



## ELENA ANDERSEN

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Elena is Danish born and bred and, if prompted, will talk your ear off about Scandinavian myths and legends. She has spent time living in New Zealand and England, getting her high school and university degrees there. Growing up, her time was divided between martial arts, archery, horse riding, scuba diving and ignoring her schoolwork. Now, her time is divided between writing, making cosplays (she's cool like that) and ignoring real-life responsibilities. *The Vætte Child* is Elena's first novel.

### About *The Vætte Child*

Danish teenager Tristan hasn't been close to his twin sister, Aida, for years and knows nothing of the secret double life she lives. But that changes when the school gym burns down and Tristan gets caught in the middle of it. Now he is attached to an ancient grave gift, and with help from his sister and her friends, must find where it belongs before the gift's owner decides to bring havoc upon the world. On their journey, they meet bog elves, nisser and dunkelmen, creatures Tristan only thought existed in fairytales.

But this isn't a fairytale. They have unleashed an evil even older than the Vikings and time is not on their side.

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# THE VÆTTE CHILD

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## *Chapter 1*

### *My Sister, the Pyromaniac*

It all started the day my twin sister set fire to the school gym. Well, *technically* it wasn't her fault. But I didn't know that yet.

Hi. My name is Tristan Pedersen. I'm fourteen years old, from Odense, Denmark. I play hockey, support my local football club and spend more time playing video games than on my homework. Just your average, everyday teenager, living an ordinary life.

Sounds boring? It was. And it was awesome. Then that changed.

Do you have any siblings? Do they annoy you sometimes?

Have they ever burned down a gym, almost got you poisoned, eaten and burned alive, and then risen an ancient evil, determined to exterminate the human race?

No? Well, I win. My twin sister, Aida, managed that, all during one summer holiday.

Hope your siblings seem better in comparison.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start over:

It all began with a mind-wreckingly boring maths class in June ...

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'And as you can see, when the value of A changes, we can determine what X ...'

The numbers and letters danced around on the whiteboard, blending together with the specks of dust, clouding my vision.

Why were we even attempting to learn maths at the end of the school year? Another week and the classroom would be empty. Did our potato-faced teacher honestly think anyone cared by now?

‘On the contrary, to determine the value of B, we must first determine the answer, X ...’

I blinked the spots out of my eyes. Beside me, Magnus was busy taking notes. Across from him, Atif was throwing paper aeroplanes at Simone.

I turned my head towards the window, immediately recognising the person running across the field in a real hurry.

It wasn’t hard to pinpoint the black ponytail or the grey tank top and camouflage jeans combo.

What was Aida doing outside? Why was she running towards the gym?

I kept looking. She reached the gym’s backdoor and pulled it open. Weren’t the doors locked at this hour?

Aida disappeared, closing the door behind her.

Well. That was interesting. What was Aida’s deal?

Maybe I should tell someone. Or check on her myself. See what the hell she was up to. At least make sure she didn’t get into any trouble. She had a knack for that.

No. We were fourteen. Not children any more. Aida wasn’t my responsibility.

Whatever she was up to, it wasn’t my problem.

Besides, it wasn’t like she would want my help anyway.

I turned back to face potato-head, only to realise the whole class was staring at me, potato-head included. He raised a brow, holding out the marker.

‘So, Tristan. You want to come up and solve this or would you rather stay inside the *no doubt* thrilling daydream of yours?’

Well. That didn’t exactly sound like a question.

I rose from my chair and walked up to grab the marker pen from potato-head. He smirked at me, probably thinking I had no idea how to solve his problem.

I looked at the writing on the board:

$$6x - (37 - 13x) = 21x - (2x - 37)$$

OK then. He was right about that.

Hesitantly I brought the pen to the whiteboard, praying to any maths gods out there that they would take mercy on me.

Amazingly, my prayers were answered. I was saved by the bell.

Well, almost. The fire alarm saved me.

‘Calm down!’ Potato-head shouted over the sudden panic. ‘It’s probably just a drill. Find your partners and walk towards the field in a peaceful, orderly line, and leave your bags behind.’

No one was paying him any attention. Bags got slung over shoulders, people grabbed their jackets and books (well, Magnus grabbed his books. Most people weren’t too fussed about saving their homework from a potential fire) and we all headed out the door in groups, chatting along the way.

‘Neat,’ Atif said, as we went downstairs and joined the rest of the school on the playground outside. ‘I totally needed a break too! Perfect timing!’

A girl from a grade above us snorted at his comment.

‘You guys realise it’s not a drill, right?’ she said. ‘Baldy Paul was in our class talking about the exam choices and he had no idea what was happening either.’

‘There’s a real fire?’ Atif shouted, making several people turn to look at him.

‘Yup,’ the girl said. ‘Probably someone smoking in the bathroom or something stupid like that though.’

‘Bet it was Nina from 8A,’ Atif said. ‘Never trust a girl with a nose ring.’

‘I think she heard that,’ Magnus muttered, nodding across the hall of students where Nina was glaring our way. Atif ducked to hide behind me.

We all spilt out the school’s doors, and on to the handball field, about six hundred odd students aged seven to sixteen all gathering around their homeroom teachers.

I glanced over at class 8A, trying to pick out a black ponytail. One of the girls caught my eye and poked her friend in the side, pointing me out.

My stomach rolled uncomfortably.

‘Attention!’ Baldy Paul, the principal, called through his microphone. ‘Attention, everyone! Has somebody seen Aida Pedersen from 8A?’

As one, my classmates turned around to look at me.

I felt my body go numb.

Our teacher made her way over to me, closely followed by the principal.

‘Tristan?’ she asked. ‘Have you seen your sister?’

‘You better spit it out, kid. Where is she?’ Baldy Paul grumbled at me.

Anger bubbled in my stomach. This was just typical. Typical of Aida to skip class at exactly the wrong time, typical that everyone assumed that somehow I was responsible.

I opened my mouth – either to say that I hadn’t seen her or that I knew exactly where she was, I wasn’t sure.

I didn’t have to decide.

A rumble went through the ground, through the air, like thunder, even though the sky was clear. Everybody stopped chattering and looked around in confusion.

Then a crash sounded, so loud people covered their ears. A massive grey dust cloud rose from the gym across the grounds where everyone had gathered.

The roof of the gym had caved in.

We all stared in stunned silence, watching the dust cloud clear, making way for the black smoke, as enormous flames licked out the now open roof.

Then, one by one, the windows along the building shattered, spraying glass far enough that the closest bystanders had to run to avoid it.

That’s when the panic hit. People screamed and *ran*. Baldy Paul led the panicked group, rushing to get the gates open, while students around him started to climb over the fence.

I fought to escape the grab of the crowd. My heart was pounding wildly.

‘Tristan!’ Atif shouted from somewhere, ‘What the hell are you doing?’

‘Aida’s in there.’ It was meant to be a shout. It came out as a whisper.

‘*Tristan no!*’ Magnus shouted, but my feet were already moving.

Aida was in there. My stupid, careless, *moronic* sister had somehow managed to start a fire in the gym, and now she was trapped in there.

I didn’t bother with the doors, just jumped through one of the already broken windows. As I grabbed the windowsill with my right hand, the broken glass cut the skin, making my hand bleed. I hissed in pain, but couldn’t focus on it.

The fire seemed to have started right in the middle of the huge room – the same place where part of the roof had caved in. Roof tiles and big pieces of plaster had shattered and spread out over the floor, all of them on fire, like hundreds of bonfires.

The grey smoke made it impossible to see too far ahead. I pulled my jumper up over my nose to have some protection from the thick smoke. Blinking tears away from my eyes, I made my way through the gym.

'AIDA! WHERE ARE YOU?'

I staggered past some plaster blocks, through the smoke. I could hear something. Someone? Through the roaring fire, it was hard to make out.

'Aida?' I yelled again, but my voice was already rough from the smoke.

Then I heard it more clearly. A scream.

'Aida!' I stumbled through the middle of the place, careful to avoid the parts that were still on fire. My eyes stung, and I could barely breathe. But I had to go on. I continued stumbling through the smoke, through the rubble, tripping with every step.

'AIDA!'

Maybe she wasn't in here. Maybe she had escaped.

Maybe I should too.

That's when I spotted it. A black figure in the smoke.

'Aida?' My voice had turned croaky. She wouldn't be able to hear me.

I carried on, making my way to her. Flames were gaining up on me on both sides. But I was getting closer. The form was taking shape. Just a little more ...

'AIDA!' I put in my last bit of effort, and pushed through, jumping past the fire.

The shadow seemed to be getting bigger.

Getting closer.

Then it screamed again, a pained and angry, not entirely human, scream.

Not my sister's scream.

Everything started shaking, and a push of black smoke hit my face so hard I had to close my eyes and cover my head with my arm. When I looked up again, the figure was gone.

No, not gone. It was above me, soaring in the air. With one more piercing scream, it flew upwards, out the giant hole in the roof.

I was hallucinating. That had to be it. The smoke – it was the smoke, making my brain go crazy.

I needed to get out of there.

As I turned, a wooden pillar fell over, blocking my way, making me

stumble back. The fire welcomed it with delight, and in no time my exit was blocked.

Panic gripped my body.

No. No, no, no, no! I had to get out. I had to.

In my panic I felt my foot get caught on something and I fell, banging my head on the concrete floor. I swore and tried to pull at my leg. It was stuck.

I reached out to grab what had caught my foot, not realising I grabbed it with the hand I had cut on the broken window.

I swore as my wound brushed against something cold. Something ice cold, here, in the middle of a roaring fire. When I touched it, a sharp light flashed before my eyes, and the pain in my hand shot all the way through my body. I gasped for air. My ears were ringing.

Then, just as suddenly, the light, the pain, the ringing, all disappeared. I could move my foot again.

I didn't have time to wonder what had happened. I got to my feet and hurried on through the fire. The flames and smoke seemed to have cleared out. There was an open path straight to the main exit. Why hadn't I seen that before?

I ran as fast as I could, kicked open the door and stumbled outside. I continued until I was far enough away from the fire that it felt safe to collapse against a tree.

A coughing attack hit me, and I spat out mouthful after mouthful of grey spit globs.

I was covered in soot, my shoes were ruined, my hair felt singed. In my hand, I was still clutching the thing my foot had gotten caught on.

I held it up in front of my eyes. It was a cylinder, a bronze tube with a wooden knob on each end. It shone brightly in the sunlight, not dulled by soot like I was.

I turned it in my hand. Something had been engraved on its surface. Little symbols. Runes, maybe? I couldn't tell.

'CWRAHA!'

I looked up. In the tree above sat a black bird, eyeing me suspiciously.

'Hey there,' I said, my voice dry and croaking. 'How are you?'

The bird jumped down to a branch closer to me. I stared at it. From a distance, I had thought it was a crow, but now I realised it was much, much too large.

Though I hadn't seen one in the wild before, I recognised the bird well enough.

A raven.

'Cwraha!' it repeated, flapping its wings.

Several more ravens flew down, perching on different branches. I hadn't realised how many there were.

I knew we had ravens in Denmark, but I hadn't ever seen one on Fyn Island, certainly not in Odense. I didn't think they even came into cities.

'BAH!' I yelled, jumping up and down waving my arms.

The ravens continued to stare at me, unfazed.

'If you had been pigeons in the park that would have terrified you.' I mumbled in frustration.

'Grahahahaha!' The first raven cawed, waving its wings up and down. It sounded like it was laughing at me.

I looked down at the cylinder in my hand. Something about it made my stomach roll. I wasn't sure I wanted to have anything to do with it.

Aiming, I threw the cylinder as hard as I could, back into the fire. As soon as I did, the ravens went berserk. They took flight as one, cawing wildly. One of them grabbed my hood, dragging it over my eyes.

'Let go! Let go, you stupid birdbrain!' I punched after the bird and received several sharp hacks into my fingers for my efforts.

The raven released me and took to the sky. I looked up, just in time to see it join the rest of its group.

Well, this had all been entirely pointless. Aida was safe somewhere far away, completely unaware that I had almost died to save her life.

I wandered home, dejected and covered in soot.

No one was at home when I got in. I went to my room and threw myself on my bed. Something hard stabbed me in the back. Hadn't I had enough pain for today? Now my room was against me too?

I reached under the covers, my hand grabbing hold of what had hurt me. A shiver ran down my spine.

No way. There was just no way. It couldn't be ...

I pulled it out. The runes were still glowing the same way they had in the fire.

Somehow, somehow, the bronze cylinder had followed me home.