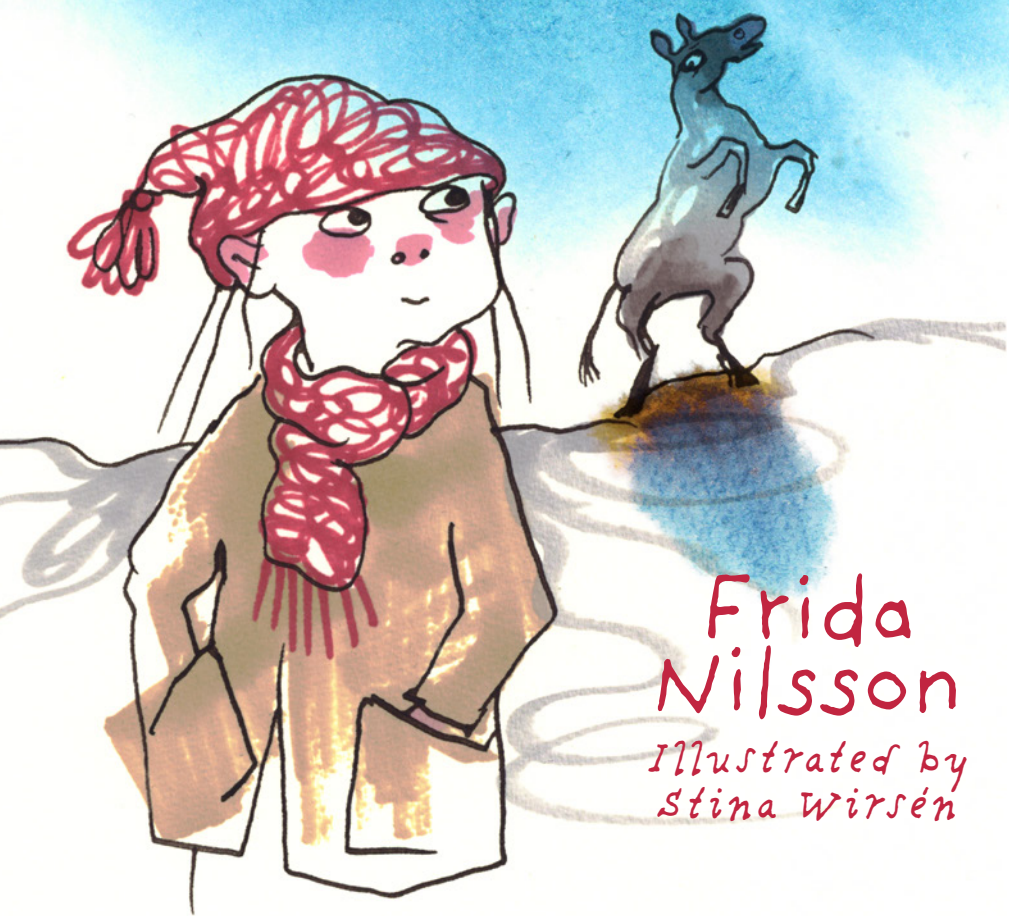


INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

HATTIE + LAF



Frida
Nilsson

*Illustrated by
Stina Wirsen*

Horse fever

There's a pear tree in the schoolyard in Hardemo. Actually, there are several, but this particular tree is the tallest and has a fork at the top. It's perfect for two people to sit in. There isn't room for a third.

Hattie and Linda sit in the fork almost every break time. They grab small, tart pears from the branches and throw the cores so they rattle down through the lilac bushes.

Hattie and Linda are best friends. They have been since the first day of school, and now they're already in their second year.

In one way they're alike. Neither of them knows when to keep quiet. But they're not alike at all to look at. Hattie has straight, brown hair. Her ears stick out like two big coins and her nose is as round as a potato.

Linda is small. Her hair is blonde and messy. Her teeth are as big as sugar cubes and she has a turned-up nose that twitches. Her mother stays at home all day sewing sleeve holders for a factory—they're elastic bands to hold your sleeves out of the way. When Linda comes home her mother is very tired. She can hardly even talk or play.

"I wish my mother was more like yours," says Linda, biting into her pear.

Hattie's mother sleeps all day. But she wakes up when Hattie comes home from school and she has enough energy for most things. She needs a lot of sleep because she works nights at the hospital in town. She sees the most terrible things. Once she saw a man who fell asleep while he was squatting. He slept for two days and his legs turned blue. And then they had to cut off his legs!

Hattie shudders to think of it. She doesn't ever want to work at the hospital. But her mother is tougher than most. That's because she grew up with three big brothers who she had to fight with every day. The brothers, called Nisse, Janne and Olle, are grown-ups now. And they don't fight anymore.

"Mmm..." says Hattie. "What about your father? You have him."

"Oh, he's mostly in the garage," Linda answers, "and only comes in for dinner."

"Roy then?" says Hattie. "You have him."

Roy is Linda's small ugly guinea pig. He lives in a cage.

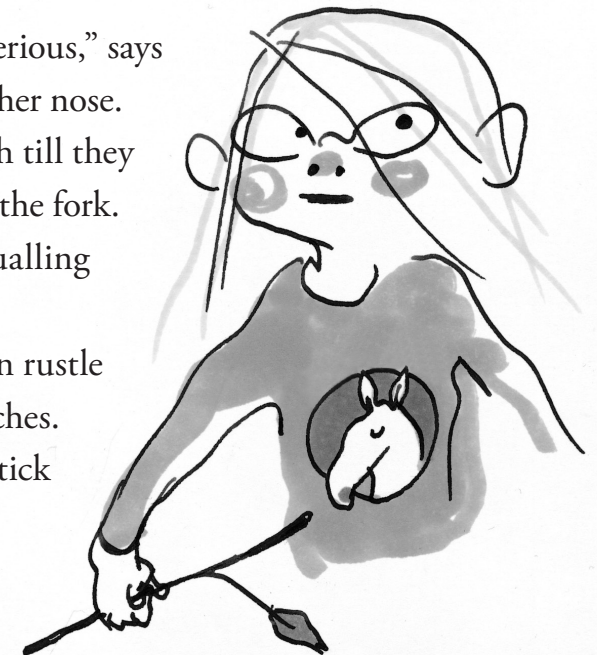
"That old wreck!" Linda laughs. "He just screams when you try to pat him. I think he's wrong in the head."

Hattie is quiet for a bit. She grabs a pear and sinks her teeth into it. "But you have me. I'm not wrong in the head!"

"Nothing too serious," says Linda, twitching her nose.

Then they laugh till they almost fall out of the fork. A magpie flies squalling from the tree.

There's a sudden rustle in the lower branches. Karin and Ellen stick their heads up.



“We’re sitting here by ourselves,” says Linda.

Ellen is out of breath. “We’re playing horses, do you want to join in?”

Linda twitches her nose. “Nah.”

But Hattie tosses away the rest of her pear and starts climbing down. “Might as well.”

Linda sighs and climbs down after her.

Something has happened to Hattie this term; well, to almost all the girls in the class. They don’t want to do the same things as before. They don’t want to play clapping games or football or skipping or tag. All they want to do is run at full gallop around the schoolyard. They snort and toss their heads, rear and kick their hind legs. Their pockets are full of bookmarks with happy horses on them and in their bags are magazines called *Pony*.

They have horse fever.

You can’t see it on their body when someone has horse fever. They don’t get green boils or a ponytail and four hooves. Horse fever happens in their brain, and it means horses are all they can think about.

Linda is the only one who hasn’t got horse fever. She sits on the bench beside the gravel area, kicking

her feet while the others play. She wouldn’t want a horse if they threw one at her. She’d much rather have a moped, but she’s too young. Ellen says girls shouldn’t have mopeds. But Linda doesn’t care one bit about that.

Ellen, who has glasses, is the happiest in the whole class. She lives in a house called Peaceful Haven and her father is a policeman. But that’s not why she’s so happy. In the field a little way away from Peaceful Haven is a pony and it belongs to Ellen. The pony is as round as a barrel. It’s called Crumb.

Karin has been heaps of times to Peaceful Haven to meet Crumb. That’s because Karin and Ellen are best friends.

Now Ellen pulls a stick from the ground. “I’m the trainer!

“I’m Crumb!” says Karin.

“Can’t I be Crumb?” says Hattie. “You were yesterday.”

“No,” says Ellen. “Crumb’s my horse; I decide who’ll be her.”

Hattie sighs.

“You’ll have to think up another name,” says Karin.



"I can't think of anything," mumbles Hattie.

"You could be Agneta Johansson!" calls Linda.

"I know a horse called that!"

Ellen frowns. "You don't," she says.

"Yes, I do!" calls Linda happily.

"Where is this horse, then?" asks Karin.

"Where I live, in Berga! Except both my parents seem to think she's a person, because she looks normal in the daytime. But I was suspicious, and one night I sneaked up on her to check. At midnight she got up in her nightie and opened the fridge. And inside was just hay and carrots! She ate a whole pile, and then she went out and neighed at the moon."

"That's not true!" says Karin.

"Yes, it is," says Linda, happier still. She jumps down. "And do you know how she turned into one? She was *bitten* by a horse when she was small."

Ellen swallows.

"Ha ha!" says Linda. "You've heard of vampires, but you didn't know there's such a thing as horse vampires. Better watch out for that Crumb-ball!"

"She's called Crumb!" shrieks Ellen.

Hattie laughs so hard she shakes.

Ellen hisses and kicks the gravel. "Are you playing or not?"

"Yes," mumbles Hattie.

"Then you can be called Trotter. Now we'll start. Gallop!"

Ellen begins to wave her stick, and Karin and Hattie run around and around, tossing their heads.

"Ne-e-e-e-eigh!" neighs Karin.

"Very good, Crumb," says Ellen.

"You're my best horse."

"Can I come and meet Crumb one day?" puffs Hattie.

"Maybe, we'll see," says Ellen.

"Please?"



"We're playing! Horses don't talk! Trot!"

Hattie and Karin slow down to a trot.

Linda sighs and climbs back up the pear tree. She grabs pears without tasting them and throws them instead at the school wall. Sloppy marks appear on the bricks. She hates that stupid horse fever.



“Frida Nilsson is a worthy successor to the great Astrid Lindgren, and indeed Hattie could very easily be this generation’s Pippi Longstocking.” Readings Bookstore



Hattie wants a horse more than anything. Her friend Ellen has three ponies. When Hattie’s father finally comes home with a horse trailer, Hattie is ecstatic. But instead of a horse, out stomps Olaf—a donkey. Now Hattie not only has horse fever, she suddenly catches lying sickness as well.



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