



A GHASTLY CHRISTMAS

Björn was an old man and when he fell asleep, late on Christmas Eve, it felt exceptionally pleasant. His last thoughts were about the Christmas dinner, which is on Christmas Eve in Sweden. There was ham and rice pudding, which was so good, and glasses of strong spiced wine which he emptied with such pleasure.

Somewhere, at the other end of the house, his relatives, children and grandchildren were still enjoying themselves, but it didn't matter. He was so self-occupied they didn't disturb him. He just couldn't understand how they were able to keep going while he felt so terribly tired. Anyway, he didn't intend to request them to calm down. It was their business if they wanted to stay up and fly around like stupid birds. One fine day they would perhaps realize that sleep was the only thing which could give real pleasure and joy of living.

As he lay sleeping, Björn began to dream; he dreamt he was dead. However, he was not at all nervous. On the contrary he thought it was relaxing to pretend to be dead for a few hours.

On the morning of Christmas Day he got up to brush his teeth, but he got a shock when he looked in the mirror. His face was whiter than the snow outside the house and his eyes had burst; it looked ghastly. Apparently, he died during the night. Death was certainly no dream now but a grim reality.

Björn didn't know what to do. Perhaps he should go back to bed, but he had no wish to do that. The whole family would come in and stare at his corpse and that was no fun. He would rather startle his sleeping offspring by staring at them when they woke early in the morning. They would probably be frightened to death and that wasn't kind of him. But one could have some fun at the expense of the living when one was dead. He thought it was only fair. He went to his sleeping son and daughter-in-law and touched them. His son woke first.

"So Dad is dead," his son muttered with a drawn out yawn.

"Go to bed and rest, for God's sake. It isn't good for a dead person to run around."

"You should be a bit afraid of me," muttered Björn disappointed.

"Afraid of you? No, I am not afraid of you now, when you are dead."

Björn became so angry that he stooped over his son and strangled him.

The dying young man's death rattle woke his young wife and she screamed with fear. As a consequence of his success at scaring somebody, Björn became excited and so satisfied with himself that he also strangled her. He continued in this way with his brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, grandchildren and cousins. During the morning of this Christmas Day he strangled all his close relatives in their beds.

In a flash, he woke up from his disgusting dream; the most bloodcurdling he had ever experienced. How could he be so cruel as to dream of strangling all those dear and near to him? It was an atrocity!

Björn left his bed, brushed his teeth and looked in the mirror. There was color and life in his face and eyes. In the lounge, the Christmas tree looked green and fine with all its decorations. The atmosphere created by the weak illumination, and the early morning darkness outside the window, was really impressive. He smiled and felt at ease.

But why was it so quiet in the house? Why didn't he hear anything from any of his relatives' bedrooms? Why?