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# The Story About the Mistelås Murder<sup>+</sup>

Elisabeth Anderberg\*

Rune Johansson is like an open history book. He is interested in history and has worked on an inventory of crofters' holdings (*torp*) for a long time.

One day, he invited *Smålandsposten's* reporter to his home and told about an event that only a few people know about—the murder in Mistelås parsonage in 1744.

“Well, not much has been written about this,” says Rune as he looks through his papers.

He finally finds the documents from the county court judgment book. The documents are dated 11 June 1744 and Hans Joakim Kempf served as the judge.

“Let's see how it all began,” Rune mumbles and begins jokingly, “Once upon a time...”

A man by the name of Per Larsson had worked for Pastor Nils Hagelberg at Mistelås as a farm hand. Toward the end of the 1730s, the pastor accused Larsson of theft on the farm.

Larsson became very angry and decided to take revenge one day.

A few years later, Larsson happened to be taken into custody and was jailed in Alvesta together with another person, Olof Jonsson.

“It doesn't say what crime they had committed,” says Rune, and continues to read.

## Escaped from jail

The two men broke the cell padlock and then replaced it neatly so the guards would not suspect anything. Then they ran off.

They each stole a horse from the crofter's holding (*torp*) Alvesta Grind and rode through the forest toward Mistelås parsonage.

When they arrived, Per walked up to the house and intended to gain entry to the pastor's wife. He discovered the doors were locked. First he threw a rock through the window, then went to get an ax to break the doorframe.

“You blasted whore!” Per yelled at the wife, Christina Hagelberg.

Two of the children, Ulrika and Erik, became the witnesses to a fight between their mother and Per. She pulled his hair and held him down by lying on top of him.

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Olof came running to pull the woman away from Per. Per told him to kill her with the ax, but Olof refused. Instead, she was beaten with a rake and a piece of wood until she begged for her life. All of this in front of her children.

“Yes, it was a terrible thing,” sighs Rune and turns the page.

After the assault, the two men walked toward the pastor’s bedroom. What they didn’t know was that the man in the bed was not the pastor, but the tailor Anders Valberg.

“In those days, tailors traveled between the different farms and stayed a few weeks in each place to finish their work. Then they went to the next farm,” explains Rune.

“Just this one night, the tailor must have taken the opportunity to sleep in a real bed while the pastor was gone.”

### **Wrong man assaulted**

Per walked up to the man, whom he presumed was the pastor, and immediately began assaulting him. He did not notice he had the wrong man, but continued the beating. The tailor fought for his life and managed to escape the house. Outside, he fell to the ground and was beaten to death with the ax. Neither one of the men had discovered they had the wrong man.

Now the men had to hurry. The servants had run for help. They took an unknown amount of money from the parsonage and left quickly, so quickly that Per lost his hat.

He was unfortunate to lose this particular hat. Another farm hand who had worked with Per knew he had been cutting on his hat. This particular cutting pattern was evident on the hat found in the yard and the county sheriff Nils Ekström picked up Per and Olof for questioning.

The men flatly denied everything, but eventually the pressure became too much for Olof who admitted his guilt and Per could not deny it either.

### **Punishment: Decapitation**

Both men were sentenced to death by decapitation on the shore of Lake Dansjön.

Rune closes the folder containing the documents and puts it aside.

“I bet Per was shocked to find out he had taken revenge on the tailor,” he says.

But what happened to the wife? And what about the pastor and the money, where did it go?

“The wife died from the results of the beating and the pastor eventually remarried,” explains Rune and returns the folder to the bookshelf. But the money was never recovered, so it is probably still somewhere between Mistelås and Alvesta.

“Their son Erik who witnessed the beating of his mother, became feeble-minded and was admitted to Växjö Hospital where he eventually died. There is a story about him also, but we will save it for another time,” smiles Rune.