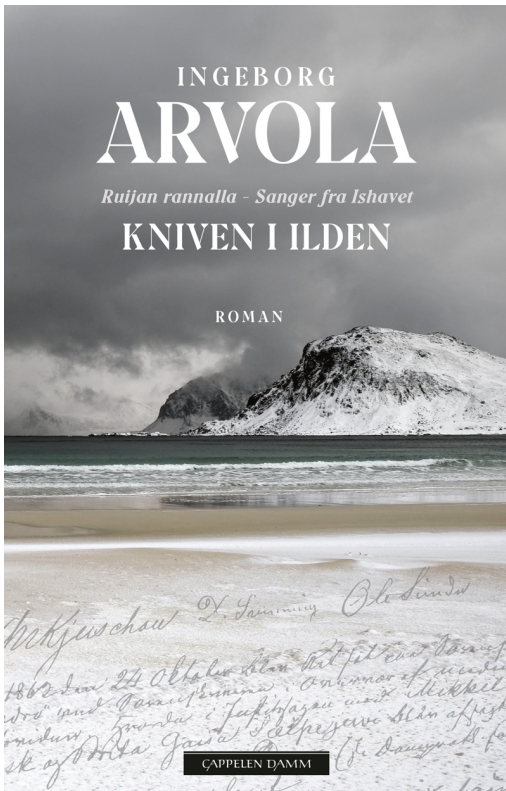


Cappelen Damm Agency

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The Knife in the Fire is a riveting historical novel about work and love, strong communities, and carefree erotica, the individual and the community.

The year is 1859. Brita Caisa Seipajærvi straps on her skis and takes the long road from Finland to Norway with her two children. Brita Caisa has been disciplined by the church for having an affair with a married man. She can heal animals and humans. The destination for their journey is Bugøynes, where the sea is said to be brimming with cod.

The Knife in the Fire is the first title in the Ruijan rannalla/Songs from the Arctic Ocean series, about Finnish Kvens and the landscape they live in. Brita Caisa was the great-great-great-grandmother of author Ingeborg Arvola. Arvola's writing evokes the smell of blood after slaughtering reindeer, the taste of cloudberry, the feeling of coldness from the snow and heat from the fire.

The Knife in the Fire

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CAPPELEN DAMM AGENCY

The Knife in the Fire
Ingeborg Arvola

Reviews

The knife in the Fire is a magnificent epic tale by Ingeborg Arvola. A fascinating and riveting read, with an ending promising for a future continuation. And yes, the publisher promises that there will be a trilogy. *****

VG

A dramatic, poetic and steamy novel sets the bar high

[M]ore than anything, it's the forbidden attraction and love between Brita Caisa and the married Askan Mikko that gives the story its force. It's been long since bodies and desire have been portrayed so nakedly and simply put, sexy, in a Norwegian book! A sensuous, realistic and very poetic novel.

KLASSEKAMPEN

Juicy sex and unbridled desire

... Bestseller-potential. ... a riveting novel about love, work and superstition. ... historically interesting. ... can be read in one lustful rush. *****

DAGBLADET

*There is much to like about this novel, dealing with an less communicated part of the Norwegian, Sami and Kven history. The writing is excellent, the story is exciting and dramatic, the descriptions of the landscape are beautiful, and the character descriptions are realistic. ******

AFTENPOSTEN

Most exciting is the descriptions of the love between Brita Caisa and the married farmer Mikko, with intensely sensual erotic writing as a result. Together they are greater than his bible and triumphing the judgement by society.

STAVANGER AFTENBLAD

Forbidden love, boiling arctic fishing and warm hands. Ingeborg Arvola's novel set in Northern Norway has everything required to become a bestseller. ... lovesickness this hot – and equally steamy lovemaking – I have not encountered in a Norwegian novel in quite some time.

NRK.NO

Ingeborg Arvola

Ingeborg Arvola (b. 1974) grew up in Pasvikdalen and Tromsø in the far north of Norway. She made her debut with the novel *Korellhuset*, published in 1999. She has since written a number of novels for children and adults. She has received the Cappelen Prize in 2004 and Havmannprisen in 2008. In 2019 she was awarded The Ministry of Culture Prize for Children's Books for her novel *Buffy By is Talented*, a book for which she was also nominated to the Brage Prize.

In 2022 *The Knife in the Fire*, the first book in her trilogy *Songs from the Arctic Ocean*, was published to great acclaim.



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The Knife in the Fire
Ingeborg Arvola

Synopsis

In 1859 Brita Caisa Seipajærvi emigrates from Sodankylä to Finnmark. She has been disciplined by the church for having children outside of marriage. Now she wants to create a new life for herself and her two sons Aleksi, 11, and Heikki, 3. Many people travel to Ruija for fishing and increasingly more people decide to settle in the new land. The journey is long, and a lot of people work from place to place. When Brita Caisa is asked to use her warm hands along the way she arrives late for the spring fishing and is advised to stay in Neiden to help on a farm until the next spring fishing. Destiny sends her to Askalaiset, where the talented but childless farmers Mikkel Aska and Gretha Lisa have created a lovely farm over the 20 years they have lived there.

But then Priita-Kaisa from Sodankylä arrived on the scene, and Mikko lost farm and ground... as it is written in folk life portrayer's Samuli Paulaharjus' People of Finnmark, a quote which also opens The Knife in the Fire.

It starts with an attraction between Brita Caisa and Mikko. When they leave for spring fishing in Pykeijä, Brita Caisa forgets all her wishes about finding a nice man to marry who can teach her sons to fish and who she can create a future with. She doesn't think about anything other than Mikko, and eventually they are unable to resist one another. They experience a terrific love, and Mikko leaves his wife to live with Brita Caisa. He assumes his wife and nephew can continue running the farm, but Gretha Lisa doesn't want to lose her husband and reports the relationship between Brita Caisa and Mikko in November 1861.

While this historical and notorious love story plays out, the stories of other people, destinies, county, weather, history and how important the fishing is are also told, as well as the stories of the formidable work done by both women, children and men. About the exposed lives they lead with a strong belief in God and just as strong a belief in superstitions, where three whole families share one living room, where conversations and oral depictions light up the dark times. Many dreamt of America and the Rychaby Peninsula in Russia. The first Laestadian get-

together were in Vadsø, but most are happy as long as they manage to keep hunger at bay, can go to a sauna once a week and sometimes get *kaffeost*, cheese, with their coffee.

The verdict in the case against Brita Caisa Seipajævi and Mikkel Aska is due on the 24th October 1862.

Sample translation by Lucy Moffatt

The Knife in the Fire (Kniven i Ilden)

by Ingeborg Arvola

p. 8 – 27

The snow has a sheen all of its own when the wind lets up and the evening stars twinkle in the afternoon sky. There is sky in all directions. I've never seen so many stars at once. Like so many before us, we peer back at the dense forest, the tarns and rivers we have lived close to; the villages, the blueberry meadows, the families we are leaving behind. *Voi ei*. It's the others, the others who cast these glances as the plateaux around us swallow up every familiar thing. I do not look back. I take in the new. The open, the expansive. When the wind picks up again as the evening draws on, I stop my cheeks from turning away from the wind. I do not look back. I look forward. That road, ahead. I hold the reins to guide Rakastan, the reindeer doe that draws our pulk sled. The skis and pulk glide smoothly, conditions are good and the terrain is easy. Both boys sit in the pulk now that we're on the flat: Heikki innocent, wide-eyed; Alekski reserved. Alekski often chews over unfairness and resentment, chews away at his lips and injustice the way others chew on dried meat. It is a quality, darkness is a quality, just as light is. Everything can be put to use and he must learn to find his strength; the strength of darkness is vast and deep, as long as darkness does not become a resistance that makes you wear yourself out on unimportant things. Unimportant things, I savour the words. The rest of our belongings are in the pulk along with the children. They don't amount to much.

“I need a draught reindeer,” I’d said to Aleksí’s father when we met by chance at the autumn fair. Since he was there without his wife, the wealthy farmer from Unari was keen to indulge at length in cheery chat about this and that, but all I wanted was a draught reindeer. “I need at least one reindeer.”

When the first snow settled, one of his neighbours arrived with a doe drawing the pulk. I examined her, beginning at last to dread the thought of leaving. Many people go to Ruija for the fishing, travelling back and forth as the seasons change, the way they always have. Rugged, life-loving forest Finns are we who glide to meet the night, borne by the crusted snow; food’s scarce too, bark-bread-fed, fur-clad northern Finns or *qvæner*, as they call us, Kvens – the people who have been in the North forever, who can tap the resin from a tree and put it to use, who can survive on little or nothing, who mostly live on riverbanks and build log homes, who keep cows and reindeer if the world is open-handed, but believe that birds must fly free; who settle for small homes, small lives and small prospects just as long as they do not dwindle to nothing – for no one can live on nothing – and if they do, we pack up our future in a bundle that we take with us, many of us travelling on our own skis, many paying to ride with the Lapps, some taking their own reindeer, which cost little to keep, and those of us with children can put them to work digging up moss and birch bark from the frozen earth when we set up camp for the night, while we ourselves pitch tents, light the campfire and cook the thin gruel, boiling it until the grain thickens, talking all the while of the fish and future that await us.

I share out the gruel between the children. We adults chew on dried meat and good, hard chunks of rye bread. Sleep comes creeping up on us. Everyone’s cheeks are round and ruddy from the cold wind. Heikki falls asleep over his food. I wake him and make him eat up. Aleksí lets his little brother curl up close to him as I take care of the

dishes, cleaning them in the snow and wind before I, too, stumble into a reindeer skin and sleep. I will never return to these dense tree trunks, the stinging horseflies and the muggy heat of July. Every step is a beginning. Every step is never more.

The children have pissed yellow patches in the white snow. With practised ease Matti Mokkola packs his tent and all the rest of his gear, helped by Valla and his boys. Alekski and I deal with our pulk and our furs. Our doe is called Rakastan. Love. She's a good draught animal, strong and broad-chested for a doe, but has developed a little limp in the past two days. If I don't keep an eye on her, she veers to the left, but there are worse draught reindeer – lazy, old, irritable. As soon as I know where we're going to live, the reindeer will be slaughtered, Rakastan will meet the knife, as we all must meet the knife some day, and she, with her lovely eyes, will know there's no malice in it – then her meat will be hung to dry, her skin will become a bedspread, her bones will be boiled for stock and I'll give that stock to my children, so they can eat until they're fit to burst. Alexander will get to suck on the marrow, all the marrow he can suck, for he's started to grow and if we don't hurry, he'll be a man before we reach Pykeijä and can look around for work. I know how to work, every soul in Lapland knows how to work, it's in our blood – a surging will to achieve, to see things through, though not everyone works alike, it's true. One could come from harder-working stock. Less given to drinking. More tight-knit. Less expansive. Of course one could.

Matti Mokkola has brought a testimonial from the priest along on his journey to the new country. The young lads, too, they're confirmed, from decent families and can read the Bible – all these things the testimonials explain. Testimonials for decent people. Reliable people. From good, hard-working families. Churchgoers and Bible-readers. Thieves and louts don't get testimonials. I stare into thin air. Surely they can't know I

was disciplined by the church in Norway? When my brother Pehr left, I didn't realise how angry the priest was; I didn't know that four Sundays of church discipline awaited me because of my indecent way of life, as he put it when he came to our door, the priest, his hands clean, freshly washed, as if he went through his days without ever touching a thing; as for me, I had a shoulder soiled with Heikki's vomit, a slimy cloth my sister had coughed into, an apron dirty from tending the animals, and I had just found out that they wouldn't be needing a person like me in Salla either when springtime came around, a woman with children born out of wedlock, and so the priest stood there with his clean hands and peered straight into my eyes and I wanted to be able to meet his gaze and nod when he told me about the discipline, but instead I looked down. I looked down at the ground and my cheeks burned as the priest said that if I wanted Heikki to be baptised, I would have to endure the discipline.

The mere thought of it sets my cheeks burning again. My neck grows damp with sweat. If I weren't wearing mittens I'd check my nails to see if they were clean, but I can't possibly be the only person who is travelling without a testimonial from the priest. There are many reasons not to have a testimonial. The most common is that you live too far away from the priest. Besides, if people arrive without a testimonial, does it really mean all that much? Isn't the opposite actually true: that people with testimonials are greeted with an extra hearty handshake and a chance to buy land? I smile. Buy land. That's something I shan't be able to do. There are two items of value in my baggage: Okki's hymn-book, with the most powerful verses circled, and Ämmy's best brooch. Those aren't the kind of things that will buy you land. Besides, I have no intention of selling them.

I'm glad it's behind me. It's one thing to have two fatherless children. It's quite another for their mother to be held to public scorn in church for four Sundays in a row. The priest began the service by telling the congregation what a loose woman Brita Caisa Seipajævi had been, how she was now being put to shame before the congregation, and I dared not lift a finger as my cheeks burned and the service followed its course. Brother Pehr is already in Pykeijä with his family. He told us all to follow him in the first letter he sent – me and our brother Simpa and our youngest brother Mikkel.

As I work, I will get to know the unmarried fishermen. I'll find out who's skilled at fishing, who has a boat without encumbrances, who doesn't fritter away every penny on drink and fripperies, who has a cow and a good singing voice and a beautiful knife. If he's a nice-looking fellow besides, I may marry him. If he gets to know me and finds out about the church discipline, I'll tell him how it was. Heikki's father died. Lots of people die. As for me, I've lived at home with my parents since Heikki was born, but then I decided to make a new life for myself in Ruija, where the sea never freezes to ice and my sons can harvest a field that will never be empty.

I have no testimonial but I shan't buy land either. Mother so wanted to send me on my way with some pieces of silver, but where would she have found them?

"The only silver you'll be left with if you carry on this way is the silver colour in your hair," said Mother. "Be hardworking and God-fearing, Brita Caisa."

We stood ready to leave in front of the cottage. The cracks in the windowpanes. The icicles hanging from the roof. The gaps in the wall of the outbuilding. The paths trampled across the snow-covered earth – to the well, to the cow, to the privy, to the road, to the river. Father's ski tracks from the time he left in the morning darkness to sell moonshine at the market further south. The cottage still warm with the sleep of our

bodies and the embers in the hearth. Mother would be cold in the morning now that we were no longer there.

“You’re hard-working and God-fearing, little Mama of mine,” I answered, stroking her cheek. “And what has that ever brought you but a fool of a husband, dead children and a disgrace like me?”

“No one as lovely as you could ever be called a disgrace,” Mother said as she embraced me, skinny, strong and wrinkled in the big greyish-brown shawl she likes so much, the one her sister made for her. “Write to me, Brita Caisa, write to me and tell me when you’ve reached Pehr in Pykeijä.”

The farewell between Aleksi and Mother was harder. His back hunched, his shoulders shook, there was strength in the arms that clung fast to the tiny woman before him.

Do they love each other? I thought as I watched their faces, turned towards each other, as Mother pushed him away slightly, then laid her hands on his cheeks and smiled and nodded and whispered – how alike the bridges of their noses were – was this what they were doing, loving one another, these people who were my outer reaches: one I was borne by, the other borne by me?

It filled my heart with sweet warmth to see them like this.

The right to love, is that not also a reward in itself? Is that not what it is to love?

“Ämmy,” Aleksi said, still sobbing in the face of Mother’s wrinkles, “Don’t let her take me. I don’t want to leave you.”

Mother whispered in his ear, coaxed him as only she can coax, his sobs abated. It’s easier with three-year-olds.

Three-year-olds are submissive as silly sheep. They don’t know any better.

The first time the dream comes, I am ten and it is summer and hot. So real. More real than being in the waking world. The dream starts with me hurrying, running and stumbling along a path my feet know, even though I'm in a place I've never been before, where the air is fresh and salty and surges towards me, the grass strong and spiky between the curved stones, and as the path rounds a cliff, roofs come into view – small houses, compact, no trees, not a single tree – and I stride off up the slope, soundless still in reindeer hide boots, and I'm carrying something, but only when a house window comes into view do I peer down at what I carry in my hands: a dollop of blood, a gut from which something hangs, dangles – an animal foetus without any hair, I think, before I see it is a child and halt in horror. The blood drips through my fingers, my apron is sticky with it, a heart beats at the centre of the bloody bundle, a green eye opens where first there were only wrinkles. I want to let go of the child, I don't want to hold it, I just want to let go of it.

I force myself to look away. I look up. I cry for help. In the window of the house, a woman's face looks out at me. She reminds me of someone. In the dream, it is her child I carry.

"You will lose a child," Mother says when I tell her.

She lights her pipe and sits herself down by the sunny wall.

"But the child belongs to the woman in the window," I protest. "I want to rescue the child."

"It is your child," Mother says. "You will lose a child, maybe all of them. It's a powerful dream. Tell Okki about your dream."

"Will he travel into the dream and see what happens?"

"Maybe he will show you the way."

“Into the dream?”

“So you can travel there yourself.”

“Can I travel there?”

“It is a powerful dream, to dream your dead children; the thing you call guts, Brita Caisa, that was the line between life and death, the umbilical cord that you held, the umbilical cord that dangled with the weight of the placenta.”

“I’m special, like Okki,” I say. “Okki Pekka Kōngäs, the sorcerer from the forests who can bring the dead to life and staunch the blood of both friend and foe.”

“Don’t go thinking that way,” Mother says, brushing me aside. “My father is your grandfather, your Okki. He’s a helper and no helper calls himself ‘special’.”

“Everyone says I’m special,” I tell mother. “The sun always finds me, even in the shade of the forest, the sun shines upon me.”

“You run after whatever makes your face light up,” Mother answers. “Praise, sunbeams, scraps of food, song and dance.” Mother sucks on her pipe, sending a spiral of smoke up the timber wall. A cuckoo crows on the hillside over towards the brook. “But where is the sun when winter comes?”

“The sun sleeps then,” I say. “Doesn’t it Mother?”

“It wants to see that you are strong,” Mother says.

“Strong?”

“Life is not all smiles, Brita Caisa.”

“I know that, I know that very well,” I say. “You tell me all the time that life is not all smiles.”

“I do.”

“But there *are* smiles, too,” I say firmly. “All mouths have a smile in them.”

Mother stares into space, sits there as our cow's bell chimes in the nearby meadow.

"Does your body ache, Mother?" I ask.

"It aches like ice in winter," she answers, laying down her pipe.

"Shall I fetch you a nip?"

"Is there any left?"

"Father hid the bushel barrel behind the ladder, where you never look."

"Fetch me a nip, Brita Caisa, and ask your sister if she needs any help."

"I won't tell Father."

"No, don't – not a word to that ragamuffin."

"What's a ragamuffin?" I ask as I hand the cup to Mother.

"A person who doesn't look after his things properly."

"Does he look after them badly?"

"What do you think?"

"He fixed the gate, didn't he?"

"Why do you think we had to move?"

"Plenty of people move."

"Not people with their own farm."

"People with proper farms?"

"They don't move."

"No."

"And not everyone moves here, do they now?"

"Do you want to move somewhere else?"

"Before, your father's family used to move wherever they wanted to. Maybe that's why he doesn't know how to live properly."

“Move in with anybody? Into their cottages?”

“They moved with the seasons.”

My clothes are damp with sweat when I get up and steal out into the freezing cold. So good to feel the frost. Three blinks of the eye, four breaths and the fear loosens its grip. The frost can chase anything away, even fear. I stand there feeling the sweat-warm hair at my temples freeze into intricate icy strands. A faint, sweeping beam of aurora shimmers across the western sky, like a serpent, the serpent in Paradise that tempted the woman. *Voi ei*. But the strand of light looks just as much like the lasso that so many of my family can cast around a reindeer’s neck – the young reindeer that is to die flails its forelegs and hurls itself around but the rope is drawn tight, and then comes the jerk. Many of Father’s family never lived settled lives; his uncle went north when settlers arrived, bringing laws and rules and regulations with them.

Sister, I think, as I slip into the tent of sleepers. No one can find sister now. Not among the living. Now and then, I find her in my thoughts. Some memories are so good that I keep them out of me, like the time I was milking the cow and remembered how she taught me on our own cow. Some memories hop around like bullfinches and sparrows and blue tits in leafy bushes.

