

SNOW TREASURE



A story of courage
and adventure.



MARIE
McSWIGAN



SCHOLASTIC

CHAPTER ONE

“**B**EAT you to the turn!” Peter Lundstrom shot his sled down the long steep slope.

“No fair. You started first,” his friend, Michael Berg, protested. Nevertheless, he flew along in Peter’s tracks.

School was over for that day at least, and Peter and Michael were enjoying one of the sled rides the children of Norway never seem to tire of.

At the turn they paused for breath. But their rest was short for Peter spied another sled.

“Look out! Here come the girls!” With that he headed down another slope, his friend behind him.

Peter was twelve and felt grown up. Playing with girls was something he meant never to do. Heavy clothes hid all but his yellow hair and his face. His eyes were clear and brown. Wide apart and in an even line, they looked untroubled.

Michael, the same age, seemed different in everything else. While Peter was tall and slender, Michael was square. His hair was like tow and his eyes were that bright blue that is often called “typically Scandinavian.”

“Hey—wait a minute!” A dark-eyed girl drove her sled into the place the boys had just left. Her black curls bobbed like sausages under the cherry red of her hood. She was Helga Thomsen and somewhat of a tomboy. Behind her on the same sled was a smaller girl, fair as

Helga was dark. The smaller girl was Lovisa, Peter's ten-year-old sister.

"We'll catch them at the lookout. Hold on!" Helga dug her heels into the snow and began another swift descent.

Catch them at the lookout they did, for the sled track made a sharp twist; and below that, nearly a thousand feet, lay the sea. Peter and Michael had to slow down to avoid crashing a wall that protected the road.

Helga, daring as any boy, drove straight at them so there was a clamor of yells and a tangle of windbreakers, caps, sweaters and mittens.

There never had been such a winter for snow!

It began early and with each month grew higher and higher on the ground. April was like January, with no sign of thaw. From one end of Norway to the other, people talked of nothing else. They only stopped talking about it when something entirely terrifying drove it from their minds. Then they remembered it again and looked to it to help them in their trouble.

Up in the Arctic Circle where these children lived, it was winter for much of the year. Sleds and skis were used for travel for all but a few months. But accustomed as the people were to the long cold and the white stillness, the winter of 1940 surpassed anything even the oldest could remember.

The mountains seemed asleep that April. Along the sea the world was lifeless. Except for the fiords, the harbors here in the north were ice-locked, their channels great fields of white. The fiords alone seemed alive with their black rushing waters and bobbing ice cakes. These

forceful streams flow too fast for freezing and so are always a highway to the open sea.

The four friends at the lookout continued their lively play. Peter and Michael tried to wash Helga's face but the snow was too hard and dry and the face washing could hardly have been called successful. Helga managed to get a handful of snow down Peter's back and that *did* amount to something, for he had a bit of trouble shaking it out to prevent the discomfort of its melting.

Tired of the tussle, the four squatted on their sleds. When Michael idly tossed a lump of snow in Helga's lap she got up to shake her dress. In doing so she turned toward the sea.

"Why, Peter, there's your Uncle Victor!" She was surprised. "And Rolls, his mate! Look!"

"You're crazy!" Peter didn't bother to get up.

"But it is your Uncle Victor. Honest!"

"Now what in the world would he be doing here? You don't suppose he's fishing this time of the year, do you?"

"But it is, Peter. Come, see."

She was so sure about it that he got up, if only to be able to tell her she was wrong.

Below, miles away by road but only a little distance for a stone, Uncle Victor was making footprints in the hard snow. Behind him was the stocky figure of Rolls, second in command of the Lundstrom fishing fleet.

"Yoo hoo, Uncle Victor!" Lovisa was on her feet and looking out over the wall of the lookout. But she could not make him hear.

Now every sled ride was a matter of life and death.

Peter Lundstrom never thought he would become a hero. But that bleak winter of 1940 was like no other. Nazi troops parachuted into Peter's tiny village and held it captive. Nobody thought they could be defeated—until Uncle Victor told Peter how the children of the village could fool the enemy.

It was a dangerous plan. Peter and his friends had to slip past Nazi guards with nine million dollars in gold hidden on their sleds. It meant risking their country's treasure—and their lives.

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