Adventures in Thule

Thulina and the Alod

A children's book

To make adults think



Stuart Hill

The girl who asked silly questions

1 By order of the king

On the morning the men came and locked the mill, Thulina's grandmother was watering her cabbages.

Two men arrived carrying a board. A third carried a stool, so that the first two could watch him hammer the board above the mill door without having to bend.

BY ORDER OF THE KING, it said.

Below that, in smaller letters: CLOSED UNTIL PAINTED GREEN. The king had given instructions about the colour of things.

The man on the stool climbed down. He produced a stamp with a brass handle, breathed on it and pressed it against the board.

THUMP.

PROPERLY SO.

"There," he said. "Official."

Thulina's grandmother rested both hands on her watering can.

"Du is ständin ower mi ingans."

The man looked down at his boot, which was standing on her onions. He moved it onto another onion.

Thulina, who was twelve and supposed to be mending a sail, laughed. The younger of the watching men nearly did. His companion opened a red book.

"Obstruction," he said, and wrote something down.



The mill stood beside the burn on Granny's land. A leat led water from farther upstream to its tirl. The water struck the fedders—wooden paddles—turning the millstone above, then returned to the burn. Neighbours brought their grain there. Everyone helped clear the leat after storms.

"Who gave the king our mill?" Thulina asked.

"The king holds the Alod of Thule."

"The what?"

"The Alod. It's something only known to the king."

"What is it?"

"The source of sovereign power."

"What's sovereign? Is that when people can no longer do things they had always done?"

"It's what the king is – highest in the land."

"And where is the Alod?"

"In the king's possession."

“Where?”

The man closed his book.

“That question requires the proper office.”

They locked the mill. The green mill in the next village was half a mile away, and Granny’s hip was bad.

Thulina took a sack of grain to the other mill and carried the meal home against a wind determined to push her back. By supper her skirt was soaked and her arms ached.

“I’m going to find the Alod,” she announced.



Granny’s needles kept moving. Mak 3, slip ower 1, tak in 2, slip ower 1, mak 3, cast, mak 1, cast. Mak plain, mak 2 ..... . She set down her makkin and started to prepare a box of food.

“Tak a piece, du’ll need some maet,” she said.

“You don’t think I can.”

“I tink da keings office is steekit fir der twell.”

Granny wrapped a small iron lamp in a cloth and put it beside the food.