



ROCK CRYSTAL
ADALBERT STIFTER

INTRODUCTION BY
W. H. AUDEN

ADALBERT STIFTER (1805–1868), the son of a provincial linen weaver and flax merchant, was born in the rural Bohemian market town of Oberplan, then part of the Austrian Empire but today in the Czech Republic. When Stifter was still a child, his father was crushed under an overturned cart; the family was left poor, but Stifter's grandfather sent him to school at the Benedictine Monastery of Kremsmünster and he proved a brilliant student. Stifter attended the University of Vienna, where he studied law but failed to obtain a degree. Instead he supported himself as a much sought-after tutor for the children of the high Viennese aristocracy while also acquiring a small reputation as a landscape painter. For a number of years Stifter eagerly courted the daughter of a rich businessman, but his lack of worldly position turned her family against him, and in 1835 he married Amelia Mohaupt, a milliner. In 1840, he published his first story, the success of which started him on a career as a writer, and in 1850, after working as an editor on two newspapers, he was appointed supervisor of elementary schools for Upper Austria. Stifter's works include numerous stories and novellas, as well as *Witiko*, a historical novel, and *Indian Summer*, considered one of the finest examples of the German Bildungsroman. Stifter's mental and physical health deteriorated in his final years. In 1868, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, he committed suicide.

W. H. AUDEN (1907–1973) was born in North Yorkshire, England, the son of a doctor. He studied at Oxford and published his first book, *Poems*, in 1930, immediately establishing himself as one of the outstanding voices of his generation. Auden emigrated to New York in 1939, where he became a United States citizen and converted to Anglicanism. He wrote essays, critical studies, plays, and operas, librettos for such composers as Benjamin Britten, Igor Stravinsky, and Hans Werner Henze, as well as the poems for which he is most famous.

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ADALBERT STIFTER

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Introduction by

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CONTENTS

Biographical Notes

Title Page

Copyright and More Information

Introduction

ROCK CRYSTAL

INTRODUCTION

ADALBERT Stifter is generally considered one of the great German stylists. The son of a linen weaver, Stifter was born in the Bohemian village of Oberplan in 1805, educated in a Benedictine monastery and at the University of Vienna and became an inspector of schools. All his life he suffered from fits of depression and anxiety; one of his adopted daughters died of typhus, the other, for no apparent reason, drowned herself in the Danube; in 1868, ill and discouraged by the public indifference to his two big novels, *Nachsommer* and *Witiko*, he cut his throat.

As might be expected from a man of his temperament, he loved tradition, order, childhood and the limpid serenity of the classical style. He never traveled without a volume of Goethe in his pocket and shared his master's interest in natural history and geology; he was also a charming landscape painter. His prose may remind an English reader of W. H. Hudson.

The plot of *Rock Crystal* is simple enough. Two children walk from one mountain valley to visit their grandparents on Christmas Eve. On their way home it starts to snow; they miss the path and when night falls they are far out on a glacier. They take shelter in an ice cave and are saved from falling asleep and freezing to death by some black coffee extract their grandmother has given them to carry home, which stimulates their bodies, and by a wonderful discharge of electric flashes in the sky which excites their minds. In the Christmas morning they are found by a search party and brought down the mountainside home to their rejoicing parents.

To bring off, as Stifter does, a story of this kind, with its breathtaking risks of appalling banalities is a great feat. What might so easily have been a tear-jerking melodrama becomes in his hands a quiet and beautiful parable about the relation of people to places, of man to nature.

He achieves this result by a sort of fugal repetition of descriptive details. The two valleys with their inhabitants, the road over the col past the baker's memorial, the way up to the mountain and the glacier are first presented objectively as if to a tourist or a historian, so that the reader knows where everything is and what everybody does. He knows, for instance, that love for the daughter of the wealthy dyer of Millsdorf made the restless young cobbler of Gschaid settle down to making mountain boots, but that she, who came over the hill to marry him, is still regarded as an outsider.

The same road over the col is traveled again, and again in the daylight, but this time by young children who have never been up the mountain. Consequently, when the crisis comes, while the appearance of the mountain by night is as unfamiliar to the reader as it is to the children, he has been there before with a guide, he knows where and how they are lost, and this knowledge heightens his awareness of Conrad's courage and common sense and Sanna's simple faith in her brother which overcomes all fear.

Finally the story returns to the panorama from which it started, but though everything looks the same, the eye that sees them is full of memories and no longer disinterested. The mountain is not only beautiful, but dangerous and lovable because its dangers have been met with courage. The road over the col is no longer taken for granted, but is seen as a triumph of the human will to neighborliness over an indifferent or hostile nature which would keep men estranged. Home has become really home for the first time, through the experience of being lost. The community, through having responded to a common to a threat to some of its members, has realized itself completely:

Only from that day on were the children really felt to belong to the village and not to be outsiders. Thenceforth they were regarded as natives whom the people had brought back to themselves from the mountain. Their mother, Sanna, was now a native of Gschaid, too.

The children, however, can never forget the mountain and earnestly fix their gaze upon it when in the garden, when as in times past the sun is out bright and warm, the linden diffuses its fragrance, the bees are humming, and the mountain looks down upon them as serene and blue as the sky above.

The translation by Elizabeth Mayer and Marianne Moore reads like an original: that they should have managed this with an author who, like Flaubert, worried over every word, is testimony to their patience no less than to their skill.

—W. H. AUDEN
November 1941

THE CHURCH observes various festivals that are ever dear to the heart. What more gracious than Whitsuntide: more sacred or of deeper significance than Easter. The portentous sadness of Holy Week and exaltation of the Sunday following, accompany us throughout life. One of the most beautiful Church festivals comes in midwinter when nights are long and days are short, when the sun slants toward earth obliquely and snow mantles the fields: Christmas. In many countries the evening that precedes our Lord's nativity is known as Christmas Eve; in our region we call it Holy Eve, the day following Holy Day, and the night between, Holy Night. The Catholic Church observes Christmas, the birthday of our Saviour, by magnificent and holiest ceremonial. In most places, midnight as the very hour of his birth is solemnized by ritual of great splendor, to which the bells ring out their heartson invitation through the still darkness of the wintry air; then with their lanterns, along dim familiar paths, from snow-clad mountains, past forest-boughs encrusted with rime, through crackling orchard, folk flock to the church from which solemn strains are pouring,—the church rising from the heart of the village, enshrouded in ice-laden trees, its stately windows aglow.

Associated with the religious festival is a domestic one. In Christian lands far and wide it is the custom to portray for children the advent of the Christ-child—a child himself, most wondrous that ever dwelt on earth—something joyous, resplendent, exalted, an ever-present influence throughout life that sometimes in old age, for one lost in sad or tender memories, revives bygone days as it passes on wings of fair colors, through the cheerless expanse of desolate night.

It is the custom to present children with gifts the Blessed Christ-child has brought; given usually on Christmas Eve when dusk has deepened into night. Candles are lit, generally a great many, that flicker together with the little wax lights on the fresh green branches of a small fir or spruce tree that has been set in the middle of the room.

The children must wait till the sign is given that the Blessed Christ-child has come and left his gift. Only then is the door thrown wide for them to enter, and the sparkling radiance of the candles reveals objects hanging from the tree or spread out on the table, things beyond anything the children have imagined, things they dare not touch but which, after they have received them as gifts, they will carry about in their little arms and afterwards take with them to bed. If later in their dreams they hear the midnight bells calling the grown-ups to church, it will perhaps seem to them that the angelic host is winging its way across high heaven, or that the Christ-child is returning home after visiting children everywhere and bringing to each, a wondrous gift.

Next day, when Christmas comes, how festive it is early in the morning to be there in the war-room dressed in their prettiest clothes, and later when Father and Mother put on their Sunday best go to church; or when at noon comes Christmas dinner—finer than any other in the whole year; and in the afternoon or toward evening, when friends call and, sitting about on chairs or benches, visit together as they look out at the wintry scene of falling snow or at the gray mist wreathing the mountains, or at the blood-red sun going down. Here and there about the room on stool or bench or window sill, lie the magical gifts of the evening before—now familiar and all their own.

After this, the long winter departs; spring comes, then lingering summer—and when the mother again tells the story of the Christ-child, saying that his birthday is now to be celebrated and that he will visit the earth again, it seems to the children that his last coming has been inconceivably long ago, and as though the joys of that distant time lie veiled in remoteness.

Because this festival has such enduring power over us, with an afterglow reaching even into old age, we love to be with children when they joyously celebrate Christmas.

Among the high mountains of our country there is a little village with a small but needle-fine church-spire. Conspicuous above the green of abundant fruit-trees, this spire—because the slates are painted vermilion—can be seen far and wide against the faint blue of the mountains. The hamlet nestles in the very center of a fairly wide valley that is an almost perfect ellipse. Besides the wa-

church, a school-house, and a parish-house, there are a few stately homes around a square with four linden-trees and a stone cross in the center. These are not simple farmhouses, but a haven of handicrafts indispensable to humanity, providing the mountain people with essential commodities. In the valley and scattered along the mountain-sides are many little huts of a sort common to such regions—whose inhabitants belong to the village, use its church and school, and support its craftsmen by buying their wares. Even more distant huts are now also part of the village, but, hidden away in the mountains, cannot be seen from the valley; the people rarely come down among their fellow parishioners. Often, indeed, they are obliged to keep their dead with them over the winter till they can bring them to the valley for burial after the snow has melted. The great man of the village is the priest. The villagers regard him with veneration and he, after a protracted stay in the valley, usually becomes used to isolation, stays on not unwillingly, and then just goes on living there. At least since time immemorial no priest in the village has ever craved a change, none has been unworthy of his calling.

There are no highways in the valley, merely cart-roads with double wheel-tracks, along which the crops are brought home on one-horse carts. Accordingly, few strangers come to the valley; among these an occasional wanderer, a nature-lover who lives for a time in the prettily-painted upper room of the inn, enjoying the mountain-view; or possibly an artist who sketches in his portfolio the delicate church-spire and beautiful rocky peaks.

The village people thus constitute a separate world, they know one another by name and are familiar with all the grandfathers' and great-grandfathers' tales. All mourn when anyone dies; all know the name of the new-born; they speak a language which is different from that used in the plain; they have their quarrels and settle them; they help one another, and if anything unusual happens, come flocking together.

They are steadfast, ever adhering to the ancient ways. If a stone is dislodged from a wall, that very stone is put back; the new houses are built like the old ones; damaged roofs are mended with shingles just like those they replace. If the cows on a farm are brindled, the calves on that farm must always be brindled; the color never changes.

South of the village you see a snowy mountain with dazzling horn-shaped peaks, rising, as it seems from the house-tops themselves, but actually quite far away. All year round, summer and winter, there it is with its jutting crags and white expanses, looking down upon the valley. As the most prominent feature of the landscape and ever before the eyes of the villagers, the mountain has been the inspiration of many a tale. There is not a man, young or old, in the village who has not something to tell about its peaks and crags, its caves and crevasses, its streams and torrents—either something that has happened to himself or that he has heard about from others. This mountain is the pride of the village, as though the people had made it themselves, and with due respect to their honesty we can swear to it that once in a while they would not fib for the honor and glory of their mountain. Besides being notable in itself, the mountain is actually profitable, since on the arrival of a party of mountain-climbers to make the ascent from the valley, the villagers serve as guides; and to have been a guide—had this or that experience, known this or that spot—is a distinction which affords anyone great satisfaction. When they sit together in the common room at the inn, they are always talking about their feats and strange adventures, never failing to mention what this or that traveler said and how much he had given for their labors. The mountain also sends down from its snowy flanks streams that feed a lake in the forest, from which a brook emerges and flows merrily through the valley, driving the saw-mill, the grist-mill, and small machinery of various kinds, providing cleanliness for the village and watering the cattle. The forest tracts afford timber and also break the force of the avalanches. Through subterranean channels and loose soil at these altitudes water filters and, coursing veinlike through the valley, comes to the surface in little fountains and springs from which the people drink. And as time and again they offer strangers this unrivalled, much extolled water, they never stop to think how

useful it is, accepting it simply as something that has always been there.

With regard to the change of seasons on the mountain, in winter the two pinnacles called “horns” are snow white and on clear days stand out in the dusky atmosphere with blinding brilliance; all the alpine meadows at the base of the summits are white then, as well as their sloping shoulders; even the precipitous rock-faces or walls as the people call them, are coated with a white velvet nap of hoar frost and glazed with ice-tissue, so the entire mass towers like an enchanted castle above the darkening weight of gray forest mantling the base. In summer as the sun and temperate winds melt the snow on the steep gradients, the horns soar up, as the mountain people say, black into the sky, their surfaces marked only by exquisite little flecks and snow-veins. These veins, however, are not really white but the delicate milky blue of the distant snow on the darker blue rocks. At higher levels in hot weather the alpine meadows about the horns never lose their blanket of eternal snow and it shines down on the verdure in the valley; but on the lower levels the recent winter snowfall—a mere down—melts away and iridescent blue-green tints appear in the glacier that, now bared, greets the people in the valley.

Ascent of the mountain is made from the valley. One follows in the southerly direction a smooth well-made road that leads by a neck or “col” into another valley. A col is a mountain-range of moderate height, connecting two larger, more considerable, ranges; and following it, one passes between the ranges from one valley into another. The col which links the snow-mountain with the corresponding range opposite, is thickly studded with pines. At about the highest point of the road before it descends into the further valley, stands a little rustic memorial. One time a baker, carrying his basket over the col, was found dead at this spot. A picture of him and his basket with the pines about him, was painted on a tablet, fastened to a scarlet post, and erected to mark the scene of the tragedy. At this marker, one turns off the road and follows along the col instead of making one’s way straight down into the valley beyond. There is here an opening in the pines as if a road led into the distance and indeed during part of the year there is a path leading to the rustic memorial, by which timber is brought down and which afterwards disappears, overgrown by grass. Proceeding along this path which climbs gently, one comes at length to a clearing quite bare of trees, a barren heath with not so much as a bush, only scant heather, drought-inured mosses and small hardy plant-life. The ground then rises sharply and the ascent is long; one climbs in a worn groove or trench, which has the advantage of preventing one from losing the way over the vast sameness of heath. After a time, rocky towers as of a church thrust upward from the grassy floor and between these walls one keeps on climbing. Then more bare ridges appear, with scant vegetation, and one is breathing the air of the higher altitudes that lead direct to the ice-cap. At either side of the path is a steep wall, and it is this defile which joins the snow-mountain with the col. To scale the ice one skirts the margin for some time above the rocks that surround it, until one comes to the packed snow bridging the crevasses, snow hard enough at most seasons to bear the traveler’s weight.

At the highest point of the icefield, the two horns rise from the snow. These peaks are difficult to ascend, moated as they are by snow, now wide, now narrow, and the *bergschrand* or rim must be compassed by a leap. Since the sheer verticals offer only scant ledges for foothold, most climbers are satisfied with reaching the *bergschrand* and from there enjoy as much of the panorama as is not cut off by the horn. Those wishing to reach the summit can do so only with the aid of spiked shoes, ropes and cleats.

There are other mountains besides this one on the southern horizon, but none so high. In the early autumn they too are covered with snow, and on into late spring. Summer, however, eats the snow away and the rocks gleam in the sun with a gentle allure, and the rich green of the lower forest is intersected by broad-lying violet shadows—a scene so lovely, one could look at it all one’s life and never tire of it.

Along the valley in other directions—to the north, the east and the west—the mountains stretch

away into the distance, on and on, but lower, with occasional pastures and patches of tilled ground on the slopes and higher up forest clearings and alpine huts, the skyline marked by a delicate sawtooth edge that is an indication of the moderate height of the range; whereas on the southern horizon the mountains, although clothed with magnificent forest, sweep along with smooth outline against the luminous sky.

Standing in about the middle of the valley, one has the impression that not a single road leads either into or out of the basin—an illusion familiar to anyone who has spent much time in the mountains—while in reality there are several roads leading not only into the northern plains, but also toward the south, where the valley appears to be closed in by walls of perpendicular rock, there is the col path.

The little village is called Gschaid, and the snow-mountain that looks down upon its houses is called Gars.

On the other side of the col, with the beaten path from the wayside shrine leading down to it, is a much more beautiful and fertile valley than that of Gschaid. As one comes into it, one encounters the stately market-town of Millsdorf. It is a sizeable town with several kinds of mills and a number of buildings in which trades and crafts are housed. The inhabitants are more prosperous than those of Gschaid, and although the valleys are only three hours' distance apart—a trifling matter to mountain people, used as they are to great distances and inured to hardship—manners and customs in the two valleys are so different and they are so unlike in appearance, one would think that untold miles separated them. This is often the case in mountainous regions not only because of their varying positions—more or less propitious—with relation to the sun, but also as a result of character, which has led the inhabitants to choose differing occupations. But in one respect they are all alike, they cling to what is traditional and to the ancient ways of their forefathers, never seem to miss the bustle of traffic, love their own valley ardently, and could scarcely exist away from it.

Months, sometimes a year, may pass before anyone from Gschaid crosses into the valley beyond to visit the great market-town, Millsdorf. And although the same is true of the people of Millsdorf, yet being in communication with other parts of the country around them, they are not as sequestered as the people of Gschaid. There is even a road which might be called a highway, the length of the valley, and many a traveler, many a wanderer, goes on his way without a suspicion that north of him on the farther side of the lordly snow-mountain, lies a valley with a goodly scattering of houses, and a hamlet with tapering church-spire.

One of the trades supplying the people in this valley with essential commodities is the shoemaker—indispensable the world over where human beings are no longer in the primitive stage. These valley people of Gschaid, be it said, are so far beyond it that they need the very stoutest and most durable highland footwear. The shoemaker—with a minor exception—is the only one in the valley. His house in Gschaid fronts on the square—among the better houses—and with its gray walls, white window-sills and green shutters, looks out on the four linden-trees. It has, on the ground-floor, the work-room, the journeymen's room, a large and a small living-room, the little shop, together with kitchen, larder, and such cupboards as pertain to them. On the second floor, that is in the gable-end, is an upper chamber, a formal best room in which stand two imposing beds, well-polished and well-stocked wardrobes, also a china closet with dishes, an inlaid table, upholstered chairs, a little recessed wall safe or cupboard for savings, pictures of saints, two exquisite time-pieces, and shooting match prizes. Lastly, in a special cabinet of their own, with glass front, hang rifles for target practice and for hunting, with everything pertaining to them.

Adjoining the shoemaker's house is a much smaller one separated only by an arched passage, built in the same style, and a component part of the other—a detail of the whole. It consists of one room with the usual adjuncts. It is for the use of the owner when he has transferred the property to his son or successor—a retirement annex as it is called—in which he and his wife may spend their last year

Then again, the small house will be vacant, awaiting a new occupant.

The shoemaker's house has a stable and barn at the rear, since everyone who lives in the valley—tradesman or not—tills the ground, obtaining thus his nourishing food. Behind the buildings, as with any of the better houses in Gschaid, is a garden which furnishes vegetables, fruit, and, for festive occasions, flowers. As in most mountain regions, bee-keeping is customary, with straw hives in the garden.

The aforementioned minor exception, the only rival of the shoemaker, was Old Tobias who, in reality, was no rival at all, since by that time he merely did cobbling. He had plenty of work and it never occurred to him to compete with the fashionable shoemaker on the square, especially as the latter often provided him with patches, pieces of sole and the like, without charging for them. In the summertime Old Tobias would sit under the elder-bushes at the end of the village, working away. All about him were low shoes and mountain shoes, but it was the same with each pair—they were old, scuffed, discolored, and muddy. There were no high-legged boots among them because these were never worn in the village and valley of Gschaid. The only two persons who had such boots, the priest and the school-master, had their mending as well as their new work done by the shoemaker on the square. In winter Old Tobias stayed in his cottage behind the elder-bushes, which, since wood in Gschaid is not expensive, was always nice and warm.

The shoemaker on the square, before he inherited his house, had been a chamois-poacher and a general, so people said, not too model a youth. In school he had always been one of the best pupils. Later he had learned his father's trade, and after working as a wandering journeyman, had finally come back to the village. But instead of wearing a black hat as becomes a tradesman—such as his father had worn all his life—he perched a green one on his head, stuck every available feather in it, and strutted about wearing the shortest frieze coat in the valley, whereas his father had always worn a dark coat, preferably black—since he was a man of trade—and invariably cut long. The young shoemaker was to be seen on every dance floor and at every bowling alley. If anyone tried to reason with him, he just whistled a tune. He and his marksman's rifle were at every shooting match in the neighborhood and sometimes he carried home a prize—treasured by him as a great trophy. The prize was usually a set of coins artistically arranged. But the shoemaker, in order to win it, had to disburse many more similar coins, in his usual spendthrift fashion. He went to all the hunts in the neighborhood and had quite a reputation for being a good marksman. Sometimes, however, he fared forth alone with his blunderbuss and spiked shoes, and it was rumored that he had once received a serious wound on his head.

In Millsdorf just where the town begins, as you come in by the road from Gschaid, there lived a dyer with a thriving business in which he employed many workmen; and—something unheard of in the valley—he even made use of machinery. He was, moreover, the possessor of extensive farmland. To woo the daughter of this prosperous dyer, the shoemaker would trudge all the way over the mountains. Noted far and wide for her beauty, she was also admired for her virtue, decorum, and housewifely accomplishments. Nevertheless, it would seem, the shoemaker attracted her attention. The dyer would not allow him to enter the house; and whereas the beautiful daughter had never previously gone to public places or taken part in festivities and had rarely been seen away from home, now she went nowhere but to church or into the garden or from one room to another in the house.

Some time after the death of his parents when he had become proprietor of the house where he now lived all alone, the shoemaker changed into a wholly different person. Whereas till then he was always rollicking about, he now sat in his shop, hammering away on sole-leather, day and night. He boasted that no one could make better shoes and footgear, and engaged only the best workmen whom he nagged and pestered a good deal as they sat at their work, making them follow his instructions and do exactly as he told them. The result was that not only did everyone in Gschaid who had always before

got footwear from neighboring valleys, now come to him, but the entire valley as well. And as time went on, even people from Millsdorf and other valleys came to have their footwear made by the shoemaker of Gschaid. His fame traveled even into the plain so that many people who intended to climb the mountains had their special shoes made by him.

He kept his house spick and span, and shoes, mountain-shoes, and high boots gleamed on the shelves of the storeroom; and on Sundays when folk from all over the valley flocked to the village and stood around on the square with its four linden-trees, they liked to go over to the shoemaker's and peep through the windows at all the people buying and ordering shoes.

In keeping with his love for the mountains, mountain-shoes were his best work, and he used to show them in the common room at the inn that no one could show him a mountain-shoe made by anyone else that could compare with one of his. "They haven't the knack," he would add. "They can work all their lives and still they don't know how a shoe like that should be made, so the nail-starred design has the heads of the nails at exactly the right place on the sole, with just the right amount of iron in them; so that the shoe is hard on the outside and no loose stone, however sharp, can be felt, and the inside lies as soft and tender against the foot as a glove."

The shoemaker had had a big book made in which he entered all finished work, the names of those who had furnished the material, and of those who had bought the finished product,—together with a word about the quality of the goods, and this book was kept in the large chest in the store.

Now, although the dyer's beautiful daughter stayed at home most of the time and visited neither relatives nor friends, the shoemaker from Gschaid managed it so that she should catch a glimpse of him when she went to church, walked about the garden, or looked from the windows of her room. Because of this constant gazing, the dyer's wife by long, insistent, unremitting supplications induced her stiff-necked husband to give in, and the shoemaker (who had, after all, mended his ways) carried off the beautiful and wealthy maiden of Millsdorf as his bride. The dyer, however, was a headstrong person. The right sort of man, he said, has an occupation, makes it thrive and grow, and thereby supports his wife, children, himself and domestics; he keeps his house in order and lays by a good nest-egg which is the only thing that gives a man dignity and standing in the world. Thus it was that the only dowry his daughter received was a well-filled hope chest, the rest was the husband's concern—for the present and in future. The dyeworks in Millsdorf with its farmland was a business worthwhile in itself, besides reflecting credit on its owner; and since all of it was, in a sense, capital, he would give none of it away. But once he and his wife had died, the dyeworks and farmland would fall to their only daughter, namely the shoemaker's wife in Gschaid; and the shoemaker and his wife might then do with them as they pleased: provided, that is, that the heirs were worthy; should they be unworthy, they would get only the legal share, the inheritance going to their children, and if there were none, to other relatives. Nor did the shoemaker make any demands, showing proudly that all he had wanted was to win the dyer's beautiful daughter, and that he was well able to keep her and care for her as she had been kept and cared for at home. And, as his wife, he dressed her not only better than any of the women of Gschaid and of the valley were dressed, but better even than she had been at home, and the meat and drink and everything about the house had to be better and choicer than anything she had enjoyed in her father's house. And to spite his father-in-law, he bought more and more land, so that he came finally to possess a considerable property.

Since the people of Gschaid seldom leave their valley and almost never go to Millsdorf, from which they are separated by mountain and by customs—and since, furthermore, no one ever leaves his valley to settle in a neighboring one—although removals to great distances occur—and lastly since no girl ever leaves her valley except on the rare occasion when, obeying the dictates of love, as a bride, she follows her husband into another valley—so it came about that after the beautiful daughter of the dyer of Millsdorf married the shoemaker of Gschaid she was still regarded by the people of Gschaid as

stranger; and although they were not unkind to her, and even loved her for her charm and virtue, there was always something, reserve or a sort of shy respect, that kept her from enjoying the same familiarity and warm intimacy that existed between the people that belonged to the valley. That's the way it was and no use talking about it. And the finer clothes and easier domestic life of the shoemaker's wife only made it worse.

After having been married a year she bore her husband a son, and several years later, a daughter. She felt, however, that he did not love the children as much as she thought he ought to, and as she herself loved them; for he looked so serious most of the time and was always preoccupied with his work. He rarely petted or played with them, and always addressed them quietly as one speaks to grown-up persons. In the matter of food, clothes and all material things, however, his care for them was above reproach.

At first, the dyer's wife often came to Gschaid and the young couple also at times went over to Millsdorf to attend church fairs and on other festive occasions. But after the children were born, things were different. Mothers may love their children and tenderly long for them when they are absent, but a grandmother's longing for her grandchildren amounts almost to a morbid craving. The dyer's wife would often come over to Gschaid to see the children, bring them presents, stay a while, and then after giving them some good advice, depart. But when age and health made these frequent journeys inadvisable and the dyer for that reason objected to them, a different plan was devised, everything was reversed, and the children visited their grandmother instead. Their mother herself would often take them in the carriage or they would be entrusted to a maidservant, and driven in a buggy over the col well bundled up since they were still of tender years. But when older, they would go on foot accompanied by their mother or a maid, and when the lad had grown strong, knowing, and self-reliant they let him take the familiar road over the col by himself, and even, when he begged to take his little sister along, if the weather was good would allow her to go with him. There was nothing unusual about this in Gschaid, since the people were hardy walkers, and parents—especially a man like the shoemaker, admired physical strength and were glad to see it in their children.

So it came about that the two children went over the col oftener than any of the other villagers and in this way, like their mother who had always been treated as a stranger in Gschaid, the children became strangers too; and were hardly Gschaid children, but belonged half to Millsdorf.

Conrad, the boy, already gave evidence of his father's serious disposition, and Susanna the little girl, named for her mother and called Sanna for short, had unbounded faith in his knowledge, judgment and physical strength, and followed unquestioningly wherever he led, just as their mother accepted their father's guidance and never questioned his superior judgment in all matters.

On clear days the children could be seen early in the morning, making their way down the valley crossing the meadow and coming to the place where the col forest looks down upon it. Going up toward the forest they would keep to the path, finally reaching the highest point, and before noon be descending the open meadows on the other side, toward Millsdorf. Conrad then showed Sanna the one belonging to their grandfather; as they walked across the fields he told her about the various kinds of grain; they would look at the cloth-lengths hanging from poles under the rafters to dry, and capering in the wind or blown into antic postures; then they would hear the fulling-mill and the pounding in the tannery built by their grandfather beside the brook, for fullers and tanners; and now, turning a corner of the field, they were soon entering the garden through the back gate where they were welcomed by their grandmother. She always seemed to know when they were coming, would watch from the window, and seeing Sanna's red kerchief shining in the sun would recognize them from far away.

She then led them through wash-house and press into the living-room, made them sit down, and would not let them open their neckerchiefs or spencers lest they catch cold. After the midday meal they were allowed to go out and play, run about the house, or do anything they liked, provided it was

not indecorous or forbidden. The dyer, always at table with them, asked them about their school work dwelling particularly on the subjects they should study. In the afternoon, even before it was time, the grandmother would begin urging them to start back, so that they would not be late reaching home. Although the dyer had given his daughter no dowry and vowed that until his death none of his fortune should be given away, his wife had no such scruples, and not only gave the children all kinds of things when they visited her, frequently even pieces of money of considerable value, but also and invariably made up two little bundles in which she put such things as she thought they might need or that would give them pleasure. And even if they had the same things in the shoemaker's house in Gscheid—good as one could desire—their grandmother would give for the sheer pleasure of giving, and they would carry her gifts home with them as something very precious. So it always happened that the day before Christmas they would take home carefully wrapped well-sealed packages, quite unaware that they were presents they would receive that same evening.

Their grandmother's bundling them off always long before it was time merely resulted in the children's loitering at this spot or that along the way. They liked to sit by the hazel-trees on the creek and crack nuts with stones; or if there were no nuts, play with leaves or little sticks or with the pine cones that drop from the pine and fir branches in early spring. Sometimes Conrad would tell little stories to his sister, or coming to the wayside shrine, would take her a little way up the side-road at the left toward the heights, saying that that was the way to Snow-mountain, that there were crags and huge boulders up there, chamois scampering, and great birds flying about. He often took her even high up above the tree-line, and they would gaze at the dry grass and stunted heather; but he led her back again in time and they would have returned before the gloaming.

One winter, the day before Christmas, when in the valley of Gscheid early dawn had broadened into a day, a faint clear-weather haze overspread the sky, so that the sun creeping up in the south-east could be seen only as an indistinct reddish ball; furthermore, the air was mild, almost warm in the valley and even in the upper reaches of the sky as indicated by the unchanging forms of the motionless clouds. So the shoemaker's wife said to the children: "Since it is such a fine day and since it has not rained for so long a time and the roads are hard, and since yesterday your father gave you permission, provided it was the right kind of day, you may go over to Millsdorf to see your grandmother; but first you must ask your father again."

The children, still in their night-clothes, ran into the adjoining room where their father was talking with a customer, and begged him—since it was such a beautiful day—to give them his permission again. And as soon as they had his consent, they ran back to their mother who then dressed them both with great care, or rather, dressed the little girl, for the lad was able to dress by himself and was ready long before his mother had finished bundling up the little one in warm clothes. Then, when everything was right, she said: "Now Conrad, listen carefully. Since I am letting your sister go with you, you must start for home in plenty of time and you must not loiter on the way. As soon as dinner at your grandmother's is over, you must leave at once and come straight home. The days are short now, and the sun sets early."

"Yes, Mother, I know," said Conrad.

"And watch out for Sanna, so she doesn't fall or get herself overheated."

"Yes, Mother."

"Well, God protect you. Now go tell your father you are leaving."

The lad slung a calfskin pouch over his shoulder by a strap—a perquisite deftly sewn by his father—and the children went into the next room to bid him farewell. They were soon back, and after the mother had made the sign of the cross over them in blessing, they skipped merrily off down the street.

They walked quickly along the square and the row of houses, past the picket fences of the orchard and finally came into the open. The sun had already risen over the woodlands on the eastern heights.

that were still shot with wefts of pale mist,—the dull reddish ball keeping pace with them through the leafless branches of the crab-apple trees.

There was no snow anywhere in the valley; the higher mountains which had been glistening for weeks, were covered with it; the lower ones stood snowless and silent in their pine-mantle of green and fallow brown of bare branches. The ground was not yet frozen and would have been quite dry because of the long stretch without rain, if the cold had not overlaid it with a faint moisture, which instead of making it slippery, had made it all the safer and so resilient that walking was easy. The sparse grass still on the meadows and particularly along the ditches, had an autumn look. There was no frost on the grass and examined closely, not even any dew, all of which interpreted locally was a sign that rain was imminent.

Down toward the far edge of the meadow was a mountain brook crossed by a high plank. The children walked along the plank and looked down. There was scarcely any water in the brook, a mere thread of intense blue on the stony bed, the dry pebbles having become perfectly white in the long weeks without rain, and the scantness as well as the color of the water meant bitter cold at the high altitudes—cold that held the ground in a vise so it could not make the brook turbid with sediment, and hardening the ice so the core gave off only a few clear drops.

From the foot-bridge the children raced over the meadows, closer and closer to the woodland.

They came at last to the outskirts of the forest and went on into it.

When they had climbed into the higher woods of the neck, the long ruts in the cart-road were not so soft as they had been in the valley, but firm, because they were frozen; in some places hard enough to bear the children's weight. Child-like, they no longer kept to the smooth path by the road but walked in the ruts, seeing which ridges would bear their weight. When in an hour they had reached the crest of the col, the ground was by that time so hard their steps rang and the clods were like iron.

Sanna was the first to notice at the shrine erected in memory of the baker, that the red post supporting the tablet was no longer there. They went closer and saw that it lay in the dry grass that stood up like pale straw, partly concealing it. They did not see why the post should be lying there—whether it had been thrown down or had fallen of itself—but they did see the wood rotted where it came out of the ground, and that it might have toppled over of itself; but as it lay there, they were glad to be able to have a closer look at the picture and the inscription. When they had studied it all,—the basket with the rolls, the whitish hands of the baker, his closed eyes, his gray coat, and the pines about him—had spelled out the legend and then said it out loud—they proceeded on their way.

Another hour and the dark woods on both sides were dim behind them; thin-set trees, part single oaks, part birch and clusters of scrub, met the eye, continuing with them a distance and shortly after the children were running down through the meadows into the valley of Millsdorf.

Although this valley is considerably lower than that of Gschaid and is therefore so much warmer, that harvest begins two weeks earlier than in Gschaid, the ground here was frozen too; and when the children came to their grandfather's tannery and fulling-mill, they found in the road where the wheels scatter drops of water, thin sheets of cat's-ice, ever a delight to children.

Their grandmother had seen them and coming out to meet them, took Sanna's little cold hands in hers and led the children inside.

She undid their wraps, had fresh wood put in the stove, and asked what had happened on the way over.

When they had answered, she said: "That's good, that's all right, I am glad you came, but this time you must be off very soon, the days are short and it is getting colder; nothing was frozen in Millsdorf this morning."

"Nor in Gschaid," said the lad.

"See? You must hurry then so you won't be too cold by evening," answered their grandmother.

Then she asked how their mother was, how was their father, and had anything happened in Gschaid.

~~After these inquiries she busied herself with the meal, made sure it would be on the table earlier~~ than usual, and herself prepared little appetizing things for the children that she knew they liked. Then the dyer was called in, the children sat down at the table laid for them as for grownups, ate with the grandfather and grandmother, the latter piling good things on their plates. After dinner, she patted Sanna's cheek, quite rosy by this time. Then she bustled about here and there, packing to overflowing the lad's calfskin pouch, besides stuffing things into his pockets. She also put divers things into Sanna's little pockets, gave them each a piece of bread to eat on the way, and in the bag, she took for them, were two rolls in case they became very hungry.

"For your mother," she said, "I am giving you some well-roasted coffee-beans, and in the very tightly wrapped bottle with the stopper is some black coffee extract better than your mother herself usually makes; she can taste some just as it is; it is a veritable tonic, so strong the merest sip warms the stomach so that you cannot feel chilled even on the coldest of winter days. The other things in the bag, in the cardboard box wrapped with paper, you are to take home without opening."

After a word or two more with the children, she said they must go.

"Take good care, Sanna," she said, "not to get chilled; don't get overheated; and don't you run up over the meadows and under the trees. The wind may come up toward evening and then you will have to go slower. Greetings to Father and Mother, and tell them we wish them a right merry Christmas. She kissed them each on the cheek, and hastened them forth. But she accompanied them through the garden, let them out by the rear gate, shut it again, and came back into the house.

The children went past the thin sheets of cat's-ice beside their grandfather's mill, crossed the field and turned up toward the rising meadows.

When they had come to the heights covered with scattered trees and thickets of scrub, already mentioned, some few snowflakes floated slowly down.

"See there, Sanna," said the lad. "I knew it would snow; remember when we left home, we could still see the sun, as red as the lamp over the Holy Sepulcher in church during Holy Week, and now we can't see even the faintest ray and there's only gray fog up there over the tree-tops. That always means snow."

The children walked on more briskly, and Sanna was delighted whenever she caught a falling flake on the sleeve of her dark coat and it did not melt for a long time. When finally they came to the further fringe of the Millsdorf heights before entering the dark woods on the col, the serried wall of pines was already prettily flecked with the fast-falling snow. They now entered the deep woods, the longest part of the remaining way home. Up and up, from the fringe of the forest, the ground rises to one comes to the red post of the wayside shrine, from where as we said before the road turns off down to Gschaid. The ascent through the woods is so steep from the Millsdorf side that the road does not lead straight up but in wide serpentines, west to east and east to west. At each side of the road, the whole way up to the shrine and down to the meadows of Gschaid, there are impenetrable dense towering woods that thin only a little as one gains the valley level and comes out on the meadows of the valley of Gschaid. The col itself, though but a small link between two great ranges, would, if set on the floor of the valley, be a considerable mountain-chain.

The first thing that struck the children on entering the woods, was that the frozen ground had a whitish look as though meal had been scattered; the heads of some of the grasses by the road and amongst the trees were drooping with the weight of snow on them and the many green pine and fir ends, reaching out like hands, held up little thistledown pyramids.

"Is it snowing at home now, where father is?" asked Sanna.

"Certainly," answered her brother, "getting colder, too, and you'll see tomorrow, the whole pond will be frozen over."

“Yes, Conrad,” said the child.

~~She all but doubled her short steps to keep pace with the lad as he strode along.~~

They went steadily up the winding road, now west to east, now east to west. The wind predicted by their grandmother had not come up; the air, on the contrary, was so still not a twig or a branch stirred in fact it felt warmer in the woods, as is usual, in winter, among spaced objects like tree-trunks, and the flakes kept falling thicker and thicker so the ground was already white, and the woods began to gray and take on a dusty look, with snow settling upon the garments and hats of both the boy and his sister.

The children were delighted. They set their feet on the soft down and eagerly looked for places where it seemed thicker so they could make believe they were already deep in it. They did not shake the snow from their clothing. There had descended upon everything a pervading sense of peace. Not the sound of a bird, although a few birds usually flit about the woods even in winter, and the children on the way to Millsdorf that morning had heard them twitter; they did not see any, either flying or on branches, and the whole forest was as though dead.

Since the footprints behind were their own and the snow ahead lay white and unbroken, it was evident that they were the only ones crossing the col that day.

They kept on in the same direction, now coming toward trees, now leaving them behind, and where the underbrush was thick they could even see the snow lying on the twigs.

Their spirits were still rising, for the flakes fell thicker and thicker and in a little while they did not have to look for snow to wade in, because it lay so thick it felt soft to the feet everywhere, and even came up around their shoes; and it was so still, so intimate, it seemed as if they could almost hear the rustle of the flakes settling on the pine needles.

“Shall we see the baker’s post today, I wonder,” asked the little girl, “for it’s fallen down and will be snowed on, so the red will be white.”

“We’ll see it, just the same,” said the lad, “we’ll see it lying there even if the snow does fall on it and make it white for it’s a good thick post and the black iron cross on top would always stick up.”

“Yes, Conrad.”

In the meantime, while they kept on, the snow became so thick they could see only the nearest trees.

They could not feel the hardness of the road or the ridges of the wheel-ruts; the road was an even softness everywhere because of the snow, and one could distinguish it only as it wound on through the forest smooth and white like a ribbon. Every bough was mantled in fairest white.

The children were walking now in the middle of the road, their little feet ploughing through snow that slowed their steps, for the going was harder. The lad pulled his jacket together at the collar so the snow would not fall on the back of his neck, and shoved his hat further down about his ears for protection. He also drew the shawl tighter, that his mother had folded about his little sister, and pulled it out over her forehead in a little roof.

The wind predicted by their grandmother had not yet come up, but on the other hand the snowfall had by degrees become so heavy that after a while even the nearest trees were indistinct and stood out like the blur like powdery sacks.

The children pushed on. They shrank down into their coats and pushed on.

Sanna took hold of the shoulder-strap by which Conrad’s bag was suspended, and with her little hand clutching the strap, they wended their way.

They were still not as far as the wayside memorial. The lad could not be sure of the time because there was no sun, and everything was the same monotonous gray.

“Will we be at the post soon?” asked Sanna.

“I don’t know,” answered her brother. “This time, I can’t make out the trees, or the road because it is so white. We may not see the post at all, because there is so much snow it will be covered up, and

hardly a grass-blade or arm of the cross will stick out. But that's nothing. We'll just keep straight on. ~~The road leads through the trees and when it gets to the place where the post is, then it will start~~ downhill and we keep right on it and when it comes out of the woods we are in Gschaid meadows; then comes the footbridge, and we're not far from home."

On they went, climbing the path. Their footprints did not show for long now, since the unusual heavy snow blotted them out at once. The quick-falling flakes no longer made even a ticking sound on the needles as they fell but imperceptibly merged with the deep white already mantling the ground.

The children drew their wraps still closer to keep the ever-falling snow from working in on all sides.

They quickened their steps and the road was still climbing.

After a great while they had not yet reached the place where the memorial post was supposed to be from which the path to Gschaid turned off downhill.

At last they came to a tract with not a tree on it.

"I don't see any trees," said Sanna.

"Perhaps the road is so wide we can't see them because of the snow," said the lad.

"Yes, Conrad," said the little one.

After a time the lad came to a halt and said, "I don't see any trees myself now. We must be out of the forest. Yet the road is still going up. Let's stop a minute and look about. Perhaps we can see something."

But they did not see anything. They stared up through wan nothingness into the sky. As during a hailstorm, when leaden striations slant downward from the massed white or greenish cloudbanks, so here; and the mute downfall continued.

The place was a circular patch of white ground, nothing else.

"You know, Sanna," said the lad, "we are on that dry grass I have often brought you to in summer where we used to sit and look at the grassy floor sloping up, where the beautiful herb-tufts grow. We shall turn right now, and be going downhill."

"Yes, Conrad."

"The days are short, as Grandmother said and as you know yourself, so we must hurry."

"Yes, Conrad," said the little one.

"Wait a minute, I am going to snug you up a bit," said the lad.

He took off his hat, put it on Sanna and tied the two ribbons under her chin. The kerchief she had been wearing was too slight protection, whereas the profusion of curls on his head was so thick, snow would rest on them a long time before the wet and cold could penetrate. Then he took off his little fur jacket and drew it on his sister, up over her little arms. With only his shirt to protect him now, he tied about his shoulders the little shawl Sanna had been wearing. It would do for him, he thought, if they could just walk at a brisk pace.

He took his sister by the hand and thus they started on again.

With trustful eyes the little thing gazed up at the prevailing gray all about them and accompanied him willingly; only that her small hurrying feet could not keep up with him as he strove onward like someone bent on settling a thing once and for all.

They were going on now with the dogged endurance that children and animals have, not knowing what is ahead or when their reserves may give out.

However, as they went, they could not tell whether they were going down the mountain or not. They had soon turned downhill to the right but then came to elevations leading up. Often they encountered sheer rises they had to avoid; and a hollow in which they were walking led them around in a curve. They climbed hummocks that became steeper under their feet than they expected; and what they had deemed a descent was level ground or a depression, or went on as an even stretch.

“But where are we, Conrad?” asked the child.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “If only my eyes could make out something and I could get my bearings.”

But on every side was nothing but a blinding whiteness, white everywhere that none the less drew its ever narrowing circle about them, paling beyond into fog that came down in waves, devouring and shrouding everything till there was nothing but the voracious snow.

“Wait, Sanna,” said the lad, “let’s stand still a little and listen and see if we can’t hear something,—a sound from down there in the valley perhaps, a dog or a bell or the mill, or maybe someone calling—we ought to be able to hear something, at any rate, then we’ll know which way to go.”

They stood still, but heard nothing. They stood a little longer, but there was nothing to be heard, not a single sound, not the faintest except their breath; indeed in the stillness reigning, it was as if they could hear the snow falling on their very eyelashes. Their grandmother’s prediction had still not come true, the wind had not risen and, what was rare for those regions, not a breath stirred overhead anywhere.

After waiting a considerable time, they went on again.

“Never mind, Sanna,” said her brother, “don’t be frightened, just follow me and I’ll get you there yet. If it would only stop snowing.”

She was not afraid but lifted her feet as well as she could and followed him. He led her on through the white fluctuating all-pervading pearly opaqueness.

After a time rocks suddenly loomed up dark and indistinct in the white luminescence—they had almost run into them—rocks that rose so sheer scarcely any snow could cling to them.

“Sanna, Sanna,” he said, “there are the rocks, let’s go on, let’s go on.”

They went on, had to, between rocks and along the base. The rocks admitted of swerving neither right nor left, leading on in one narrow hollowed-out channel. After a time the children left the rocks behind and could not see them any more. As unexpectedly as they had come in among them, so unexpectedly they came out. Again there was nothing about them but whiteness, with no dark obstructions looming up. It seemed just one vast volume of white and yet one could not see three feet ahead; everything was closed in, so to speak, by a mysterious white obscurity, and since there were no shadows it was impossible to judge the size of objects and the children did not know whether to step up or down until steepness raised the foot and compelled it to climb.

“My eyes hurt,” said Sanna.

“Don’t look at the snow,” answered the lad, “but at the clouds. Mine have been hurting a good while, but it doesn’t matter, I have to look at the snow anyhow, in order to watch the road. But don’t be scared. I will get you down to Gschaid yet.”

“Yes, Conrad.”

They went on again; but however they went or however they turned it didn’t seem ever as if they were beginning to go downhill. At either side steep rooflike formations led upward, and they walked between, but always up. Whenever they went outside the “roofs” and turned downhill, it became so steep immediately they had to come back; their little feet often encountered jagged objects, and they were constantly avoiding hummocks.

They noticed also that whenever their feet sank deeper in the fresh snow, they did not feel an earthy firmness beneath but something different, like already frozen, older snow. But they kept on, walking fast and steadily. If they stopped, everything was silent, unbelievably silent; when they walked they heard the shuffling of their feet, nothing else; for the pall of flakes descended without a sound, such heavy snow one could fairly see it wax deep. The children themselves were so thickly covered they did not stand out against the general whiteness and would not have been able to see each other if they had been more than a few steps apart.

It was a blessing the snow was dry as sand, so it shook off easily and slid from their feet and little mountain-shoes and stockings without caking and soaking them.

At last they again came to something with form, immense shapes heaped in gigantic confusion covered with snow that was sifting everywhere into the crevices; the children had, moreover, almost stumbled on them before they had seen them. They went close to look.

Ice—nothing but ice.

There were great slabs lying, covered with snow but on the edges glassy green ice showed; there were mounds of what looked like pushed-up foam, the sides dull but with inward glimmers as if crystals and splinters of precious stones had been jumbled together; there were, besides, great rounded bosses engulfed in snow, slabs and other shapes, slanting or upright,—as high as the church steeple or the houses in Gscheid. Some were eroded into cavities through which an arm, a head, a body, or a great cartload of hay could pass. All these irregular shapes had been driven into one another or upright, and stood out in the form of roofs or eaves; and overlying and overlapping them were great white cat-paws of snow. Even a fearsome black boulder huge as a house lay tilted up under the ice, resting on its point, so that snow could not cling to the sides. And not this stone merely, but others, and yet larger ones, locked in the ice, which one did not notice at first, formed a wall of Cyclopean debris along the ice rim.

“There must have been a great deal of water here, because there is so much ice,” said Sanna.

“No, it wasn’t made by water,” answered her brother, “it’s the ice of the mountain, and always here since God made it so.”

“Yes, Conrad,” said Sanna.

“We are as far as the ice now,” said the lad, “we are on the mountain, you know, Sanna, the one that looks so white in the sun from the garden. Now think hard about this. Do you remember when we were sitting in the garden, how pleasant it was, how the bees hummed round us, how sweet the linden smelled, and how the sun was shining so bright on us?”

“Yes, Conrad, I remember.”

“We would look at the mountain too. We saw how blue it was, blue as the gentle sky, we saw snow up there even though it was summer in the village and hot, and the wheat was getting ripe.”

“Yes, Conrad.”

“And down where the snow ends, you see all manner of colors if you look hard,—green, blue, and a whitish color—that is the ice that looks so small from down below because you are so far away, and that, as Father said, is going to be there as long as the world lasts. And then I’ve often noticed that the blue color keeps on below the ice,—probably stones, I’ve thought, or maybe ploughed ground and pastures, and then come the pine woods that go down and down, and all kinds of rocks in between, then the green meadows, then the woods with leaves, and then our own meadows and fields in the valley of Gscheid. Now you see, Sanna, we are at the ice and from here we will go down over the blue color and through the woods where the rocks are, then over the meadows and then through the woods with the leaves, and then we shall be in the valley of Gscheid and then it will be easy to find our village.”

“Yes, Conrad,” said the little one.

The children went on into the ice wherever they could find a place to step.

They were just tiny moving dots among the formidable masses.

As they peered in beneath the projecting slabs, almost as if instinct were impelling them to seek shelter, they walked along in a broad deeply-scored channel that led straight out of the ice, like the bed of a stream, dried up now and covered with new-fallen snow. Where it emerged it was vaulted over with ice, beautifully arched like a canopy. Following the channel, they went in—deeper and deeper. The snow was entirely dry, and they had smooth ice to walk on. But the whole cavern was blue, bluer than

anything on earth, a blue deeper and finer than the vault of heaven itself, blue as azure glass with faint light inside. ~~There were massive ribs overhead, and more delicate ones, with pendant icicle point lace, and tassels, the way leading further still—they knew not how far but they did not go on.~~ It might even have been pleasant in the cave, it was warm, no snow was falling; but it was so fearsome blue the children were frightened and ran out again. They walked on a while in the hollowed bed of the stream and then climbed up over the side.

They kept along the edge of the ice as far as they could thread through the detritus and crevasses between the great slabs.

“We have to get up over this and then we can run down, away from the ice,” said Conrad.

“Yes,” said Sanna, and clung tight to him.

They now struck a downward course through the snow, one that was to lead them into the valley. But they did not get far. Another river of ice, heaved up in a pile like a gigantic barricade, lay across the soft snow and seemed almost to be reaching out arms to the left and the right. Under the blanket white that hid it there were greenish, bluish, leaden, black, even yellow and reddish glimmers from the sides.

They now had a better perspective since the unprecedented unwearying snow was thinning and flakes were coming down only as on ordinary snowy days. With the fortitude of ignorance they clambered up on the ice to cross the protruding tongue of the glacier and then descend on the farther side. They crept through slits, planted their feet on any snow-capped projection whether rock or ice, helped with their hands, crawled where they could not walk, their light bodies working on up until they had scaled the inside of the barrier and were on top.

They had intended to climb down the other side.

There was no other side.

As far as the eye could reach there was only ice. Pointed masses and irregular clumps thrusting up from the fearsome snow-encrusted ice. Instead of a barricade that could be surmounted, with snow beyond, as they had expected, yet other walls of ice rose from the buttress, cracked and fissured, with innumerable meandering blue veins, and beyond these walls, others like them; and beyond, others until the falling snow blurred the distance in its veil of gray.

“Sanna, we cannot go over there,” said the lad.

“No,” said the little one.

“We shall just turn around and get down somewhere else.”

“Yes, Conrad.”

The children then tried to climb down at the place where they had clambered up, but were not able. There was nothing but ice, as if they had missed the direction from which they had come up. They turned this way and that and could not get away from the ice; it was as if they were clasped in it. They worked down and came to more ice. Finally when the lad went as he thought always in the direction from which they had come, they came to other deformed fragments but larger and more intimidating for the most part than along the ice-margin, and by crawling and clambering, they managed to get out. At the edge of the moraine were gigantic boulders heaped up in a way the two children had never seen in all their lives. Many were shrouded in white; others on the under sides or where they slanted up had a smooth high-polished surface as if they had been shoved forward on it; some were tilted together like houses or the sides of a roof; some lay one upon the other like misshapen clods. Not far from the children, several were slanted together, and lying on them were great wide slabs like a roof. A little house had thus been formed, open at the front but closed at both sides and the back. It was dry inside since the snow had been falling straight down and not a flake had drifted in.

The children were thankful not to be in the midst of ice any longer but to be standing on solid ground again.

By this time it had grown very dark.

“Sanna,” said the lad, “we cannot go down any farther because it’s night, and we might fall, or even stumble into a crevasse. Let’s go in under the stones where it’s so dry and warm, and wait there. The sun will come up again and then we’ll run down the mountain. Don’t cry, please don’t cry, you can have all the things to eat that Grandmother gave us to bring along.”

She did not cry. But when they had both gone in under the projecting stone roof where there was even room to sit, stand or walk about, she sat down close to him and was still as a mouse.

“Mother is not going to be displeased with us,” said Conrad. “We shall tell her all about the heavy snow that has kept us and she won’t say anything; neither will Father. If we are cold, remember, slap your body with your hands the way the foresters do, and then you’ll feel warmer.”

“Yes, Conrad,” said the little thing.

Sanna was not disheartened at not being able to go down the mountain and run home, as he might have expected, for the severe strain—the children had not realized how heavy it was—made it seem good to sit down, inexpressibly good, and they gladly gave in to their weariness.

But now hunger too made itself felt. At almost the same instant, they took out their pieces of bread and ate them. They ate the other things too, bits of cake, almonds and nuts and little things the grandmother had slipped into their pockets.

“Now, Sanna, we must get the snow off us,” said the lad, “so we’ll not be wet.”

“Yes, Conrad,” answered Sanna.

They went out in front of their little house, and Conrad first got the snow off his sister. He shook her things by the corners, removed his hat that he had put on her and emptied it of snow and brushed off with a kerchief the snow that was left. Then he got off, as best he could, the snow collected on himself.

It had stopped snowing altogether by this time.

The children felt not a flake.

They went back into the stone house and sat down. Getting up had shown them how tired they really were, and they readily sat down again. Conrad took off his calfskin bag. He got out the cloth that had been wrapped by his grandmother around the cardboard box and paper-covered packages, and laid it about his shoulders for warmth. He also took the two rolls from the bag and gave them to Sanna. The child ate eagerly,—one and then part of the second. But the rest she gave back to Conrad when she saw that he was not eating. He took it and ate it.

Then both sat and gazed straight ahead.

As far as they could see in the dusk, glimmering snow lay upon everything, separate tiny faces scintillating curiously here and there as if, after absorbing the light all day, they were now reflecting it again.

Darkness fell with the suddenness usual in high altitudes. Soon it was dark all around; only the snow continued to shine with its pallid glimmer. Not only had it stopped snowing but the obscurity of the mist had begun to lift and was parting here and there, for the children caught the twinkle of a little star. Since the snow shed an actual radiance, as it were, and a veil no longer hung from the clouds, they could see from their refuge the mounds of snow sharply silhouetted against the sombre sky. As it was much warmer in the hut than it had been elsewhere, they rested huddling close against each other and even forgot to be afraid of the dark. Soon the stars came out in greater numbers, one here, one there, until it seemed not a cloud was left in the sky.

It was the moment when people in the valleys were lighting candles. At first but one is lit and placed on the table to light the room, or just a pine-splinter or a fire in the hearth, and a brightness from all the windows where the family is gathered shines out into the snowy night but on this evening above all—Holy Night—there would be many more lights to shine upon the presents lying spread out

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