

THE INGMAR PLAY

A summary

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Tims Halvar Halvarsson, farmer
Karin Ingmarsdotter, his wife
Ingmar Ingmarsson, her brother
Gertrud, the schoolmaster's daughter
Stark Ingmar, an old farmer
Hellgum, a Revivalist preacher
Hök Matts Eriksson, an old farmer
Hök Gabriel, his son
The Company Manager
Bergens Per Persson, senior magistrate and farmer
Gunhild, his daughter

Parishioners young and old

The plot is a dramatised version of "In Dalarna", Part I of the novel, "Jerusalem", by Selma Lagerlöf, and is based on events which took place in Nås between 1889 and 1896.

ACT I

SOWING TIME

It is a Saturday evening. *Tims Halvar Halvarsson* is now the master of the old farm of Ingmarsgården, which has descended from father to son from time immemorial. He came to the farm through marriage to *Karin Ingmarsdotter*. Karin had previously been married to Eljas Elof, a rake who drank himself to death. Her younger brother, *Ingmar Ingmarsson*, was a mere child when their father, Stor Ingmar, was drowned in the spring flood of the river. Eljas Elof had spent Ingmar Ingmarsson's inheritance and so deprived him of the right to cultivate the soil of his forefathers.

Tims Halvar goes to a parish meeting. Karin arranges a dance at the farm to cheer up her brother. The young people of the parish arrive, among them *Gertrud*, a childhood friend of Ingmar. Gradually she manages to get Ingmar to participate in the dance.

Stark Ingmar, an old farmer, who was their father's closest friend, arrives. He points out to Ingmar how unjust it is that he, the rightful heir, should not be master of Ingmarsgården, and suggests they go up to the forest together to build a small sawmill there. With the money they make he intends that Ingmar should buy back the farm, his heritage.

Suddenly a storm comes in the middle of the dance. An unknown Revivalist preacher, *Hellgum*, enters the scene and harangues the dancers to repent of such wicked activities. The dance is stopped and everyone goes home in silence. Gertrud is deeply impressed by the words of Hellgum.

When Tims Halvar comes back from the meeting in the evening, he finds his wife, Karin, sitting paralysed: she cannot move her legs. The thunderstorm and the preacher's sermon have given her a shock.

Summer is advancing. Ingmar and Stark Ingmar are far away in the forest, working at their sawmill. Gertrud is considering joining the Revivalist Movement.

One day Hellgum comes to Ingmarsgården just as Halvar is carrying his lame wife out into the sunshine. Halvar asks Hellgum where he comes from and learns that he was originally a fisherman in the province of Bohuslän in

south-western Sweden, but that he has found his faith in "the New Light" in America. He says that he can heal the sick too, but when he tries to give Karin divine healing she repels him. She is left alone on the stage. Her little daughter comes to get her doll which she has left on the edge of the open well, and almost tumbles in. Karin shrieks in despair, jumps up, and rescues the child.

A miracle has taken place, and from now on Halvar and Karin are adherents of the new beliefs taught by Hellgum.

ACT II

REVIVAL TIME

By and by a community is formed at Ingmarsgården, where Hellgum too is now living. People gather and sing pious songs. Hellgum preaches that the end of the world is nigh, and a flood of fire and brimstone will drown all the faithless, but that the Lord will preserve his flock on Mount Sion. Hök Matts, an old farmer, also belongs to the gathering. When he modestly suggests a milder doctrine than the one preached by Hellgum, the latter reproves him severely and makes him do penance for his heretical views.

In the middle of the meeting Ingmar and Stark Ingmar return from their sawmill. Ingmar knows nothing of the events which have taken place in his absence, but when he meets Gertrud he realises that she is a changed person. She tries to persuade him to embrace their new beliefs and Halvar and Karin join in. He realises that they will no longer allow him to live under the same roof unless he shares their faith, and when they proceed to tell him that the sawmill will be given to Hellgum to provide an occupation for him, Ingmar and Halvar start quarrelling violently. Ingmar sinks into deepest despair, since Hellgum and his preaching have bereft him of Gertrud, the sawmill, and the home of his forefathers.

While he sits outside brooding revenge, two men arrive whose wives have left them as a result of conversion to the new beliefs. They want to see Hellgum. When he arrives they attack him. Ingmar rushes to the rescue and is wounded in the neck with a knife. Karin and Gertrud find him lying on the ground bleeding. Karin tells him that nobody is going to take the sawmill away from him, and Gertrud says that she has now seen reason and will never leave him again.

ACT III

TIME TO LEAVE

Hellgum has returned to America. Several years have passed. Ingmar is working to provide a home for Gertrud and himself. Halvar now leads the sect, but Hellgum keeps in touch with them by means of edifying letters. One day Halvar calls the sect members to a meeting in order to read one of Hellgum's letters to them. It is obviously of the utmost importance, since the meeting takes place in the middle of the week. They learn that Hellgum is urging them to sell their farms and emigrate to Jerusalem to wait for the Coming of the Lord in the Holy City. Deeply moved and prostrated in prayer, the farmers of Nås hear the voice of the Lord calling them, one after the other, and Halvar announces that Ingmarsgården will be sold by public auction.

Ingmar comes down from the forest and meets Gertrud. In high spirits he describes the home he is going to build for her.

Stark Ingmar now tells Ingmar about the striking resolution taken by the sect members and that Ingmarsgården is to be sold by public auction. Ingmar is deeply shaken when he hears that the ancestral farm is to go out of the family. Stark Ingmar then tells him that there is only one thing to be done: the senior juryman of the district has a marriageable daughter, Gunhild, and he might be induced to buy the farm to provide a good home for her. In order to save the farm, therefore, Ingmar must marry Gunhild. Ingmar is repelled by the idea of so great a sacrifice. In his despair he invokes his dead ancestors in heaven.

Ingmarsgården is to be sold. A representative of the Company is there with all the necessary documents. Old Hök Matts also arrives to sell his farm, but when he thinks of the lifetime of hard work he has put into the place, he changes his mind at the last moment. Only his son, Gabriel, is unshaken in his faith.

The auction begins. Ingmar stands there as if paralysed. The bids pass between the juryman and the Company. Finally the juryman settles the deal and congratulates Ingmar, his future son-in-law. When Gertrud learns that Ingmar has forsaken her for the farm, she rushes off in the deepest despair.

One night Gertrud has a strange dream. Demons of revenge torture her in the form of the spirits of popular superstition, but Christ, in the shape of Hellgum, offers her peace and crowns her with thorns.

The wedding of Ingmar and Gunhild, the juryman's daughter, now takes place. In the midst of the celebrations Gertrud arrives and wishes to speak to Ingmar. She is now calm and confident. She has made her choice, just as Ingmar has. Both have done what their consciences bid them do and they leave each other without bitterness.

The day of departure for the Holy Land has arrived. There is an atmosphere of sadness as people say farewell to each other, perhaps for the last time. Everything these people have loved has to be left behind. Halvar and Karin say goodbye to Ingmar. They find peace in the thought that things are just as hard to bear for those who remain behind as for those who are leaving.

Hellgum has returned to conduct his flock to Jerusalem and before leaving preaches another heavy and threatening sermon. But Ingmar reminds him that "in my Father's house there are many dwellings". And no doubt there will be room in heaven even for those who remain at home.

The carriages roll away while the pilgrims sing:

"We are leaving for Sion..."

Selma Lagerlöf, Swedish author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1909), was born in 1858 at Mårbacka, Östra Amtervik, in the province of Värmland, into a clergy family. It was there that she imbibed both stories and story-telling techniques, in an area of Sweden which is particularly noted for its story-telling traditions. She trained as a teacher and taught for a short while, but then devoted the rest of her life to writing. She was elected to the Swedish Academy in 1914. Among the best known of her writings are Gösta Berling's Saga, and The Wonderful Adventures of Nils - both available in English translation.

Selma Lagerlöf died in 1940 and is buried in the churchyard at Östra Amtervik, where there is a wonderful view of the surrounding countryside.

Mårbacka, her family home, is open to the public and well worth a visit.
For details, see www.marbacka.com/engelska/e_index.php