

# **Unto a Good Land a Novel Study Guide**

## **Unto a Good Land a Novel by Vilhelm Moberg**

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## Plot Summary

Karl Oskar Nilson, his wife Kristina and their three children arrive in America as the story opens. The family is from Sweden and Karl Oskar's younger brother, Robert, is also a member of the group. They are traveling with several other families, including Kristina's uncle, Danjel, and his children. He is a widower, his wife having died during the passage. There are several others traveling with the group, including Ulrika who has a bad reputation in their home village in Sweden, and Ulrika's illegitimate daughter. Ulrika steps in to help Danjel with his children after his wife's death and Kristina is the first to realize that they must accept Ulrika and her effort to make a new life for herself in America. Kristina and Ulrika become close during the trip and it is Ulrika who helps Kristina during the birth of her son, the first of the group born in America.

The group arrives in America and begins the trip overland to Minnesota. They choose this destination because it is the home of the son of a member of the group. They travel by rail and by steam boat. The train makes most of the group nervous but Ulrika loves it. The steam boat takes them up the Mississippi River and they have to walk the final thirty miles to the small settlement of Taylor Falls. There they discover that the son, Anders Mansson, is living in a tiny house that is little more than a hovel and that he has cleared little land in the time he has been there.

The men of the group choose their homes near Taylor Falls but Karl Oskar goes several miles farther from the settlement, choosing to homestead near a lake that has previously been unsettled by white people. Karl Oskar is a hardworking man and takes his responsibilities toward his family very seriously. He believes that he can overcome any obstacle by hard work. He worries over every decision, including when to use the precious nails he manages to buy with his last few dollars. Karl spends the entire winter building tools and furniture and preparing for the spring planting. The winter becomes difficult with the family depending on game from the nearby forests and fish from the lake as their main staples. At one point, the family runs out of flour for bread. With little to eat other than game and fish, the bread is necessary for the family's well-being. Karl Oskar walks the miles into town and almost dies in the cold of the night.

Kristina, while supporting her husband's decision to make a new life for the family, is homesick. Karl Oskar realizes she is sad but does not figure out the extent of her homesickness for some time. He tries to console her by promising that their lives will be better but it takes time before Kristina is able to work through the depths of her sadness. Even then, she still misses her family and her former home and cannot help referring to Sweden as "home."



# Chapters 1 through 6

## Chapters 1 through 6 Summary

In "A Ship Unloads Her Cargo," the Charlotta arrives. The ship is a brig and among her passengers are a group of Swedish farmers and their families. The captain of the ship exchanges the money entrusted to him by the passengers for American gold and silver money. The passengers are forced to remain on board for three additional days as New York health officials look for signs of cholera. The captain is worried about an older woman named Fina-Kajsa Andersdotter because she is ill and her husband died during the voyage from Sweden. He fears he will have to pay the hospital bill. Other passengers aboard include Karl Oskar Nilsson, his wife Kristina and their three children. When the captain gives Karl Oskar his money, Karl Oskar tells him that he plans to take his family to Taylors Falls, a settlement in the Minnesota Territory. The captain tells Karl Oskar that the trip is more than fifteen hundred miles but agrees to help locate someone willing to guide them at least part of the way. Karl Oskar chooses that location because the old woman, Fina-Kajsa, has a son there named Anders Mansson. Anders is reportedly doing well and Karl plans to take Fina-Kajsa with him on the trip. The captain is relieved to discover that Karl Oskar will take the old woman off his hands and becomes more helpful as a result. Other members of the group include Karl's younger brother, Robert, and Kristina's uncle, Danjel Andreasson. Danjel's wife died during the voyage and another member of the party has taken over the care of Danjel's children. Her name is Ulrika and she is known as the village whore. She is accompanied by her young, illegitimate daughter, Elin.

Karl Oskar does not really want to be the leader of their group but the entire party decides they will go with him to Minnesota. He notes that Jonas Petters, the oldest member of the group, should be the leader, but that Jonas does not take that role. The guide the captain locates is a man named Long Landberg. He is very tall and is an emigrant himself. While he does not speak the language of Karl Oskar and his group, their native languages are close and they are able to communicate.

In "Battery Park," the group is finally allowed to leave the ship. The trip has taken longer than they had hoped and Karl is well aware that they may arrive at their destinations too late to put in a crop this season. He knows this will make their beginning more difficult but also believes that he can accomplish anything, given the opportunity to work hard at it. The park is filled with those who have only recently arrived in America from various countries.

In "Milk and White Bread," Danjel knows that he has been "guided" to America by the Lord and he holds to that though he now has four children and no wife. Kristina stays in the park with her youngest son, a boy named Harald. She watches as the woman, Ulrika, cares for Danjel's children. Ulrika is a Christian, converted under Danjel's preaching, but is still scorned by most of the party because of her past. Kristina admits that Ulrika is unselfishly giving of her time with Danjel's children but also notes that



Ulrika and her daughter have divided the possessions Danjel's wife left behind. As she waits in the park, Karl and the other two children—a daughter named Lill-Marta and a son named Johan—arrive. Karl has fresh milk and fresh bread as well as an apple. He says that the children already ate an apple each but Kristina shares hers with them anyway. The baby loves the milk as well. They are all amazed at the number of people and are anxious to continue their journey. Kristina cannot help but long for the home she left behind.

In "A Letter to Sweden," Karl writes a letter to his parents. He tells them that they have arrived safely in America and promises to write more when he is settled on land of his own. In "the Most Beautiful Street in the World," Robert and his best friend, Arvid, are allowed to accompany a ship's mate on an errand into the city. They are in awe of the things they see, especially when they see a drunk man lying in a gutter. They think he is dead but he jumps up when Arvid pokes at him and the two boys run away. They are disoriented for a time but eventually find their way to Battery Park where their families are awaiting their departure. Both are in awe of the sights and sounds of the city. Robert is studying English with the help of a book and he is practicing various words and phrases. After he and Arvid have made their way back to the park to join the others, Robert decides that he is going to have to work harder at learning the language. He knows a sentence, "Please listen to me, Mr. Policeman! I appeal for your protection against this unfriendly person who is annoying me." He says that he will have to learn to say that very quickly in order to avoid being murdered while in America.

In "Journey with the Steam Wagon," the immigrants go from New York to Albany by way of a steam boat named the Isaac Newton. They then board a train, though most are afraid and want to be as far from the engine as possible. Ulrika, however, is enamored with the transportation and spends her time staring out the window, engaged with the sights passing by. Johan does not understand the situation and keeps asking Kristina where their house is, citing the fact that he had been promised they would live in a wonderful house once they reached America. Karl sees a sign that says, "Danger! Watch your step" on the train and feel frustrated that he is unable to read. He feels it is an incredible task ahead of him, coming to terms with the language as well as learning to read and write all over. When he hears other passengers talking and cannot understand what they are saying, he feels certain that they are talking about him and his family.

Ulrika is almost immediately recognized as a widow by the people she meets and no one in her group corrects the misinformation. Ulrika says that she knows all her previous sins are noted by God, including those times she was taken to bed by married men, but she hopes that things will be different for her in America. Arvid has a toothache and Danjel buys a medicine for him called "Painkiller" from their guide. When the members of the group take time to examine and learn about American money, they discover a woman in a flowing robe on the coin and come to the conclusion that she must be the president's wife.

While on the train, the families take out their food baskets and begin to eat but Kristina notes that Danjel's family is out of food. She is initially angry that Ulrika has not



managed to keep food for the family but realizes that she cannot eat with her own family while Danjel's young children are looking so pitifully hungry. She portions out their food to include Danjel's family and is then faced with the problem of whether to also share with Ulrika and Elin. She initially decides that she will not, but then realizes that the entire group is going to have to band together if they are to make a better life for themselves in this country. She hands over a portion of the food to Ulrika and Elin who are grateful but try to act as if they were not starving.

## Chapters 1 through 6 Analysis

The first glimpse of Robert's personality is seen while the group is still aboard the ship in New York. Ulrika's daughter, Elin, says that Robert overheard one of the crewmen talking about an upcoming auction. Robert tells Elin, who in turn tells her mother, that the emigrants have been taken advantage of and that they are going to be sold at auction. The story causes Ulrika to become angry at Karl and the two have angry words. Karl straightens the story out and tells Robert that he is going to get himself in trouble with his lies. Robert is not particularly sorry that he told the story but is angry that Elin told it to her mother.

Karl's determination to travel inland as far as Minnesota is a statement of his character. He is headstrong and believes that he must travel as far from Sweden as possible in order to truly overcome the obstacles there. Later, Robert points out that Karl has always done what he wants and Karl realizes this to be true. Karl takes his role as head of his household very seriously and does not confide in Kristina the length of the distance, nor does he tell her about their financial difficulties until it is unavoidable.

The reader is given the first real look at Danjel in chapter three. Danjel's wife dies on the voyage and the reader knows nothing about that, other than the fact that Danjel is left with four motherless children to raise. Danjel is devout but seems to expect too much of himself and his God. He believes that God is going to provide things that are not really feasible and puts every calamity as a sign of God's disapproval of Danjel. This is shown as Danjel arrives in America and finds that he cannot understand the languages spoken around him. He says that he believed God would provide his understanding because of Danjel's religious beliefs. Danjel cites the Tower of Babel and says that it was sinners who could not understand each other. He believes that his lack of understanding is a judgment from God.

It is while Robert is in New York, alone and exploring with Arvid, that the reader first learns about Robert's hearing. He notes that he has a "humming" that is sometimes extremely intense in his left ear. It will later be revealed that Robert was hit by an angry employer, causing the damage to his ear. This seems to have amplified Robert's desire for a better life and he believes that if he can earn enough money, he will be able to find a doctor who can fix his hearing problem.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In "Voyage on the Lake Steamer," the party arrives at Buffalo where they are to board a steam boat. Robert is hurriedly studying, hoping to be able to speak for the group when their guide is gone. Ulrika, learning from their guide how much farther they have to go before reaching Minnesota, confronts Karl. She accuses him of misleading them and he tells her that she and all the others are welcome to stop following him at any time. The two yell at each other and are unwilling to make up when Danjel and the others call on them to mend their differences. The steamer stops off in Detroit and many go ashore. Karl is sidetracked by the sight of a mule that has fallen into the water and does not realize that Kristina has boarded without him. When he goes aboard with Johan, they discover that Lill-Marta is not aboard and begin their search but cannot find her. The other two children are aboard as the boat prepares to leave the dock and Karl and Kristina cannot decide what to do. Just as they are wavering, Ulrika runs up with Lill-Marta and they all safely boards. She had guessed that the missing child might have gone to a grove of fruit trees they had seen as they docked.

In "Peasants on a Sea of Grass," the group travels onward, into the heartland, and all realize that the prairie—which they describe as a "sea of grass"—is not where they want to settle. Along the way they encounter a prairie fire. It is along this leg of the journey that most come to fully accept the length of time and the rigors of the trip. With this comes the realization that they will not ever return to Sweden.

In "Danger Signs Are Not Always Posted," the group realizes that the boat they are on sometimes stops and a few men go ashore with a bundle and shovels, returning a short time later. They pay little attention for the first few stops but then word travels through the passengers that there is an epidemic of cholera aboard the boat. Karl and Kristina believe that the food they are being served is tainted and they decide that they will not eat, nor will they allow the children to eat from the food. The decision is difficult because the children are hungry and plead for food. After a few days, Danjel's youngest daughter, Eva, gets sick and dies after just a few hours. The stop to bury the child takes little time. Ulrika is heartbroken. Danjel believes that he was overly devoted to the child and that God took her away so that Danjel could move his focus back to God. Ulrika makes a mustard plaster which she and Elin wear though Danjel derides her for it, saying that she should have enough faith in God to believe that he will protect her. Kristina responds that God is more likely to help those who are willing to do something to help themselves but Ulrika is upset at Danjel's words. She cites the fact that Danjel had assured her that her sins were gone when she accepted the Lutheran faith and that she now wonders if she can fall out of grace. Kristina's son, Johan, is ill but it is apparently only hunger because he gets better quickly. When the boat docks one day to take on wood, Karl goes ashore in an effort to find fresh milk and food for the family. He is beset by would-be thieves but manages to escape with some minor injuries. The



children are bitterly disappointed when he comes back without milk and Kristina is worried about his injuries.

In "Their Last Vessel," the group boards the boat, "The Red Wing," which will take them almost all the way to their destination. Robert spends part of each day studying the language. He wants to be sure he can ask the right question in any situation and also studies money in order to be certain that they are not cheated when receiving pay or making purchases. Robert spends a great deal of time thinking about his future plans. He says that he does not want to make a huge fortune because it would be difficult to handle. He does, however, plan to accumulate a "small fortune." He also plans not to buy too many possessions. One night a man falls off the boat into the river and is not missed until the following day. The rest of the passengers take up a collection for the family.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

As Karl and Kristina are looking for Lill-Marta, she mentions another of their children, Anna. The death of Anna is part of a previous book and the reader learns little, other than the facts that the child dies before she is able to wear out her first pair of shoes and that Karl feels responsible for her death. During this scene, Kristina obviously blames Karl for not keeping an eye on Lill-Marta and he equally blames himself. Later, when the family is settling into their new home, she keeps a close eye on the children. She notes that, at their home in Sweden, she would have allowed them to play without such close supervision. Her own insecurities seem to make her more careful with her children.

The scene in which Karl is almost robbed is described in great detail. He enters a store in the town and finds that there is a man there who understands enough of his language for them to communicate. That man offers to take Karl to a store to buy milk but when they get in the wagon and start leaving the immediate area, Karl becomes suspicious. When they encounter a man who asks for a ride, Karl is more suspicious and comes to realize that the two plan to rob him, and likely take his life. He manages to escape by jumping from the wagon and spooking the horses into running away while he runs the other direction. For Karl, this is an important lesson in being careful who he trusts.

It is while the group are traveling on the river boat that the reader learns that there are some religious motives behind the decisions of some to move to America. Danjel notes that he had fully expected Sweden to be destroyed but that he had faith that God would wait until Danjel and his followers were out of the country. What is interesting here is that Danjel has come to doubt himself to the point that he creates doubt within everyone around him. The religious aspects of the story are not closely examined but their roots lie in a previous book of this series. Others later mention their own religious persecutions as a motive behind their decisions to leave Sweden as well.





# Chapters 9 through 14

## Chapters 9 through 14 Summary

The first chapter in part two is "Will No One Help Me?" In this chapter, the group leaves the steamboat at Stillwater. The town is some thirty miles from their destination of Taylor Falls. The steamboat captain warns them not to stay in the area because there has been cholera. Evidence of the disease is seen in the form of empty houses all along the river. The captain had promised to help them locate assistance for the last leg of the journey, but he falls ill and is unable to provide that aid. Robert and Karl go into the town while the rest of the group remains at the riverside with their baggage. Robert has practiced asking for help but everyone they meet seems in a tremendous hurry and no one will stop to listen to them, a fact they find out later is prompted by the fear of cholera. Henry O. Jackson is a Baptist minister in the town and he soon sees the group. He offers help, which initially prompts Karl's suspicion. Though they are unable to communicate past Robert's few words, Jackson invites the group into his little cabin and prepares a meal for them. Jackson uses everything he has to make beds on the floor of his cabin for the group and goes to sleep at a neighbor's house. The next morning, he returns to prepare breakfast for them.

A neighbor named Sigurd Thomassen arrives. Like others on the journey, his language is near enough to that of Karl and the others that they can communicate. From Thomassen, they learn that Jackson is a preacher and that he is single. Ulrika is touched by Jackson's kindness, saying that he served them all as if they were nobility. Thomassen tells the group that they will have to walk the rest of the way to Taylor Falls and that their baggage can be shipped up by river barge. They also learn that they are likely to meet Chippewas along the way but that they are, for the most part, friendly. The members of the group discuss Fina-Kajsa, fearing that she will be unable to survive such a strenuous walk, but she insists and points out that no one else will know her son. They finally agree and set out together, the end of their journey in sight.

In "At Home in a Foreign Forest," the group begins the walk and is soon enthralled by all the things they find in the forest. The men realize that there are trees to be used for all aspects of building a home while the women and children take note of the possible sources of food, including berries. Robert tells Elin an elaborate story about his adventure in New York and Elin confides that she does not plan to live in Danjel's household after the family is settled, but wants to find work to support herself. The group shares what is almost the last of Kristina's food from her basket, including a small jar of honey, making sure that the children have the larger shares. The group has to camp in the woods that night and the men take turns watching out for danger. Robert is unable to sleep, though he is not asked to keep watch, because he feels he knows better than the others the dangers that lurk in this new country. During the night, Jonas Petter confronts an animal like nothing he has ever seen. The furry creature tries to break into their food basket and even climbs a tree when Jonas moves the basket to a limb. They cannot figure out what the animal could be but later learn that it is a raccoon.



The walk on the second day is more difficult. Everyone is tired. Karl is carrying a large load and Johan does not want to walk, whining for his father to carry him as well. Fina-Kajas complains that their journey will never end and there is no real trail to follow. When they find a cabin, Karl and Robert approach, asking to buy milk. The woman gives them milk but locks the door without waiting for money. A short time later they encounter several men carrying guns and Fina-Kajsa recognizes her son, Anders, among them. Fina-Kajas asks Anders why his face is so red and he tells her the heat bothers him. He takes the group to his tiny cabin but Fina-Kajsa refuses to go inside, accusing her son of playing a trick on her. She keeps saying that she knows this is the barn and wants to know where his house is.

In "Distant Fields Look Greenest," everyone in Taylor Falls is eager to greet the new arrivals. Among those is a man named Samuel Nojd and a woman named Anna Johansdotter, known as "Swedish Anna." Anders is thankful for the group's care of his mother and opens his house to provide whatever help he can for them. It is time for the crops to be harvested and the men help Anders with this task. Karl is somewhat amazed that Anders has only about eight acres cultivated in the four years he has been settled in America, even though Anders owns a team of oxen to help with the plowing. The men of Karl's group have many questions as they seek information about setting up homesteads of their own. Anders talks about adversity, including grasshoppers and the weather. He is a quiet man and Karl and the others have to ask direct questions to get the answers they seek. Karl continues to think that Anders has some secret that he is not sharing with the others but cannot imagine what it might be.

Anders agrees to take the men on a trip into the forest near Taylor Falls in order to help them find the lands they want to homestead. The men continue to make note of all the forest has to offer, including sugar maples that will provide syrup for their families. They each look for soil that will yield good crops but know they must have nearby running water as well. Anders warns that they may have to dig as deep as twenty-five feet if they seek to have a well for their water supply—a huge undertaking. As they walk, the subject turns to families and Anders is obviously interested in Ulrika. He says that any man would be happy to marry her, adding that she is "healthy and well shaped." He then asks how long she has been a widow and the three men who know of her past decide that they will not tell what they know.

The group finds a likely spot for homesteading and Danjel and Jonas decide that they will settle there. There is a small lake and Danjel and Jonas believe that they will not find any land better. They urge Karl to choose a spot nearby but Karl has become enamored by the idea of another lake, a larger one named Ki-Chi-Saga, several miles farther into the forest. He declines the urging of Danjel and Jonas and travels on alone. When he finds the lake, he cannot believe his good fortune and realizes that this is exactly why he came to America. He blazes a tree to mark the beginning of his claim and falls asleep under a tree where he spends the night.

In "A Smaland Squatter," Karl returns to the spot where Danjel and Jonas have decided to homestead and where Danjel, Jonas and Anders are waiting. The men first build shanties for their families and clear a rough road in order to bring supplies in with a cart



and Anders' oxen. Among the supplies is a barrel of rye flour that he hopes will sustain his family over the winter. Karl has dug deeply into his remaining cash to buy what he believes to be necessary. The day comes when he takes Kristina and the children to the new homestead. The ox cart is so rough that Kristina eventually decides to walk because she is becoming heavier and uncomfortable with the child she is carrying. She knows the baby will be born before Christmas. The road from Taylor Falls to the lake is nine miles and Kristina is sad that she is so far from the settlement and so far from the other settlers. She and Karl argue about it, she accusing him of always having his way and never considering what she wants. The children are immediately caught up in the freedom of their new home. Karl is ashamed that he is not able to offer his family—especially Kristina—a better house. Kristina is horribly homesick but is glad her family cannot see it.

## Chapters 9 through 14 Analysis

It is while they are in the forest that Kristina's worry about the dangers they face changes. She has been terribly concerned that some danger would befall someone in their party but comes to realize that there is no way she can possibly look out for every possible danger. Over the coming weeks, she will be diligent with her children—more so than she would have felt necessary at home in Sweden—but will begin to feel less threatened by every aspect of their new life. Over time, Kristina worries more about the nutrition of her family than she does about the possibility of some unseen danger causing harm. This could be attributed to the fact that she can see hunger literally knocking at their door, driving away other fears.

While they are walking to Taylor Falls, Robert has an opportunity to be alone with Elin. Elin is apparently a teenager and she and Robert have a connection though it does not seem to be romantic. Robert tells Elin that he and Arvid had an adventure while they were away from the family in New York. He tells her about finding the drunk man passed out in the gutter, but then he elaborates on the story, telling Elin that he saved Arvid from being killed by the man. Robert's story takes on a life of its own. He tells her that the police wanted to offer him a job because of his heroics but that he knew the group needed him. He goes so far as to tell Elin that a knife had pricked Arvid's vest before Robert stepped in to save his friend. At that moment, Arvid appears and does have a small tear in his vest. Though he has torn his vest on a thorn, Elin takes it as a sign of Robert's truthfulness. Robert seems to have no malicious intent with these lies, but wants only to be in the spotlight.

All are somewhat dismayed by the look of Anders' house, not because they are snobs but because they had imagined that he would have accomplished much more during his time in America. It is most difficult for Fina-Kajsa to accept because she has told the others about the wonderful house her son described. No doubt he never expected that his parents would know the truth when he exaggerated his possessions and accomplishments. Fina-Kajsa sits on the doorstep for a long time and it seems that she might have literally lost her mind. The others realize that Fina-Kajsa had not been trying

to reach America, but had been traveling toward a successful son. Since she was trying to reach this dream, she will never reach her destination.

Kristina's first glimpse of her new home in America is devastating for her. Karl is ashamed that he is not able to provide her a better house and she is relieved that her family is not able to see the pitiful little shack she is to call home. All she can think is that she is homesick for a place she will never see again. Kristina realizes that Karl will be expecting her to say something positive about their new home. She searches her mind and finally tells him that the flowers in the fields are very pretty. Karl tells her that there are flowers and weeds growing in the fields this year, but that they will be replaced by crops in years to come. He makes that promise and continues to try to assuage her homesickness with promises of the home he is going to build and the things he is going to accomplish. Karl is an enterprising man and is hardworking, but he can become so caught up in the things he can accomplish that he does not remember that there are other things in life that are also important.



# Chapters 15 through 19

## Chapters 15 through 19 Summary

In "To Survive with the Help of his Hands," Kristina begins unpacking the chest filled with possessions from home. Robert packed fishing supplies which they now realize will be very useful. Kristina finds some things she does not remember having packed and all evoke memories of Sweden. The chest is the only piece of furniture in the shanty and it is used as a table for the family's meals. There is no hearth in the shanty and Kristina cooks over an open fire outside. One day Kristina realizes that Robert and Karl are looking extremely shaggy and she uses her shears to cut their hair. Robert asks that she cut his as short as possible in the hope that he will be safe from Indians seeking to scalp him. Shot and powder for their only gun is scarce and Robert learns that he can chase down rabbits, catching them without expending a shot. Kristina realizes that the children are in need of milk if they are to remain healthy on the otherwise skimpy diet available and asks that Karl buy a cow. It pains him to admit to her that he does not have money left to buy a cow.

Robert works hard alongside Karl as they are preparing for the coming winter but he has already come to the conclusion that he will not remain in Minnesota with Karl. He has begun making plans to go to California where he fully expects that he will be able to pick up enough gold to make his fortune. He says that he does not want to continue to work in the fields with a hoe, but wants to go to the gold fields. Karl sees all the hay that could be used as fodder for animals, though he does not have any animals to care for. He remembers the animals in Sweden that he could hardly afford to feed and now has all this extra fodder available. He cuts the hay and stacks it, though he does not have a real use for it at the moment. Karl notes that the land is fertile and says that any man should be successful with this land.

In "At home on Lake Ki-Chi-Saga," Karl has to buy the items necessary for building the cabin he and his family will live in. He buys nails and three small windows, though he wishes he could afford more glass to let the sun in. Anything metal is very expensive and he thinks about every purchase, trying to decide when he can make do with something he can make himself. He uses pegs as much as possible in the building in order to save the cost of nails. He buys two metal hinges for the door at the cost of another of his precious dollars. Kristina meanwhile is looking for ways to stretch and preserve the family's meager supplies. She knows she will have to be careful about the clothing because there will not be a way to buy more. She battles rats that seek out the food and wishes for a cat to help with that chore. One day Johan comes in with a black and white creature that he calls a cat but that turns out to be a skunk. The family battles the smell for days and Kristina has to wash his clothes in what is passing as soap, a concoction made of rabbit fat and ashes.

Danjel names his farm New Karragarde for his home in Sweden and urges Karl to do the same but Karl says he will wait until a name presents itself. One day Swedish Anna



comes to the farm to visit Kristina and her children, bringing young Harald a new coat. Kristina enjoys the visit because she is bitterly lonely most of the time. One day the family wakes to an early frost. Temperatures plummet and they are very cold. Karl realizes that the shelter of the new cabin is more pressing than ever and he spends most of his time on that. The day comes when Danjel, Jonas and Robert come to help Karl build his house and the work takes about a week. They move in near the end of October and Karl promises that he will focus soon on furniture. The neighbors come to Karl and Kristina's for their housewarming, though the festivities are much less than they would have been in Sweden. The group reminisces about Sweden and those left behind, increasing Kristina's homesickness.

In "Guests in the Log House," Robert returns from Taylor Falls one day with one of Anders' cows. The cow is old and Anders had planned to slaughter it for meat, but the cow had become pregnant and Anders decided to wait another year. He lends it to Kristina for the winter, citing the fact that he has another cow and does not need the milk. Karl houses the cow in the shanty the family had initially lived in and is glad to have the fodder. The cow gives little milk but it is enough that the children have some every day. One day some Indians walk into the cabin while Karl is away, frightening Kristina and the children. She screams for Karl but he does not hear her. The Indians look at the gun and one of them takes it from its place on the wall. Kristina believes she is about to be killed and puts herself between the Indian and the children, then faints. Karl returns and for awhile remains near the house. When it is his turn to go to Danjel's to help with a building project, he sends Robert instead so that he can be near Kristina and the children. When she comes to, Karl is there and the gun is back in its place. Kristina goes into labor a short time later, though it is at least two weeks early by her calculations. Late that evening she sends Karl for Ulrika, saying that she had already asked Ulrika to be with her during the birth. Karl is initially skeptical but agrees and goes to get her, having Kristina carefully bolt the door before he leaves.

Karl collects Ulrika from Danjel's house and the two make their way back to Kristina. On the way, Ulrika points out that Kristina has had twins before, and that this might be the case again, which would have prompted the early delivery. Karl says that Lill-Marta's twin brother died at two weeks of age. When they get there, Kristina does not answer the door and Karl is on the verge of breaking out one of the precious windows when Johan manages to work the bolt and open the door. The night passes with Kristina in labor. Karl goes outside for awhile, feeling useless and in the way. The baby boy is born early the next morning and Ulrika guesses his weight at twelve pounds.

In "Mother and Child," the emerging relationship between Kristina and her young son is described. She knows that she has not any clothing for him and comes to the conclusion that she will have to use her bridal petticoat for his diapers and clothing. In "The Letter to Sweden," Karl writes a letter to his parents. He describes their new home, focusing on the fact that there are plenty of trees, good soil and a lake. He says that everyone else is fine and that Danjel's family has settled nearby. He also relates the news that Kristina delivered a son and that Kristina was homesick upon their arrival but "has gotten over it."





## Chapters 15 through 19 Analysis

Kristina is really angry when she learns that they are not going to be able to afford a cow. Karl realizes that she does have reason to be angry. He says that if she had known she was moving to a place where her children were going to be without ample food, she would never have come. He also appreciates the fact that she does not say those things to him aloud. Kristina and Karl have not discussed money prior to this and Karl is struggling to figure out what he should do. He has enough money left to either buy a cow or build their house, but knows that they will freeze to death without shelter.

Karl remains skeptical of Ulrika and the fact that she has really changed. He can only remember the person she was in Sweden but Karl is intolerant of Ulrika's circumstances. In fact, she had been sold into servitude as a child and had never been in the position to turn down the men who forced themselves on her. The fact that she had children out of wedlock was not really her fault, but due to the close-knit, intolerant society, it had not really mattered. Kristina realizes all this before Karl, though she herself has trouble reconciling herself to the fact that Ulrika has always seemed so proud. After arriving in America, Kristina remembers times when she snubbed Ulrika, based on Ulrika's reputation and ignoring the fact that Ulrika, as Kristina's elder, deserved respect.

There is a note that the boy born to Kristina after their arrival in America is Karl's fourth child, and that the four counts Lill-Marta's twin who died in infancy. What is confusing here is that Karl mentions the death of another child, a daughter named Anna, who was carried to her grave in a coffin so small that Karl carried it alone. He also recalls telling his parents that he would never again bury a child of his and that this was his motivation for moving to America. It is unclear how the number of children is reconciled and it is never explained in this book. The reader who wants to know these details will have to read the first book of the series.



# Chapters 20 through 22

## Chapters 20 through 22 Summary

In "The Indian in the Treetop," there is a creek that flows into the lake and near that creek is a cliff that "strongly resembled the head of an Indian." Robert is always cautious as he passes by this point, fearing that the head might somehow be a threat. Karl believes the Indians to be lazy and Kristina feels sorry for them because they seem scrawny and malnourished. Robert, however, believes that the Indians are probably derisive of the whites for wasting so much energy on work. One day Robert and Arvid are talking and Robert confides that he plans to leave Minnesota for the gold fields of California as soon as the spring thaws come. He reminds Arvid of their mutual pledge to remain together in America but Arvid initially refuses to commit. He reminds Robert that Danjel paid his passage to America and that he owes Danjel that money. He promises to speak to Danjel but Robert urges that he wait, saying that he does not plan to tell Karl until the day before his departure. Robert tells Arvid that he could always leave for the gold fields and promise to pay Danjel whatever he still owes upon his return. Robert is certain they will return with lots of money. Robert also reminds Arvid that the rules in America are different and that a master has no legal hold over a servant, meaning that Danjel cannot force Arvid to stay.

One day Robert is hunting alone near the Indian head when he sees the tracks of an elk. He wants badly to bring the animal home because Karl has not yet shot one of the large creatures. He slips quietly through the woods until he happens upon an Indian in a tree. He stops and moves away as quietly as possible and cannot believe that he is nearing escape when he hears a rustling in the bushes nearby that he is certain is the sound of an arrow. That sound is followed by several more and Robert believes he is being shot at. He fires wildly and races away, not taking time to look back. At the cabin, he is obviously agitated and eventually tells Karl and Kristina that he shot an Indian. Karl takes Robert out of Kristina's hearing to question him further, knowing that if Robert did shoot an Indian, there will be retaliation, and Robert stands by his story, saying that the arrows from the Indian's bow had barely missed him and that he was certain he shot the Indian because he was not pursued. For the next days, Karl is careful to remain near the cabin and to always have his gun ready, fearing an attack that does not materialize. After a few weeks, he is some distance from the house when he happens upon the spot where Robert said he was attacked. Karl spies an Indian in a tree and discovers that he has been secured there by an arrow through the neck. Karl remembers that Indians sometimes do this to preserve their dead through the coldest part of winter when it is impossible to dig a grave. Back at home, he confronts Robert who refuses to admit that he might have been wrong about his story and adamantly refuses to say that he was exaggerating.

In "The Swedish Settlers' Almanac," the winter sets in and one day Karl becomes disoriented between the house and the shed where the cow is kept. He manages to find his way but avoids making that mistake again by making a rope of linden bark stripped





from trees. He has a great deal of firewood at hand and Kristina and the children spend most of their time inside. Kristina is recovered from the birth of their son and resumes her normal housekeeping. Karl begins working with wood on all sorts of furniture. He makes a cradle for the baby from a dugout log and chairs from the butts of logs. He also makes an incredible table, spending hours on the surface to make sure there are no splinters in the tabletop and making sure that the table is sturdy and does not wobble. Karl realizes that the end of the year is quickly approaching and that he will have no almanac for the coming year. He knows that he will have to come up with some way to mark the passage of time. Robert comes up with the idea of making an almanac for his Swedish neighbors and eventually sells several copies, making himself a little profit.

During the Christmas holidays, Samuel Nojd and Swedish Anna come for a visit. Kristina brings up the question of a christening for her baby and says that she thought of asking Danjel but that he has not preached or done any of the duties of the clergy since coming to America. She says that she also thought of asking Henry Jackson, the preacher they met in Stillwater. Anna says that Henry is a Baptist and that to ask him to participate would be to condemn the child to Satan. Kristina is amazed at the information but comes to believe Anna is telling the truth about Henry's faith being Baptist. They eventually agree to have Danjel perform the ceremony and Danjel agrees to do the service as ordained by the Lutheran church. Ulrika holds the child and they name him Nils Oskar Danjel, planning to call him Danjel.

In "Mother, I Want Bread," Kristina hears a rumor that Anders has proposed to Ulrika and asks her. Ulrika says that the rumor is true and that she had planned to keep her refusal quiet but that Anders had asked Jonas Petter for advice and Jonas had spread the story. Ulrika agrees with Kristina that Anders would provide her a home and that he is a kind man, but she says that she cannot marry him because she is waiting for God to offer guidance. The house Karl built is snug against the cold but as the winter advances and the food quickly diminishes, Kristina and Karl worry about starvation. Eventually, Karl and Kristina agree to borrow five dollars from Danjel though Danjel's situation is also becoming serious. Karl uses the money to go to Stillwater to buy flour. When he leaves home early that morning, the weather is mild and he feels confident that he will return before nightfall. At the store, he is initially upset at how little flour the five dollars buys. He hoists it onto his back and sets out but as he walks, he realizes the flour is heavier than he first realized and the load becomes increasingly burdensome as he walks. Over the course of the afternoon and evening, the temperature plummets and Karl realizes he is in trouble. He also becomes lost and eventually sees his own footprints in the snow, pointing out that he is walking in circles. When he finally finds the house, he is approaching from the wrong direction, meaning he has walked many extra miles. Kristina has his supper waiting and is obviously worried, but says that Danjel has offered to share some of his remaining potatoes with the agreement that Karl will repay them with his first crop. Karl learns that he must always be careful because he came near to dying in the woods, which would have left his family to fend for themselves.



## Chapters 20 through 22 Analysis

Robert believes the Indians to have a way of life much preferable to his own, a very different view from that of Karl and Kristina. Robert is not exactly lazy but he certainly wants to find an easier way of life. He believes the Indians have that and he also believes it awaits him in the gold fields. When Robert and Karl clash over the story of the Indian shooting at Robert, the brothers are at a complete impasse. Karl feels that he is at least somewhat responsible for Robert and wants desperately to help his brother become a better man. Robert is chaffing under Karl's stern rules and wants to be out on his own. To add to that, Robert feels his hearing loss—which contributed at least in part to this story—is unfair. In Robert's mind, the story he told is true and he refuses to say that he lied or even that he might have been mistaken. It is during their confrontation that Robert points out that Karl has gone his own way since he was a teenager, and that he has never allowed others to tell him what to do. Karl reluctantly admits to himself that Robert is telling the truth on that score and realizes that he is going to have to let Robert do the same, even though in Karl's mind Robert is incapable of taking care of himself.

The addition of the table as a piece of furniture in the house is a great accomplishment for Karl. Not only does he feel better about having completed the project, the table represents an important aspect of home and family life.



# Chapters 23 through 26

## Chapters 23 through 26 Summary

In "The Letter from Sweden," the settlers struggle on through the winter, waiting impatiently for the first signs of spring. One day Johan comes home with a small flower he calls a "sippa," which they know to be a sign that spring will soon arrive. A heavy spring rain melts off some of the snow and birds return to the lake, another sign of the impending spring. Danjel takes Elin and Ulrika into Stillwater where Henry helps Elin find a position as a maid in the house of a wealthy man involved with the sawmill. Ulrika confirms yet another rumor, this time that Samuel Nojd proposed, but she says that she gave him the same answer she gave Anders. When Kristina says she wonders who Ulrika's next suitor will be, Ulrika says that she had a proposal from a Norwegian in Stillwater, but that she also turned him down.

One day Robert walks to Danjel's where he and Arvid agree that it is time to go. Danjel tells Arvid that he has worked enough to repay the cost of his passage to America and Arvid leaves with Danjel's blessing. Robert goes home that evening and tells Karl that he plans to leave the next day. He says he and Arvid will wait in Stillwater for the next steam boat and will earn their passage by working on the boat. Karl tries to talk Robert out of the plan but Robert refuses to be swayed and Karl finally gives in. He gives Robert all the cash he has on hand, a total of five dollars, and Kristina packs a large food basket for him to take as he sets out on his journey. As Robert and Arvid leave, Karl and Kristina are aware that they might not see the two boys ever again.

In Taylor Falls, there is a small store that serves as a post office. Everytime Karl is in town, he stops by the store to see if his name is on the list as having mail waiting inside. Months pass without a letter then the day comes when there is a letter waiting at the post office. Karl eagerly goes inside to collect his mail but discovers that there is fifteen cents postage due on the letter. He does not have any money with him and knows that there is none at home. He seems to hope for a moment that the store keeper might let him have the letter anyway but that does not happen. Karl decides that he might go by Anders' house in the hope of borrowing the fifteen cents in order to pick up the letter. However, when he gets there, Fina-Kajsa is outside and says that Anders is "flat a-back" inside. When Karl goes inside the small cabin, he discovers that Anders is passed out on the bed with an empty keg of liquor at his feet. Outside again, Fina-Kajsa says that her son drinks as often as he can. Suddenly, Karl realizes the "secret" that he had suspected Anders of keeping. The red-faced look that Anders tried to explain as a result of the heat and the lack of industry around the farm are obviously the result of his drinking. Karl does not ask for the money but goes home.

At home, Karl tells Kristina about the letter and the postage due. Kristina asks if he knows who the letter is from but Karl says he does not. Kristina wants him to borrow the money from Danjel or Jonas but Karl is too proud to admit that he does not have even fifteen cents. One day Kristina decides that she will walk to Danjel's and borrow the



money herself. Before she can make the trip, a traveler stops in and they share a meal with him. He gives Johan a dime as he is leaving and Kristina is excited, then realizes it still is not enough to redeem the letter. The traveler quickly returns, saying that he has seen the fodder stacked nearby. The cow that they had for most of the winter has been returned to Anders and the hay Karl harvested was more than enough to feed the single animal. The traveler says that he needs fodder for the animals at the sawmill and buys what is left of it for three dollars. Karl goes immediately to pick up the letter. It is from his parents and has a little news about everyone, saying that most are in reasonably good health.

In "Unmarried Ulrika of Vastergohl Weeps," Kristina learns that Ulrika is to marry Walter H. Abbott, the man who is postmaster and storekeeper in Taylor Falls. Kristina goes to wish her friend well in this new life and finds Ulrika packing to leave Danjel's house. However, Ulrika says that she is not going to marry Mr. Abbott, though she is leaving Danjel's house. She confides that she has been questioning her faith and has come to realize that something is not right about her situation. She says that she realized that Henry is teaching the faith that is right for her and says that she is going to be baptized along with several other new converts to the church, as soon as the water is warm enough. She then plans to marry Henry. Ulrika cries tears of joy at this turn in her life. Swedish Anna is to move into Danjel's house to care for the house and the children. As the men return to the cabin, the conversation between the women ebbs. Danjel, who now has two cows, gives Kristina a pail of milk and Ulrika walks with her a little way toward home. On the way, Ulrika says that she wanted to show Kristina what she had just bought—an incredibly frivolous hat.

In "At Home Here in America, Back There in Sweden," Kristina continues to battle homesickness. She tries to hide it from Karl, fearing he will think her "silly." He knows something is wrong but cannot put his finger on it. One night she prays aloud that he move her back to Sweden. Karl hears and says that he would hold her at his side. One day Karl brings out a small pair of shoes and hands them to Kristina. She recognizes them as the shoes that belonged to their deceased daughter, Anna. Karl asks if Kristina recalls the winter Anna died and she says that she does, and that it was the winter she agreed to move to America. Karl says that "because of hunger the little girl's life had been so short that she had not needed more than one pair of shoes." Karl now tells Kristina that he knows their children will someday thank them for moving to America where they will have better lives. Karl says that he has been thinking about a new name for their American home and suggests Duvemala, named for Kristina's parents' home in Sweden. She thanks him for the gesture.

In "A Letter to Sweden," Karl writes another letter to his parents. He tells them briefly of what is happening in their lives, ending by saying that the children are happy and healthy and that not a day passes that he does not think of his parents.



## Chapters 23 through 26 Analysis

Karl believes Robert's determination to go to the gold fields of California is nothing more than Robert's tendency to chase rainbows. Karl says that, as a child and even up until he was about twelve, Robert would run through the countryside in the hope of reaching the end of the rainbow. The brothers are very much alike in many ways—both are determined and stubborn. However, in this way they are incredibly different: Karl believes everything he could possibly want is within his reach if he only puts himself to work at it; Robert believes there has to be a better way of achieving dreams than to perform such difficult manual labor. Both might be right. Robert seems very intelligent but it is still going to take determination and hard work to succeed.

The letter from Sweden represents news from home for Karl but to Kristina, that letter is of vital importance. She is still so homesick that she is sometimes almost overwhelmed with the emotion and she desperately wants to hear from her family. Karl goes on about his work and cannot understand why Kristina is so caught up in the need to redeem the letter. When the traveler gives Johan the dime and Kristina momentarily thinks it will be enough to pick up the letter, Karl chastises her, saying it is the first money that was ever Johan's alone and that she surely would not take the dime from the boy.

Karl's father is obviously not happy that Karl left for America. Karl recalls telling his father about his plans and trying to justify the decision. In the letter from his father, there is a line that makes those feelings abundantly clear. The letter reads, "You have had your free will and have deserted home." There follows some additional lines indicating that he hopes Karl and the family have managed to survive and admitting that it must have been incredibly difficult to forge a home from this new land.



# Characters

## Karl Oskar Nilsson

Karl is twenty-seven when he leaves Sweden for America, accompanied by his wife and their children. Karl is a hard-working man who wants desperately to build a new life for himself and his family. He realizes that he will have to work hard at it, but knows that he can accomplish it. Karl is so frugal that he stops and considers the use of every nail before he hammers it in. If he believes he can make do with a peg, he does that instead. He also considers purchases before making them and while he wishes he could have more daylight in the home he builds for his family, he feels the price of glass is too much. Karl is literate and writes letters home several times. He is accompanied to America by his younger brother, Robert. While Karl loves Robert, he realizes that Robert is not always trustworthy. Karl hates the idea of waste and when he sees an enormous amount of fodder in the fields, he cuts and stores it though he does not have a cow to eat it at that point and has no money with which to buy one. Karl is embarrassed by the fact that his money is running low by the time his family arrives and is established in a home and he hates to share that information with Kristina, though he eventually does.

## Kristina Nilsson

Wife of Karl Oskar and niece of Danjel Andreasson, she is mother of three children at the time she leaves Sweden with her family. She is also pregnant with her fifth child, one having died as a youngster. Kristina is strict but kind-hearted and is the first to realize that she has to accept Ulrika as an equal in this new situation. Kristina is horribly homesick but tries desperately not to allow the others to see it. Kristina is as frugal as Karl. She diligently works at keeping her family's clothing in good condition, knowing that it is impossible to replace the clothing. When Kristina goes into labor after her arrival in America, she is worried that she has no clothing ready for the child and no way to get material for the clothes and diapers. She finally comes to the conclusion that she must use her wedding petticoat for the baby's clothes and says that she cannot imagine a better use for the petticoat. Kristina worries greatly about her children. She loses a child while the family still lives in Sweden, which makes her more conscious of the fact that something could happen to her children. She works hard at their new lives in America but spends a lot of time keeping an eye on her children, though in Sweden she would have allowed them to run free much more often.

## Johan Oskar Nilsson

The four-year-old son of Karl and Kristina. Johan is a curious boy and is sometimes quite demanding. When they are making the journey by foot to Taylor Falls, he is upset that he cannot be carried more, even when his parents explain that his father is too tired



to keep carrying him. When he the family runs out of flour for bread, he is vocal about the fact that there is no bread at meals though the rest of the family is silent. This is mostly attributed to the fact that he is very young, but it also likely evidence of his true personality.

## **Robert Nilsson**

Karl Oskar's younger brother, he is capable of hard work but is also a dreamer and is anxious to make a life for himself. He is intelligent and learns English by setting his mind to studying the language from a book. He makes some money by creating almanacs for the Swedish people who find themselves in America without one. He has a tendency to stretch the truth and convinces his friend Arvid to go with him to California by promising that gold is easily acquired and that they can quickly become wealth. Robert seems to fully believe this and plans to buy a manor for his parents with part of his earnings.

## **Ulrika of Vastergohl**

Often called the "Glad One" or "Unmarried Ulrika," she is known for being a prostitute of sorts in the Swedish village where the group originates. She has an illegitimate daughter and the women believe she should be ashamed of herself. However, she is proud to the point of being haughty. She becomes accepted as a member of the group after finding Karl's young daughter who becomes lost at a port. Once in America, she finds that she is one of the few single women and is greatly in demand, but turns down several proposals, believing that there will be an offer ordained by God. This comes to pass and she marries a Baptist preacher.

## **Danjel Andreasson**

One of the group who travels from Sweden, he is very religious and believes that he has somehow betrayed God because he does not understand the language in American. Danjel's wife dies on the trip and Ulrika takes over much of the care of his children. Danjel is banned from returning to Sweden because of religious "breaches." He is Kristina's uncle.

## **Jonas Petters**

A man who is traveling alone as a member of the group from Sweden, Jonas leaves his home after years of constant quarreling with his wife. He, as the only man in the group without a family to care for, spends his first year with Danjel's family.





## **Fina-Kajsa**

An older woman who is traveling from Sweden with her husband in the hope of settling with her only son in Minnesota. Her husband dies on the sea voyage and she remains part of the group. She is the mother of Anders Mansson who settles in America several years before her voyage and believes that he has made an incredibly prosperous life for himself in America.

## **Anders Mansson**

Son of Fina-Kajsa, he lives in America several years prior to the arrival of Karl Oskar and his group. Anders writes to his parents about the wonderful life he has built for himself in America and his mother is disappointed when she discovers the truth. He is ultimately lazy, especially compared to the endeavors of men like Karl Oskar, and he has a drinking problem.

## **Henry O. Jackson**

The Baptist minister who lives in Stillwater, he is the first of the town's people willing to greet Karl's group because the others are afraid of cholera. Henry takes the entire group into his home, feeds them and provides them a place to sleep for their one night in Stillwater. He later converts Ulrika to Baptist Christianity and marries her.





# Objects/Places

## Sweden

Where Karl and Kristina live prior to moving to America.

## New York

Where Karl Oskar and his group land on American shores.

## Detroit

Where Lill-Marta is lost for a short period until Ulrika finds her.

## Red Wing

The name of the steamboat that takes the group up the Mississippi River.

## Stillwater

The town in the Minnesota Territory where the passengers leave the Red Wing.

## The St. Croix River

The river that flows through Stillwater.

## Taylor Falls

The town in the Minnesota Territory where Anders Mansson lives and where Karl Oskar's group settles.

## Ki-Chi-Saga

The name of the lake where Karl decides to homestead.

## New Karragarde

The name Danjel gives his farm in America.

## Duvmala

The name Karl and Kristina give their home in America, named for her parents' home in Sweden.



# Themes

## The Desire for a Better Life

The desire for a better life is the theme that drives this story. Karl Oskar and Kristina are living in Sweden near their families when they make the decision to move to America. Their decision, while not thoroughly discussed in this book of the series, is apparently based on the fact that the family life is difficult with few options available in Sweden. When Kristina is bemoaning the fact that the family does not have a cow in America so that the children can have fresh milk, Karl Oskar points out that they had a cow in Sweden but struggled to feed her. He points out the hay that is growing on their property when he first selects it is proof that they will eventually be able to feed an entire herd of cows. This desire is shared by others in the group. Robert, Karl Oskar's younger brother, believes he will have a better life in America because the life will be so much easier. Robert bases these beliefs mainly on his own suppositions. He says that he is certain that there is gold lying around and waiting to be picked up in the gold fields of California. He packs up and leaves the home of his brother based on that belief. Ulrika is another example of this theme. Both she and her daughter are shunned in Sweden because Ulrika was sold as a child and bore illegitimate children as the result of rape at the hands of her master. Ulrika fully believes in her ability to have a better life in America and she sets out to get it. Danjel is another example of a person seeking a better life. In his case, Danjel believes that he will escape religious persecution in America. Jonas Petters is also looking for a better life, though in his case this better life is in the form of escape from his shrewish wife.

## Homesickness

Kristina apparently agrees to move to America with Karl Oskar, leaving her family and friends behind, because she agrees that there is an opportunity for a better life. Despite the fact that she goes into the situation with her eyes wide open, it is not until the trip is well underway that she realizes that she will probably never see her parents and family again. The other adults in the group realize that they will not be returning to Sweden but this homesickness is most severe for Kristina. There comes a point when Karl Oskar also realizes that he will never see his parents again and feels sad by this thought, but it does not impact him as it does Kristina. Kristina's homesickness may be multiplied by the fact that she is expecting a child as the family moves to America and this would be a natural time for a young woman to want her mother near. Karl Oskar realizes this and notes that both his mother and Kristina's mother had been with her during the births of her previous children. What is noteworthy about Kristina's homesickness is that she seeks to keep it hidden from the others. She tries not to let Karl Oskar see that her sadness is so overwhelming. When he does realize the extent of her homesickness, he tries to console her with thoughts of how much better their lives will be in America. Another person who claims this homesickness is Anders Mansson. Anders drinks to excess and says that he took up the habit of drinking when he first arrived in America,



knew few people and longed for Sweden. This claim is up for debate and may not be the real reason Anders drinks so much.

## Faith

Faith is a recurring theme in this story though the various characters have faith in very different things. For Karl, the faith is obvious. He believes wholeheartedly that he can accomplish anything he wants if he works hard enough at the task. For Robert, the faith is entirely different. Robert believes equally wholeheartedly that he can become wealthy if he follows his dreams of going to the gold fields in California. Robert has no first-hand knowledge of what to expect and little in the way of real information, but he believes that there are fortunes to be made for anyone who takes the time to go to California. Danjel's faith is badly shaken though he still believes in God's hand on everything. This is seen when Danjel refuses to do anything that others are doing in an effort to escape the cholera. Danjel not only refuses to take any precautions, he derides Ulrika's efforts to do something for herself. Kristina's faith in Danjel wavers and when it is time for her to have her son christened, she worries that having Danjel perform the ceremony will somehow anger God.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is written in third person from an omniscient perspective. An example of this perspective is when Kristina is thinking about the fact that she is homesick and Karl Oskar knows there is something wrong, but does not know what. The reader is presented with the thoughts of both Karl Oskar and Kristina and so understands the thoughts and concerns of both characters. There are some limitations, though these are seen mainly in the presentations of the minor characters. Notable among these is Anders Mansson. Anders has been in Taylor Falls for several years prior to the arrival of Karl Oskar and his group. During that time, he has worked to clear only a little land, in Karl Oskar's opinion, and Karl Oskar believes that Anders has a secret. When Karl Oskar learns that Anders has been drinking to excess whenever he has the money to do so, he understands the lack of initiative. The reader is presented with the idea that Anders took up drinking because he was homesick. Karl Oskar seems to believe otherwise. In this case, the thoughts of only Karl Oskar are presented and it is left to the reader to decide what is going on in Anders' mind.

## Setting

The story has several distinct settings, all based along the travel route from Sweden to the Minnesota Territory where the group is headed. The most important of the settings is in the Minnesota Territory where Karl Oskar and the others decide to settle. This setting is described in great detail. Karl Oskar pays close attention to the quality of the land, the nearby water and the trees in the area where he decides to homestead. These aspects of the land are described as he encounters them, as he finds them important. For example, it is noted that there are maple trees that can be tapped for the syrup. The land and lake are vital to the family's survival and Karl Oskar chooses land that he believes to have the richest land for the crops he plans to grow. The settings along the route to Minnesota are less important in the overall story but lend credence to the story. For example, there are the impressions of the settlers who have to spend some time in New York prior to making their way inland to Minnesota. This is followed by the setting of various means of transportation, including boats and a train. The train is frightening to most of the settlers though Ulrika finds it exciting. The settings are reasonable to the story line and the time frame. Both the places and events are true, which adds an additional level of credence to the story.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in a straightforward manner. An average reader will be able to read and comprehend the majority of the story. With the exception of a single chapter, the story is written in past tense. That chapter is chapter eighteen and it is written in present



tense. That chapter is titled "Mother and Child" and tells about the emerging relationship between Kristina and her newborn infant. Changing the tense of this chapter brings a great deal of emphasis that would not otherwise have been possible. The immediacy conveyed by the changing of tense makes it evident that the most important thing in Kristina's life is her family. The repeated use of the word "whore" throughout the book may be a problem for some readers who find the word offensive. The reader should keep in mind that, in this time and place, the word is considered descriptive and used because it aptly describes what the people believe to be true of Ulrika. The term is derogatory but is not meant as a curse word. The story conveys, overall, a strong sense of hope and optimism, though there are points of hopelessness as well. The characters of the story are, for the most part, hard-working people who are anxious to do whatever is necessary in order to achieve their goal of making better lives for themselves and their families.

The book is the second in a series. While it can be read as a stand alone, there are some aspects of the story that will remain vague to readers who have not read the first book. The story comes to an acceptable conclusion with the family completing their first year after leaving Sweden. A reader may want to pick up the sequel but the conclusion of this book is satisfactory as a conclusion to the entire story.

## Structure

The book is divided into three parts. Each is headed with a number and a title. The titles are meant to provide a look into the happenings of that part. Part one is "In Search of Homes." Part two is "The Settling" and part three is "To Keep Alive Through the Winter." The book is further divided into twenty-six chapters. The first ten appear in part one, chapters eleven through nineteen are in part two and part three contains chapters twenty through twenty-six. Chapter titles are "A Ship Unloads Her Cargo", "Battery Park", "Milk and White Bread", "A Letter to Sweden", "The Most Beautiful Street in the World", "Journey with the Steam Wagon", "Voyage on the Lake Steamer", "Peasants on a Sea of Grass", "Danger Signs are not Always Posted", "Their Last Vessel", "Will No One Help Me?", "At Home in a Foreign Forest", "Distant Fields Look Greenest", "A Smaland Squatter", "To Survive with the Help of His Hands", "At Home on Lake Ki-Chi-Saga", "Guests in the Log House", "Mother and Child", "The Letter to Sweden", "The Indian in the Treetop", "The Swedish Settler's Almanac", "Mother I want Bread", "The Letter From Sweden", "Unmarried Ulrika of Vastergohl Weeps", "At Home Here in America—Back Home in Sweden", and "Letter to Sweden." The chapters are further divided into sections that range from less than a page in length to several pages. The chapters also vary greatly in length with some as short as three to six pages while others are more than twenty.



## Quotes

"But this time Karl Oskar let Robert off with a strong warning: If he didn't stick to the truth he might get himself and others into great danger. He was now seventeen years old and he must begin to have some sense of responsibility; he must remember that here in this foreign land unknown dangers awaited him." *A Ship Unloads Her Cargo*, p. 14.

"Most of them were not allowed to ride on any kind of wagon until they were picked up by the corpse cart. And the gentry in Sweden would have preferred to see them walk to the grave as well." *Journey With the Steam Wagon*, p. 71.

"There were only two kinds of people in North America: those who had lived here long enough to grow rich, and those lately arrived and still poor." *Voyage on the Lake Steamer*, p. 83.

"A realization which their minds had long resisted became fixed in their hearts and souls: this road they could never travel again; they could never return. They would never see their homeland again." *Peasants on a Sea of Grass*, p. 106.

"They arrived at a time of year most inconvenient for farmers: the summer was by now so far advanced that it was too late to sow or plant anything. They were peasants who had lost a year's crops, and they knew what this meant." *Their Last Vessel*, p. 143.

"The men who had traveled thousands of miles to take over the Chippewas' land, and who had measured the topsoil of the Indians' hunting grounds, gazed in wonder at the grave in the forest; they stood there timidly, glancing around suspiciously, as though listening to the oldest saga of all the sagas in the world." *Distant Fields Look Greenest*, p. 193.

"This rich soil without a stone it in had lain here since the day it was created, waiting for its tiller. Now he had arrived." *Distant Fields Look Greenest*, p. 200.

"The chest bore the scars of its emigration adventure; it had been used roughly on the journey, in New York one corner of it had been smashed in, it was marred and scratched all over. But within its oaken planks, held together with heavy iron bands, it had protected its owner's indispensable belongings." *To Survive with the Help of his Hands*, p. 212.

"How happy the woman who can cut up her best petticoat for her child." *Mother and Child*, p. 270.

"Kristina pitied them because they were so thin and lived in such wretched hovels; and both she and Karl Oskar were grateful not to have been created Indians." *The Indian in the Treetop*, p. 276.



"Now, as he put his feet under his own table, his self-confidence increased: Now he had settled down, now he had become his own master in the new land." *The Swedish Settlers Almanac*, p. 292.

"And she tried, she tried to think and say the opposite. She said to herself: At home here in America—back there in Sweden." *At Home Here in America*, p. 163.





## Topics for Discussion

Who is Karl Oskar? Who is Kristina? How are they related? How do the two characters come to be in America? Describe their personalities. How are they similar? What is the main difference between these two characters and their goals in America?

Who is Ulrika? What kind of life did she live in Sweden? How do you know this? What does she hope to find in America? How does this differ from what others in the group hope to find? Describe Ulrika's personality. Who is first among the group to accept her? Why?

Who is Robert? What is Robert's reason for moving to America? What is he like? How is he different from Karl Oskar? What are Robert's strengths? His weaknesses? What does Robert want to do with his life? What are his future plans? Are these realistic?

Who is Danjel? Who is in Danjel's family unit upon his arrival to America? What kind of person is he? What is his reaction upon the loss of his youngest daughter? What is his attitude about his faith? These attitudes have a great impact on another member of his household—who? What is that impact?

Describe the journey from the arrival in America to the ultimate destination in the Minnesota Territory. How does the group decide to settle in Minnesota? What are some of the dangers they face? What are their reactions to the various stages of their journey?

What does Kristina say about Karl Oskar's need to travel as far from Sweden as possible? Is she correct? What drives Karl Oskar? Does Kristina support this drive?

Who is Anders Mansson? What kind of person is Anders? Who is his mother? What is his role in helping the group decide to settle in Minnesota? Prior to their arrival, what do Karl Oskar and the others believe about Anders' success as a farmer? What do they come to learn is the truth?