that Pehrson learned from the foreman that, early that morning, Elis had gone to the great crater and descended into it; he had been alone, since everyone else had been invited to the wedding. Pehrson and all the miners that were there hurried out to the mine, but, though they searched even at the greatest risk to their own lives, they searched in vain. Elis Fröbom was not found. It was certain that the fall of earth had buried the unfortunate youth; thus misery and woe descended upon the house of Pehrson Dahlsjö at the moment when he thought he had secured peace and repose for his old age.

Pehrson Dahlsjö had long been dead, his daughter Ulla had long since vanished, and no one in Falun knew anything of either of them, for fifty years had passed since Elis Fröbom's unhappy wedding-day. Then it happened that, as the miners were attempting to dig a passage-way between two shafts, they found in a pool of vitriolic water at a depth of three hundred ells the body of a young miner. The body appeared to be petrified when they brought it to the surface. The lines of the face were so well preserved, the clothes and even a flower attached to the jacket were so completely free of decomposition, that the youth might have been merely sleeping. Everyone in the neighbourhood assembled about the body, but none of them knew who it was and none of the miners could recall any of their number having been buried in an accident. They were about to take the body to Falun when an ancient woman appeared out of the distance, gasping as she made her way on her crutches.

'Here comes the St John's Day woman!' cried some of the miners. It was a name they had given her on account of her habit of appearing once a year, on St John's Day, when she would approach the crater, gaze down into its depths, wring her hands, weep and wail in the most melancholy way and then disappear again.

The old woman had hardly set eyes on the motionless youth when she let her crutches fall, raised her hands to Heaven and cried in heart-rending tones: 'O Elis Fröbom! O my Elis! My dear bridegroom!' And with that she knelt down beside the body and took the rigid hand in hers and pressed it to her aged breast. 'Alas!' she cried, gazing around at the assembled company, 'alas! none, none of you can recognize poor Ulla Dahlsjö, who was the happy bride of this youth fifty years ago! When in misery and woe I departed for Ornäs, I was consoled by old Torbern, who told me that one day I would see my Elis – buried alive on his wedding day – again on this earth; since then I have come here, year in, year out, and, filled with desire and faithful love, gazed down into the depths. And today this happy reunion has been granted me! O my Elis, my beloved bridegroom!'

Again she clasped her thin arms about the body of the youth as though she never wanted to let him go. All who stood around were deeply moved. But at length the old woman's sobs and sighs grew softer and softer, and finally they ceased. Then the miners came forward and made to lift her from the ground, but Ulla had breathed her last on the body of her bridegroom. It was then, too, that they noticed that the body had not petrified but was beginning to dissolve into dust.

In the Koppaberg Church, where, fifty years before, the couple were to have been married, they laid the ashes of the dead youth, and with them the body of his bride, Ulla, who had been faithful to him unto death.

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