

TOMTEN

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Illustration by Harold Wiberg

Tomten usually have long white beards and wear long pointed red hats.

Tomten in Swedish and **Tonttu** in Finnish (also called **Nisse** in Norwegian) are mischievous little gnomes, usually associated with farms and forests. They protect the animals and people who live there. They are thought to originally come from the soil of a particular farm and its first owner. They tend to the welfare of the animals and protect the farm and family. Tomten are seen by the animals with whom they can talk in a special language that humans can't understand, but they are not seen by humans.

A tomte comes out at night and makes the rounds of all the farm animals, checking to see that they are safe and in good health. Then, he quietly goes into the farmhouse to check the children and parents to see if they are asleep and snuggled warm in their beds.

Tomten are usually very gentle. But if people don't keep their farms and homes clean and in good condition or upset them in any way, they can become angry and play tricks, sometimes very nasty tricks, in retaliation. It's best not to get on the wrong side of a tomte. They are also very adverse to change and become upset if things don't stay the same. If the farm is sold, they stay and take care of the new family. Each farm has its own resident tomte.



Viktor Rydberg, a Swedish poet, wrote the [classic poem](#), **Tomten**, about the lonely nighttime wanderings of one tomte on a cold winter's night, **Astrid Lindgren** adapted that poem in 1960, and turned it into [a lovely book](#), illustrated by **Harald Wiberg**. [Here is a video](#) of the book with illustrations.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANgulkJBJVM&t=2s>

Book: <https://bookshop.org/books/the-tomten/9780698115910>