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# Meatballs and Milk

**A scenario by Anna Rosengren**

**For three players**

**Run time: approximately two hours**

**English version**

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## About this scenario

Your city is being bombarded, and food is scarce. You have been offered to send your children to safety in another country. But you cannot go with them. Will you send them or keep them?

You are a child on a long journey without your parents. What will happen to you in the new country?

You have taken in a foster child from a war-torn country. Can you keep them safe and care for them, and then send them back to their families?

This is the story about the Finnish war children and the parents who sent them away and the foster parents who took care of them.

During the Second World War 70 000 Finnish children were evacuated without their parents, most of them to foster families in Sweden. The evacuations started shortly after the Soviet Union invaded Finland. The initiative came from Swedes who wanted to help Finnish families. The news reports talked of people having to leave their homes and evacuate to other parts of the country, of cities being bombed and of a shortage of food.

The children were meant to return to their Finnish families, and the majority did. But many remained in their new homes in Sweden.

At the end of the scenario is a short historical background and reading list for those who would like to learn more.

## Instructions for the game master

This scenario is played in a number of short, scripted scenes.

The players will switch between different roles in different scenes. The same character can be played by different players in different scenes. Any player can take any role, regardless of gender or age. The players can choose roles, or the game master can cast them.

Prepare the game by printing out and cutting the character sheets into separate pieces. You will hand them over to the players at the start of each scene. There is also a character overview to help the players keep track of who is who.

Also print out the four letters for the end scene.

**Pro tip:** Change your printer's settings to only print on one side of the paper!

Between each scripted scene there is an option for letters. This means that one of the characters can dictate a letter out loud. There are some suggestions, but you are free to come up with others.

You will start by a brief introduction to the game.

You will introduce the different scenes by reading the introductory text.

There are suggestions for how long time each scene will take, but that is up to the game master and the players.

This scenario has four possible endings, represented by four different letters. In this story the players do not get to choose their ending! You can place the letters face down on a table and choose one at random.

After the final scene, you may lead a brief discussion.

The scenario is planned to take about two hours total time.

# Character overview

## In Finland:



**Helmi**

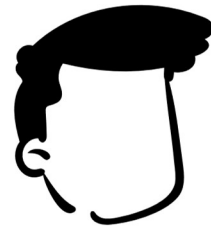
The mother, who has left their home close to the border with the Soviet Union.



**Timo, 8**



**Aino, 5**



**Matti**

The father, a soldier, (not played).



**Eeva**

Helmi's cousin, lives in Helsinki.



**Mikael**

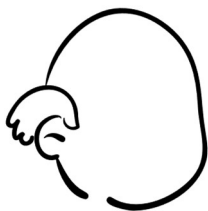
Eeva's husband.



**Ritva, 3**

Their daughter (not played).

## In Sweden:



**Gottfrid**

A farmer.



**Emmy**

Gottfrid's wife.



**Anders**

Their son, a soldier (not played).

# **TIMO**

## **Child, 8 years old**

**Timo** is from a village in Karelia. But there is a war now, so he has had to leave the village with his mother Helmi and sister Aino. They are staying with relatives Eeva, Mikael and their daughter Ritva in Helsinki. Their father Matti is a soldier.

Timo enjoys playing with his new friends in the city. He just wished his little sister Aino would stop trying to tag along! And that Mother would understand that Timo is a big boy now. He misses the animals back on the farm. And he misses Father and makes sure to mention him in his prayers every evening.

# **AINO**

## **Child, 5 years old**

**Aino** is from a village in Karelia. But there is a war now, so she has had to leave the village with her mother Helmi and brother Timo. They are staying with relatives Eeva, Mikael and their daughter Ritva in Helsinki. Their father Matti is a soldier.

Aino wants to play with Timo and his friends, but he always tells her to go play with little Ritva instead. She doesn't like the air raids or running to the shelter at night.

# **HELMI**

## **Grown up in Finland**

**Helmi** is from a village in Karelia, close to the Soviet border. The area is now a war zone in the Continuation war. Helmi and her two children Timo, 8, and Aino, 5, are staying with Helmi's cousin Eeva and her husband Mikael in Helsinki. Helmi's husband Matti is a soldier.

Helmi works in a shop a few days a week and looks after her own children and her cousin's daughter Ritva.

Helmi is worried about the children. War time Helsinki is not a good place for children. And life is difficult with six people in a small apartment. People say it's better to send the children to safety. But what if something happens on the long and dangerous journey? And what if they forget their parents back home? Or if the Swedish families forget their promises to send the children back?

# EEVA

## Grown up in Finland

**Eeva** is Helmi's cousin. She is also from Karelia, but she lives in Helsinki with her husband Mikael and their daughter Ritva, 3 years old. She is a nurse at the hospital. They have taken in Helmi and her children Timo and Aino.

Eeva is worried about the children. War time Helsinki is not a good place for children. But she doesn't think it's right that the children should be sent away to another country. They are Finland's future, after all. People say that the Swedes are generous when they offer to help the children. But why can't they send food here? Or help evacuate whole families to safety within the country?

# MIKAEL

## Grown up in Finland

**Mikael** is married to Eeva, Helmi's cousin. They have a daughter, Ritva, 3 years old. He works for the railway and hasn't had to enlist as a soldier. They have taken in Helmi and her children Timo and Aino.

Mikael is worried about the children. War time Helsinki is not a good place for children. The children look so pale and thin. Food is rationed and there is very little milk or meat. Sometimes you can buy food on the black market, but your salary doesn't go far. Children shouldn't have to spend nights in a bomb shelter. And what will happen if Soviet troops reach the capital? Maybe the children are better off with kind families in Sweden, where there is peace and plenty of food.

# GOTTFRID

## Grown up in Sweden

**Gottfrid** is a farmer in Sweden. He lives with his wife Emmy. They have one son, Anders, who is away doing army service. Their farm is not large, but they are doing well enough.

Gottfrid is too old to be an active soldier, but he knows his duty. The Finnish course is ours! He and Emmy have followed the awful news from Finland and of course they should take in a little child from the neighbouring country. Hopefully it will be a well behaved and obedient child. Maybe you should remind your wife that the child is only on loan and will be sent back as soon as peace comes.

# EMMY

## Grown up in Sweden

**Emmy** is married to Gottfrid. They have one son, Anders, who is away doing army service. Their farm is not large, but they are doing well enough.

She and Gottfrid have followed the awful news from Finland and of course their family should take in a little child from the neighbouring country.

After raising a boy Emmy longs to have a sweet little girl. She will do her best to get the child well fed and healthy, and hopefully also safe and happy. That's what the family owes the poor Finnish parents who have given up their children to keep them safe.

# Introduction

**Time:** Approximately 10 mins.

Start by talking about the background to the scenario. You can ask the players if they already know something about the Finnish war children. Maybe they have relatives who were war children, or who welcomed children into their families. They need to know these things:

- During the Second World War Finland was at war with the Soviet Union in different periods from 1939 to 1944. During this time people were driven away from their homes, cities were bombed and food was rationed.
- Sweden remained neutral, but there was a lot of popular support for the Finnish people. About 70 000 children were evacuated without their parents and placed in Swedish foster families.
- The children were always meant to return to their families in Finland, and most of them did. But some of them stayed in Sweden.

The players should understand the structure of the scenario:

- You will play a story in short, scripted scenes.
- The players will switch between different roles in different scenes. The same character may be played by different players in different scenes. Any player can take any role, regardless of gender or age. Two of the characters are children.
- Between scenes there is an option for letters. This means a character can dictate a letter to another person, inside or outside of the scenario.
- After the run time there will be time for a short discussion.

## Scene 1: Save the children

**Roles:** Helmi, Eeva and Mikael

**Time:** Approximately 10 mins.

**Introduction:** It's spring 1942 and we are in Eeva's and Mikael's apartment in Helsinki, where Helmi and the children are also staying. The grownups are worried about the children. Helsinki has been attacked by Soviet bomb planes and food is rationed. You just heard that the neighbours are sending their children to Sweden. Maybe you should let Timo, Aino and little Ritva go? You all want what is best for your children - but you do not agree on what that is. There is no need to reach a decision at this time.

## Scene 2: The children are sent away

**Roles:** Helmi, Timo and Aino

**Time:** Approximately 10 mins.

**Introduction:** A week has passed. Helmi has decided to send Timo and Aino to Sweden. Mikael and Eeva will keep Ritva, for now.

**Helmi:** You must explain to the children that they are going away tomorrow. You are worried, but you don't want to scare the children. Make sure Timo understands that he must take care of his little sister.

**Timo:** You have many questions about what will happen. You don't want to leave Mother but you understand that you must be a big brave boy now.

**Aino:** You don't really understand what's happening. Maybe it's more important that you can bring your favourite toy. And will there be cakes in Sweden?

## Optional scene: Letters

If one of the players want to, they can dictate a letter. Suggestion: Helmi to Matti, explaining her decision to send the children to Sweden.

## Scene 3: On the boat

**Roles:** Timo and Aino

**Time:** Approximately 5 mins.

**Introduction:** It's your first night away from Mother. You are on a ship in a large room full of beds and mattresses, together with hundreds of other children. There are also women in uniform, who have given you sandwiches and helped you find a place to sleep.

Aino doesn't understand why Mother is not on the boat with them. And when are they going back home? Timo tries to comfort Aino and answer her questions as best he can. And they really should be quiet and go to sleep, or the ladies might be angry.

## Optional scene: Letters

If one of the players want to, they can dictate a letter.

## Scene 4: In the attic

**Roles:** Gottfrid and Emmy

**Time:** Approximately 10 mins.

**Introduction:** Gottfrid and Emmy are in the attic of their farmhouse, looking for their son Ander's old toys and clothes. You have volunteered to be a foster family and have been told that in a few days a group of Finnish children will arrive at the train station. You do not know what child you will receive. You want to make sure that you are prepared to welcome the little one.



## Optional scene: Letters

If one the players want to, they can dictate a letter.

## Scene 5: Meatballs and milk

**Roles:** Timo, Gottfrid and Emmy

**Time:** Approximately 10 mins.

**Introduction:** This is Timo's first evening with Gottfrid and Emmy. After a long train journey Timo and Aino arrived in a town. Aino began to cough during the journey. When the train stopped, a nurse took her away. Before Timo could learn what had happened to her, he was taken away by a Swedish man! He tried to explain that he had to wait for his sister, but the man did not understand him.

In this scene Timo cannot speak Swedish, and the others cannot understand Finnish. This will be represented by you speaking different languages, any languages. It could be English and gibberish, Finnish and Spanish or whatever works for the players.

**Timo**, you will again try to ask for your sister.

**Emmy**, you have made meatballs for dinner with fresh milk from the farm. You can see that Timo needs a bath but that will have to wait. But try at least to get him to wash his hands before supper. You also want to know why Gottfrid didn't bring home a little girl.

**Gottfrid**, you asked for a girl, but you were handed this boy. You were told t he boy has a sister but that she was taken to the hospital. The boy looks strong enough, in fact he was giving you a lot of trouble on the way home. Hopefully everything will be all right after he has eaten.

## Optional scene: Letters

If one the players want to, they can dictate a letter. Suggestion: Emmy to Helmi reporting about the safe arrival of the children. Helmi to Timo, urging him to be a good boy.

## Scene 6: The fishing trip

**Roles:** Timo, Aino and Gottfrid

**Time:** Approximately 5 mins.

**Introduction:** After a short stay at the hospital Aino joined her brother at Gottfrid's and Emmy's house. Now a year has passed, and the children have learned Swedish and settled into their new life. They have new friends in school, they help out with the cows and chickens on the farm and their foster parents are strict but kind.

Today Gottfrid has taken the children fishing. He tells the children that he and Emmy will ask Helmi if the children can stay in Sweden even after the war is over. If the parents say no, they must return to Finland.

Timo, you have many memories of your parents and miss them. You like living in Sweden, but you know that Mother misses you and you want to go back.

For Aino, life with Emmy and Gottfrid is almost all you remember. You would love to stay here.

## Optional scene: Letters

If one of the players want to, they can dictate a letter. Suggestions: Gottfrid or Emmy to Helmi, asking for permission to keep the children. Timo to Helmi, telling her that he wants to come home – or stay?

## Scene 7: Going home

**Roles:** Timo, Aino and Emmy

**Time:** Approximately 10 mins.

**Introduction:** It is autumn 1944 and the war in Finland is finally over. The children are now 10 and 7 years old. For the final scene you will pick one of four different letters. Emmy will read the letter to the children. You can talk about how the children react and what will happen now.

## Optional scene: Letters

If one of the players want to, they can dictate a letter. Suggestion: One of the children, as a grownup, to a brother, sister, parent or foster-parent.

## Letter 1

### From Helmi

*Dear Mr and Mrs Bengtsson,*

*I hope you and the children are well. I am well, and so is my husband Matti. He returned home yesterday, safe and sound, and as happy as I am that the war is finally over.*

*I showed him your letter asking for Timo and Aino to remain with you. Matti and I are both grateful for your kindness and generosity towards our children. It warms a mother's heart to hear that you care for them and would like to keep them. But we can not accept your kind offer. We long for our children and would like for them to return at the earliest opportunity.*

*We hope that the Lord will keep you all safe and that the children will have a safe journey back to Finland.*

*Best regards,*

*Helmi Saarinen*

## Letter 2

### From Eeva

*Dear Mr and Mrs Bengtsson,*

*It is my sad duty to inform you that my cousin Helmi was killed in a car accident last week. The funeral will be held here in Helsinki tomorrow.*

*She recently received your letter asking for Timo and Aino to remain with you. She told me that she was grateful for your kindness and generosity. However, she was going to ask for you to send the children home as soon as it is safe for them to travel. She wanted nothing more than to be reunited with her children, especially as their father is still missing in action, presumed dead.*

*As the situation is now, my husband and I believe that it is in the children's best interest to remain with you in Sweden. We will cooperate with the authorities and hopefully you will soon become their legal guardians.*

*My husband and I send our love to the children. Please know that you will always be welcome to visit us in Helsinki if you ever have the opportunity to travel.*

*Best regards,*

*Eeva Koskinen*

## Letter 3

### From Helmi

*Dear Mr and Mrs Bengtsson,*

*I hope that you and the children are well. I am sorry that you have had to wait for an answer to your letter asking for Timo and Aino to remain with you. Now that peace is finally here, it is high time to make that decision.*

*I long for my children, and I am grateful for your kindness and generosity towards them. As you probably know, things are still very difficult in our poor war-torn country. And there is something else that I must tell you. My husband Matti is reported as missing in action, presumed dead. I have been informed that I must now think of myself as a widow.*

*In this situation I feel that I can only manage to care for one of my children, not both. I believe that Timo, big strong lad that he is, will have the best chance of a good future with you in Sweden. And I think it is best that my little girl should return to me, so that we can comfort each other.*

*Please give my love to the children, tell them that I think of them every day. And please let me know how soon you can send Aino to Finland.*

*Best regards,*

*Helmi Saarinen*

## Letter 4

### From Matti

*Dear Mr and Mrs Bengtsson,*

*I hope this letter finds you well. It is my sad duty to inform you that my wife Helmi died in a car accident last week. I was given permission to leave my regiment for the funeral, which will be held tomorrow. And as we now finally have peace, I expect to be discharged shortly.*

*My wife's cousin Eeva has informed me of your intent to keep the children with you permanently. I am grateful for your kindness and generosity during these difficult times. However, I can not give my permission for them both to remain in Sweden. My poor war-torn country must be rebuilt, and Finland will need her children.*

*However, I must also think of my situation as a widower with two young children. I am sure that I can manage raising a boy alone but that it is best for my little girl to remain in your kind care. Therefore, I must ask you to send Timo back to Finland.*

*Please give my love to the children, tell them that I think of them every day.*

*Best regards,*

*Matti Saarinen*

# Post larp discussion

**Approximately 20 mins.**

Gather to talk about the experience of playing the scenario. Here are suggestions for topics:

- Invite everyone to share how they feel and how they have reacted to what happened in the story.
- What do you think will happen to the children Timo and Aino, according to the ending you picked?
- How do you think the children will feel about their Finnish and their Swedish parents?
- What do you think about the choices the grownups made – the Finnish and Swedish parents, and the authorities who decided to evacuate the children?

Thank you for playing Meatballs and milk!

# Historical background

## Two waves of war hit Finland

The Second World War started in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. On November 30 the Soviet Union invaded Finland. This part of the war became known as the Winter War. Only two weeks after the start of the Winter War the first ship with Finnish children were sent to Sweden. Charitable organisations were quickly formed to handle the transports. Children were also sent to Denmark and Norway.

After the peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union in March 1940 the children began returning.

A second and larger wave of war children were evacuated after the Continuation War started in June 1941. This continued until the end of the war in 1944.

In total about 70 000 children were sent out of the country. The children travelled either by boat to Stockholm or by train the long way over Haparanda. Some children were sent by plane, usually the ones who were ill and needed medical treatment. The transports were accompanied by volunteers from the Women's Voluntary Defence Organization (Lottakåren).

## Reactions in Sweden and Finland

Even though Sweden as a nation remained neutral during the war many Swedes were eager to help the Finnish people, after news reports about bombings and a shortage of food. More families signed up as foster families than there were children.

Initially there was some criticism of the project in Finland, but the government felt that it was right to accept the help the Swedes were offering. From 1942 there was even a ban on writing about the transports in a negative way.

## After the war

The children were always meant to return to their homes in Finland, and the majority were indeed sent back. But a large number stayed with their Swedish families. either as adopted or as permanent foster children. The Finnish authorities were reluctant to accept adoptions. The policy was that all the children should be returned.

As grownups many of the former war children have talked and written about their memories, which were not always good. They went through a separation first from their parents in Finland, and usually a second separation from their Swedish foster parents. The children from Finnish speaking families had forgotten their language, which led to difficulties back in Finland. Many mention a feeling of not belonging in either country This goes for both those who stayed and those who returned.

On the other hand, there are also those who had mostly happy memories, and who felt they were lucky to belong to two countries and two sets of families.



## Postscript

The story about Timo and Aino and their families is inspired by my family's history. The scenario is dedicated to my mother Säde and her mothers Rakel from Karelia and Anna from Skåne.

Säde was sent to Sweden as a two-year-old during the Continuation War. She remained with her Swedish foster family after the war and eventually became a Swedish citizen. When the former war children started to organise in Svenska Krigsbarnsföreningen she became an active member.

I have based the story on things my mother told me about her experiences, and on books from her collection of literature on the Finnish war children, mostly these two:

Kavén, Pertti: *Krigsbarnen Förväntningar och verklighet*. 2012

Liikkanen, Annu: *Med lapp om halsen (Det får inte hända igen)*. 1995.



These are some of the many Christmas and Easter cards my grandmother Rakel sent to her daughter and her Swedish foster parents during the 40's and 50's.