



# *Tomten*

*A Christmas Poem by Viktor Rydberg*

## INTRODUCTION

The Christmas poem, Tomten, by Viktor Rydberg is one of the most popular ones in Finland and Sweden. I recall having to learn this in grade school; each student was assigned some verses so we could recite the full poem by heart in class. During Christmas it was often read in the radio.

This text of the poem is shown in Swedish, English and Finnish. You can listen to the traditional recital in Swedish, see a movie in Swedish with English subtitles and listen to it in a song in Finnish. The pictures used here of Tomten are from "Tonttula" in the village of Larsmo in Finland, between Karleby and Jakobstad.

I have included a relationship list showing how Viktor Rydberg is one of our distant cousins.

### Tomte

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A **tomte**, **nisse** or **tomtenisse** (Sweden) or **tonttu** (Finland) is a humanoid mythical creature of Scandinavian folklore. The tomte or nisse was believed to take care of a farmer's home and children and protect them from misfortune, in particular at night, when the housefolk were asleep.

The tomte/nisse was often imagined as a small, elderly man (size varies from a few inches to about half the height of an adult man), often with a full beard; dressed in the everyday clothing of a farmer.

The Swedish name *tomte* is derived from a place of residence and area of influence: the house lot or *tomt*. *Nisse* is the common name in Norwegian, Danish and the Scanian dialect in southernmost Sweden; it is a nickname for Nils, and its usage in folklore comes from expressions such as *Nisse god dräng* ("Nisse good lad", cf. [Robin Goodfellow](#)).

Lars Granholm  
Adamstown, MD 21710  
December 2012

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor\\_Rydberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Rydberg)

# Viktor Rydberg

**Abraham Viktor Rydberg** (December 18, 1828 – September 21, 1895) was a Swedish writer and a member of the Swedish Academy, 1877-1895. "Primarily a classical idealist", Viktor Rydberg has been described as "Sweden's last Romantic" and by 1859 was "generally regarded in the first rank of Swedish novelists."

*Rydberg in 1876*



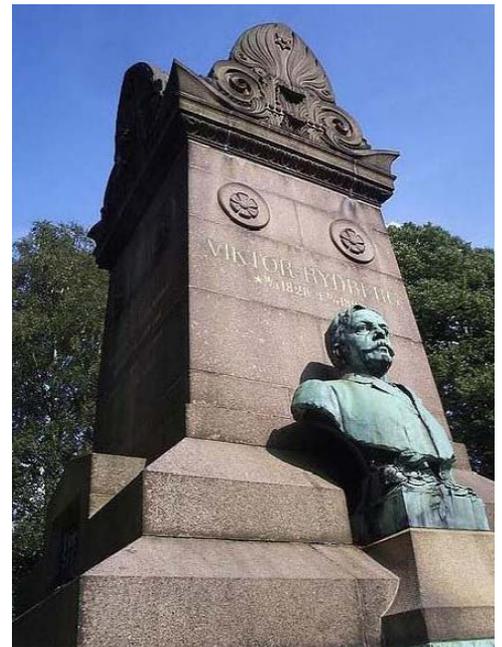
Viktor Rydberg was of humble parentage. One biographer notes that: "He had a hard struggle to satisfy the thirst for learning which was a leading passion of his life, but he finally attained distinction in several fields of scholarship." The son of a soldier turned prison guard, Johann Rydberg, and a midwife, Hedvig Düker. Viktor Rydberg had two brothers and three sisters. In 1834 his mother died during a cholera epidemic. Her death broke the spirit of his father, who yielded to hypochondria and alcoholism, contributing towards his loss of employment and the family's apartment, forcing authorities to board young Viktor out to a series of foster homes, one of which burnt down, further traumatizing the youth.

Despite his economic status, Rydberg was recognized for his talents. From 1838 to 1847, Rydberg attended grammar school, and studied law at the

University in Lund from 1851 to 1852. Due to financial reasons his university studies ended after one year, without a degree. Afterward, he took a job as a private tutor. In 1855, he was offered work at the *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, a newspaper in Göteborg, where he would remain employed for more than 20 years. It was during this time that his first novels saw print. He soon became a central figure of late Romanticism in Sweden, and Sweden's most famous living author.

Throughout his adult life, Rydberg was active in politics. In 1859, he wrote a pamphlet on national defense, which inspired the "Sharpshooter's movement", a voluntary militia of some political importance during the 1860s. In 1870, he took a controversial pro-German stance during the Franco-Prussian War. Representing the traditional economic system of Sweden, from 1870 to 1872, Rydberg was a member of the Swedish Parliament as a supporter of the Peasant's Party.

*Rydberg grave in Gothenburg*



## Original Swedish text

### TOMTEN

Viktor Rydberg



Midvinternattens köld är hård,  
stjärnorna gnistra och glimma.  
Alla sova i enslig gård  
djupt under midnattstimma.  
Månen vandrar sin tysta ban,  
snön lyser vit på fur och gran,  
snön lyser vit på taken.  
Endast tomten är vaken.



Står där så grå vid ladgårdsdörr,  
grå mot den vita driva,  
tittar, som många vintrar förr,  
upp emot månens skiva,  
tittar mot skogen, där gran och fur  
drar kring gården sin dunkla mur,  
grubblar, fast ej det lär båta,  
över en underlig gåta.



För sin hand genom skägg och hår,  
skakar huvud och hätta ---  
»nej, den gåtan är alltför svår,  
nej, jag gissar ej detta» ---  
slår, som han plägar, inom kort  
slika spörjande tankar bort,  
går att ordna och pyssla,  
går att sköta sin syssla.



Går till visthus och redskapshus,  
känner på alla låsen ---  
korna drömma vid månens ljus  
sommardrömmar i båsen;  
glömsk av sele och pisk och töm  
Pålle i stallet har ock en dröm:  
krubban han lutar över  
fylls av doftande klöver; ---



Går till stängslet för lamm och får,  
ser, hur de sova där inne;  
går till hönsen, där tuppen står  
stolt på sin högsta pinne;  
Karo i hundbots halm mår gott,  
vaknar och viftar svansen smått,  
Karo sin tomte känner,  
de äro gode vänner.



Tomten smyger sig sist att se  
husbondfolket det kära,  
länge och väl han märkt, att de  
hålla hans flit i ära;  
barnens kammar han sen på tå  
nalkas att se de söta små,  
ingen må det förtycka:  
det är hans största lycka.



Så har han sett dem, far och son,  
ren genom många leder  
slumra som barn; men varifrån  
kommo de väl hit neder?  
Släkte följde på släkte snart,  
blomstrade, åldrades, gick --- men vart?  
Gåtan, som icke låter  
gissa sig, kom så åter!



Tomten vandrar till ladans loft:  
där har han bo och fäste  
högt på skullen i höets doft,  
nära vid svalans näste;  
nu är väl svalans boning tom,  
men till våren med blad och blom  
kommer hon nog tillbaka,  
följd av sin näpna maka.



Då har hon alltid att kvittra om  
månget ett färdeminne,  
intet likväl om gåtan, som  
rör sig i tomtens sinne.  
Genom en springa i ladans vägg  
lyser månen på gubbens skägg,  
strimman på skägget blänker,  
tomten grubblar och tänker.



Tyst är skogen och nejden all,  
livet där ute är fruset,  
blott från fjärran av forsens fall  
höres helt sakta bruset.  
Tomten lyssnar och, halvt i dröm,  
tycker sig höra tidens ström,  
undrar, varthän den skall fara,  
undrar, var källan må vara.



Midvinternattens köld är hård,  
stjärnorna gnistra och glimma.  
Alla sova i enslig gård  
gott intill morgontimma.  
Månen sänker sin tysta ban,  
snön lyser vit på fur och gran,  
snön lyser vit på taken.  
Endast tomten är vaken.

Swedish traditional recital

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=832EH7HE1bw>



**Tomten**

Movie about Tomten in Swedish with English subtitles

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rJ0Ec-jYg8>



Midwinter's nightly frost is hard —  
Brightly the stars are beaming;

01:36 / 11:24

### Robin Goodfellow / Tomten by Viktor Rydberg

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Uploaded on Dec 20, 2010  
with English subtitles by Lars Ulwencreutz. Translation made by  
Anna Krook 1926.

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eMusic  
Artist

## English text

### Tomten by Viktor Rydberg

Midwinter's nightly frost is hard —  
Brightly the stars are beaming;  
Fast asleep is the lonely Yard,  
All, at midnight, are dreaming.  
Clear is the moon, and the snow-drifts shine,  
Glistening white, on fir and pine,  
Covers on rooflets making.  
None but tomten is waking.

Grey, he stands by the byre-door,  
Grey, in the snow appearing;  
Looks, as ever he did before,  
Up, at the moonlight peering;  
Looks at the wood, where the pine and fir  
Stand round the farm, and never stir;  
Broods on an unavailing  
Riddle, forever failing;

Runs his hand through his hair and beard —  
Gravely, his head a-shaking —  
»Harder riddle I never heard,  
Vainly, my head I'm breaking.« —  
Chasing, then, as his wont for aye,  
Such unsolvable things away,  
Tomten trips, without hustling,  
Now, about duty bustling.

Goes to the larder and tool-house fine,  
Every padlock trying —  
See! by moonlight, in stalls, the kine,  
Dreaming of summer, are lying;  
Heedless of harness and whip and team,  
Polle, stabled, has too a dream:  
Manger and crib, all over,  
Fill with sweet-smelling clover.

Tomten goes to the lambs and sheep —  
See! they are all a-dreaming!  
Goes to the hens, where the cock will sleep,  
Perched, with vanity teeming;  
Karo, in kennel, so brave and hale,  
Wakes up and gladly wags his tail;  
Karo, he knows his brother-  
Watchmen, they love each other.

Lastly, Tomten will steal to see  
The masterfolks, loved so dearly;  
Long have they liked his industry,  
Now, they honor him, clearly;  
Stealing on tiptoe, soon he nears  
Nursery cots, the little dears;  
None must grudge him the pleasure;  
This is his greatest treasure.

Thus he has seen them, sire and son,  
Endless numbers of races;  
Whence are they coming, one by one,  
All the slumbering faces?  
Mortals succeeding mortals, there,  
Flourished, and aged, and went — but where?  
Oh, this riddle, revolving,  
He will never cease solving!

Tomten goes to the hay-shed loft,  
There, is his haunt and hollow,  
Deep in the sweet-smelling hay, aloft,  
Near the nest of the swallow;  
Empty, now, is the swallow's nest,  
But when spring is in blossom dressed,  
She for home will be yearning,  
Will, with her mate, be returning.

Then she'll twitter, and sing, and chat  
Much of her airy travel,  
Nothing, though, of the riddle that  
Tomten can never unravel.  
Through a chink in the hay-shed wall,  
Lustrous moonbeams on Tomten fall,  
There, on his beard, they're blinking,  
Tomten's brooding and thinking.

Mute is the world, is nature all,  
Life is so frozen and dreary;  
From afar, but the rapids' call,  
Murmuring, sounds so weary.  
Tomten listens, half in a dream,  
Fancies he hears the vital stream,  
Wonders whither it's going,  
Whence its waters are flowing.

Midwinter's nightly frost is hard —  
Brightly the stars are beaming.  
Fast asleep is the lonely Yard,  
All till morn will be dreaming.  
Faint is the moon; and the snow-drifts shine,  
Glistening white on fir and pine,  
Covers on rooflets making.  
None but tomten is waking.

Finnish song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VDckHzvlaE>



For information about the poster below and other Rydberg's "Tomten" items see <http://tomtenposter.com/index.html>



## Finnish text

Pakkasyö on, ja leiskuen  
pohja loimuja viskoo.  
Kansa kartanon hiljaisen  
yösydänuntaan kiskoo.  
Ääneti kuu käy kulkuaan,  
puissa lunta on valkeanaan,  
kattojen päällä on lunta.  
Tonttu ei vaan saa unta.

Ladosta tulee, hankeen jää  
harmaana uksen suuhun,  
vanhaan tapaansa tirkistää  
kohti taivasta kuuhun;  
katsoo metsää, min hongat on  
tuulensuojana kartanon,  
miettivi suuntaan sataan  
ainaista ongelmataan.

Partaa sivellen aprikoi,  
puistaa päätä ja hasta –  
tätä ymmärtää ei voi,  
»ei, tää pulma on vasta;» –  
heittää tapaansa järkevään  
taas jo pois nämä vaivat pään,  
lähtee toimiin ja työhön,  
lähtee puuhiinsa yöhön.

Aitat ja puodit tarkastain,  
lukkoja koittaa nytkyin, –  
lehmät ne lehdoista näkee vain  
unta kahleissa kytkyin;  
suitset ja siimat ei selkään soi  
ruunan, mi myöskin unelmoi:  
torkkuen vasten seinää,  
haassa se puree heinää.

Lammasten luo käy karsinaan,  
makuulla tapaa ne ukko;  
kanat jo katsoo, pienallaan  
istuu ylinnä kukko;  
kopissa Vahti hyvin voi,  
herää ja häntää liehakoi,  
tonttu harmajanuttu  
Vahdille kyllä on tuttu.

Puikkii ukko jo tupahan,  
siellä on isäntäväki,  
tontulle arvoa antavan  
näiden jo aikaa näki;  
varpain hiipivi lasten luo,  
nähdäkseen sulot pienet nuo,  
ken sitä kummeksis juuri:  
hälle se riemu on suuri.

Isän ja pojan on nähnyt hän  
puhki polvien monten  
nukkuvan lasna; mut mistähän  
tie oli avutonten?  
Polvet polvien tietämiin  
nousi, vanheni, läks, – mihin niin?  
Ongelma, josta halaa  
selkoa, noin taas palaa!

Latoon, parvelle pyrkii vaan,  
siellä hän pitää majaa:  
pääskyn naapuri suovallaan  
on liki räystäään rajaa;  
vaikka pääsky nyt poissa on,  
keväällä tuoksuun tuomiston  
kyllä se saapuu varmaan  
seurassa puolison armaan.

Silloin aina se sirkuttaa  
monta muistoa tieltä,  
ei toki tunne ongelmaa,  
näin joka kiusaa mieltä.  
Seinän raosta loistaa kuu,  
ukon partahan kumottuu,  
liikkuu parta ja hulmaa,  
tonttu se miettii pulmaa.

Vaiti metsä on, alla jään  
kaikki elämä makaa,  
koski kuohuvi yksinään,  
humuten metsän takaa.  
Tonttu puoleksi unissaan  
ajan virtaa on kuulevinaan,  
tuumii, minne se vienee,  
missä sen lähde lienee.

Pakkasyö on, ja leiskuen  
pohja loimuja viskoo.  
Kansa kartanon hiljaisen  
aamuhun unta kiskoo.  
Ääneti kuu käy laskemaan,  
puissa lunta on valkeanaan,  
kattojen päällä on lunta.  
Tonttu ei vaan saa unta.

**Viktor Rydberg is the Half 11th cousin 5 times removed of Lars Erik Granholm**

