

LIS 402 Oral Fable

A Giant or a Nack?

SHAWN URBAN
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Gail de Vos

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Background

On four illustrated pages in the middle of the second volume of the 1972 Childcraft Library series (Unknown 1972) there is a brief story about a pile of rocks that 32 years later still mesmerizes me. I was four years old when I first heard and read the tale of Halvar's House. Even then I gluttoned on story and imagined alternate versions of the tales I was told and read.

Halvar's House was one of my favourites. It is one of those stories that stuck with me and crawled ever so tenderly into my own stories. The magic of the house of stones in the hills, with horizons hiding the house from surrounding eyes and hiding adventures just over ridges and behind trees surrounding it, drew – still draws – me in. Tolkien said to his son (Tolkien 1945) that the horizons recurse endlessness in story. A story with horizons always expands, ever grows. My imagination fed on that eternity.

And of course the children found the house – the children and the storymakers. They always do. I loved playing in that house and sitting by the giant with the other children as he read stories from immense tomes and told others that came from nowhere.

There is story in play and play in story. The world is endless when story is involved. Each story is a world unto itself and a bridge to other stories. Books are a form of horizon.

So Halvar's House, this simple story, was easy to pick, easy to choose to study, to see how it works and what it means. The study also it seems to have revealed magic, for it unveiled a deep history I never before imagined.

Halvar's House (Source Story)

Halvar's House (The Children's Playhouse)

Adapted from a Swedish folk tale

High in the hills of Sweden stands a big, empty house made of strangely shaped stones. People in the neighborhood call it the Children's Playhouse, the favorite playing place of children for more years than anyone now living can recall. How did the house get there?

Some people say that long ago the stone house belonged to a giant named Halvar, a most unusual giant – the only poor giant that ever lived. Halvar was poor because he was always giving things away. This made him happy, and every one who knew him loved him.

Perhaps that is why the house he once lived in, high in the hills of Sweden, is forever filled with good cheer and happiness. And perhaps that is why, down through the years, children have found Halvar's House a fine place to play.

Tolkien, J.R.R. (1945.) Letter 96. The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien. First Edition, 1981. Carpenter, Humphrey and Tolkien, Christopher. London: George Allen & Unwin. P. 124-126.

http://www.docstoc.com/docs/157783073/Tolkien_-_The_Letters_of_JRRTolkien.

Unknown. (1972.) Halvar's House. Childcraft: The How and Why Library. Volume 2: Stories and Fables. Field Enterprises Education Corporation. Chicago, Illinois. Pages 258-261.

On Halvar’s House (Notes about the Source Story)

“Halvar’s House” is an adaptation of a local Swedish origin-legend describing the origin of an unusual house-shaped mound of stones. In Sweden, where this story originates, these kinds of tales often had giants associated with them (Floyd 1972, Lindow 1978, Simpson 1988). Local Swedish children seem to have enjoyed Halvar’s house for generations. So the legend of the origin of Halvar’s house sprang from the house-like appearance of the stone heap and the favour of the children. What makes “Halvar’s House” so unique and appealing is that it is also didactic, clearly demonstrating the rewards generosity and kindness bring.

This folk legend was a favourite of mine when I was a child. I loved the high hills, the strange stones, the friendly giant and the children’s playhouse. I dreamt of playing in Halvar’s yard. It was not just a playground; it was a world where exploration and fascination were key features. Nature, Halvar and children lived here. The version of “Halvar’s House” I learned as a child comes from a Childcraft Library volume (Unknown 1972). I have not found another version since¹. This, however, is typical of local folk legends; their very nature makes them locally popular and universally unknown.

I chose to retell “Halvar’s House” because of its subtle didactic message and its continuing appeal to me. Until I researched “Halvar’s House,” I thought this message was the purpose of the story, like all fables which have lessons embedded in their hearts. The discovery that the tale was likely created long ago in order to explain the origins of a heap of strange stones only enriched the story, for it introduced a depth to the tale which I was unaware of until then. The creator was likely a farmer, woodsman, miner or hunter, depending on where Halvar’s house, a real feature, at least when the tale was created, is located. The landscape is likely rough and hilly, backed by mountains and forested with evergreens. In addition, lakes and peatlands are likely abundant. Glacially deposited stone artifacts or erratics are also present, for this whole country was covered by ice fields during the last glacial period of the current Ice Age. The whole countryside and its natural history resembles the countryside I am used to north of Edmonton, Canada.

In fact, movement of the story setting from the boreal hills of Sweden to the mixedwood hills of Alberta was natural. I even have a particular ridge and valley in mind when I envisage Halvar’s yard. The move does not disturb the cultural context or spirit of the original tale. The story itself remains intact, even when moved from the past into the present. My listeners, however, can identify with the local and current setting. In fact, I half expect some of them to seek out this ridge and stone heap when they travel toward Mayerthorpe. The ridge exists; I’m not sure about the heap, though Alberta has its share of erratics. The countryside, the seasonal cycle and the histories of farmers, woodsmen, miners and hunters living in isolated villages is also shared by the two countries, though for both the isolation is pretty much constrained today.

¹ This is no longer true. A few adaptations of Halvar's House have since surfaced.

[Halvar's House, The Day's News 2015](#)

[Halvar's House: The Novel, Kid Pub 2013](#)

[Halvar's House, Primary Comprehension Book 3 2005](#)

[An expanded version of the tale in a later version of Stories and Fables](#)

Halvar's House (The Children's Playhouse).

Unknown. (1972.) Halvar's House. Childcraft: The How and Why Library. Volume 2: Stories and Fables. Field Enterprises Education Corporation. Chicago, Illinois. Pages 258-261.

Stone origin-legends.

- Floyd, Donald Ray. (1972.) Attitudes toward nature in Swedish folklore. University of California, Berkley, Ph.D. 1976 Folklore.
- Lindow, John. (1978.) Swedish legends and folktales. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Simpson, Jacqueline. (1988.) Scandinavian folktales: Translated and edited by Jacqueline Simpson. Penguin Books, London, England.

About Halvar's House (Research)**Translation of Halvar's House and Children's Playhouse**

Halvar (Swedish) = Half-year (English), Halv = half, Ar = year
 Halvar, Halvor, Hallvor, Halvard, Hallvard (Swedish) = Rock Defender, Defender Like a Rock (English),
 Hall = stone, hell, the hall, the house, the world, Vardr = guard
 Short for Valhallvardur = Valhall's Guard, God's Guardian
 Name Days: Hallvard = Norwegian, May 15, Halvard, Halvar = Swedish May 14, Halvar = Finnish July 6
 Hus (Swedish) = House (English)
 Barnens (Swedish) = Children's (English), Barn = child, Barnen = children
 Lekstuga (Swedish) = Playhouse (English), Leka = play, Lek = game, Stuga = cottage

Origin-legends of Stone

Floyd, Donald Ray. (1972.) Attitudes toward nature in Swedish folklore. University of California, Berkley, Ph.D. 1976 Folklore.
 Archive of folk legends: Nordic Museum's Folklore Archive, Stockholm
 Halfarssten (Halfer's Stone) halfway between Sixtorp and Vekhyttan, Kvistero Parish, Narke (p. 329, ex. 485)

Background: economic mainstay – agriculture, animal husbandry
 rural folk – farm folk, fisher folk, forest workers, hunters, miners, isolated cultures
 landscape – south: older/flat/populated/agricultural
 north: newer/rougher (hilly, mountainous)/densely forested (evergreen)
 glacial artifacts (ie. erratics: out-of-place stones or stone heaps)
 climate – northern, harsh, cold, aurora, short growing season
 any unusual landscape feature was noticed, often became the subject of some kind of folk legend
 folk legends articulate amusing or wondrous events for entertainment of listeners

Stones

- major theme: how stones came to be in a certain place
- many local variations on a theme
- all place names nonfictional
- stones could, at least at time of story, be located
- dual motifs centring on same stone common
- history, myth and physical features often married

Identified Motifs

1. giant cast (toward churches, each other, poor shots)
2. stones that turn/move themselves (triggered by ringing of church bell, aroma of freshly baked bread or fried pork, cuckoo, cock crow)
3. petrification (often giants/blasphemous humans/loaves of bread/churches, outlines of familiar forms in stones)
4. peculiar shape, unusual size, odd markings (troll's house, creation story: once all stones were soft ∴ markings (tracks on stones), focus on reason for stone's name)
5. stone heaps and grave mounds (grave mounds, churches, ruins; focus on manner of formation: home of trolls, site of mysterious buried treasure, assembled by giants or trolls or men (burial customs), hiding places of outlaws; custom: throw stone on spot someone died)
6. site and situation (boundary stones, hazard markers)
7. medicinal and luck rituals (curative ritual, transfer pain to stone or rain water/dew in depressions of stones (wet stones: water from stone, not sky, never dry out even in drought), wise man or woman often applier,

- collected pain accumulates, disturber gets all, offerings to stone or water (cure, luck), luck can be gained and lost: individual, village, Sweden, agricultural fortunes, crop luck)
8. religious rituals (lightning strikes sanctify, offerings of religious significance, also sacrifice, bride stones)
 9. lift stones/competition stones/farmhand stones (prove manhood (festivals, initiation rite, determine wage received), moved stone (heavy) returns to original position on own)
 10. prognostication (earthfast stones: if wet, rainy summer; leaning stones: lean or tilt in direction of best crop growth, judgment stones: determine which livestock will be prey)
 11. strange and inexplicable (spooky, behaviour or eerie events linked to stones, graves/grave mounds/monument stones (move to original position (on own or light) if translocated (heavy), inability to sleep/ill health/sight loss until returned (then sleep/health/sight restored), noises, crying child (baptize and name); theme: disturb resting place of dead, disturb resting place of violator), disappearing stones, once-in-a-lifetime stones, astray stones (stare at, get lost, no recognition, unable to escape even with landmarks, all roads lead to stone))
 12. supernatural beings (wood nymph (vitter) home, piles from field gathering (stone heaps), dwarf forgings (stone representing mountain crystal), ornaments hammered out by elves/others (bear one on tongue, protect from thirst), stone balls/elf mills (spheroid), giant graves, tiny maidens (dancing, burning candles), black dog with burning tongue, murder site, sacrificial stone, king's resting spot, seat-like hollows in stone, avoid building over, disturbing, using in building (similar to catch all pain, ill at ease), also places where lay or once lay (graves, heaps, elf dance rings))

Bones and Beings

Lindow, John. (1978.) Swedish legends and folktales. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Simpson, Jacqueline. (1988.) Scandinavian folktales: Translated and edited by Jacqueline Simpson. Penguin Books, London, England.

Migratory legends (tales migrate) and local legends (motifs migrate)

Etiological legends (characters take on characteristics of culture members, including names)

Origin legends (origin of feature) – stone origin, often related to giants; secondary: size, relations with man

Bones:

Better a castle of bones than of stones. – Swedish proverb

Fergusson, Rosalind. (1983.) The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs. Penguin. Harmondsworth.

Beings:

1. Jatte (sg), Jattar (pl) – Jotunn (sg), Jotunar (pl) – Eoten
 - giant, large; nice giants smart, mean giants dumb
 - tales: migratory, entertaining, origin legends, size, relations with man
2. Troll (sg), Troll (pl)
 - communal, look like men (= pagan strangers)
 - ultimately dangerous since pagan
 - overrun, change (accounts for abnormalities, changeling), kidnap (bergtagning), lameness, lack of wits, altered behaviour, tales about driving away = avoid embarrassment/trouble
 - tales: migratory, human foibles
3. Nack
 - solitary, male, water spirit (nack = wash/rapids)
 - musical – ruffles = fiddle, teach fiddler (payment or drown), ceaseless dance
 - cultural suppression: drunkenness, sexual freedom; devil fiddler
 - also innocent, cheerful, seeks salvation (wails with grief at denial, fallen angle)
 - takes form of horse (wild workhorse dangerous to ride, backahast (brook horse) tempts children to mount it and carries them into deep water to eat them)
4. Ra
 - solitary, female/male
 - skogra – forest being (skog = forest)
 - sjora – water being (sjo = lake/sea)
 - gardsra – household spirit (gard = farm)
 - not nack (no music, no horse affiliation), female like skogra, male like troll

- astray (ability to change outward appearance of things = lost in forest)
 - quarry of wild hunt (noises in nature)
5. Tomte (sg), Tomtar (pl) – Nisse
- solitary, house spirit (tomt = plot of land for building, nisse = from Saint Nicholas)
 - folk conscience (vs swearing, drinking, fighting)
 - prosperity/luck are limited goods (↑ for one means ↓ for another)
 - if reward, will leave (too elegant to work, “treating servant unusually well will make him too uppity for his job”)
6. Grim (goblin), Fossegrim (falls goblin), Fossekalon (old man of the falls), Kvernknurren (mill growler)

Letters (Research)

From: Shawn Urban

To: worldbook@mts.net

Sent: Saturday, January 10, 2004 8:19 PM

Subject: Childcraft Information request

Dear Ian:

I am searching for some information on one of the stories World Books, Inc. featured in its 1972 Edition of Childcraft: The How and Why Library. Volume 2: Stories and Fables. The story and citation are appended below.

I realize you are likely not the correct person to ask help with this question, but I hope you will know who to forward this to.

Long ago, I used Halvar's House from Stories and Fables as a source of some of the concepts I was developing in a story I wrote. The story evolved into something completely different from Halvar's House, but Halvar's House helped start the ball rolling.

This year, I'm taking a Library and Information Studies course on Storytelling and I decided to adapt Halvar's House for an oral story due at the end of this month. It turns out this is an obscure fable, for I have failed to find any other version of it, at least under the title, Halvar's House, but the story stuck with me ever since childhood so I think it will make a great source.

What information can you give me on this tale? In particular, is it part of the public domain or is it a created story? What is World Books, Inc.'s source of the tale?

I rarely get the chance to thank authors and publishers for works which significantly shaped my life, so I would like to extend my gratitude to World Books, Inc. for creating such a great series. A good series, as a good book, never is abandoned nor forgotten.

Thanks sincerely for your help,
Shawn Urban

From: Janet Peterson

To: Shawn Urban

Sent: Friday, January 23, 2004 11:02 AM

Subject: Halvar's House Swedish Folktale

Dear Shawn Urban:

I regret I cannot give you any information on the tale "Halvar's House", which at one time appeared in a volume of CHILDCRAFT. The adaptation was likely done by an editor we had on staff as opposed to an adaptation that was already created. What I can do for you however is contact one of my Swedish cousins who used to be a teacher, and see if she recognizes the tale by some other name. I'll let you know when and if I find out anything, even though it won't be useful to you for your course.

Thank you for your kind comments. We're always glad to know our books are so well remembered.

Sincerely,
Janet T. Peterson
Editorial Administrator and Permissions Editor
World Book, Inc.
233 N. Michigan, Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60601
Phone: 312-729-5575, Fax: 312-729-5600, E-mail: Janet.Peterson@worldbook.com
Web site: www.worldbook.com

From: Shawn Urban"

To: Janet Peterson" <Janet.Peterson@worldbook.com>, Ian Glassford" <iangl@mts.net>

Subject: Re: Halvar's House Swedish Folktale

Date: Fri, 23 Jan 2004 14:14:26 -0700

Hi Janet and Ian,

From the research I've done, it sounds like "Halvar's House" is an adaptation of a typical local origin legend; that is, a small folk story created to describe the origin of an unusual local geographical feature, in this case a "house" or glacially deposited stone heap. These kinds of tales often had giants associated with them. What makes "Halvar's House" so unique and appealing is that it also seems didactic. I can understand why World Books included the tale in its Childcraft series.

The tale might go under the name Halfarssten or "Halfar's Stone," though Halfarssten might be a completely different landscape feature. It marks the halfway point between Sixtorp and Vekhyttan in Kvistbro Parish, Narke. I have not found any information on Halfarssten, other than its position, so I do not know what tales are associated with it. I also came across a reference to "Halfar's Dolmen," with little more than that to go by.

The alternate name for "Halvar's House," "The Children's Playhouse," might also lead to some information, but I don't know what "children's playhouse" would be in Swedish.

What I can say about "Halvar's House" is that it seems typical of true local Swedish folk origin legend. That is, if I were to read it within a set of known Swedish origin legends, I would not be able to tell if it were or were not one of them. Of course, I am not an expert!

I am very curious to discover more about "Halvar's House," even if the information won't help me with my story. Janet, your offer to ask your cousin regarding the tale is very generous and beyond the call. Thank you, I would appreciate the search and any information it might turn up. If your cousin does uncover information, I would also like her name so I can cite her.

*-----

Under the assumption that "Halvar's House" is not a true Swedish folk legend, and therefore not in the public domain, and given your speculation that the version of "Halvar's House" I read in Childcraft was adapted by one of your editors, may I have permission to adapt the Childcraft version of "Halvar's House" into an oral story? I find the story very appealing and worth retelling.

*-----

Thank you very much for all your help. I can't properly express how deeply I appreciate your efforts and the information you have given me. It is gratifying to learn the history behind the tales we tell. The information I'm learning from this venture has instilled in me a new appreciation of "Halvar's House." I hope you find it equally satisfying. This is turning into a very fun puzzle. If I find any more information myself, I would be glad to pass it on.

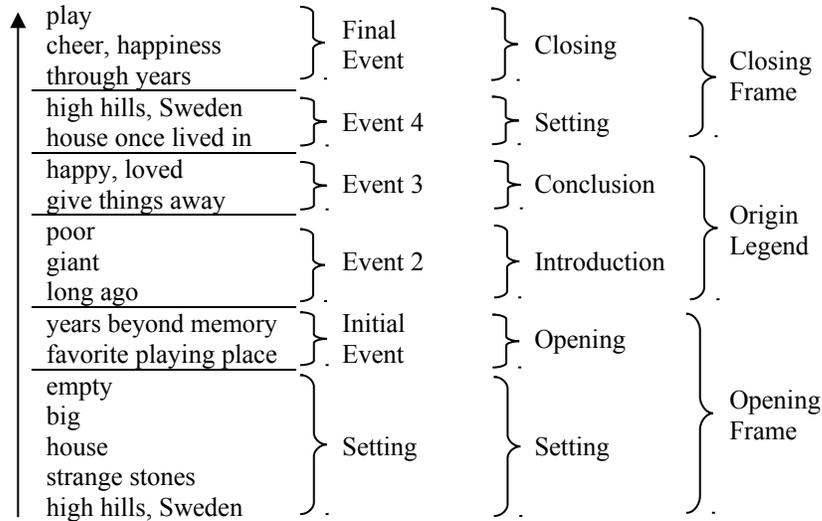
Sincerely, with thanks,
Shawn Urban

Analysis of Source Story

Structure of Source Story

Halvar’s House (The Children’s Playhouse)

Why told? origin legend (Floyd 1972)



In addition to the structure above, elements of the story nest within each other. The high hills of Sweden frame the description of the stone house. The cheerful play frames the description of ancientness. These frame the origin legend. Yet they do not frame each other. In both frames, the setting precedes the opening and closing.

Motifs of Source Story

Source elements: Halvar’s House (The Children’s Playhouse) origin legend (motifs A977.1, F531.5.1)

Motifs:

F531.5.1 friendly giant

A977.1 giant responsible for certain stones

Setting Summary of Source Story

General past, hill country of Sweden, parkland, glacial erratics
 Specific stone heap in wide grassy clearing, mid-slope of ridge
 forest: aspen (top>bottom), white spruce (bottom>top), high grass, wild rose
 dirt road down slope, passes stone heap
 season: early fall still warm, geese, ducks
 energy: imminence (Winter), laziness (Summer) [∞ shade: clouds]
 sensations (see Character Summaries)

Character Summaries of Source Story

Halvar (giant): Role: protagonist
Traits: kind, gentle, friendly, loves children, helpful, generous (gives gifts of food, money, stones, flowers, etc., help, time, company, stories), patient, never forgets faces nor names, likes entertaining, sociable, protective, responsible, happy
Motivation: sociable; pride in children; values company, children and neighbors
Relationships: loves children, neighbors, company (neighborhood parties and events)
Setting: sensitive to season, “ownership”, vigilant (all senses), conscious, preparation

Children:	<u>Role:</u>	catalysts
	<u>Traits:</u>	curious, explorers, playful, include Halvar, attentive to Halvar’s stories, happy fun, enjoy each other’s and Halvar’s company, love/trust Halvar, enjoy Halvar’s house and yard, “secret” place with parents’ blessings, grateful (gifts)
	<u>Motivation:</u>	fun, enjoy each other’s and Halvar’s company, love/trust Halvar, enjoy Halvar’s house and yard, “secret” place with parents’ blessings, grateful (gifts)
	<u>Relationships:</u>	like/trust Halvar, bring Halvar gifts of food or stones, etc., respect parents
	<u>Setting:</u>	warm, energized, relaxed, experiences (busy season), food, stone, grass, playing
Parents:	<u>Role:</u>	observers
	<u>Traits:</u>	trusting, protective, caring, vigilant, neighborly, friendly, community
	<u>Motivation:</u>	safe/trusted place for children, keep Halvar company (thank you), also visit once played in Halvar’s house/yard, good parents, good neighbors, like/trust Halvar, bake, etc. for Halvar and children (picnics)
	<u>Relationships:</u>	safe/trusted place for children, keep Halvar company (thank you), also visit once played in Halvar’s house/yard, good parents, good neighbors, like/trust Halvar, bake, etc. for Halvar and children (picnics)
	<u>Setting:</u>	preparing for Winter, what needs to be done, busy (all senses, selves and others)

Adapted (Oral) Story 1**A Giant or a Nack?**

Good morning, class. Welcome to Ethics in Law 101. We are all here because we want to become lawyers. Not the easiest job in the world, but the rewards can be substantial.

I always begin this class with a story and every year the story is different. This year I am reminded of two cousins I have, who live in Mayerthorpe, along the highway between Whitecourt and Edmonton.

Along this highway, near Mayerthorpe, there is a valley. The valley is real. If you find yourself pummelled by ethical dilemmas, I can give you directions.

When we were kids, my cousins and I used to play on this stone mound on the top of the valley, just off the highway. This mound is called the Children's Playhouse, because it has been a favourite stomping ground for Mayerthorpe's children for generations. Below the mound, in the valley, is a wooded fen, locally called Fiddler's Fen, which my cousins warned me to avoid.

Of course that definitely meant I was going to explore it. That was my first mistake. You should always listen to the local urban legends when you are new to a fishing pond.

My cousins told me this legend about why the Children's Playhouse was so popular and the Fiddler's Fen was so forsaken.

The stone mound used to be the home of a friendly giant who built the house. He was a very generous giant, so he was very poor, but he was loved by the locals and always had company and friends. The children loved to explore his strange stone house and the surrounding forest. It was the perfect place for picnics and games like tag and hide and seek.

The wooded fen was the home of a haughty nack who just one day charged up and moved in. What is a nack? It is a very vile creature who hated locals, but loved their toonies and their bones. He gathered quite a hoard from the locals who he lured into his fen with his fiddle. Many locals lost everything to him. Some who went in were never seen again.

So, eventually people stopped visiting the nack and his fiddle in the fen and took their company instead to the giant on the hill.

This used to be a favourite playground for Mayerthorpe's children. Today, however, you will find no children there. The place is crowded with lawyers.

[set-up: get asked what happened to me when I visited the fen] [search pockets frantically]

Structure of Adapted Story 1

Ethics in Law 101	Not easiest job <u>Rewards</u> substantial	Begin with story	Cousins Mayerthorpe Highway Whitecourt and Edmonton	Valley Real Ethical dilemmas, Directions
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When kids Cousins and I Stone mound (top valley, off highway)	<u>Children’s Playhouse</u> Stomping ground Mayerthorpe’s children Generations	Below mound, in valley Wooded fen <u>Fiddler’s Fen</u> Warned to avoid	Definitely meant Explore it	First mistake Always listen Local urban legends New to fishing pond
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Legend Children’s Playhouse popular Fiddler’s Fen forsaken	⇒	Stone mound Home <u>Friendly giant</u> <u>Built</u>	<u>Generous</u> Poor Loved Always company, friends	Children Explore house, forest Picnics, Tag, Hide and seek
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Wooded fen Home <u>Haughty nack</u> <u>Charged up, moved in</u>	What nack? Vile Hated locals (children) <u>Loved toonies, bones</u>	Hoard Lured locals (<u>fiddle</u>) Lose everything Never seen again	⇒	Stopped visiting Giant instead
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Used to be Favorite playground Mayerthorpe’s children

Today No children Crowded with lawyers

Set up What happened to me? Search pockets

Motifs of Adapted Story 1**Source elements:** Halvar's House (The Children's Playhouse) origin legend (motifs A977.1, F531.5.1)**Added elements (adaptation):** fen, nack, fiddle (motifs D1427.1, D1441.1), generosity vs greed**Motifs:**

F531.5.1 friendly giant

A977.1 giant responsible for certain stones

D1427.1 magic musical instrument compels one to follow (pied piper, children)

D1441.1 magic musical instrument calls animals together (pipe, fiddle)

Setting Summary of Adapted Story 1

Frame (part of opening / closing, not story):

- university lecture hall
- 150+ students

Time:

- present day, early fall
- still warm, geese and ducks gathering, tamarack turning yellow
- energy: imminence (Winter), laziness (Summer) [∞ shade: clouds, valley]

Place:

- valley between Whitecourt and Edmonton
- stone heap in wide grassy clearing, top of wooded ridge, off highway
- forest: aspen (top>bottom), white spruce (bottom>top), high grass (tangle)
- wooded fen in valley: black spruce, tamarack, sedge, off highway
- lake beyond fen
- town nearby (out of sight)
- general context: mixedwood parkland, peatlands, hilly

Sensation:

- feel: warm, energy (above)
- smell/taste: seedy, food, dry grass, dry stone, dry breeze/air
- touch: rough grass, smooth stone, shade (coolness)
- sound: children/Halvar laughing and playing, trembling leaves, swaying branches, creaking, snapping, rustling sedges, rasping grasses, geese, ducks, splashing, grasshoppers, occasional cars
- sight: clear skies, occasional clouds, shade, Halvar's house, towering aspen, sheltered white spruce, twisted dark black spruce, yellow tamarack, far parts of fen and lake, highway

Character Summaries of Adapted Story 1

Halvar (giant): Role: protagonist
Traits: kind, gentle, friendly, loves children, helpful, generous (gives gifts of food, money, stones, flowers, help, time, company, stories, etc.), likes entertaining, sociable, patient, never forgets faces nor names, vigilant, protective, responsible, resourceful, confident, happy

Motivation: sociable; pride in children; treasures company, children and neighbors

Relationships: loves children, neighbors, company (neighborhood parties and events)

Mood: preparing for Winter, what needs to be done, socializing with children

Fiddler: Role: antagonist

Traits: loner, keeps hidden, hates noise, crafty, spiteful, envious, eats kids, lures with fiddle, collects bones, jewelry and things from pockets, scatters throughout depths of fen and sedges, lets rust/rot

Motivation: anger at loneliness, hates kids playing and laughing (noise and exploring, coming near home), envy, greed, hunger

Relationships: loner, hates Halvar, children = food, nick-nacks, bones for “house” (Better a castle of bones than of stones – Swedish proverb)

Mood: hunger, motivation exasperated by season (geese, etc.)

Children: Role: catalysts, observers

Traits: curious, explorers, playful, include Halvar in activities, attentive to Halvar’s stories, happy

Motivation: fun, enjoy each other’s and Halvar’s company, love/trust Halvar, enjoy Halvar’s house and yard, “secret” place with parents’ blessings, grateful (gifts: food, rocks, flowers picked along road)

Relationships: like/trust Halvar, bring Halvar gifts of food or stones, etc., respect parents, unaware of fiddler’s presence (slight caution regarding water)

Mood: warm, relaxed, feel business of season, energized, curious

Parents: Role: catalysts, observers

Traits: trusting, protective, caring, vigilant, neighborly, friendly, community

Motivation: safe/trusted place for children, keep Halvar company (thank you), chaperon (implied, emphasis switched to community over children), also visit

Relationships: once played in Halvar’s house/yard, good parents, good neighbors, like/trust Halvar, bake, etc. for Halvar and children (picnics), unaware of fiddler’s presence (slight suspicion of fen, warn children, mainly about water)

Mood: preparing for Winter, what needs to be done, busy (all senses, selves and others)

Professor: Role: observer, narrator

opening / closing: protagonist / victim (cousins antagonists)
class: antagonist / catalyst (students protagonists)

- Traits: experienced, confident, likeable, casual, direct, guide not preach, humorous, satirical, entertaining, practical, approachable, (as child: defiant, cocky, curious, gullible)
- Motivation: teach law students ethics / life lessons (greed vs generosity, build vs charge in, relationships vs clients / money sources, feel for neighborhood / potential clientele)
- Relationships: professor, respected, liked, comfortable joking with / asking questions, (as child: younger, easy target, loved, watched over)

Adapted (Written) Story 2**The Children's Playhouse and the Fiddler's Fen**

You are yourselves, which is a good thing, because in this story every coin has two sides.

Off the highway between Whitecourt and Edmonton there is a valley which overlooks the mixed wood forest that stretches north of here. Above this valley, off the highway, is a mound of stones. Below this mound, in the valley, is a wooded fen.

Oh, how the children loved to laugh and play in Halvar's home. They picnicked and explored the wooded slope and played tag within the strange stones of Halvar's house. They played hide and seek, one of their favorite games, amongst the trees and walls. They listened to stories and enjoyed the sun as it paced the morning skies.

Halvar was a happy man. He enjoyed the children's play. He gave gifts of coin and stone and flowers he picked in the fields. They brought food and he cooked his own and they picnicked until the afternoon. And then the kids would explore again and play hide and seek once more. So it was day after day, year after year, generation after generation. Halvar was deeply loved and he returned the feeling.

But there was another who lived not far away in the wooded fen below Halvar's house. He did not like the yelling and screeching, the trampling and sneaking, the laughing and playing. He did not like the noise and the running and the kids trespassing on his fen. He did not like the children and Halvar. Not at all. At all.

So one early fall morning he took out his fiddle and began to quietly play. He played a tune that sounded like sedges scraping in the breeze. He played a tune that sound like water swirling across the fen.

He caught the attention of Johnny Russle who was hiding from the seeker near the fen. Johnny stood up and left where he was hiding and began to draw nearer, nearer the fen.

The fiddler played harder, making clicks and creaks which sounded like they came from the trees.

Johnny looked up and saw the yellow branches of the turning tamarack.

This would make a gift beautiful for Halvar, a sprig of yellow larch needles. So Johnny moved closer, farther and farther. Into the fen he went.

Subtly the fiddler fiddled his fiddle and drew Johnny farther in. A dragonfly here, a mosquito there, a distraction, a whisper to keep Johnny off guard.

Closer Johnny came toward the fiddler reaching for the closest larch. He reached for a branch of yellow larch needles. The fiddler reached up for Johnny.

By Halvar's house, the children heard a splash, but a group of startled geese leapt up from the fen and honked loudly before settling back in. So the children went back to playing their games.

When the games were ended and the day was closing and supper was drawing near, the children bade thank you, good bye and see you and left Johnny in the fen.

Johnny's parents were frantic. *Where is our son? Has no one seen Johnny today?*

He was with us at Halvar's, playing and laughing. The last we saw him he was playing hide and seek.

The town came knocking, searching and calling. Halvar and the children joined in the search. They came upon coins, rusted chains and necklaces, rotted wallets and pieces of cloth. In the fen, in the sedges, in the muck underneath, they found bits of gold and silver and copper and plastic and steel. Then they found white bones, long bones, old and new bones, crumbling bones and holey bones, fresh bones and black.

They found Johnny's body holding a yellow branch, a branch of tamarack. It was tangled in the sedges, his pockets were missing, his wallet was sunken nearby. But worse than this his legs were missing and the water was dark and thick.

The townsfolk decided, since others had obviously gone missing, to set the fen afire. They built a fence between the fen and the stone mound and set warnings and bans around the fen. Some say they saw a shadow leaving, but no one could really say.

Halvar's house is still visited again and often. The fen was shunned ever after.

And so ends my story of the Children's Playhouse and the Fiddler's Fen.

On Halvar's House (Notes about the Adapted Stories)

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I included the nack and the wooded fen to expand on the didactic message that originally attracted me to this tale. Halvar's generosity and the love he is rewarded is countered by the nack's greed and shunning. I chose a nack because I needed an isolated creature which had the ability to lure and kill children fairly quickly without drawing immediate attention. Swedish troll are communal, so these could not be used, even though most people in Canada would recognize a troll before they would recognize a nack. The nack had just the features I needed (Lindow 1978): an isolated creature, a means to lure the unwary and naïve, a means to kill them, a reason to kill them and an association with water, something Sweden and north-central Alberta have plenty of. In addition, the sound of wind through rough sedges and creaking black spruce could easily translate into the fiddling lure of the dangerous nack. The fen and lake make for a believable addition to the landscape beneath Halvar's house, allowing for proximity of the two "houses." The added didactic warning normally associated with nack that deep or fast water should be avoided also complements my version of the story.

So, with these changes and from these sources, the tale of the Children's Playhouse and the Fiddler's Fen is set.

Structure of Adapted Story 2

Opening: [spread out coins] There are two sides to every coin. So it is with this story.

Highway 43 to Whitecourt (present) <u>wooded</u> slope, stone pile, wooded fen, valley, early fall (<u>geese</u> , <u>breeze</u> , warm)	Giant, Children Playing, exploring, picnicking Games, stories (groups)	Halvar happy man Enjoys children's play Gives gifts (money, rocks, flowers, food)	Day after day Year after year Generation after generation
Halvar deeply loved Returns love	Fiddler, wooded fen Bothered by: yelling, screeching trampling, sneaking laughing, playing noise, running trespassing	Plays fiddle Sedges scraping Water swirling	Johnny Russle (hide and seek) Abandons game to explore sound To fen and fiddler
Fiddler plays harder Clicks and creaks (trees)	Johnny, yellow larch Sprig of needles gift for Halvar	Johnny reaches closer Fiddler fiddles harder	Johnny at edge, reaches for branch Fiddler reaches for Johnny
Splash Geese leap and resettle	Games end Time to go home Johnny missing	Search for Johnny Rusted coins, chains, necklaces Rotted wallets	Johnny's body Pockets and limbs missing
Bones found, mound Other items (mound and fen)	Stories of many gone missing, runaway Generations	Burn fen Build fence	Halvar's house still visited Fen shunned ever after

Closing: [pick up coins] And so ends my story of the Children's Playhouse and the Fiddler's Fen.

[Clapping] Thank you.