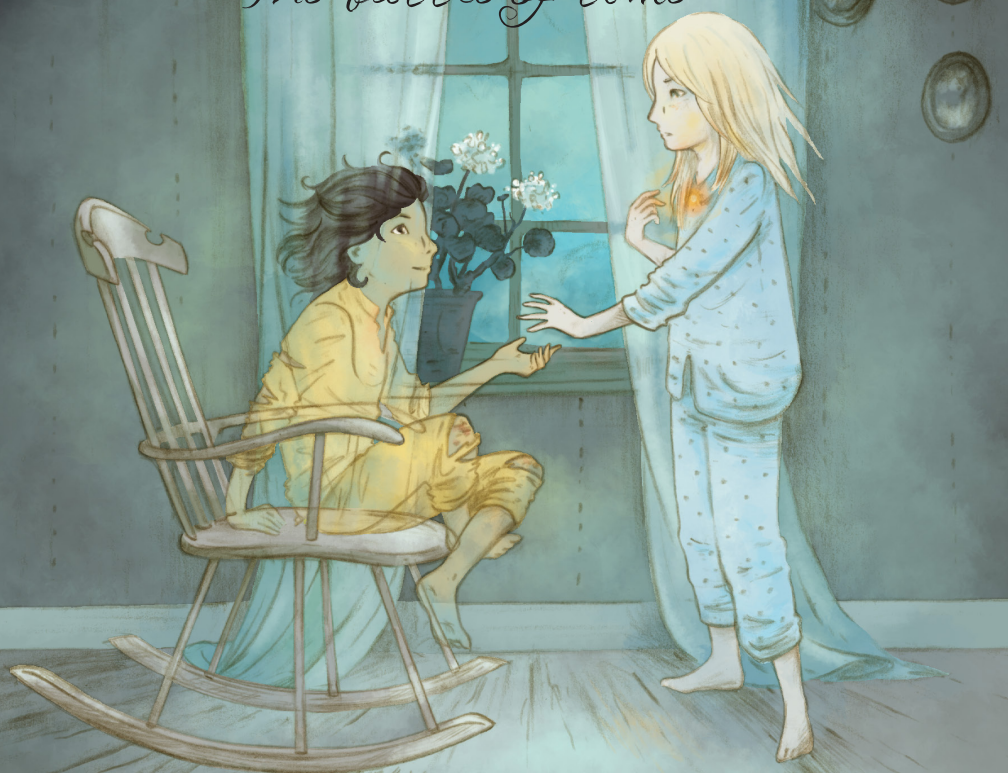


# Swing to the East

*The battle of time*



*Anna-Klara Mehlich*

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*The battle of time*

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The chronicles about Aina and her friends are standalone adventure novels. They are books with supernatural elements that all have current underlying themes. The adventures is about time and stress, environment and climate changes, as well as tolerance and diversity.

Four books are planned in the Rocking Chair Chronicles:

Swing to the East - the battle of time

Swing to the West - the battle of nature

Swing to the South and North - a battle of innerness

Swing back home

Read more about the books and Anna-Klara Mehlich on

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Cover and illustrations: Sofia Falkenheim

Translation by Neil Betteridge

Published by Barfotaböcker AB

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This booklet contains a prolog and three chapters from the book *Swing to the East*. The book consists of three parts. Here you can read the first chapter of part one and chapter 23 and 24 of part two.

The first chapter takes place in the middle of the night on the Swedish countryside. In chapter 23 and 24 the main character Aina and her friend Elmi are in East. They have been riding through the ghostly woods for several days, heading to the Windchimer - the loud striking clock that controls time.

There's so much I want to say. So many strange things have happened recently and I can't keep it to myself any longer. I know I mustn't say anything. But I'll be meeting the Master soon, and nothing will matter any more. I'll probably have to suffer the Punishment. I get a knot in my tummy just thinking about it. But you have to know. So as the Windchimer strikes ever louder, I will now tell all.

# Part one

## The clock key



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It started one night in the middle of the summer, or at 2.52 in the morning of Sunday 17 June to be exact. I'd arrived at my granddad's a week before, and was to stay with him for the summer holidays. Dad and Mum would be working almost the whole summer, as usual. My granddad – that's my mum's dad – lives in a big white house in a village called Solsäter, deep in the Dalsland countryside. The house has been in our family for generations.

I've often thought about how it feels so alive, as if the past is somehow present. And I've always thought it was because Granddad had saved so much of the furniture and stuff from the people who'd lived there before him. Never have I felt the presence of the past so physically as I did that summer.

It was one of those balmy summer nights when the air is almost still. I couldn't sleep, and lay there tossing and turning until I finally decided to go and get a glass of water. My bedroom is on the first floor, and to get to the kitchen I have to first take the stairs down to the conservatory. From there, I can pass through either the box room, which is Granddad's bedroom, or the best dining room, which is

really only used when we have parties. Since I didn't wish to wake Granddad, that's the route I took.

In mid-July, it never gets properly dark, so it was easy for me to navigate the room. But I was still a little scared – the chairs around the dining table seemed so high and desolate. The tiled stove, which I usually find so handsome, was lent an almost fierce expression by the pattern of flowers, which looked to me like angry eyes. There are old photographs hanging on one wall, and I had the sensation that the people in them were following me with their gaze.

I snuck through the room as quickly and quietly as I could, breathing a deep sigh of relief once I made it across the high threshold into the kitchen. Here, everything was familiar and cosy, even in the middle of the night. Practically every evening, even in the summer, Granddad lights a fire in the old cast iron range, and it was still warm to the touch. I could hear Granddad's reassuring breaths from his room. Other than that, the only sound was the wall-clock pendulum swinging back and forth. I poured myself a glass of water and checked the time. It was eight minutes to three, 02:52.

"I'm really going to have to get some sleep," I said quietly to myself.

It was then, just then, that I heard a noise that made my heart skip a beat, a kind of squeaky creak that repeated again and again. It came from the dining room and was a





sound that I recognised only too well. I'd produced it myself many times. It was the rocking chair at the far end of the room. It's old, and creaks every time someone sits in it. I froze in terror. Granddad was asleep in his room, and there was no one else in the house. So how come the rocking chair was creaking?

I tiptoed to the dining room, cracked open the door and crept in. It was as I suspected: someone was sitting in the rocking chair! I stood in the doorway, rooted to the spot with the glass in my hand. I would have fled, if some invisible hand had not prodded me in the back and pushed me into the room. I ended up so close to the chair that I could clearly see the woman sitting in it. For it was a woman, more accurately an elderly lady, who sat watching me with a fixed air. Moonlight shone in through the window and fell on her wrinkled face. She was dressed in a style that I imagine was worn by women of a previous generation, with a long dark skirt and grey blouse. Across her shoulders was draped a tartan shawl. The only thing that wasn't dark was her hoary hair, which was tied into a bun, and an orange stone that hung in a pendant round her neck. Her hair and the stone glowed in the moonlight.

She sat rocking, her eyes fixed on me. I dared hardly breathe, and stood motionless listening to the slow creaking. Suddenly she stopped and began to speak.

"Aina, the one," she said. "We have been waiting for this day."



Her voice was clear and dark. Her eyes didn't leave me for one moment. I'd never met anyone who radiated such power and resolve. And yet somehow she seemed sad. Her gaze bored into me, filling me with a mixture of fear and wonder. Instinctively, I took a few steps back, bumping into the dining table as I did so. I dropped the glass onto the floor, but there was no time to worry about that. I had to escape, so I sprang from the room as quickly as I could.



*Part two*  
*The watchmaker*



## 23.

Something unexpected happened one afternoon. Elmi and I had been riding through the ghostly woods for several days without having seen a single soul, when suddenly we caught sight of a little bright yellow house.

There it stood, amongst all the dead trees and shrubs, looking quite homely with its white curtains and flowers in the windows.

“Am I dreaming?” signed Elmi.

“I don’t think so...or I am too.”

We rode cautiously up to the house. It was still just as pretty close up. The paint on the walls looked fresh and washing was hanging out to dry on a line behind it. At one end was even a large heap of fresh grass that Ene and Lokka started eyeing hungrily.

“What shall we do? Knock on the door or ride on?” I asked.

Before Elmi could answer, the door opened and a woman’s rosy-cheeked face popped out. She smiled when she saw us and welcomed us in with eager gestures.

Elmi looked dubious.

“Just for a while,” I signed.

I was tired and saddle sore and desperate to see something



other than dead trees. And I was curious too. I wondered how anyone could live in such a fine house surrounded by all this desolation. As soon as we'd dismounted, the woman led Ene and Lokka to the pile of grass. They snorted merrily and began immediately munching away as Elmi and I entered the house.

It was even cosier inside than I could ever have imagined. There was a bouquet of flowers on the table, a fire was crackling in the hearth and there was the wonderful scent of freshly baked bread. Elmi and I had been living on a diet of dawnberries so when I breathed in the smell and saw the little round cobs in a pile on the table, my mouth started to water.

"Oh, how lovely it is to have guests!" she exclaimed with a clap of her hands.

As soon as she shut the door, the striking of the Windchimer fell silent. It couldn't be heard at all in the house, whereas outside it was deafening.

"I so rarely have visitors," she continued. "So this is indeed quite a treat!"

"No, there doesn't seem to be anyone..." Elmi started to say.

"...living around here," the woman interrupted. "No, I have to manage quite on my own. Which makes company even more welcome! I was just going to sit down to eat. Would you care to join me? It would be ever so nice if you did."

The woman wore a permanent smile. Her cheeks were



flushed and she looked so keen, almost as if she was desperate for someone to talk to.

“I suppose we can have a bite and then be on our way,” Elmi whispered to me.

I regarded the table with hungry eyes and nodded. The woman was delighted. She told us to sit down while she set the table. She was obviously so excited about having guests that she didn’t stop her chattering. I took an immediate liking to her. She looked so kind. She reminded me of my mother in the way she moved and in her jovial eyes. I’d been thinking quite a bit about Dad, Mum and my little brother these past few days, so meeting someone who was like my mum made me happy. She told us that her name was Rosila and showed us lots of ornaments that she’d made herself. There were dolls and animals that she’d whittled from wood and an owl, my favourite, standing in the window, with one eye shut and the other open and watchful. As we tucked into our little meal she told us that she grew up in this house.

“When I was little there were lots and lots of people living nearby, but that was many years ago now.”

“How come you...”

“... stayed?” said Rosila, ending Elmi’s sentence again, and answering it in the next breath.

“I’m happy here in my little house. It’s so nice and cosy, I find. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes,” we both replied.

“But how do you manage...”



“...to live here on my own?” This time I was the one interrupted.

“It’s not so bad. But, as I said, there aren’t that many people to talk to. No, indeed.”

“But you’re not affected by the striking of the Windchimer?”

The question had just tumbled out of my mouth and this time, Rosila didn’t complete my question for me. It apparently took her aback as she gave a little jerk when she heard the Windchimer mentioned and eyed me suspiciously. Elmi was also frowning.

“I think I’ve got used to it,” she said after a moment’s silence. “I suppose that’s the fact of it. I’ve been living here for so long. So tell me, what are you two doing out here in this desolate forest?”

“We’re on an important and difficult mission. That’s why we’re...”

“...out riding,” added Rosila. “Why, how thrilling! What is it you have to do?”

I couldn’t help myself. That was why I’d let on about our mission. Rosila’s eyes were shining with curiosity, while the blood drained from our faces. Elmi stared at me and I glared back at him. I could tell he thought I’d said too much, but surely it didn’t matter that much. Rosila was as kind as could be. Before I had time to say more, Elmi explained:

“We’re to fetch my grandfather, who lives a little way away. He’s old and can’t take the striking...”



“...any more. I see, so you have a grandfather living nearby?” asked Rosila. “I wasn’t aware of anyone else living in the forest.”

“He lives a few days’ ride away,” said Elmi.

And then turned to me.

“We have to be on our way.”

Rosila, who had looked thoughtful as Elmi was speaking, gave a start. She clapped her hands again and smiled.

“You’re not going off riding now, are you? It’s far too dark out there. It’d much better if you slept here and set off tomorrow when you’re rested. Look, here are some beds you’re welcome to use. I can sleep on the kitchen settee.” She opened a door leading to a neighbouring room and sure enough inside were two made-up beds. Beside them crackled another cosy fire. It was actually getting dark outside, even though it felt like we’d just arrived.

“Imagine sleeping in a real bed,” I said to Elmi. “We can spend the night here, can’t we? We’ve got to get some sleep soon anyway.”

“I don’t think so. We should leave,” Elmi repeated.

“Please, please, please...” I whispered.

“Remember that your horses need a rest too,” interjected Rosila.

Elmi sighed.

“In that case we’ll have to set off first thing.” He turned to me. “You know how short of time we are.”

“I know. We’ll get up early,” I said with a smile, glad to be staying over at Rosila’s.





As soon as Elmi and I were in bed he whispered to me.

“What were you thinking, Aina? No talking about the Windchimer with strangers, you know that. And what made you tell her that we’re on a mission?”

“I never said what kind of mission...” I began. “And she seems so kind, so what difference does it make?”

“Maybe she is. Maybe she isn’t. We don’t know her. What got into your head?”

He sounded furious.

“But she’s really friendly...” I ventured.

“Sure she seems friendly, but we don’t know her,” Elmi said again, and continued to sign:

“Now that we’re so close to the Windchimer we’ve got to watch ourselves. But sleep now. We have an early start. You know how little milk we’ve got left. Good night.”

“Good night. I still don’t think it was that serious...”

It was quite a while before I could hear heavy breathing from Elmi’s bed, and shortly after that I dropped off too.



## 24.

It was the bee that woke me, buzzing around my head. I kept trying to whisk it away but it kept returning. In the end I sat up. The fire in the hearth had gone out and the room was dark. In the next bed Elmi was in a deep sleep. Looking at him actually irritated me a little. I thought it was wrong of him to get so cross with me. After all, it wasn't that serious a blunder to tell Rosila that Elmi and I were on a mission.

I heard clattering from the kitchen. Rosila must still be up, I thought. All of a sudden I felt restless, so I decided to get up and go and have a chat with her. Gingerly, I opened the door to the kitchen. Inside, the fire was still blazing merrily and in its glow I could see Rosila standing by the table. Looking at her I grew even more confident of her kindness, and again she made me think of my mother. They had the same hair. Rosila's own brown tresses, which she'd now let out, were shoulder-length, just like Mum's. She was taking things out of something big and dark on the table in front of her.

It took a while for me to work out what it was, and it wasn't until she fished out a bottle that I realised. It was



our backpack on the table, and she was holding the bottle of Ruur's milk!

Rosila examined the bottle, tipped it back and forth and swirled its contents. Finally she took the top off and sniffed the milk. She nodded to herself and then did something terrible. She opened the window and held the bottle out of it. Even though I had a good idea of what she was about to do, I was frozen to the spot. I could neither move nor shout. All I could do was just stand there watching her slowly tip her hand.

"NO, YOU MUSTN'T!"

Elmi had entered the room. Rosila started and snatched her hand back in. She looked momentarily sheepish, but then clapped her hands and smiled.

"Why, hello! Are you awake?" she exclaimed. "I thought I'd make up a little packed lunch for you to take tomorrow. There was so little left in this bottle here I thought I'd use it for juice instead."

Elmi, who had dashed over to the table, grabbed the bottle of Ruur's milk.

"That won't be necessary," he said as he fitted the lid back on and slipped the bottle back in the backpack, along with the dawnberries, the knife and the torch that Rosila had also removed.

"We have to be off now."

Elmi sounded so resolute that I didn't protest.

"You're not going off riding in the middle of the night, are



you?” asked Rosila. She sounded genuinely sad.

“We’ve got no choice. Farewell and thank you for the food and beds.”

“But surely you’re not going to be setting off...”

Rosila looked imploringly at me, and I was filled with pity for her. She looked so lonely. She’d only wanted to surprise us by preparing a little food for our journey.

“I’m afraid we have to. But maybe we can look in...”

“...on the way back,” she said. “Please do. But won’t you at least take the packed lunch?”

“No,” said Elmi brusquely.

We spent the rest of the night riding in silence through the dead forest. At first I felt peculiar, almost as if I was wrapped in cotton wool, but after a while the sensation wore off. The striking of the Windchimer was almost ear-splitting. It wasn’t until daybreak that we stopped and took our daily dose of Ruur’s milk.

“Lucky she didn’t pour away the milk,” I signed.

“Lucky?! If I hadn’t woken up she’d have emptied the bottle! You were just standing there. Why didn’t you try to stop her?”

“I don’t actually know.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know?”

“I mean that I don’t know! I don’t really know what happened to me when I was there. I really took to her. She reminded me of my mum... My mind was in a muddle, I think.”



“You could say that again. You were acting really strangely.”

I could tell that Elmi was still angry.

“She couldn’t have known it was Ruur’s milk in the bottle,” I said.

“I don’t know. I don’t know what to believe any more. We’d put the backpack between our beds. She must’ve come into the room to get it,” signed Elmi.

That’s when it struck me.

“The clock key.... Is it still there?”

Elmi rummaged around the backpack.

“Yes, it’s wrapped in the watchmaker’s polishing cloth and Inna’s blanket.”

“That’s a relief,” I signed.

Just then I felt something icy against my chest. I knew immediately what it was. The agate.





Barnens bibliotek (The Children's Library), together with the project "Hitta en bra bok" (Find a good book) has produced a poster with the theme "Heroes in other worlds." On the poster is *Swing to the East* among books by Astrid Lindgren, Neil Gaiman, Suzanne Collins, Philip Pullman and Martin Widmark.

**Aina can't believe her eyes.** It's the middle of the night and there in her grandfather's rocking chair, swinging back and forth, sits a strange woman, staring at her. Suddenly she stops.

"Aina, the one. We need your help."

This is the beginning of an adventure that will take Aina to the East, where she and her new friend, Elmi, are destined to stop the Master abusing the Windchimer – the clock that controls time not only in the East but in our world too.

This particular summer in Dalsland is everything but normal. Dangers appear where least expected, and friends in strange guises. Aina, who's normally afraid of almost everything, is faced with the toughest trials of her life and the prospect of losing all she holds dear.

*Swing to the East - The Battle of Time* is the first thrilling part of the Rocking Chair Chronicles.

*"Swing to the East is an  
action-packed adventure  
you can't afford to miss!"*

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