

# Treasures of the Snow

by Patricia St John

## Part 1

### 1 Christmas Eve

It was Christmas Eve, and three people were climbing the steep, white mountainside, the moonlight throwing shadows behind them across the snow. The middle one was a woman in a long skirt with a dark cloak over her shoulders. Clinging to her hand was a black-haired boy of six, who talked all the time with his mouth full. Walking a little way away from them, with her eyes turned to the stars, was a girl of seven. Her hands were folded across her chest, and close to her heart she carried a golden gingerbread bear with eyes made of white icing.

The little boy had also had a gingerbread bear, but he had eaten it all except the back legs. He looked at the girl spitefully. "Mine was bigger than yours," he said.

The girl did not seem upset. "I would not change it," she replied calmly, without turning her head. Then she looked down again with eyes full of love at the beautiful bear in her arms.

How solid he looked, how delicious he smelled, and how brightly he gleamed in the starlight. She would never eat him, never!

Eighty little village children had been given gingerbread bears, but hers had surely been by far the most beautiful.

Yes, she would keep him forever in memory of tonight, and whenever she looked at him she would remember Christmas Eve—the frosty blue sky, the warm glow of the lighted church, the tree decorated with silver stars, the

carols, the crib, and the sweet, sad story of Christmas. It made her want to cry when she thought about the inn where there was no room. She would have opened her door wide and welcomed Mary and Joseph in.

Lucien, the boy, was annoyed by her silence. "I have nearly finished mine," he remarked, scowling. "Let me taste yours, Annette. You have not started it." But Annette shook her head and held her bear a little closer. "I am never going to eat him," she replied. "I am going to keep him forever and ever."

They had come to where the crumbly white path divided. A few hundred yards along the right fork stood a group of chalets with lights shining in their windows and dark barns standing behind them. Annette was nearly home.

Madame Morel hesitated. "Are you all right to run home alone, Annette?" she asked doubtfully, "or shall we take you to the door?"

"Oh, I would much rather go home alone," answered Annette, "and thank you for taking me. Good night, Madame; good night, Lucien."

She turned and ran, in case Madame should change her mind and insist on seeing her to the door. She so badly wanted to be alone.

She wanted to get away from Lucien's chatter and enjoy the silence of the night. How could she think, and look at the stars, when she was having to make polite replies to Madame Morel and Lucien?

She had never been out alone at night before, and even this was a sort of accident. She was supposed to have gone to the church on the sleigh with her parents. They had all been thinking about it and planning it for weeks. But that morning her mother had been taken ill and her father had gone off on the midday train to fetch the doctor from the town up the valley. The doctor had arrived about teatime, but he could not cure her in time to get up and go to church as Annette had hoped he would, so to her great disappointment she had to go instead with Madame Morel from the chalet up the hill. But when she had reached the church it had been so beautiful

that she had forgotten everything but the tree and the magic of Christmas, so it had not mattered so much after all.

The magic stayed with her, and now, as she stood alone among snow and stars, it seemed a pity to go in just yet and break the spell. She hesitated as she reached the steps leading up to the balcony and looked around. Just opposite loomed the cowshed; Annette could hear the beasts moving and munching from the manger.

An exciting idea struck her. She made up her mind in a moment, darted across the sleigh tracks, and lifted the latch of the door. The warm smell of cattle and milk and hay greeted her as she slipped inside. She wriggled against the legs of the chestnut-colored cow and wormed her way into the hayrack. The cow was having supper, but Annette flung her arms around its neck and let it go on munching, just as the cows must have munched when Mary sat among them with her newborn baby in her arms.

She looked down at the manger and imagined Baby Jesus was lying in the straw with the cows, still and quiet, worshipping about Him. Through a hole in the roof she could see one bright star, and she remembered how a star had shone over Bethlehem and guided the wise men to the house where Jesus lay. She could imagine them padding up the valley on their swaying camels. And surely any moment now the door would open softly and the shepherds would come creeping in with little lambs in their arms and offer to cover the child with woolly fleeces. As she leaned further, a great feeling of pity came over her for the homeless baby who had had all the doors shut against him.

“There would have been plenty of room in our chalet,” she whispered, “and yet perhaps after all this is the nicest place. The hay is sweet and clean and Louise’s breath is warm and pleasant. Maybe God chose the best cradle for his baby after all.”

She might have stayed there dreaming all night if it had not been for the gleam of a lantern through the half-open door of the shed and the sound of firm, crunchy footsteps in the snow.

Then she heard her father call her in a quick, hurried voice.

She slipped down from the rack, dodged Louise’s tail, and ran out to him with wide-open arms.

“I went in to wish the cows a happy Christmas,” she said, laughing. “Did you come out to find me?”

“Yes, I did,” he replied, but he was not laughing. His face was pale and serious in the moonlight, and he took her hand and almost dragged her up the steps. “You should have come in at once, with your mother so ill. She has been asking for you for half an hour.”

Annette suddenly felt very sorry, for somehow the Christmas tree had made her forget about everything else, and all the time her mother, whom she loved so much, was lying ill and wanting her. She had thought the doctor would have made her better. She took her hand out from her father’s and ran up the wooden stairs and into her mother’s bedroom.

Neither the doctor nor the village nurse saw her until she had crept up to the bed, for she was a small, slim child who moved almost silently. But her mother saw her and half held out her arms. Annette, without a word, ran into them and hid her face on her mother’s shoulder. She began to cry quietly, for her mother’s face was almost as white as the pillow and it frightened her. Besides, she felt sorry for having been away so long.

“Annette,” whispered her mother, “stop crying. I have a present for you.”

Annette stopped at once. A present? Of course, it was Christmas. She had quite forgotten. Her mother always gave her a present, but she usually had it on New Year’s Day. Wherever could it be? She looked around expectantly.

Her mother turned to the nurse. "Give it to her," she whispered. The nurse pulled back the blanket and lifted out a bundle wrapped in a white shawl. She came around to Annette and held it out to her.

"Your little brother," the nurse explained. "Let us go down by the fire and you shall rock his cradle. We must leave your mother to sleep. Kiss her good night."

"Your little brother," echoed her mother's weak voice. "He is yours, Annette. Bring him up and love him and look after him for me. I give him to you."

Her voice trailed away and she closed her eyes. Annette, too dazed to speak, allowed herself to be led downstairs by the nurse. She sat down on a stool by the stove to rock the wooden cradle where her Christmas present lay covered in shawls and blankets.

She sat very still for a long time staring at the bump that was her little brother. The house was very still, and the Christmas star shone in through the windows as it had shone on that other Christmas baby in the stable at Bethlehem, with Mary sitting watching God's little Son, just as she was sitting by the stove watching her little brother.

She put out gentle fingers and touched the top of his downy head, which was all she could see of him.

Then with a tired sigh she leaned her head against the cradle and let her imagination go where it would—stars, shepherds, little new babies, shut doors, wise men, and gingerbread bears—they all became muddled up in her mind, and she slid gradually onto the floor.

It was here that her father found her an hour later, lying as peacefully asleep as her new baby brother, her bright head resting on the cradle rocker.

"Poor little motherless creatures," he said as he stooped to pick her up. "How shall I ever bring them up without her?"

For Annette's mother had gone to spend Christmas in heaven.

## **2 Grandmother Arrives**

So Daniel Burnier, age three hours, became the special property of Annette Burnier, age seven years.

Of course, the kind village nurse stayed for some time to bathe and feed him, and when she left, her father paid a woman from the village to come and nurse him. But Dani belonged to Annette, and nobody ever spoke of him as anything but Annette's baby.

For once the first great shock of losing her mother was over, Annette gathered up all the love of her sad, lonely little heart and poured it out on her little brother. She held his bottle while he sucked and sat quietly by his cradle in case he should wake and want her. It was Annette who ran to him in the night if he woke or whimpered, and who carried him out onto the balcony at midday so that the sun might shine on him. And with so much love and sunshine surrounding him, the baby grew strong, until there was no other baby of his age in the valley who was as healthy and beautiful. He slept and woke and chuckled and fed and kicked and slept again. In fact, he never gave a moment's worry to anyone.

"He was born under a lucky star," exclaimed a woman from the village, gazing at him thoughtfully.

"He was born under a Christmas star," said Annette solemnly. "I think he will always be good and happy."

And how he grew! By the time the sun was beginning to melt the snow, and the crocuses were pushing up in the pale fields, Annette was having to think about new clothes. As soon as the cows had gone up the mountain, Dani cut his first tooth. As Annette knew nothing about first teeth, and expected no

trouble, the baby himself forgot that it should have been a painful time, so instead of fretting and crying he just giggled and sucked his fists.

Soon Dani was moving around, and his cradle could hold him no longer. He wanted to explore everything from the stove to the balcony steps, and Annette spent an anxious few weeks keeping him out of danger. In the end she decided to tie him by one pink foot to the leg of the kitchen table and he explored in circles, and life became more peaceful.

It was just about this time that Annette, slipping down to the living room after tucking Dani up in his cradle, found her father sitting by the stove with his head in his hands, looking old and tired and grey. He had often looked old and tired since his wife died, but tonight he looked worse than usual. Annette, who tried hard to make up for her mother, climbed onto his knee and laid her soft cheek against his bony brown one.

“What is the matter, Papa?” she asked. “Are you very tired tonight? Shall I make you a cup of coffee?”

He looked down at her curiously for a minute or two. She was so small and light, like a golden-haired fairy, but how sensible and womanly she was! Somehow during the past year he had made a habit of telling her his troubles and even listening to her serious advice. So now he pulled her head against his shoulder and told her all about it.

“We shall have to sell some of the cows, little daughter,” he explained sadly. “We must have some more money or there will be no winter boots for you.”

Annette lifted her head and stared at him in horror. They only had ten cows, and each one was a personal friend. Any one of them would be missed terribly. She must think of a better way to earn money than that.

“You see,” her father went on, “other men have wives to look after their little ones. I have to pay a woman to nurse Dani, and it is expensive. Yet someone must look after him, poor little lad.”

Annette sat up very straight and tossed back her plaits. She knew exactly what to do, and all she had to do was make her father agree.

“Papa,” she said very slowly and distinctly, “you do not need Mademoiselle Mottier any longer. I am eight and a half now, and I can look after Dani as well as anyone. You will not have to pay me anything, and then we can keep the cows. Why, think, Papa, how unhappy they would be to leave us! I do believe Paquerette would cry!”

“But you must go to school,” said her father rather doubtfully. “It would not be right to keep you at home, and anyhow it is against the law.

The schoolmaster would want to know why, and he would tell the mayor and we should get into trouble.”

“But it is much more important to look after Dani,” answered Annette, wrinkling her forehead, “and if you explained to the master, he would understand. He is a kind man, and he is a friend of yours. Let’s try it and see what happens. I will do my lessons here in the kitchen, Papa, every morning, and Dani can play on the floor. In any case, it’s only for four years. When Dani is five he will go to the infant school, and I can take him down and go to the big school.”

Her father continued to look at her thoughtfully. Although she was small, she was as clever as a woman in looking after the baby, and she was very handy about the house. But she could not do the cooking, or knit the stockings, or do the rough heavy work. And besides, she ought to have some schooling. He sat thinking in silence for a full five minutes. Then he had an idea.

“I wonder if your grandmother would come,” he said suddenly. “She is old and has rheumatics, and her sight is poor, but she could do the cooking and mending perhaps, and she could help you with your lessons in the evenings. It would be company for you, too, when I am up the mountain. You’re a little girl to be left alone all day long. If I write a letter to the schoolmaster telling

him that Grandmother will give you a bit of teaching, maybe he will agree to keep quiet about it.”

Annette climbed off his knee, and fetched two sheets of paper and a pen and ink from the cupboard.

“Write to them both now,” she said, “and I will post them when I go for the bread. Then we shall get the answers nice and quickly.”

Both letters were answered that week. The first answer was Grandmother herself, who arrived by train, bent and crippled, with a wooden box roped up very securely. Annette went down to meet her and watched the little electric train twisting its way up the valley between the hay fields like a caterpillar. It was rather late, the driver explained angrily, because a cow had strayed onto the line and the train had had to stop. He moved off so quickly that Grandmother hardly had time to get down, and her wooden box had to be thrown out after her while the train was moving away.

Grandmother, however, did not seem at all worried. She leaned on her stick and wanted to know how she was going to get up the hill. Annette, who knew nothing about rheumatism, suggested that they should walk, but Grandmother said, “Nonsense, child,” and in the end they got a lift in an empty farm cart that had brought cheeses down to the train and was now going back up the mountain.

The road was stony, the wheels wooden, and the mule uncertain, and Annette enjoyed the ride very much more than Grandmother did. But the old woman gritted her teeth and made no complaint. She only let out a tired sigh of relief when she found herself safely on the sofa by the stove, with a cushion at her aching back and Annette bustling about getting her some tea.

Dani came out from under the table, getting along on his bottom. He stuck three fingers in his mouth and laughed at Grandmother, who put on her glasses to see him better. They sat for some moments staring at each other,

her dim old eyes meeting his bright blue ones, and then Dani threw back his head and laughed again.

“That child will wear out his trousers,” said Grandmother, taking a piece of bread and butter and cherry jam. “He should be taught to crawl.”

She said no more until she had finished her tea, and then she flicked the crumbs from her black skirt and got up, leaning heavily on her stick.

“So,” she remarked, “I have come. What I can I will do; what I cannot you must do for me. Now, Annette, turn that baby the right way up and come and show me around the kitchen.” And from that moment Grandmother did what she could, Annette did the rest, and the household ran like clockwork. All except for Dani, who continued to move round and round the table legs on his bottom in spite of Grandmother.

So after a few days Annette was sent to the village to buy a yard of thick, black felt, and Grandmother sewed round patches onto the seats of all Dani’s trousers. He did look rather odd in them, but they served their purpose very well indeed, and after all they were hardly ever seen because they were nearly always underneath him.

The second answer arrived in the shape of the old village schoolmaster, who walked wearily up from the valley late on Saturday afternoon to call on Monsieur Burnier. He was milking cows and saw him coming out the cowshed window. He did not want to argue with the schoolmaster because he was afraid of getting the worst of it, so he ran out the back door and hid in the hayloft. Annette, who was also looking out of the living room window, saw her father’s legs disappear up the ladder just as the schoolmaster came around the corner, and she understood perfectly what was expected of her.

She opened the door and invited the master in, offering him most politely the best chair with a smart red seat. He was very fond of Annette, and Annette was very fond of him, but today they were a little bit shy of each

other. Grandmother folded her hands and sat up straight like an old warhorse ready for battle.

"I have come to see your father," began the schoolmaster, coughing nervously, "to discuss his letter about you being away from school. I cannot say that I think it right for a little girl of your age. Besides, it is against the law of the State."

"The State will know nothing about it unless you choose to mention her," said Grandmother. "Besides, I will teach the child myself. I do not think it right for a little boy of Dani's age to be left without his sister to look after him."

"But can't you look after him?" suggested the schoolmaster gently.

"Certainly not," snapped Grandmother. "My sight is so poor that I cannot see where he is going, and my arms are so rheumatically that I cannot pick him up if he falls. Besides, he moves like an express train, and I am nearly eighty. You do not know what you are talking about."

The schoolmaster gazed at Dani, who was face-downwards in the woodpile eating shavings. There was nothing much to be seen of him but the black felt patches and his dimpled brown legs. The master realized Grandmother would not be able to manage him.

The schoolmaster didn't know what to do. Perhaps his old friend Monsieur Burnier would be more reasonable. He turned to Annette. "When will your father be in, Annette?" he asked.

"I don't know. He has gone out and he may not be back for some time. It is not worth your while to wait, monsieur," replied Annette steadily, knowing perfectly well that her father would return just as soon as the master disappeared down the valley.

The schoolmaster sat thinking. He was a good man, and really cared about Annette and his duty toward her. Yet he did not want to give up his old friend

into the hands of the law, especially when it was quite clear that the child was needed at home. At last he had an idea. He did not think that it was a very good one, but it was better than nothing.

"I will let the matter rest," he said at last, "on one condition only. And that is that every Saturday morning, when Annette comes down for the bread, she shall visit me in my house and I will test her. If I find she is making progress I will say no more, but if I find she is learning nothing then I shall feel it my duty to insist that she attends school like other children."

He tried to speak sternly, but Annette beamed at him, and Dani, sensing a family victory, suddenly turned himself the right way up and crowed like a cock. The schoolmaster looked at the two fair, motherless children for a moment, smiled very tenderly, and said good-bye. As soon as he had disappeared into the pine wood Annette ran to the door and called to her father to come down from the hay loft, and she told him the good news.

So it was that every Saturday morning Annette rapped at the front door of the tall, white house where the schoolmaster lived, with her bread-basket on her back and her tattered exercise book in her hand, and the schoolmaster joyfully let her in. In the winter they sat by the stove, ate spiced fruit tart, and drank hot chocolate, and in the summer they sat on the veranda and ate cherries and drank apple juice. After that the tests would begin.

They always started with arithmetic, but Annette was not good at arithmetic. As she never knew the answers, the schoolmaster would feel, after a few minutes, that it was a waste of time to ask any more questions, so they would pass on to history, and here Annette never needed any questions. She would lean forward, clasping her knees, and relate how William Tell had won the freedom of Switzerland, and how the brave little son had stood still while the apple on his head was split by the whizzing arrow. Annette knew all about the brave Swiss heroes, and she and the schoolmaster would look at each other with shining eyes, for they both loved courage. After this they

would turn to the Bible, which Annette was beginning to know quite well, for she read it aloud to Grandmother every evening.

By this time the schoolmaster would have forgotten to tell Annette off because she couldn't do her sums, and instead he would give her fresh books to read and would fill the gaps in her bread basket with spiced gingerbread hearts and knobby chocolate sticks wrapped in silver paper. Then they would say good-bye to one another, and he would stand at the door and watch her until she reached the edge of the pine wood, because here she always turned around to wave.

Years ago the schoolmaster had loved a golden-haired girl who lived high up in the mountain, and he had bought this white house and made it beautiful for her. But she went out to pick soldanellas and was killed by a treacherous fall of late snow. So the schoolmaster really lived alone. But in his dreams she was always there, and also a little daughter with corn-colored plaits and eyes like blue gentians who sat on a stool close to his knees. And on Saturday mornings that part of the school-master's dream came true.

### **3 A Very Special Christmas Present**

It was Christmas Eve again, five years after the beginning of this story, and Dani was now five years old. It was a great day, because for the first time in his life he had been considered old enough to go down to the church with Annette and to see the tree.

He sat up in bed, drinking a bowl of potato soup, his blond hair only just showing above his enormous white feather duvet, which was almost as fat as it was wide. Annette sat beside him, and in her hand she held a shining gingerbread bear.

"I'm sorry, Dani," she said firmly, "but you cannot have it in the bed with you. It would be all crumbs by the morning. Look, I will put him here on the cupboard and the moon will shine in on him and you will be able to see him."

Dani opened his mouth to argue, but changed his mind and filled his mouth with potato soup instead. It was unfair of his sister to say he couldn't hug his bear all night, but, after all, there were lots of other things to be happy about. Dani was always happy from the moment he opened his eyes in the morning to the moment he closed them at night. Tonight he was especially happy because he had heard the bells and seen the glittering Christmas tree and been out in the snow by starlight. He handed his empty bowl to Annette and cuddled down under his feather duvet.

"Do you think," he asked, "that Father Christmas would come if I put my slippers on the window-sill?"

Annette looked rather startled and wondered where he had heard of such a thing, for in Switzerland Father Christmas is not such a well-known person as he is in England. Swiss children have their Christmas bear from the tree on Christmas Eve, and presents from their family on New Year's Day. On Christmas Day they go to church and have a feast, but few children get a present.

"They said," went on Dani, "that he came on a sleigh drawn by reindeer and left presents in good children's slippers. Am I a good child, Annette?"

"Yes," answered Annette, kissing him, "you are a very good child. But you will not get a present from Father Christmas. He only goes to rich little boys."

"Aren't I a rich little boy?" asked Dani, who thought he had everything he wanted in life.

"No," replied Annette firmly, "you are not. We are poor, and Papa has to work hard, and Grandmother and I have to go on and on patching your clothes because we cannot afford to buy new ones."

Dani chuckled. "I don't mind being poor," he said firmly. "I like it. Now tell me a story, Annette. Tell me about Christmas and the little baby and the cows and the great big shining star."

So Annette told the story, and Dani, who should have been asleep, listened with his eyes wide open.

“I should have liked sleeping in the hay better than in the inn,” he said when she had finished. “I should like to sleep with Paquerette.

I think it would be fun.”

Annette shook her head. “No, you wouldn’t,” she replied, “not in the winter without a duvet. You would be very cold and unhappy and long for a warm bed. It was cruel of them to say there was no room for a little new baby—they could have made room somehow.”

The cuckoo clock on the stairs struck nine. Annette jumped up.

“You must go to sleep, Dani,” she said, “and I must make Papa’s hot chocolate.”

She kissed him, tucked him in, put out the light, and left him. But Dani did not go to sleep. Instead, he lay staring out into the darkness, thinking hard.

He was not a greedy little boy, but he could not help thinking that if Father Christmas happened to come to their house it would be a great pity not to be ready. Of course, it was unlikely he would come, since Dani was only a poor child, but on the other hand it was just possible that he might. And, after all, it wouldn’t hurt to put out the little slipper even if there was nothing in it in the morning.

The question was where to put it. He could not put it on the windowsill, because he could not open the high, barred shutters by himself. Nor could he put it outside the front door, because the family was all sitting in the front room. The only place was just outside the back door on the little strip of snow that divided the kitchen from the hay barn. Of course Father Christmas probably wouldn’t see it there, but still, there was no harm in trying.

Dani’s mind was made up. He crept out of bed and tiptoed carefully across the bedroom and down the stairs. He went barefoot, because he did not want anyone to hear him, and in his hand he carried one small scarlet slipper lined with rabbit fur. Annette had made the slippers, and Dani felt Father Christmas might notice them as they were bright and rather unusual.

It was a struggle to lift the great wooden bar on the kitchen door, and Dani had to stand on a stool before he managed it. He had a moment’s bright glimpse of snow and starlight, and then the bitter cold air struck him like a knife and almost took his breath away. He quickly pushed the slipper onto the step and shut the door again as quickly as he could.

Back to bed scuttled Dani with a light heart. He cuddled down under the bedclothes, curled himself into a ball, and buried his nose in the pillows. He had already said his proper prayers with Annette before he got into bed, but now he had a little bit to add.

“Please, dear God,” he whispered, “make Father Christmas and his reindeer come this way. And make him see my red slipper, and make him put a little present inside even if I am only a poor boy.”

And then the bump that was Dani rolled over sideways and fell asleep to dream, like thousands of other children all over the world, of the old gentleman in the red cloak careening over the snow to the jangle of reindeer bells.

He woke very early, because children always wake early on Christmas morning, and of course the first thing he thought of was the scarlet slipper. It was such an exciting thought that his heart beat with great thumps, and he peeped over the top of his duvet to see whether Annette was awake.

But Annette was fast asleep, with her long, fair hair spread all over the pillow, and for all Dani knew it might still have been the middle of the night. In fact, he had almost decided that it must still be the middle of the night, when he heard his father clattering the milk churns in the kitchen below.



So it must be Christmas morning, and Dani must get down quickly or his father would open the door and find his present before he did. Somehow Dani was absolutely sure that there would be a present. All his doubts of the night before had vanished in his sleep.

He crept out of the room without waking Annette and slipped into the kitchen where his father was cleaning out the churns.

Father did not see Dani until he felt two arms clasping his legs and looked down. There was his son, rosy, bright-eyed, and with his hair all scruffy, looking up at him.

“Has Father Christmas been?” asked Dani.

Surely his father, who stayed up so late and got up so early, must have heard the bells and the crunch of hoofs in the snow.

“Father Christmas?” repeated his father in a puzzled voice. “Why, no, he didn’t come here. We live too far up the mountain for him.”

But Dani shook his head. “We don’t,” he said eagerly. “His reindeer can go anywhere, and I expect you were asleep and didn’t hear him. Open the door for me, Papa, in case he has left me a present.”

His father wished he had known of this earlier so he could have put a chocolate stick on the step, for he hated to disappoint his boy. However, he had to open the back door to roll the churns across to the stable, so he lifted the latch. In an instant Dani had dived between his legs like an eager rabbit, and was kneeling by his slipper in the snow.

Then he gave a wild, high-pitched scream of excitement and dived back again into the kitchen with his slipper in his arms.

A miracle had happened. Father Christmas had been and had left a present, and in all his happy five years of life Dani had never had such a perfect present before.

For curled up in the furry lining of his scarlet slipper was a tiny white kitten, with blue eyes and one black smudge on her nose. It was a weak, thin little kitten, very nearly dead with cold and hunger, and if it had not been for the warmth of the rabbit fur it would certainly have been quite dead. But it still breathed lightly, and Dani’s father, forgetting all about the churns, knelt down on the kitchen floor beside his son and set about making it better.

First he wrapped it in a piece of warm flannel and laid it against the hot wall of the stove. Then they heated milk in a pan and fed it with a spoon, as it was far too weak to suck. At first it only spluttered and dribbled, but after a while it put out a soft pink tongue and its dim blue eyes grew bright and interested. Then, after about five minutes or so, it twitched its tail and stretched itself. Finally, having had quite enough to eat, it curled itself back into a ball and set up a faint, contented purr.

All this time Dani and his father had not spoken one word, because they were so intent on what they were doing. But now that their work was successfully finished for the time being, they sat back and looked at each other. Dani’s cheeks were the color of poppies and his eyes shone like stars.

“I knew he would come,” he whispered, “but I never guessed he would bring such a beautiful present. It is the most beautiful present I have ever had in all my life. What shall I call it, Papa?”

“You had better call it Klaus after the Christmas saint,” said Papa. It certainly seemed like a miracle.

Papa left the sleeping kitten in Dani’s care and went to the stables. Sitting in the dim light with his head pressed against the sides of the cows and the milk frothing into the pails, he tried to think of some explanation. Of course the kitten had strayed across from the barn, but it did seem wonderful that it should have found Dani’s slipper and been there all ready for him. After a while Dani’s father decided that perhaps it was not so wonderful after all. Surely it was natural on Christmas night that the Father in heaven, thinking of

His own Son, would not have wanted to disappoint a motherless child on earth. Surely He had guided the steps of the white kitten for the sake of the baby born in Bethlehem. Dani's father paused for a moment in his milking and thanked God on behalf of his little son.

Annette appeared in the kitchen shortly afterward to get breakfast and stood still in amazement at the sight of Dani in his nightshirt and overcoat watching over a white kitten. She was about to ask questions when Dani put his finger on his lips to ask her to be quiet, for he was very much afraid of waking the kitten. Then he tiptoed over to her, pulled her down on a chair, climbed onto her knee, and whispered the whole strange story into her ear.

Annette had no difficulty explaining it to herself. She believed that such a pure white kitten must surely have dropped straight from heaven. She sat down on the floor and gathered Dani and the kitten onto her lap, and here Grandmother found them half an hour later when she came in expecting to find her Christmas coffee steaming on the table.

#### **4 The Quarrel Begins**

Lucien lay under his large feather duvet and wished it was not time to get up.

His bed was so warm and the air outside so cold. He sighed and cuddled down again under the bedclothes.

"Lucien!" His mother's voice sounded really angry, and Lucien jumped up in a hurry. This was the third time she had called him and he had pretended not to hear. He could still get up and be in time for school, although he would not have time to do the milking. But, after all, if he didn't do the milking, his mother would have to, and these days she did it more often than not.

"Other boys don't have to milk before they go to school," muttered Lucien as he buttoned his jacket, "and I don't see why I should always have to work harder than everyone else just because I don't happen to have a father."

He went downstairs looking sulky and defiant and sat down to gobble up his bread and coffee. His mother came in from the stable when he was halfway through.

"Lucien," she said sharply, "why don't you get up when I call you? It happens day after day! You're no help to me in the mornings at all. Your sister gets up early enough and goes off to work without any fuss. I know other boys have fathers, but we only have three cows and we can't live without them. You're a big, strong boy now and it's shameful that you should leave all the early work to me like this."

Lucien scowled. "I work at night," he whined. "I never get any play. I have to fetch in the wood, and I have farther up the hill to come than any of the others, and I fetch down the fodder for you and clean the shed on Saturdays."

His mother sniffed. "I've usually done most of it by the time you get home from school," she replied. "I know you don't get as much time in winter as other children, but I do all I can, and this early-morning milking is wearing me out. You're quite old enough to do it now, and in future you're to get up properly. Now hurry off or you'll be late for school."

Lucien struggled into his coat and turned away with a sulky good-bye. He unhitched the sled and went whizzing away into the frosty dark. Except for the smooth sound of the sled runners, the world was quite silent, as if it was holding its breath before the coming of dawn. Usually Lucien felt in awe of the greatness of it, but today he was too cross to think about it.

"It's so unfair," he muttered. "Everyone's against me. It's not my fault I don't get my lessons done properly. I'm always having to work at home. It's reading today, and I suppose I shall be bottom again, and that show-off Annette Burnier will be top. I bet she doesn't have to milk cows before school. Oh!"

He tried to stop, but it was too late; he had reached the fork in the path, and he had been so busy feeling cross that he had not looked where he was going. He had bumped straight into Annette's sled sideways on and sent her right into the ditch.

It was careless sledding, and Lucien, crimson in the face and truly upset, jumped off his sled to help, but Annette was before him. She had never liked Lucien much, and she was badly shaken. She turned on him, waist deep in snow, her eyes blazing.

"You great clumsy donkey," she shouted, half crying. "Can't you look where you are going? Look at my book—all my work is smudged and torn! I shall tell the master it's all your fault."

Lucien, who was never good at keeping his temper, lost it at once.

"All right," he shouted back. "There's no need to make such a fuss. I didn't do it on purpose."

Anyone would think I'd killed you instead of tearing your old exercise book. It won't hurt you to lose your marks. I'm going on."

He jumped onto his sled and whizzed away, arriving just in time for school. Inside he felt really bad about it, but his manners were never very good at the best of times, and he tried not to think of what he had done.

"She's only got to get out," he muttered, "and I don't suppose she would have let me help her in any case. Thank goodness I'm in time for school. I've been late twice this week already."

But getting out of that snowdrift was a very different matter from getting in, and poor Annette had quite a struggle. By the time she had managed to get herself out and collect her books, she was really crying—crying with cold and shock and sore knees and, most of all, crying with rage. When she crept into school a quarter of an hour later, her eyes were red and her nose was blue

and her poor raw hands and knees were grazed and bleeding. With her torn, wet books, she looked a sorry sight.

"Annette," said the master, quite concerned, "what has happened to you, my child?"

For a few seconds Annette fought hard with the temptation to tell tales, but the sight of Lucien sitting so smug and safe in his desk was too much for her.

"It was Lucien," she burst out angrily. "He knocked me into a ditch, and went off and left me. I couldn't get out." She stuffed her knuckles into her eyes and began crying again. She was really very badly shaken, and oh, so angry!

The class all felt sorry for her and angry with Lucien, who hung his head and looked very sullen indeed.

The master caned Lucien for behaving in such an unkind way, which cheered Annette up and made her feel much better. Later, when the marks were read out, Annette came out top and felt better still.

Lucien came out bottom and was told to stay in and do extra work after school. So he sat through morning school and lunchtime with the others, and came back to afternoon school and sat on alone when the others had gone. All the time the rage and hatred and bad temper in his heart were getting bigger and bigger till he felt as if he was going to burst.

At last he was let out from school and wandered up the hill dragging his sled behind him. What a terrible day it had been! His mother had been cross with him, Annette had told tales about him, the master had caned him, and he had come out bottom. Was ever a boy so badly treated?

The shadows on the fields were strangely blue that night. High up, the mountaintops were still sunlit, with ragged wisps of cloud trailing about them. The quietness of the mountains seemed to hold out its arms to Lucien. Children and Nature are very close together, and often Nature's silence can do more to heal angry, unhappy children than any human words can. So, as

he trudged up the hill, Lucien's rage began to change to a sort of weary misery. Thinking he was alone, he stuffed his knuckles into his eyes and began to cry a little.

Then he suddenly discovered that he was not alone. He was again at the place where the path divided, and a little boy was standing in the snow looking up at him in great astonishment. A happy, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed little boy, his fair hair stuck out like a thatch from under his woolly cap, his face glowing with good health and good humour.

It was Dani, making a snowman. He had just put on the head and was arranging the eyes. It was the best snowman Dani had ever made, and he was just about to fetch Annette to look at it.

"Why are you crying?" asked Dani.

"I'm not crying," retorted Lucien angrily.

"Ooh, you are," replied Dani, "and I know why. It's because the master caned you; Annette told us."

He did not mean to be cruel, for he was usually a kind little boy. But Lucien had been nasty to Annette, and that, to Dani, was quite unforgivable.

Lucien's temper flared up instantly, and lifting his foot he kicked Dani's snowman into little bits. Dani lifted up his voice and gave a loud howl of alarm and disappointment.

Annette, crossing from the shed, saw what was happening in an instant. She flew down the path like a young tigress and slapped Lucien full in the face. Lucien lifted his hand to hit her back, but the sight of Monsieur Burnier coming out of the chalet with a bucket made him think better of it. Everything was clearly against him.

"Sneak! Telltale! Coward!" shouted Lucien. "Baby! Coming into school crying like that."

"Great, rough bully," shouted back Annette, "leaving me in the ditch like that, and then kicking poor Dani's snowman. He never did you any harm. Why can't you leave him alone? I'm jolly glad you were caned! Come on, Dani, come home."

She marched angrily off up the path, with Dani trotting behind her. At the door of the chalet she turned and noticed a patch of pink sky behind the far mountains. Once, Grandmother had taught her a text from the Bible, which said, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."\* She suddenly thought of it now. Well, there was still time —Lucien was still there. After all, it was nasty of her to have told tales. She hesitated.

But he'd been much worse than she had. It was up to him to say he was sorry. If she asked him to forgive her it would seem as if she was to blame, and of course she wasn't—oh, no, not in the least! She went in and slammed the door behind her.

Lucien went slowly home with his face stinging from that slap, more furious than he had been all day long. But, as he walked, he glanced up and noticed a wonderful thing. The clouds had come up in a purple bank, blotting out the mountain behind his home, but just in one spot they had broken, and in that gap Lucien could see the snowy crest, radiant with golden light.

He was used to winter sunsets, but the beauty of this one made Lucien catch his breath and look again. The pure, high radiance suddenly made his anger seem a poor, small thing, not worth hanging on to. How nice it would be to start again! There was still time to catch Annette if he ran.

But no! Annette was a show-off and would probably take no notice of him. And anyhow, why should he apologize to a girl?

So, because neither would be the first to forgive, the quarrel began—a quarrel that was to last for a very long time and was to bring with it a great deal of unhappiness for both of them.

As Lucien stood there thinking, a cloud blew across the gap, and the radiant mountaintop was hidden from view.

## 5 The Accident

Annette's birthday took place in March, and Dani made plans about it for weeks beforehand, for nothing pleased Dani so much as giving presents. Some people might have said his presents were not worth very much, but Dani thought they were beautiful. He kept them in a secret cupboard meant for storing wood. Annette knew that she must never go there, and pretended to think that it was full of wood chips for the stove.

Already the cupboard contained a family of fir cones, painted all different colors and arranged in a row. Father fir cone was red, Mother fir cone was green, and there were five little fir cones painted bright yellow. Then there was a beautiful picture Dani had drawn of Paquerette, the light brown cow, grazing in a field of enormous blue gentians nearly as big as herself. There was a pure white pebble and a little bracelet made from the plaited hairs of the bull's tail. And sometimes there was a chocolate stick, but it never stayed long because Dani loved chocolate sticks and usually ate them himself after a day or two.

But now the great day was nearly here, and tomorrow would be the real birthday. Dani's curly head was full of it, and as soon as Annette had gone to school, Dani explained his plan to Grandmother. She was sitting on the veranda in the spring sunshine, chopping dandelion leaves for that evening's soup, when her little grandson came up and rested his elbows on her knee.

"Grandmother," announced Dani, "I'm going up the mountain to where the snow has melted to pick snow drops and crocuses for Annette's birthday.

I will put them on the breakfast table with all my presents."

His grandmother, who hated him being out of her sight, looked doubtful.

"You are too little to go up the mountain alone," she replied. "The slopes are slippery and you will fall into the snowdrifts."

"Klaus will go with me," said Dani earnestly. Grandmother chuckled. "A lot of good may she do you," she replied, and then gave a little shriek because Klaus, without the slightest warning, had leaped into Grandmother's lap and begun rubbing her white head against her, purring lovingly.

"Klaus knew we were talking about her," said Dani. "She knows everything, and she is just telling you that she will look after me up the mountain."

He picked his kitten up around the middle, kissed Grandmother, and stomped off down the balcony steps, singing a happy little song. Crash went his hobnailed boots, and his voice rose loud and clear.

His grandmother strained her dim old eyes to watch him until he was out of sight, then she gave a little sigh and went on with her dandelions. He was growing so big and independent, and in a very short time he must start at the infant school. He was a baby no longer.

Dani trotted on up the slopes, and Klaus walked carefully behind him, for although she was a Christmas kitten she hated walking in the snow. It was a beautiful spring day and the snowdrifts on the mountains were beginning to melt. Already the fields were green beside the river in the valley, and the cows were grazing out of doors.

Klaus continued to pick her way until she reached the low stone wall at the edge of the field. On the other side of this wall was a rocky ravine with a rushing river at the bottom. In summer the rocks were like fairy gardens, with wild flowers growing all over them, but now they were bare and brown. Klaus sat on the wall and fluffed out her fur in the sunshine. Then she started to wash herself all over, which was unnecessary because she was already almost as white as the snow.

Dani wandered from yellow patch to yellow patch gathering flowers. The field was bright with pale mauve crocuses and bright primulas that followed the windings of the streams in the grass like little pink paths. Dani loved them, but what he loved best of all were the snow drops. They could not even wait for the snow to melt, but pushed right up through the frozen edges of the drifts, their frail stems covered in ice. Their flowers, like fringed white bells, hung downward.

Dani loved all beautiful things, and in this field of flowers he was as happy as a child could be. The sun shone on him and the flowers smiled up at him, and Dani told himself stories about tiny goblins who lived in caves under the snow. Their beards were white and their caps were red and they were full of mischief. Sometimes if there was no one looking they came out and swung on the snow drop bells— Annette had said so.

For this reason he approached each fresh snow drop clump on tiptoe and kept his eyes fixed on their bowed heads. That was why he never heard footsteps approaching until they were quite close, and then he looked up suddenly with a little start.

Lucien stood close behind him, with a rather unpleasant look on his face and a strange gleam of triumph in his eyes.

Lucien had not forgotten the slap that Annette had given him when Dani had screamed for help. Ever since that day he had planned some revenge, and when he had seen Dani's little figure standing alone in the high pasture he had hurried to the spot. Of course he would not hurt such a tiny child, but it would be fun to tease and annoy him, and pay him back for telling tales. At least he could take his flowers from him.

"Who are you picking those for?" demanded Lucien.

"For Annette," replied Dani firmly. He had a feeling that Lucien would not like this answer, but Annette had told him that he must always speak the truth, even when he was frightened.

Lucien gave a horrid laugh. "I hate Annette," he announced.

"She is a proud, stuck-up show-off. But at school she is hopeless. The little ones in the infant school are better at sums than she is. She knows no more than her own cows. Give those flowers to me; she shall not have them!"

Dani was so shocked at this speech that he went bright pink and put his flowers behind his back. How could anyone hate Annette? Annette, who was so beautiful and so good and so clever and so wise. Dani, who had never heard of jealousy, could not understand it.

"You can't have them," said Dani, holding the bunch tightly in his small hands. "They are mine."

"I shall take them," replied Lucien. "You are only a baby and you can't fight against me. I shall do as I please to you. You are a little telltale and I shall pay you back."

He snatched the bunch roughly from Dani's grasp and flung them on the ground and trampled on them. Dani stared for a moment at the crushed snow drops and bruised crocuses, and then burst into a loud howl. He had spent the whole happy afternoon gathering those flowers, and now they were all wasted. Then he flung himself on Lucien and began beating him with his small fists.

"I shall tell my daddy," he shouted. "I shall go straight home and tell him this very minute and he will come to your house and he will beat you. You are a cruel, wicked boy."

Now this was exactly what Lucien did not wish to happen, for, like most bullies, he was cowardly and was afraid of Dani's father. Dani's father was as tall and strong as a giant, and any ill treatment of his son would certainly make him furious. Lucien held Dani firmly by the wrists to stop him punching and looked around the field, wondering what he could do to stop the little boy from telling his father.

He suddenly spotted Klaus sunning herself on the wall, and he had an idea. He pushed Dani away and walked quickly towards the ravine.

Dani, who thought his tormentor had left him, wiped away the tears with the back of his hand and began picking fresh flowers as fast as he could. Lucien or no Lucien, Annette's birthday table must be bright and beautiful.

Suddenly Lucien's voice came ringing across the field. Dani looked up quickly, and what he saw made him feel quite sick for a moment. Lucien was standing by the wall, holding Klaus out at arm's length by the scruff of her neck—holding her right over the dark ravine with the rushing torrent of melted ice down below.

"Unless you come here at once and promise not to tell tales to your father," called Lucien, "I shall drop your kitten into the ravine."

Dani began to run, stumbling blindly over the snowdrifts, but his legs were trembling and he could not run fast. The thought of Klaus being carried away helpless in that swirling brown water filled him with such horror that his mouth went dry and he could not cry out. He only knew that he must get there and snatch his kitten out of the grasp of that wicked boy and never, never let it go again.

Now let it be said here, right at the beginning of this story, that Lucien never for one moment meant to drop Klaus. He was unkind, and a bully, but he was not a murderer. But Klaus was not used to being held by the scruff of the neck, and after a moment or two she began to struggle. Finding that Lucien did not let her go, she struggled more violently, and then finally, getting frantic, she did what she had never done before. She put up her front paw and gave Lucien a sharp scratch.

Lucien, who was watching Dani's stumbling progress, was taken by surprise and let go. Klaus dropped like a stone into the ravine, just as Dani, white and tearful, reached the wall.

Dani did not hesitate a single moment. He gave a shriek like some small, terrified animal caught in a trap and hurled himself over the low wall.

Lucien, quite paralyzed for a few seconds by what he had done, had time to grab hold of him and pull him back.

After that, everything happened in a few seconds. Klaus had not fallen into the water. She had stuck fast on a ledge of overhanging rock and clung there, mewling pitifully. An older child might have reached her safely and scrambled back, but Dani was only five. The surface of the rock was wet and Dani's feet slipped just as he reached his kitten. He gave another scream—a scream that haunted Lucien for years to come—and disappeared over the edge.

If Lucien had not been half stupid with panic, he would have scrambled down after him and peered over into the ravine. But he believed Dani must be dead, and to see the body of the child carried away by the water, down toward the waterfall, was more than he could bear. He sank down on the grass in a limp little heap and covered his face with his arm. Had Annette seen him at that moment, even she might have realized that Lucien had certainly been punished.

"Dani is drowned," he moaned over and over again. "I have killed him. What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

Gradually a cowardly idea came into his mind, and he sprang up and looked around wildly. Time was getting on. People would soon come and look for Dani, and then they would find him and everyone would know that he was a murderer. No one so far knew that he had had anything to do with the accident, and if he hurried home and behaved as if nothing had happened, no one would ever know. He must escape.

He ran like a hunted rabbit into the shelter of the pinewood with his heart beating furiously and his head throbbing. He dared not go home just yet, but he made his way around by lonely paths, so that if anyone should see him coming it would look as though he had come in another direction. Every few

minutes he thought he heard footsteps following and leaped around to look. But there was no one there.

At last he reached his own back door, and here he stopped. No, he could not go in. He could not face his mother, who believed in him, with that dreadful secret in his heart. Surely she would see it in his face. He could not look the same as before. He was a murderer.

Perhaps later he would summon up the courage to face her, but not yet, for his teeth were chattering, and she would ask what was the matter. In the meantime he must hide. He looked around wildly for some place and saw the ladder leaning against the barn where the straw was stored in the attic above the cowshed. Up the ladder went Lucien, and flinging himself face downward on the straw he sobbed as though his heart would break.

## **6 The Rescue**

Grandmother finished shredding the dandelions and then, leaning heavily on her stick, went back to the house and sat down in her chair. She was very, very tired, and soon her head nodded onto her chest and she fell asleep.

Grandmother was more lame than ever by now, and nearly blind, and she was usually very tired, but she loved her two grandchildren greatly and was going to work for them as long as she possibly could. So she continued to cook with crippled hands and to mend with strained, aching eyes. Annette never realized, for she was only twelve and Grandmother never complained. If we work because we love someone, it doesn't seem too difficult.

Grandmother slept much longer than usual.

Annette had gone down to the village shop, and Papa was up in the forest cutting and stacking logs. She had meant to mend Dani's white woollen socks and put patches on the elbows of his blue jacket, but she was much too tired.

She just folded her twisted old hands on her lap and went on sleeping—even the cuckoo jumped out of the clock and struck three without waking her.

It was nearly four when Grandmother woke and looked at the clock, and then she gave a little cry of alarm and surprise.

Dani had gone out at half past two and had not yet returned. Where could he be?

"Dani," she called out sharply, for he might be hiding. Perhaps in a moment he would tumble out of the cupboard, as cheeky and mischievous as usual.

But there was no answer. Grandmother hobbled onto the veranda and shaded her dim eyes. Perhaps she would catch sight of him stomping home, and how she would scold him for being so late!

A figure appeared around the cowshed, but it was not Dani. It was Annette with her basket on her back and a long, golden loaf sticking out of the top of it. She had a half holiday from school and had been shopping. She waved to Grandmother and came running up the steps.

"Annette," said Grandmother, "take your basket off and go and search for your little brother. He went out to pick flowers nearly an hour and a half ago and he hasn't come back."

Annette let down her basket with a thump. She thought that her grandmother was rather fussy about Dani. What harm could come to him, wandering about in the fields where anyone he might meet knew and loved him?

"He will be up in the woods with Papa," Annette replied. "I'll go up and see in a few minutes. Let me have a piece of bread and jam first, Grandma. I'm hungry."

She broke off a thick hunk from the loaf and spread it with butter and jam while her grandmother went back to the balcony and peered up the path



again. While she was eating, firm footsteps were heard down the hillside and Papa came into sight.

“Where is Dani?” cried Grandmother. “Hasn’t he been with you, Pierre? Didn’t you meet him up the mountain?”

“Dani?” repeated Papa in astonishment. “He hasn’t been near me. When did he leave you, Mother?”

Grandmother stopped trying to hide her worry. “He left me over an hour and a half ago,” she cried. “He and the kitten. They went out to pick crocuses in the field nearby. Something must have happened to him!”

Annette and her father looked at each other. Both were worried now, for the path from the forest led through the crocus fields, and Papa had seen no sign of Dani when he was on his way home. Annette slipped her hand into her father’s.

“Perhaps he has wandered into the forest to look for you,” she said comfortingly. “Let’s go and look for him. Klaus will probably be about somewhere to show us which direction he’s gone. Klaus hates long walks.”

Together they set out up the hill toward the forest, but they went in silence, for Papa was afraid to say what he was thinking. Spring brings certain dangers to mountains in Switzerland—swollen torrents and sudden falls of melting snow called avalanches—and Dani was such a tiny boy.

Grandmother, left alone, went indoors and prayed. As she prayed she saw a picture, for the less Grandmother saw with her real eyes, the more she saw with her mind. This time there seemed to rise before her the picture of a dark forest, with deep rushing streams, its paths rough with boulders and blocked with avalanches. Dani was running along this path with his hands full of crocuses, and beside him walked an angel with white wings, and in the shadow of those wings there was shelter and warmth and safety.

The words “the angels of little ones are always in the presence of the Father in heaven” came into her mind, and she got up from her knees feeling quite peaceful and began to get the evening meal ready.

There was still no sign of Dani or Klaus in the fields, nor at the edge of the pinewoods. Up and down Annette and her father searched, calling his name, but nothing answered except the echoes and the rushing of the torrent. Slowly the sun sank toward the mountain peaks and the shadows grew longer on the fields.

“Papa,” said Annette suddenly, “I wonder if he has gone down to Lucien’s house. I have seen Lucien talking to him once or twice. I will run down to their chalet and ask.”

Over the snow drifts and grass she bounded, and she reached Madame Morel’s chalet in less than five minutes. The back door stood open, and Annette put her head around.

“Madame,” she called, “Lucien! Are you there? Have you seen Dani?”

The house was silent and deserted, yet they could not have gone far, for they had left the door wide open. Annette was about to run across to the barns when she caught sight of Madame Morel’s stout figure toiling up the track that led to their own chalet. Annette ran to meet her.

“Madame,” she cried eagerly, catching hold of her hand, “have you seen our little Dani? He has run away, and we have not seen him for two hours. Do you think he might be with Lucien, and if so, where is Lucien?”

“He may well be,” answered Madame Morel rather grimly. “I have just been down to your chalet to ask if you could give me any news of Lucien. The lazy boy should have been home long ago, and the cow is crying out to be milked. I shall have to do her myself, unless he has arrived while I was away. If so, he will have gone straight to the shed. Let’s go across and see.”

They went together over to the barn and opened the heavy wooden door. The red cow was stamping and twitching her tail, but there was no Lucien to be seen. Madame Morel turned away angrily and was just about to close the door when Annette seized hold of her sleeve and held up her finger.

"Listen," she whispered. "What is that noise up in the loft?"

They both stood listening hard for a moment. From the straw dump above them came the sound of a child crying.

Annette was up the ladder in an instant like a little wild cat, and Madame Morel lumbered up behind her. Both of them knew that something was desperately wrong, but Annette thought only of Dani and Madame thought only of Lucien.

"Lucien," cried Madame Morel. "My poor child, what is the matter? Are you hurt?"

"Dani," hissed Annette, seizing him by the arm and shaking him. "Where is he? What have you done with him? Give him back!"

Lucien cowered lower in the straw and shook his head violently. He was quite hysterical by now.

"I don't know where he is," he screamed. "It wasn't my fault."

"What wasn't your fault?" Annette screamed back, shaking him worse than ever. "Where is he? You do know. You're telling lies! Madame, make him speak the truth!"

Madame dragged Annette out of the way and knelt down by Lucien. Her face was very white, for by now she had guessed that some harm had come to Dani and Lucien knew of it. She pulled his face up from the straw and turned it toward her.

"Lucien," she commanded, trying to talk quietly, "speak at once. Where is Dani?"

Lucien stared at her wildly and saw that all escape was impossible.

"He's dead," he said with a hiccup, then began to cry again with his head buried in the straw.

Annette had heard but she did not move. For just a few moments she felt frozen all over. Her face was so white in the dim light that Madame thought she was going to faint. She tried to put her arm around her, but Annette sprang away. Then she spoke in a hoarse voice that did not sound like her own any longer.

"He must come and show us where," she said at last.

"At least my father can carry him home. And later," she added, "I will kill Lucien."

Madame took no notice of the last part of this speech, but the first suggestion sounded sensible. She took her boy by the arm, dragged him to his feet, and almost carried him down the ladder.

"Come, Lucien," she urged at the bottom, "you must show us where Dani is, quickly. Otherwise, Monsieur Burnier will be here with the police to make you go."

This threat frightened a little bit of sense and reason into Lucien, and he set off up the hill as fast as he could go, sobbing all the time and protesting that it was not his fault. Madame Morel and Annette followed. Madame was sobbing as well, but Annette could not shed one tear, for she felt as if all her tears were frozen up by rage and misery.

They reached the wall very quickly and Lucien pointed into the darkening ravine. "He's over there, drowned in the torrent," he whispered, then flung himself down and buried his face in the grass. At this moment Monsieur

Burnier appeared at the edge of the wood and hurried toward the little group.

He took no notice of Lucien but took one look at his daughter and one look at the rocks. In that quick glance he saw something that none of the others had noticed—a shivering white kitten crouching on a ledge, right on the crest of the overhanging boulder. Once he had seen this, no more words were needed for the moment. He simply said, “I must fetch a rope,” and ran down the mountain like a man being chased by wild beasts.

Grandmother was at the door of the chalet, and she too saw by the look on his face all that she needed to know at that moment. Without a word, she watched him pull down the climbing rope that hung on the wall and run away into the shadows.

“In the ravine,” he suddenly called back, then he disappeared.

Grandmother, left alone, put on a kettle, fetched out old sheets, and filled a large stone hot water bottle, so as to be ready for anything. Then she sat down and shut her eyes and folded her hands. Once again she saw a picture of Dani, caught by the dark waters of the ravine, but the white wings of the angel stopped the current and Dani was caught up safely in his arms.

“God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you,” whispered Grandmother, and she climbed the stairs to turn down his little bed and warm the blankets.

Dani’s father was back with the rope in an amazingly short time, but to the watchers by the wall it seemed like hours. Nobody spoke as he secured it around a tree trunk and flung it over the boulder. Then, gripping it with his hands and knees, he backed himself down the slippery rocks and disappeared into the ravine. There, hanging in space, he dared to look down toward the rushing waters that must surely have carried away his child. What he saw sent a great rush of hope into his heart and a cry to his lips.

Grandmother had been right. The angels had taken care of Dani as he fell, and he had never reached the water at all. He had fallen onto a jutting-out boulder just below, and there he lay, flat on his back, with his leg doubled under him, waiting for someone to come and rescue him, and crying because he could not move.

The time had been long and Dani supposed he had been asleep, for he could never remember much about those two hours afterward. He really remembered only the moment when his father hovered over him like some great big bird, and then stopped by him and knelt on the rock at his side.

“Papa,” whispered Dani, a little faintly, “where is Klaus?”

“Just above you,” replied his father, checking everything in the little white face. “We will pick her up on the way back.”

“Papa,” went on Dani, “my leg hurts and I can’t move. Will you carry me home?”

“Of course,” replied his father. “That is what I came for. I’ll carry you home at once.” And he took his little son in his arms.

“But Papa,” went on Dani’s weak, worried voice, “can you carry us both, Klaus and me together? You won’t leave Klaus, will you? It’s time she had her milk and she will be very thirsty.”

“Klaus shall go in my pocket,” promised his father as he lifted the child very, very gently. Dani moaned, for his leg hurt when he moved.

But he kept his eyes on his father’s face and was really as brave as it is possible to be at five years old.

It was a long, slow journey back. Dani’s father could not climb the rope with Dani in his arms. He had to scramble down to the edge of the torrent and pick his way along the side of it until they came to a part where the bank was less steep and he was able to make his way up. Dani fell into a sort of deep

sleep and seemed to know nothing until his father laid him down on the grass beside Annette.

“Have you got Klaus in your pocket?” asked Dani, opening his eyes suddenly.

“I’m fetching her now,” replied his father. Holding the rope, he slid to the edge of the precipice again and picked up the white kitten. Dani held out his arms and Klaus nestled down against his heart, purring like a little steam engine. Annette, for the first time in all that nightmare evening, burst into tears.

They laid Dani on a coat, and Madame Morel and Monsieur Burnier carried him slowly home down the mountain, while Annette came behind carrying Klaus. A sad little procession, and yet their hearts were full of grateful joy because Dani was alive and had spoken. That was enough for the moment.

No one, not even his mother, gave one thought to Lucien, who still lay under the wall, huddled down in the grass. When he lifted his head and found that he had been left alone with the night, he felt as though the whole world had turned its back on him and forgotten him. He got up, slunk home through the shadows, and crept, shivering, to bed, feeling the most lonely and miserable little boy in the whole world.

### **7 Annette Plans Revenge**

Dani lay in his little bed between warm blankets, knowing very well that he was a tremendously important person and that anything he wanted would be fetched immediately. As this had never happened before, Dani was making the most of it.

Papa stood at the end of the bed watching him and telling him all the funny stories he liked best. Annette sat on one side of him with a chocolate stick in her hand. Klaus was curled up on his chest purring. Grandmother sat on the other side of his bed with a bowl of cherry jam, and every time he asked for it she gave him a spoonful! If his leg had not been aching so much Dani would

have thought he was in heaven. Even so, the cherry jam didn’t make the ache seem that bad.

“Papa,” said Dani, for about the tenth time, “are you really sure Klaus isn’t hurt?”

“Quite certain,” answered his father. “She drank a whole dish of milk and ran upstairs with her tail up. Only healthy kittens would behave like that.”

“Papa,” went on Dani, opening his mouth like a baby bird for another spoonful of cherry jam, “it was Lucien who threw Klaus over the wall. It was very cruel of Lucien, wasn’t it?”

“Very,” replied his father, “and he shall certainly be punished.” But Monsieur Burnier was too happy to have his son alive to think very much about Lucien. It was Annette, sitting quietly by with a chocolate stick in her hand, who thought most about Lucien.

I shall not be in a hurry, thought Annette to herself, but I shall never, never forgive him as long as I live. One day I shall do something terrible to him. I shall never forgive him. Never.

“Nette,” said Dani, “I want my chocolate stick, and then I want to go to sleep. And you must stay with me, Nette, because my leg hurts.”

“Yes, Dani,” answered Annette, handing him the chocolate stick. “I’ll stay with you till you go to sleep.”

Papa and Grandmother kissed him and left. Annette pulled his head down against her shoulder.

“Sing to me,” commanded Dani. “Sing my favorite song.”

It was about asking Father God to forgive sins and protect little children, and Annette didn’t want to sing it with her heart so full of hatred and revenge.

But Dani insisted, so in the end she gave in and sang it rather sadly. By the time she finished, Dani was fast asleep, dribbling his chocolate stick onto the pillow. She lay down beside him, and once again she wept, for she was very tired and the relief had been great. But they were not only tears of joy, for we cannot be truly happy if we hate someone.

She got up with a sigh and went downstairs. Her father was out with the cows, which had never been milked so late in their lives and were mooing and stamping with impatience. Grandmother was preparing something to eat, for neither she nor Papa had had a bite since lunchtime. No one had had time to think of anything but Dani.

“He is asleep,” said Annette, and she sat down and stared wearily at the stove.

“The doctor should be here soon,” said Grandmother, “and then we shall have to wake him, poor little chap. Never mind, let him sleep while he can.”

“Grandma,” said Annette, looking up suddenly after a little silence, “Lucien must be punished. What is to be done to him? I can’t think of anything bad enough that would pay him back for what he did to Dani.”

Grandmother did not answer for a time. Then she replied, “Have you ever thought, Annette, that when we do wrong it often brings its own punishment without anyone else interfering?”

No, Annette had never thought about it at all. “Think of Lucien’s fright when he saw Dani fall,” went on Grandmother. “Think how miserable and terrible he will be feeling tonight, and think of his shame and fear of others finding out what he did. And then think whether perhaps he has not been punished enough already, and whether we should forgive him and help him to start again.”

Annette did not take much notice of Grandmother’s words, except for one sentence. “Think of his fear of others finding out what he did.” That was a splendid idea. She would make sure people did find out. Wherever she went she would tell everyone. She would tell it in the village and tell it at school until everyone would hate him for his wickedness.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a hurried knock at the door, and Lucien’s big sister burst into the room. She had arrived home from the town across the mountain, where she worked, just in time to meet the slow little procession coming down from the fields. She had raced down to the village post office to phone the doctor, who lived five miles up the valley.

Dr. Pilliard can’t come,” she panted. “He has gone to another village to a sick woman and he won’t be home till midnight and the last train’s gone. They say you must take Dani in the cart to the hospital tomorrow morning and he will see him there.”

“Thank you, Marie,” said Grandmother. “It was good of you to go for us.” She turned back to the kitchen. But Marie stayed. She wanted to know what had actually happened.

“Tell me, Annette,” Marie said, lowering her voice, “how did the accident happen? Why is my mother so silent and troubled?”

“It happened up the mountain,” replied Annette shortly. “Lucien threw Dani’s kitten over the ravine and Dani tried to rescue it. Lucien did not try to stop Dani at all. I shouldn’t be surprised if he pushed him. I think Dani has broken his leg. He lay on the rocks for hours and Lucien never told anybody. He could have died.

Marie went quite pale with horror, for she had never been very fond of her younger brother. If she had been, perhaps Lucien might have turned out a better, kinder boy. Children who are not loved themselves often find it difficult to love others.

“He shall be severely punished,” she said angrily. “I will see to it myself.” Then she flounced out of the house.

Annette smiled. To turn his own family against Lucien was just what she wanted. She felt her revenge had begun.

There was nothing more to wait for now, so after a rather silent meal Annette dragged her way up to bed, tired and heavy-hearted. She lit a candle and stood looking at Dani through eyes that were misty with tears. He lay with his damp hair pushed back from his forehead and his arms flung out, and his usual peaceful look had gone. He was frowning even in his sleep, and now and then he moved his head restlessly and muttered troubled words.

Annette got into her bed by the window, but tired as she was, she could not sleep. She felt strangely alone. Then, to her joy, she heard slow, painful steps climbing the stairs and Grandmother came into her room. Grandmother hardly ever came upstairs because it hurt her rheumatic legs so badly.

“Grandma,” cried Annette, holding out her arms. Grandmother said nothing for a time. She sat down on the bed and stroked Annette’s head until the child stopped crying.

“Listen, my child,” said Grandmother at last, “when Dani was a baby we took him to the church, and by faith we asked Jesus to look after him. Every day in prayer we have asked God to hold him safe in His arms, and even when Dani fell, God did not let go of him. His arms were underneath him all the time. Even if he had been killed he would have been carried straight home to heaven. So let us dry our tears and go on trusting God to hold onto Dani and do the very best for him.”

“But why did God let Lucien hurt Dani so?” argued Annette. “Grandma, I hate Lucien so much I should like to kill him.”

“Then you cannot pray for Dani,” replied Grandma simply. “God is love, and when we pray we are drawing near to love, and all our hatred must melt

away like the snow melts when the sun shines on it in spring. Leave Lucien to God, Annette. He rewards both good and evil, but remember, He loves Lucien just the same as He loves Dani.”

Grandmother kissed her and went away, and Annette lay thinking over her words. The last remark she did not believe. It seemed impossible that even God should love cruel, ugly, stupid Lucien as much as good, sunny little Dani.

But the first part she knew to be true, and it troubled her. She could not really pray for Dani and go on planning how to hurt Lucien. The two just did not go together. She wanted to pray for Dani, but if she did, her hatred might disappear and she did not want that to happen at all—anyway, not before she had really had her revenge.

In the meantime she would let Grandmother do the praying and she would go on planning her revenge. Just as she decided this, Dani sat up in bed and started crying in a frightened, half asleep sort of way.

“Klaus,” cried Dani. “Where is Klaus? She has fallen in the stream.”

Annette ran over to him.

“No, no,” she murmured comfortingly, “she is here,” She picked up the white purring ball of fur at the bottom of the bed and put it in Dani’s arms. He fell back and went fast asleep again with his kitten sprawling across his chest.

Annette waited beside him for a few minutes until his breathing grew quiet and peaceful. Then she climbed into bed and fell asleep, too.

## **8 A Day of Escape**

Lucien lay in bed in the dark with a hot, throbbing head and eyes that would not shut. Each time he closed them he saw Dani just disappearing over the cliff. And it wasn’t an ordinary cliff. It was a dark, steep cliff that had no bottom. You just went on falling forever and ever.

Now and again he fell half asleep, but each time he awoke with a little cry of fear and his heart beating wildly, for his dreams were even worse than his thoughts. If only someone would come! It was so dreadful being alone. He wanted his mother, and he knew she had come in, for he could hear her moving about in the kitchen below. But he dared not call to her, for she must be so terribly angry with him that perhaps she was staying away on purpose. Besides, his sister might answer his call, and Lucien did not in the least want to see his sister. What she would say to him he dared not even imagine.

He began to think about tomorrow. He supposed he would have to go to school and Annette would have told everyone. Nobody liked him much in any case, because he was ugly, bad-tempered, and stupid, but now they would all hate him. No one would be friends with him, or want to sit next to him in class, or walk home from school with him.

He heard steps on the stair, and his mother came into the room. He sat up crying and held out his arms to her, but she did not come to him. Instead, she sat down on the bed and watched him with a worried look on her face.

In her heart she felt very sorry for him, and she longed to comfort him, but she was frightened. She was afraid of what the Burniers would do if Dani was badly injured—afraid of the law, afraid of the doctor's bills that she could not pay. She dared not seem too sympathetic in case it should be said that she had taken her son's side. Besides, she felt it was her duty to punish him somehow.

If she had been a more understanding woman she would have seen that no punishment from her was needed. She would have seen the long weeks of fear and misery, loneliness, and guilty shame that lay ahead of Lucien. She would have known that her part was to comfort him and help him through them as best as she could. But she was not an understanding woman.

"You are a naughty boy, Lucien," she said heavily, "and I do not know what is going to happen. If that Burnier child is badly injured we shall be ruined. We

shall have to pay all the bills, and we cannot possibly afford it. I expect we'll get the police after us. It's a terrible thing you've done, and I hope you are thoroughly ashamed of yourself."

Lucien was so very ashamed of himself that he didn't answer at all, which puzzled his mother very much for he was usually quick to answer back and to stick up for himself. A silent Lucien was indeed a new thing.

"Well," she said at last in a gentler voice, "we must hope for the best. Tomorrow you could go and tell the Burniers how sorry you are, and perhaps they will forgive you."

She waited for his reply, but none came, so she left the room feeling very troubled. She returned later with a bowl of hot soup. It might be wrong to comfort her son, but she could at least feed him.

Lucien took the bowl and tried to eat, but at the third mouthful he choked and handed it back to his mother.

Then flinging himself down with his face buried in the pillows, he cried again as though his heart would break. His mother said nothing, for she did not know what to say, but she stroked the back of his head gently. As his sobs grew quieter she crept away and left him alone.

When he awoke next morning he could not remember what had happened, nor why his head ached and his eyes felt so hot and heavy. Then it all came rushing back, and he remembered something else, too. Today he had to go to school and face the other children.

Dani might have died in the night and they would all know it was his fault.

He decided he would not go. He would hide all day. It would not be too difficult. He would run up to the pinewoods and come back in the afternoon, and no one would ever know. His mother would think he had been at school and no one from school would ask questions. He lived too far up the valley, and anyway, who cared? Of course someone would find out in the end, but

today was all that mattered at the moment. He might feel differently tomorrow, or Dani might be better. Anything might happen later on, but today he would run away and hide.

He got up and went downstairs. Marie was in the kitchen. She had already eaten her bread and drank her coffee and was getting ready to set out for the station. She tossed her head and turned away when Lucien came in, but Lucien did not look at her at all. He passed through the kitchen in silence and went across to the stable to help his mother with the early milking.

She looked at him anxiously when he came in, but he said nothing. Sitting on the stool by the stove eating his breakfast, he was still perfectly silent. At last he got up, put on his coat, kissed his mother goodbye without a word, and went off.

She stood watching him as far as the bend in the road and then waved to him. He waved back and waited around the corner until he was sure she had gone. Then, turning on his steps, he ran off up the hill as quickly as his legs could carry him.

He ran very fast and arrived breathless into the quiet coolness of the great pinewood that went around the mountain. Here he was safe, for it was still early in the morning, so he sat down and began to think.

It was a beautiful pinewood, and sap was bursting from the trees and streaming down their grey trunks. The scent of pine needles rose from the ground and the forest seemed full of peace and cool light. Lucien suddenly felt a tiny bit more cheerful.

He had no idea what he was going to do all day, and he had no food, as dinner was always provided for him at school. But this strange feeling of hope made him feel sleepy, and because he had not slept well the night before, he stretched himself on the ground and fell into a deep sleep. He slept on until the sun was high overhead and the children down in the school

were coming out to their dinners. Then he woke up and wanted his dinner, too.

But there was none to be had here in the forest, so he got up and wandered on up the hill, wondering whether some kind farmer in one of the higher chalets might give him a drink of milk. As he wandered he stuck his hands in his pockets and found his knife. He took it out. He sat down on a log, picked up a piece of wood, and began whittling away at it with the knife. He had often whittled at bits of wood, though he had never made anything properly. But now, with nothing to do, he decided to try to carve out the shape of a chamois, one of the wild mountain goats that live on the high precipices. He started off idly, chipping away.

Very gradually it began to take shape under his fingers, and a strange excitement took hold of him.

For the first time he forgot his misery and became absorbed in what he was doing. He could see the creature in his mind's eye, and as he thought about it, so he shaped it.

Lucien held it out at arm's length to inspect it. It was not perfect, though it was very definitely a chamois and he had no idea how good it was. But for the first time since the accident he felt almost happy. He had found something he could do. Though he was stupid, he could carve, and now he would not mind being alone again. When the other children didn't want him he would come out to a quiet corner of the woods and see beautiful things and carve them. While he carved he could forget, and that was what he wanted more than anything. Whatever happened, he could come away by himself and forget.

He climbed up the slope and looked down over the forest to the valley below. The sun was moving toward the western mountains, and far beneath he could see little dark specks running in all directions. The children were



coming out of school. In another quarter of an hour or so it would be safe to go home.

He walked slowly back through the pinewood, for he must not get back too soon. The sun was shining on the other side of the valley now, and the pinewood was cool and dark. Lucien kept his hand in his pocket with his fingers closed tightly over the rounded body of his chamois. It was a satisfying feeling.

He wondered rather dully what he would hear when he got home. Dani might have died, but Lucien pushed that thought away from him, for he dared not face it. He was probably just badly hurt, and into Lucien's mind there came a picture of Dani's white, scared little face looking up from the grass.

If only he could do something to make up for it, but he could think of nothing.

He walked into the chalet a little sheepishly, and his mother, at the sink, looked at him anxiously. She waited a little while for him to speak, but at last, unable to wait any longer, she began to question him.

"Well," she began, "how did you get on at school today?"

"All right, thank you," answered Lucien. "I've been down to inquire at the Burniers'," went on his mother, "and Annette and Monsieur Burnier have taken Dani to the doctor in the cart. They will not be back till late. The grandmother spoke very kindly, Lucien. They are good people and I think they will forgive you and not make the trouble you deserve."

Lucien did not reply. The grandmother might forgive him, but he knew quite well that Annette never would.

"Did the schoolmaster know of what happened?" asked his mother after a pause.

"Yes," replied Lucien.

"Did he say anything about it?" went on Madame.

"No," answered Lucien.

His mother was puzzled. She had had a miserable day thinking of what sort of a time her son might be having at school, but nothing seemed to have happened. He even looked slightly more cheerful than he had in the morning.

"I'm going over to milk the cows, Mother," said Lucien, and he crossed to the stable with a sigh of relief. The stable was a refuge where he could get away from his mother's questions, and where the cows thought none the worse of him. He started quickly, and then, tilting the bucket, drank about a pint of the warm, frothing milk straight off and felt better. He had had nothing to eat or drink since breakfast.

Tonight he would save some of his supper, and tomorrow he would go back to the woods again and spend another quiet, hidden day.

He would do it every day until he was found out ... and that might not be for a long time.

He took as long as he could over the milking and then wandered back into the house carrying the buckets. He reached the door at the same time as his sister, who had hurried up the hill and was flushed and out of breath.

"You little coward, Lucien," she exclaimed as she saw him. "Fancy missing school like that! What has he been doing all day, Mother? You should have made him go!"

Her mother turned around indignantly. "What are you talking about, Marie?" she asked sharply. "Of course he's been to school. He's only just come in. Leave the poor child alone and get on with your work."

“Indeed,” exclaimed Marie. “Well, if he’s only just come in, I should dearly like to know where he’s come from. I happen to have met the schoolmaster on my way up from the station. He was weeding his vegetable patch. He looked over the fence and called out to me. ‘Where’s Lucien?’ he asked, ‘and why has he not come to school? Is he not well?’ I answered, ‘He’s well enough, and he shall come tomorrow if I have to drag him!’ So now you know, Lucien! Goodness knows where you’ve been today, but tomorrow I shall take you to school myself.”

“Fancy you lying to me like that, Lucien,” cried his mother angrily. “You are a wicked boy. I do not know what to do with you. The master must deal with you.” Because she was so worried, and because her boy had deceived her, she threw her apron over her face and began to cry.

Lucien sat down by the stove in bitter, sullen silence. Everyone and everything seemed against him. His only hope of escape had been taken from him Tomorrow he would have to go to school and Annette would be there. If he had gone today she would not have been there.

He picked up a large wood chip and began whittling away with his knife, and once more his fingers felt for the wooden chamois in his pocket.

## **9 A Visit to the Hospital**

Dani lay in the cart on a sack stretched across a soft mattress of hay and gazed up at the blue sky, where tiny, white, woolly clouds floated by. He would have liked to look over the sides of the cart, but this was impossible, for he could not sit up. So he looked at the sky instead, and Annette described the scenery and what was happening as they went along. Dani’s leg ached badly, which made him rather bad tempered. When the cart jolted he squealed, but Annette spoke to him soothingly to calm him down, and it was still nice to feel so important.

“We are at the top of the village now, Dani,” said Annette, “just passing the church, and there is Emil the dustman’s son driving the cows out of the churchyard. Some naughty person must have left the gate open.”

“Are the cows trying to go into church?” enquired Dani with interest.

“No,” replied Annette. “They were trying to jump over the wall, but it was too high. They were jumping over the gravestones instead. Here we are at the infant school, Dani, and there is the teacher scrubbing her steps. I suppose it is her cleaning day and she has given all the infants a holiday. I wish the schoolmaster had cleaning days. Oh! Here is the teacher coming toward the cart. She has seen us and I expect she wants to know how you are. And here come Madame Pilet and Madame Lenoir. They have seen us, too.

They were washing their clothes in the fountain.”

Annette was right. They certainly wanted to know how Dani was, for in a tiny village news travels fast and is much talked about and long remembered because there is so little of it. The postman’s wife had heard some of the story from Lucien’s sister when she phoned for the doctor, and the station master’s wife had heard the rest from Marie while she waited for the early train, and by now everyone was talking about it and everyone wanted to find out more.

So Madame Pilet and Madame Lenoir left their husbands’ shirts bubbling like white balloons in the fountain while Madame Durez, who kept the village shop, left her counter and came running out with two customers behind her. The teacher left her scrubbing bucket to get cold, and they all crowded around the cart and stood on tiptoe to stare at Dani, lying flat on his back on his hay mattress—a little paler than usual, but otherwise quite cheerful and pleased to see them.

“Ah, the little cabbage,” cried the teacher, throwing up her hands. “You must tell us about it, Annette.” Although they had all heard the story once and

repeated it to somebody else, they were all ready to listen again. So Annette told them about it, and they shook their heads a great deal and clicked their tongues. They were all very angry with Lucien.

“He is a wicked boy,” said the infant school teacher. “I shall warn the little children not to have anything to do with him!”

“And I shall not allow Pierre to play with him,” said the postman’s wife. “He has a cruel heart. You can see it in his face. I feel sorry for his mother, having a child like that.” She thought proudly of her own cheery, freckle-faced son, who was one of the best-loved boys in the village.

Dani’s father flicked his whip rather impatiently and called back that they must not keep the doctor waiting. The women stood back and the cart lumbered on slowly over the cobblestones. Then they all drew together again and started talking in the middle of the road with their heads very close together.

The cart jolted on and the sun rose higher. The horse did not mind in the least keeping the doctor waiting, and Annette had plenty of time to describe the scenery to Dani as they made their slow way to town.

“The river is almost in flood, Dani,” remarked Annette. “It’s because the fine weather has melted the snows so fast. The water is right over the pine-tree roots, and here a tree has fallen right across like a bridge. Oh, Dani! There is a little grey squirrel wondering whether to run along it or not.”

“Where?” cried Dani, and he forgot and tried to sit up, but fell back with a squeal of pain.

“You can’t see,” Annette warned him. “Anyhow, the squirrel has run back into the wood. We are getting near the station now, Dani, and there are three cows on the platform waiting to be put on the train.”

The journey passed pleasantly. At last houses began to appear, and Annette told Dani they were coming into the town.

“Tell me about the shops,” exclaimed Dani eagerly.

He had been to the town only three times in his short life and thought it was the most wonderful place in the world.

It wasn’t much of a town, really, for there was only one narrow street of shops—but they were very nice shops. There was the cake shop with its windows packed with flat fruit tarts and piles of gingerbread cut into every shape imaginable, and the clothes shop with a display of embroidered national costumes. Best of all was the wood-carver’s shop with its rows of carved cuckoo clocks and the old men who opened their mouths wide and cracked nuts in their wooden teeth. At last Father drove up in front of the hospital.

It was only a little hospital, really, but to Annette and Dani it seemed enormous. The patients all lay out on sunny balconies, and the door was wide open. Papa jumped down from the driver’s seat, tied the reins to the fence, and went in. A few minutes later he returned with two men and a stretcher.

Dani, on his stretcher, was laid on a wooden bench in the outpatients’ hall, with Papa sitting at his head and Annette at his feet.

The quiet strangeness of the place and the odd, clean smell made them all go very quiet, so Dani watched the nurses instead. They wore long, white aprons and lace caps. Dani thought they looked exactly like the angels in Grandmother’s big picture Bible.

They waited for a very long time. Papa and Annette nodded and dozed. Dani flung his arms above his head and fell into a deep sleep.

He was woken by the doctor, who appeared very suddenly and seemed in a great hurry. He was an elderly man with a large, black beard and a gruff voice. Annette felt afraid of him.

Everything seemed to happen very quickly after that. Dani was hustled off on a trolley to have the bones in his leg photographed, which was interesting, and he wanted to know whether he would be allowed to keep the photograph to hang up in his house. Then he was trundled back, and the doctor pulled the bad leg until Dani screamed with pain. Then the photographs were brought along, not looking in the least like Dani's legs.

But the doctor seemed pleased with them. He studied them deeply and nodded his head wisely. Then he turned to Papa and remarked, "This child should stay in the hospital. He has broken his leg very badly."

But Papa refused completely. He was not going to leave his little son to this man with his black beard and rough hands.

"We will look after Dani at home," Papa said firmly. "Surely that is possible?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "It is possible," he replied, "but I think he would be better here. I cannot come so far. You would have to keep bringing him in."

"I don't mind bringing him in," said Papa stubbornly, and Annette put her little hand into his big one and gave it a squeeze. She, too, wanted Dani at home.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders again and spread out his hands. Dani was once more trundled off by a nurse in a great hurry, and this time he did not come back for more than half an hour.

When at last he was returned to them, he looked sleepy and strange and could remember absolutely nothing but a funny smell. It was Annette who discovered that he had on a big white plaster from his waist downward. She pointed it out to Dani, who stared down at himself in astonishment.

"Why have I got to wear these hard white trousers?" he asked at last. Then, without waiting for a reply, he said that he did not like the doctor's big, black beard and he wanted to go home.

Annette did not like it either, and they all wanted to go home—Annette because she was hungry, Dani because he was tired, and Papa because he was thinking about his cows.

When the doctor came back with a second photograph, Dani and his family were nowhere to be seen. In the far distance a sprightly horse was making her way home as fast as possible, pulling a hay cart and three passengers behind her. They had completely forgotten to ask when they should bring Dani back again, or for how long he had to wear his plaster.

They reached home at five o'clock and Dani was put to bed on the sofa, so that he wouldn't feel lonely, and Annette slept on a mattress beside him in case he should wake in the night and want her. Here Dani stayed for weeks with his leg on a pillow, and everything was arranged around him.

Annette stopped going to school altogether for the time being, and almost became Dani's slave. She told him all her stories over and over again and played games with him all day long. Grandmother cooked wonderful little meals in the kitchen to tempt the appetite of the "poor little sick boy" whose appetite didn't need tempting at all, for he was almost as jolly and cheery and hungry on his couch as he was off it. When Annette was busy, he would lie flat on his back on the veranda bed and sing like a happy lark.

He certainly had everything to make him happy; the village saw to that. They had loved his pretty, delicate mother who had grown up amongst them, and when she died they were all prepared to love her children—especially Dani, who had eyes as blue as forget-me-nots and a voice like a bird and was altogether as adorable as a five-year-old can be.

Dani, who had always taken love for granted, was not spoiled by it. He was just pleased and excited, for with so many wonderful presents and visits, he hardly missed his freedom at first.

The village children wandered up the mountains in search of the first alpine flowers for him until the table by his bed looked like an alpine flower garden.

Because Dani loved to see them, Grandmother cheerfully put up with the noise and the muddy boots until the veranda, out of school hours, became a sort of public playground where Dani was in charge.

Then there was the schoolmaster, who sent fascinating picture books, and the innkeeper who sent brown speckled eggs, and the baker who made golden doughboys with currant eyes and candied peel buttons. He used to slip them in Annette's bread basket with a wink, and that was why Dani always insisted on unpacking the shopping-basket himself. He never knew what he might find—and whatever it was, he was quite certain it was for him.

But the postman was best of all. The Burnier family hardly ever received a letter, so the postman himself decided to write Dani a picture postcard each week, and trudged up the hill to deliver it himself. He came a different day each week, so every morning Dani got excited in case he should come.

The postman was never in a hurry, and always saw to it that the postcard was at the very bottom of the sack. He enjoyed Dani's squeals of excitement as he burrowed among the letters and read the names on all the cards in search of his own. And if the post that day was a little marked and crumpled, no one minded or asked questions.

### **10 Lucien Makes a Friend**

Just as the village supported Dani and did all they could to comfort him, they also shunned Lucien, and did all they could to show how much they despised him.

For a few days he was really tormented. The schoolmaster made a speech about him in school, showing everyone what a bully and coward he was. The children chased him out of the playground and threw mud at him. But they soon gave that up and simply settled down to ignore him. When teams were picked he was always left till last. There was one extra single desk in the classroom, which he had to sit in. Everyone else sat in pairs.

Even the tiny children got out of his way, for their mothers had warned them to have nothing to do with him. "He is a cruel bully and may harm you as he harmed little Dani Burnier," they said. The little ones looked on him as some kind of monster and ran away whenever he came near them.

Down at the village, the shopkeepers handed over the things he bought without speaking to him. The milkman never chatted with him, and the grocer's wife never slipped trimmings of gingerbread into his hand as she did for the other children. They never spoke unkindly to him; they just took no notice of him.

Lucien, who was too shy to try to do anything to make them like him, drifted into a lonely little world of his own. He walked to and from school alone, he shopped alone, and in the playground he usually played alone. It was not that the children would not have him, for children forgive and forget quickly. It was simply his shame that kept him from joining in. Always he saw their dislike of him in their faces and imagined they were thinking of Dani. Gradually he grew to be afraid of them, from the milkman right down to the youngest child in the school.

Lucien himself was always thinking of Dani. The thought haunted him, and he longed to ask Annette what the doctor had said. But Annette had neither looked at him nor spoken to him since the day of the accident, and he dared not speak to her.

At home his mother found him more silent but more hard-working, for he had suddenly discovered that only by hard work could he forget his loneliness. Instead of being lazy like he used to be, he started working very hard on the farm. His mother praised him loudly, and his sister became kinder, for she herself was a hard-working girl and Lucien's laziness had always annoyed her greatly.

There was one place, and one only, where Lucien was completely happy, and that was in the forest. Here the kindly trees shut him in, and the world that disliked him was shut out.

Here Lucien fled whenever he had any spare time. Squatting against a tree trunk or boulder, he would carve away at his little figures and forget everything else in the joy of carving. Sitting beneath the pine trees, he would feel the sun on his hair and hands as he worked, and the peace and beauty of the forest in early summer soothed and comforted him.

High up on the borders of the forest there stood a small chalet where a very old man lived by himself. He had retired there long ago and lived alone with his goat, his hens and his cat. He was a strange old man and everyone in the village was afraid of him. He didn't come down to the village to shop very often, but when he did, the children ran away from him. They called him "the old man of the mountain." Some said he was a miser, some that he was hiding from the police, and others that he was crazy and bad. Whatever the real reason, no one had ever been inside his home, and no one ever passed that way after dark.

Lucien had wandered farther than usual up the mountain one half holiday from school, and sat as usual working hard on his carving. He was carving a squirrel holding a nut between its paws when he suddenly became aware of heavy breathing behind him.

He turned quickly to see the old man of the mountain looking over his shoulder.

He was certainly a terrifying sight. His huge, tangled, grey beard covered his chest, and his hooked brown nose made him look like some fierce bird of prey. But as Lucien gazed up, startled, into his eyes, he noticed that they were bright and kind and full of interest, and he decided not to run away after all. Besides, his great loneliness made him less afraid than he would

have been otherwise. This old man might be odd, or even wicked, but at least he knew nothing about what Lucien had done.

So he said, "Bonjour, Monsieur," as boldly as he could and waited to see what would happen next.

The old man put out a hand like a brown claw and picked up the little carved squirrel. He examined it and turned it over several times, then he remarked, "You carve well for a child. Who is your teacher?"

"Monsieur, I have no teacher. I taught myself." "Then you yourself are a good teacher, and you deserve proper tools. With a little training you might start to earn your living. This squirrel looks almost as if it is alive."

"Monsieur, I have no tools, and I don't have the money to buy them."

In reply the old man beckoned with his claw-like hand. Lucien, feeling like someone in a dream, got up and followed him through the dim wood. They climbed some way in silence until they came to the borders where the old man's tiny chalet stood.

There was no outhouse except for a wooden barn where the hens roosted, and the goat shared the kitchen with the old man. So did the ginger cat who sat washing himself in the sunshine. The bedroom was also the hayloft, and the old man slept on sacks laid across the goat's winter food supply of hay.

The kitchen and living room were poorly but strangely furnished. There was a stove, a milking bucket and stool, a table, one chair, and a cheese press. All around the walls, out of reach of the goat, were shelves covered with carved wooden figures— some beautiful, some ugly, but all the work of a real artist.

There were bears and cows and chamois and goats, St. Bernard dogs and squirrels. There were little men and women, gnomes and dwarfs, and dancing children. There were boxes with alpine flowers carved on their lids, and dishes with flowers carved around the rim. Best of all there was a Noah's

ark with a stream of tiny animals marching in. Lucien could not take his eyes off it. He just stared and stared.

"It's just a hobby of mine," said the old man. "They keep me company on winter evenings. Now, boy, if you will come and visit me from time to time, I will teach you how to use the tools."

Lucien looked up eagerly. His whole face was alive, and he no longer looked ugly.

"Did you say, Monsieur," he asked hesitatingly, "that perhaps I might soon earn my living?"

"In time," said the old man, "yes. I have a friend who sells woodcraft at a good price. He sells many of my little figures, but some I get fond of and prefer to keep. In a short time he would start selling your best work for you. You will do much better with my tools than with your knife."

Still Lucien gazed up at him. His heart was singing with thankfulness because this old man seemed to care for him and wanted to take an interest in him. Here at last was somebody whom he needn't be afraid of, and who thought well of him. He grabbed hold of the old man's hand.

"Oh, thank you, Monsieur," he cried. "How very good you are to me!"

"Zut," said the old man. "I am lonely, and I have no friends. We can carve together."

"And I, too, am lonely and have no friends," replied Lucien simply.

As Lucien walked home through the forest, his brain was full of ideas, but there was one big idea more important than all the others. He would make a Noah's ark for Dani like the old man had done, with dozens of tiny figures—lions, elephants, rabbits, camels, and cows, and Mr. and Mrs. Noah. When it was quite perfect he would walk around to the Burniers' chalet and give it to Dani as a peace offering. Surely no one could give Dani a better present than

that! And after that, perhaps they might even allow him to be just a tiny bit friendly with Dani again.

His heart beat fast at the very thought of it. For two whole hours he had been completely happy, and his happiness lasted all the way through the forest until the trees parted and he saw the village below him. Tomorrow he would have to go back to school. Tomorrow he would feel lonely and frightened again. But today he had found a friend.

Three times a week after school Lucien bounded through the quiet pine forest and sat on the step of the old man's chalet and worked on his Noah's ark. It was a wonderful thing to use tools with their sharp blades and easy curves—very different from his old penknife.

The old man marveled at the boy's skill. The Noah's ark family grew and grew. Every visit Lucien made, he thought of some new animal to carve, and the procession grew longer and longer.

There was another excitement for Lucien just about then. An inspector came to school and set up a handcraft competition for the children. The girls were to see who could enter the best piece of knitting, needlework, or lacemaking, and the boys the best piece of wood carving. Many of them whittled away at wood in their spare time, and some were becoming quite skillful.

"But no one is as skillful as me," whispered Lucien to himself as he plodded home alone. "I shall win the prize, and then they will know that I can do something well, even if I am stupid at lessons, and even if no one will play with me."

Lucien sang on his way home that day. He saw himself walking up for his prize in front of the amazed school.

Perhaps they would like him better after that.

He would carve a horse with a flowing mane, in full gallop, with its tail outstretched and its nostrils dilated. Lucien loved horses. The old man had

carved one like that and Lucien had admired it greatly. The Noah's ark would be finished very soon and then he could start on his little horse.

He ran straight up to the old man's house to share the news. The old man was pleased and as sure as Lucien was himself that he would win the competition.

"But why try a horse?" he asked. "You could enter your Noah's ark. It is very well done for a boy of your age."

Lucien shook his head. "That is a present," he said firmly.

"A present? Who for? Your little brother?" "For a little boy who has hurt himself and cannot walk."

"Indeed? How did he do that?" "He fell over the ravine." "Poor little chap. How did that happen?" Lucien did not answer for a moment, but the fact that this old man had become friends with him and been so nice to him made him want to speak the truth. He looked up at last and said, "It was my fault that he fell. I dropped his kitten over and he tried to get it."

He could have bitten his tongue out as soon as he said it, for he felt sure the old man would hate him now and drive him away like everybody else.

But he didn't. Instead, the old man said very gently, "So that is why you have no friends?"

"Yes." "And are you hoping to make things right with this child by making this toy for him?"

"Yes." "You are doing a good thing. It is hard work to win back love. But don't give up. Those who persevere find more happiness in earning love than they do in gaining it."

"I don't quite understand you," said Lucien thoughtfully.

"I mean that if you spend your time putting the love of your heart into what you do for those who are not your friends, you may often be disappointed and discouraged. But if you keep on trying you will find your happiness in loving, whether you are loved back or not. You may think it strange that I who live alone and love no one should say all this to you, but I believe it all the same."

That evening the Noah's ark was finished. Lucien, with a flushed face and a hammering heart, set off for the Burniers' chalet to leave it on his way home.

When he came within sight of the chalet, he hid behind a tree in panic. What would he say? How would he break the silence? If he could see Dani alone it would be easier, but Annette was always with him out of school hours.

Surely they would forgive him when they saw the Noah's ark! If only they would forgive him and give him a chance, he would gladly spend the rest of his life trying to make up for it. Struggling between hope and fear, Lucien came out from behind his tree and walked toward the chalet.

Annette was sitting alone outside.

Lucien swallowed hard, walked up to her, and held out the Noah's ark.

"It's for Dani," he whispered, and the words seemed to stick in his throat. Looking down at the ground, he held up the box to Annette.

"How dare you come here!" she burst out. "How dare you offer presents to Dani! Go away. And don't you ever come here again!"

As she said it, she kicked the Noah's ark with all the strength of her young legs into the woodpile below her.

All the little animals lay scattered on the logs.



Lucien stared at her for a moment, then he turned and ran as fast as he could. All his efforts had been for nothing. He would never be forgiven. It had all been one long waste of time.

Then the old man's words came into Lucien's mind like a tiny ray of light in his angry, bitter heart.

"Those who keep trying find more happiness in earning love than in gaining it."

Perhaps it was true. He had certainly not gained anything, but at least he had been happy making the Noah's ark and thinking of Dani's pleasure. Perhaps, if he persevered and went on putting his love into his work, someday someone would accept it and love him for it.

He did not know. But he decided not to give up just yet.

### **11 A Trip to the High Pastures**

Dani's leg was very slow in healing. Many times the doctor climbed the mountainside to visit him, but he seemed worried and puzzled. The time came for Dani to go back to the hospital and have the plaster taken off. It was then that the doctor broke the news to Dani's father that, as he had feared all along, Dani would not ever be able to walk properly. His bad leg was much shorter than his good one.

Feeling very sad indeed, Monsieur Burnier went to the carpenter and asked him to make a tiny pair of crutches. Then he visited the cobbler with a pair of Dani's boots and asked him to make one sole an inch and a half thicker than the other one.

The carpenter and the shoemaker were very upset. The carpenter carved little bears' heads on the handles of the crutches to make Dani smile, and the cobbler returned the boots stuffed with chocolate sticks, and in both cases their efforts were a great success. Dani looked upon his crutches as a new toy and was really impatient to try them out.

For a day or two he hopped about like an excited grasshopper in front of the house. Then he heard his father say that he was going to take his cows up the mountain to feed in the high pastures. Dani sat down and cried loudly, because he suddenly realized that, even with his nice bear crutches and his new boots, he could no longer follow the cows up the mountain.

Dani did not often bellow, but when he did, he really did! Annette, Monsieur Burnier, and Grandmother all rushed for the woodpile where Dani was crying, and they all started shaking him and kissing him at once. Klaus, who hated lots of noise, arched her back and hissed.

When at last they understood the reason for Dani's unhappiness, they all tried to make lots of comforting plans. In the end it was decided that Dani should go down to the marketplace in a little wooden cart to watch the cows gather together, and afterward he would drive up behind the herd in the horse cart, sleep the night in the hay, and come down next day. Annette would go with him, while Grandmother and Klaus stayed at home and kept house.

The great day dawned clear and blue, and Dani woke early with a feeling that something wonderful was going to happen. When he remembered what it was, he tried to yodel, which he couldn't do at all, and then dragged Klaus into bed with him and began to tell her all about it. But Klaus was not interested and struggled out again, and went with her tail in the air to catch mice on the woodpile.

An hour later Dani was curled up in the wood cart and Annette was taking him down to the village. Long before they reached the marketplace they heard the clanging of cowbells, the mooing of frightened cattle, the shouting of men, and the shrill screams of excited children. When they turned the corner by the fountain and bumped down the shallow steps, what a sight greeted them!

The market was a solid mass of cows and calves all pressed together. They all wore clanging bells and tossed their heads nervously. Here and there cows broke loose and jumped on each other, and over by the grocer's shop a crowd of young men was shouting at a young bullock who was trying to put his horns through the shop window. In and out among their legs swarmed the children, for this was a great holiday—school was closed.

In Switzerland, when the grass begins to grow long in the fields, the cows go up the mountains for the summer and feed in the high pastures while the hay ripens in the valleys. The farmers go up and live with them, while the women and children stay behind. On the day when they all set out, the cows are gathered together before starting on their different paths, and the children follow their own cows up to the high pastures and spend the day in the mountains, settling the cows into their new homes.

When Dani arrived in the marketplace people gathered all around him. Except for his journey to hospital, this was his first public appearance in the village, and everyone wanted to look at him.

All the children wanted to pull his cart, and all the women wanted to kiss him. What with the cows and the crowds and the cobbles, it was a wonder he wasn't tipped right out.

Time was getting on, and the procession had to start moving. The farmers were drawing their leaders out of the crowd, each group shoving its way out after them. The group leader wore a bigger bell than the rest, and was followed by all the others.

Monsieur Burnier was drawing out his leader by the collar, and his few cattle were making their way out from the crowd as best as they could. He walked up to Dani's cart with his hand on the cow's neck. "The mule cart is waiting around the back of the cobbler's shop," he said, "so put Dani into it, Annette, and we will make a start."

He went off, rounded up his cows, and set off up the steep steps behind the clock tower looking like a piper with a stream of children following him. All the children liked Monsieur Burnier.

Soon the mule cart caught them up, with Annette holding the reins and clicking her tongue. Dani lay in the back holding his crutches, which he had brought to show to the people in the village, and shouting at the top of his voice.

Dani never forgot that ride up the mountain. One of the bull calves, called Napoleon, grew tired and started dropping behind, so Dani leaned over and put his hand on his collar and pulled him alongside the cart.

His father looked back and smiled. "He's tired, poor young thing," he said. "You'd better take him in the cart with you, Dani."

Father lifted the wobbly-legged creature into the cart, and Dani flung his arms round his woolly neck and shrieked for joy. It was a beautiful calf with gentle eyes, silky ears, and pale, stubby curls on its forehead. They sat watching the forest together, sniffing the scent of the pine trees.

By the time they came out of the forest they had climbed so high that they could see right over the green mountains that surrounded the valley to the snow-capped ranges beyond, where the snows never melt. Dani lay back, counting the white peaks, and imagined himself in heaven. Then, to make his happiness complete, Annette suddenly produced a long twisty roll and a hunk of cheese and told him to sit up for his dinner. He sat nibbling one end of the hard golden crust while the calf put out its pale pink tongue and licked the other end.

Annette left the mule to make its own way while she wandered up and down the slopes picking the alpine flowers that grew in the high pastures as a present for Grandmother. It occurred to Dani that it would be nice to run up and down the slopes to pick flowers with Annette, but he did not think about it for long. There was so much else to be happy about. Besides, if he had not

been lame he would never have had his bear crutches, nor would he have been sitting in the cart with his arms around the bull calf.

The path turned a hairpin bend around the roots of a great pine tree, and as they turned the corner they came in sight of their summer home—a little shut-up cow barn with one living room joined onto it, standing in the middle of a meadow of yellow flowers. Just behind it rose the last steep slope of the rest of the mountain.

It seemed very welcoming, this hut, as though it was longing to be opened up and lived in again. The cows moved a little faster at the sight of it, and their lazy bells pealed out merrily.

A fountain splashed into a wooden trough outside the chalet, and the thirsty cattle plunged their heads into it and enjoyed a long, noisy drink. Dani and the calf tumbled out of the cart and drank, too. Then they all gathered around the door while Monsieur Burnier turned the key in the lock and went in.

The hut was damp and cold after being buried in snow all winter, but they had brought logs and provisions in the mule cart and soon they had lit a fire. As Annette flung back the shutters, the sun came streaming in, showing up the dust everywhere.

Around went Annette with a broom and duster, and Dani came hopping behind like a cheerful grasshopper. Monsieur Burnier vanished up a ladder into the loft to bring down armfuls of musty hay for the cows' bedding. Then it was milking time and the cattle wandered in one by one. After that it was supptime, and Monsieur Burnier and Annette sat on stools at the table while Dani sat on a rug on the floor because the condition of his legs made stools uncomfortable for him. They ate bread, smoked sausage, and cheese and drank hot coffee out of enormous wooden bowls. It was a lovely meal.

When he had finished his last mouthful Dani struggled to his feet and held up his arms to his father.

“Do you want to go to bed now?” asked Monsieur Burnier, picking him up.

“No,” replied Dani firmly, “I want you to carry me to the top of the mountain!”

Monsieur Burnier looked horrified. The top of the mountain was a good twenty-five minutes steep climb, and Dani was a heavy child. But he always found it impossible to refuse his little son anything, so he burst into a hearty roar of laughter at his own foolishness and started off with Dani on his shoulder. Dani drummed his heels against his father's chest while Annette clung to his coat-tail.

The mountaintop was covered with rare, beautiful flowers, and Annette ran among them while Monsieur Burnier strode on, too out of breath to speak. Only when they at last reached the top did he put Dani down, and then they all sat looking about them, thinking their own thoughts.

Everywhere they looked, rosy snow peaks rose upward. The sun was setting, and while twilight had fallen on the valleys below, the high mountains caught the last rays of the sun and were bathed in a bright pink glow. An English child might have thought that the Alps were on fire, but Dani, who was used to the sight, just sighed contentedly. As they sat watching, the sun sank a little lower until the very tips still burned crimson. Then the glow faded altogether and there was nothing to be seen at all but cold, ice-blue mountains with the stars coming out behind them. Soon the moon would rise and then the peaks would turn to dazzling silver.

It was nice to get back to the chalet and see the firelight flickering in the window, and to gather around the blazing logs and shut out the night. The door into the stable was open, and the calf came straying in and sat down on the floor by Dani, with its long legs crumpled up beneath it.

“I want to sleep with the calf,” announced Dani in his firmest voice.

“No, Dani,” said Annette quickly, “you will catch fleas.”

“But if Napoleon had fleas I should have caught them already in the cart,” reasoned Dani. “Please, Papa, I want very badly to sleep with Napoleon!”

Monsieur Burnier remarked that he thought it could be managed for a treat. So he rigged up a hay mattress covered with a sack, and Dani was tucked up on it under the rug while Napoleon happily lay on a heap of straw beside him. Annette slept in the one and only bed, and Monsieur Burnier went off and made himself comfortable in the hayloft.

## **12 Annette’s Revenge**

Lucien did not go up the mountain with his cows, for the Morels only had four cows, which they farmed out with another herd for the summer. So until hay making started in the fields around his home, Lucien had plenty of time after school. He went to visit the old man of the mountain nearly every day.

His horse was nearly finished, and it was a beautiful piece of work for a boy of Lucien’s age. It was a larger model than he had ever tried before, with a flying mane and little hooves that hardly seemed to touch the ground. Lucien spent hours over it and studied every horse in the neighborhood so that he might make each muscle look perfect.

He still had plenty of time because the competition was not going to be judged until the end of the hay-making holiday, but already the school children were beginning to make guesses about who would win.

Most of the boys thought it should be Michel, the milkman’s son, who had carved two bears climbing up a pole. He had worked hard and it was a good piece of work, but they could easily have been mistaken for dogs or any other animals, thought Lucien, looking at them silently while the other children admired it loudly. Nobody could mistake his horse, thought Lucien. It was a horse and nothing but a horse.

Now, looking at Michel’s bears, he knew he would win the prize. There was nothing as good as his entry.

He imagined himself walking up for the prize, and everyone looking at him in amazement and astonishment. Then they would all be interested and want to see his horse. And then perhaps they would like him better.

There was more discussion about the girls’ entries. Annette was a skilled knitter. Grandmother had taught her when she didn’t go to school. She had sat on her small stool keeping an eye on Dani and clicking away at her needles, with Grandmother sitting in her armchair ready to help her when she needed it.

Annette was entering a dark blue sweater she had knitted for Dani to wear on Sundays and festival days, with alpine flowers knitted in bright colors around the neck and waist.

She had not finished it yet, but it was coming on nicely, and everybody praised it as she sat working away in the playground.

“I think you are sure to get the prize, Annette,” said several of her friends. “It is harder to do a pattern like that than to make lace like Marcelle. Everyone says so.”

Annette was hopeful, too. She wanted so badly to win that prize. It would make up a little for getting such bad marks in math. And how pleased and proud Grandmother, Papa, and Dani would be!

However, unlike Lucien, she had very little time, for her after-school hours were always busy. And now the hay-making holidays had begun, and all the children worked in the fields from dawn to dusk, side by side with the adults.

A great deal of friendly arranging had to be done at hay-making time. A neighbor who had grown-up sons to help on his farm went up to the high pastures to look after the Burnier cows, while Monsieur Burnier came down to cut the hay on his own slopes. After he had finished, he always went over and cut the hay in the little meadow that belonged to the Morels, because

Madame Morel was a widow and Lucien was not yet old enough to swing a scythe.

There were no tractors or mowers on those steep mountain slopes, only great sweeping scythes that mowed the grass in curved bundles all up and down the field. Behind the man with the scythe came the women and children with wooden rakes, pulling the bundles into tidy heaps. Even the tiny children had tiny rakes, for as soon as a child could walk steadily on his legs he had to help with the hay making.

Papa and Annette had to work hard, for they had a large, sloping pasture and could not afford to pay anyone to help them. They got up at sunrise each morning in the cool, clear dawn to start their work. Later on in the day Grandmother and Dani joined them—Grandmother working slowly and painfully, and Dani doing no work at all because he couldn't manage a rake and a crutch at the same time. Instead he jumped like a kangaroo among the bundles of cut hay or buried himself under the large piles, and when he was tired out he lay flat on his back in the sun and fell asleep.

Monsieur Burnier cut his own meadow first and then went off to cut the Morels' field, leaving his family to gather in his own bundles of hay. Madame Morel had been rather worried this year that Monsieur Burnier would not want to help her because of Lucien causing Dani's accident. But she need not have worried, for she woke one morning and from her window she saw him hard at work, his brown body stripped to the waist, swinging the scythe. He was not the sort of man to take revenge.

"Hurry, Lucien," she called, "Monsieur Burnier is already mowing in the meadow. Run out and start raking in the hay."

Lucien shuffled off to the field feeling rather embarrassed. He said good morning to Monsieur Burnier, with his eyes fixed on the ground. He hated having to work with the man he had wronged, and kept as far away as possible. Monsieur Burnier had no wish to talk to him either. It was one thing

to mow a neighbor's meadow, but quite another to chat with the boy who had injured his little son.

Annette arrived at midday with her father's lunch wrapped up in a cloth. She took no notice of Lucien, and when he saw her coming he slunk away into the house.

It took Monsieur Burnier three days to mow the Morel meadow, and the third day was the last day of the holidays. Lucien and his mother and sister were working hard to clear the field before Lucien went back to school. They were all in the meadow when Annette appeared, as usual, with her father's dinner. She was in a hurry, for the next day the children had to turn in their entries for the hand-work competition, and Annette still had to put the finishing touches to her sweater.

"I do wonder if I shall get that prize," said Annette to herself. "I want it so much. But even if I don't, Dani will look sweet in the sweater."

The meadow lay at the back of the house, and on her way home Annette passed by the front. It was a very hot day, and Annette was thirsty. The door leading from the little balcony into the kitchen stood invitingly open.

"I will go in and have a drink from the tap," thought Annette, climbing the balcony steps.

And indeed there was no harm in that. Before the accident Annette had run in and out of the Morel kitchen as though it was her own.

When she reached the top of the steps she suddenly stopped dead and stood quite still, staring and staring.

There was a little table set against the outer side of the balcony with some carving tools and chips of wood on it. Amidst the chips was the figure of a little horse at full gallop, with waving mane and delicate hooves.

Annette stood for five whole minutes gazing at the little creature. Of course she realized that it was Lucien's entry for the handwork competition, and the deceitful boy had never even told anyone that he was entering, or that he knew how to carve at all.

It was almost perfect, even Annette's jealous eyes could see that. If he turned it in, he would win the prize easily. No one else's entry would be nearly as good. And when he won the prize, everybody would begin to admire his work and perhaps they would begin to like him for it. Perhaps they would even begin to forget that he had injured Dani.

And if Lucien won the prize, he would be happy. He would walk up to receive it with his head in the air, and to see Lucien looking happy would be more than Annette could bear. Why should he be happy? He deserved never to be happy again. He would not be happy if she could help it. She felt she had arrived just at the right time.

The table stood on the level with the balcony railings, and a gust of wind fluttered the shavings of wood. A stronger gust of wind could easily blow the light little model over. No one would ever suspect anything else when they found the little horse smashed and trampled in the mud below.

Annette put out her hand and pushed it over. It fell onto the stones with a little crack, and Annette bounded down the steps and stamped on it. Anyone could accidentally tread on something that had blown over the balcony railing.

So Lucien's horse lay in splinters among the cobblestones, and Annette walked slowly home.

But somehow the brightness had gone out of the day, and the world no longer looked quite as beautiful as before.

It was not long before she came in sight of her own chalet, and as she turned the corner, Dani saw her and gave a loud welcoming shout. Something very,

very exciting had happened, and if he had been able to he would have raced to meet her. But, being on crutches, he hobbled up the hill as fast as he possibly could.

"'Nette, 'Nette," shouted Dani, his eyes shining, "I think there's been some fairies in the woodpile. I made a little house down by the logs and I found a tiny little elephant with a long trunk, and then I looked again and I found a camel with a hump, and a rabbit with long ears, and cows and goats and tigers and a giraffe with ever such a long neck. Oh, 'Nette, come and look at them. They are so beautiful, and no one but the fairies could have put them down beside the woodpile, could they?"

"I don't know," answered Annette, and her voice sounded quite cross. Dani looked up at her in astonishment. She didn't seem at all pleased about his news, and it was almost the most wonderful thing that had happened to him since he had found Klaus in his slipper on Christmas morning.

However, when she saw them she was sure to be pleased. She didn't yet know how beautiful they were. He hopped bravely along, rather out of breath because Annette was walking faster than she usually did when he was beside her.

He dragged her to the woodpile and dived behind it, reappearing with the procession of carved animals arranged on a flat log. He looked anxiously at her, but to his great disappointment there was no sign of surprise or pleasure in her face.

"I expect some other child dropped them, Dani," she said crossly, "and anyhow it's nothing to make such a fuss about. They are not all that wonderful. And you're too big to believe in fairies."

She turned away and went up the steps, hating herself.

She had been unkind to Dani and spoiled all his happiness. How could she have spoken to him like that? What had happened to her?

But deep down inside she knew quite well what had happened to her. She had done a mean, deceitful thing, and her heart was heavy and dark at the thought of it. All the light and joy seemed to have gone out of life.

And now she could never get rid of it or undo it. She ran upstairs to her bedroom and, flinging herself on the bed, she burst into tears.

### 13 The Old Man's Story

Lucien ran home from the fields with a light heart that evening. He had worked hard, and his body was tired, but his little horse was waiting for him. Tomorrow he would carry it to school and everyone would know that he could carve.

Up the steps he bounded, and then stopped dead. His horse was gone. Only the tools and the wood chips lay on the table.

Perhaps his mother, who had come home earlier, had taken it in. He hurled himself into the house.

"Mother! Mother," he cried, "where have you put my little horse?"

His mother looked up from the soup pot. "I haven't seen it," she replied. "You must have put it somewhere yourself."

Lucien began to get seriously alarmed. "I haven't," he answered. "I left it on the table, I know I did. Oh, Mother, where can it be? Do help me find it!"

His mother followed him at once. She was just as keen on Lucien winning the prize as he was himself, and together they hunted high and low. Then Madame Morel had an idea.

"Perhaps it has fallen over the railing, Lucien," she said. "Go and search for it down below."

So Lucien went down and searched. He did not need to search for long. He found it all too quickly— the muddy, scattered splinters of wood that had once been his horse.

He gathered them up in his hand and took them to his mother. Her cry of disappointment brought Marie running out, and both of them stood gazing in dismay.

"It must have been the cat," said Marie at last. "I am sorry, Lucien. Haven't you anything else you could take?"

His mother said nothing except "Oh, Lucien!" But the voice in which she said it meant quite a lot.

Lucien said nothing at all. He just went indoors and looked at the clock on the wall.

"I'm going up the mountain," he said in a voice that tried hard to be steady. "I won't be home for supper."

He ran down the balcony steps and up through the hay field where the bundles of hay looked like waves in a green sea. His mother watched him with a troubled face until he disappeared into the forest. Then she went back and wept a few tears into the soup pot.

"Everything goes wrong for that boy," she murmured sadly. "Will he ever succeed in anything?"

Lucien trudged through the forest, seeing nothing. He took no notice of the little grey squirrels that leapt from branch to branch.

He could think of nothing at all but his lost prize and his bitter disappointment—how someone else would get the honor that he deserved, and he would continue to be disliked and despised. He would never get another chance to show them how good he was at carving. No one would be interested unless he won that prize.

"I wish I could go away," he thought to himself, "and start all over again where nobody knew me, or knew what I'd done. If I could go and live in another valley, I shouldn't feel afraid of everybody like I do here."

His eyes rested on the Pass that ran between two opposite mountain peaks and led to the big town in the next valley where Marie worked. The sight of that Pass always fascinated him. It seemed like a road leading into another world, away from all that was safe and familiar. Twice he had crossed the Pass himself, in summer, when the sun was shining and the ground was covered with flowers. Now, gazing at it, it suddenly seemed like a door of escape from some prison.

Lucien saw the old man as he left the wood, long before the old man saw him. He was sitting at his front door, his chin resting on his hands, gazing at the mountains on the other side of the valley. He didn't look up until Lucien was quite close to him.

"Ah," said the old man in his deep, mumbling voice, "it's you again. Well, how goes the carving, and when are you going to win that prize?"

"I am not going to win the prize," replied Lucien sullenly. "My horse is smashed to pieces. I think the cat knocked it over the railing, and someone trampled on it."

"I am so sorry," said the old man gently. "But surely you can enter something else. What about that chamois you carved? That was a good piece of work for a boy."

Lucien kicked savagely at the stones on the path. "I did it without proper tools," he muttered, "and they would think it was my best work. No, if I cannot enter my little horse, I will enter nothing."

"But does it matter what they think?" inquired the old man.

"Yes," muttered Lucien again.

"Why?"

Lucien stared at the ground. What could he answer to that? But the old man was his friend, almost the only friend he had. Maybe he had better try to speak the truth.

"It matters very much," he mumbled, "because they all hate me and think I'm stupid and bad. If I won a prize, and they saw I could carve better than any other boy in the valley, they might like me better."

"They wouldn't," he said simply. "Your skill can never buy you love. It may win you admiration and envy, but never love. If that was what you were after, you have wasted your time."

Lucien continued to stare at the ground. Then suddenly he looked up into the old man's face, his eyes brimming with tears.

"Then it is all no good," he whispered. "There seems no way to start again and to make them like me. I suppose they just never will."

"If you want them to like you," replied the old man steadily, "you must make yourself fit to be liked. And you must use your skill in loving and serving them. It will not happen all at once. It may even take years, but you must keep trying."

"Lucien stared up at the old man. He wondered why this strange old man, who seemed to know so much about the way of love, should shut himself away up here in the mountains and cut himself off from everybody."

The old man seemed to guess what Lucien was thinking.

"You wonder why I should talk of loving and serving other people, don't you?" he asked. "You are right to wonder such a thing. It is a long story, too."



“Well,” admitted Lucien, “I was thinking that it must be difficult to love and serve people when you live alone up here and never speak to anyone but me.”

The old man sat silent for some moments, looking out over the mountain peaks, then said, “I will tell you my story, but remember, it is a secret. I have never told it to another living soul. But you have trusted me, and I will trust you, too.”

Lucien blushed. Those were good words. Even his disappointment about the prize seemed to matter less. It was better to be trusted than to win prizes.

“I will start at the beginning,” said the old man simply. “I was an only child, and there was nothing in the world my father would not give me. If ever a child was spoiled, I was.

“I was a clever boy, and when I grew up I had a good job in a bank. I worked very hard and did well. I fell in love with a girl and married her. God gave us two little sons, and for the first few years of our life together I believe I was a good husband and a good father.

“But I made some bad friends, who invited me to their homes. They were interested in gambling and they drank a lot of alcohol. I admired them and began to copy their ways. Slowly I began to spend more and more money on strong drink and gambling.

“I don’t need to tell you much about those years. I was at home less and less, and often came home drunk in the evenings. My little boys grew to dislike me and fear me. My wife was a good woman, and she prayed for me and begged me to stop drinking, but I just couldn’t give it up.

“We began to lose all our money, and people were starting to talk about me and my bad ways. The bank manager warned me twice, but the third time, when I was found drunk in the streets, he sacked me. That day I went home

sober and told my wife I had lost my job. She simply replied, ‘Then I shall have to go out and work. We can’t fail our boys.’

“I tried to find another job, but people knew about me and no one would employ me. I tried to earn money by gambling, but I never had any luck. I lost the little money I had.

“My wife went out to work every day, as well as looking after the house and our two boys, but she could not earn enough to keep us all. One day she came and told me we owed money to people, and we could not pay them.

“I was desperate for money to pay our debts and to buy myself more drink. I had not had a good job in the bank for nothing. I knew its ways inside and out, so I decided to commit a robbery.

“My clever plan worked, but it was not quite clever enough and I was caught.

As I could pay nothing back to the bank, I was sent to prison for a very long time.

“My wife became very ill. She was working too hard, and ate hardly anything so that our boys would have enough food. Three times she came to prison to visit me, looking pale and worn out. Then my elder boy wrote to tell me that she was too ill to come. A few weeks later a policeman took me to her bedside to say good-bye to her. She was dying. They said she died from tuberculosis, but I knew she died of a broken heart, and I had killed her.

I remember little about the months that followed. I felt numb and lost. I had only one comfort. All my life I had loved woodcarving, and in my spare hours in the common room in prison they let me have my tools and whittle away at bits of wood. I grew more and more skillful, and a kind prison warden used to take my work and sell it in the town. I earned a little money in that way and saved it up. One day I hoped to have enough to start again.”

