Treasures of the Snow

Part 2

“The day came sooner than I expected. I was called to the governor and told that because I had been well behaved, they were letting me out early. I would soon be a free man again.

I wandered back to the prisoners’ common room, hardly knowing whether to be pleased or sorry. I supposed I should be glad to leave prison, but where should I go, and how could I start life again? One thing I was sure about: my boys should never see me again or know where I was. They had been adopted by their grandparents, and I knew they were growing up into fine, intelligent boys with good futures ahead of them. I didn’t want them to be connected with my bad name. To them I would be as though I was dead.

When the day of my release came, I walked out with my little sum of money in my pocket and took the first train up into the mountains. I got out at this village because I saw a man in difficulty with his herd of cows who were trying to push through a broken fence. I helped him get them back into the road and then asked him if he could give me work.

He did not need me, but pointed to a chalet halfway up the mountain. Up there, he told me, was a peasant whose son had gone down to the lake towns to learn a trade. He badly needed someone to take the place of his son.

I shall never forget that day! I found the chalet, and the man himself was chopping wood outside when I arrived. I went and stood in front of him. I was tired and hungry and sick at heart, and wasted no time in asking him if he had a job for me.

He looked me up and down. His face was good and his eyes were kind.

“‘You are not from our village,’ he said. ‘Where have you come from, and who are you?’

“I come from Geneva.”

“What is your work?”

“I have none.”

“But what have you been doing up to now?”

I tried to think up some good lie, but the man looked at me so straight, and his face was so honest, that I knew I had to tell him the truth. I wanted him to know me for what I was, or else not to know me at all.

“‘I have just come out of prison,’ I said simply.

“‘Why were you in prison?’

“‘For stealing money.’

“‘How do I know that you will not steal my money?’

“Because I want to start again, and I am asking you to trust me. If you do not trust me, I will go away.”

He looked me up and down. Then he held out his hand to me, and I sat down on the bench beside him and wept.

I worked hard for that man for five years. I made friends with no one and took no rest. My only joy was to work for the man I loved and who had received me when everyone else had rejected me. I often wondered why he did it, until one night I heard him talking to his son, who was home from town for the weekend.

“Father,” said the boy, “why did you take in that prisoner without knowing anything about him? Surely it was a very unwise thing to do.”

"'My son," answered the man, "Christ received everyone, whether they were good or bad, and we are his followers. We must do the same."

"In the summer we took the cows up the mountain and lived in this chalet where I live now. And the peace of the mountain seemed to enter into me and heal me. Slowly I, too, began to believe in the love and mercy of God.

But after four years my master began to grow weak and ill. He visited the doctor, but nothing could be done for him. I cared for him for a year and his son often came to see him, but at last he died and I was left alone. The night before he died, he spoke to me, as my wife had done, about the love and mercy of God and how He can forgive us for what we have done wrong.

So I lost my only friend, although his son was very good to me. He was a rich man by now. He sold the cows and gave me this chalet for my own. I bought a goat and a few hens, collected my few possessions, and came here. I have lived here ever since.

I have only one friend—the shopkeeper in town who sells my carvings. He sometimes gives me news of my sons. They have grown up into good men and they have done well. One is a doctor and one is a businessman. They do not know that I am alive, and it is better like that. I have nothing that I could give them, and my name would only disgrace them.

Because I now believe in God, and His love and mercy, I want to make things right. I cannot give back the money I stole from the bank, but I have worked hard and saved nearly as much money as I stole. When I have saved the whole amount, I will find some person or good cause that really needs it. In that way I shall pay back all I owe and I will feel I have put things right.

You tell me there is no way to start again, but you are wrong. I have done far, far worse things than you have ever done, and suffered for it. But I believe that God has forgiven me, and I am spending my days working to give back what I owe and trying to become what God meant me to be. It is all I can do. It is all anyone can do. The past we must leave to God."

The goat had come up and rested its brown head on the old man's knee. Now it butted him to remind him that it was milking time. Lucien got up to go.

He walked home slowly. "I am spending my days working to restore what I owe … trying to become what God meant me to be." He thought about it a lot—so much so that the matter of the prize seemed quite small, and he found that he had stopped minding so much.

He couldn't restore Dani's leg, but one day he might get the chance to do something great for him. As for the second part, he could at least try to be a nicer boy. There was his mother, for a start. She was miserable because his carving was broken. Well, he would be brave and show her he didn't mind, and then she would be happy again.

As he left the wood he could see the orange lights in his chalet windows shining out warm and welcoming. He hurried home and ran lightly up the chalet steps and kissed his mother, who was standing on the balcony watching for him.

"I'm hungry, Mother," he said brightly. "Have you saved my supper?"

Over the top of his soup bowl he smiled at her, and the sadness left her eyes as she smiled back.

14 The Handwork Competition

The sun woke Dani early next morning, and he lay for a few minutes trying to remember what important thing was going to happen that day. It soon came back to him, and he sat up in bed and shouted for Annette.

"'Nette," he called, "come quick! I'm coming to see you get the prize! Bring me my best black velvet suit and my embroidered braces and my waistcoat. Quick!"

Annette pretended not to hear until he had said it four times. Then she sat up.

“Be quiet, Dani,” she called back rather crossly. “I don’t suppose I shall get that prize at all, and anyhow it’s much too early to get dressed. Papa’s only just got up.”

Dani sighed and lay down again, but he was too excited to stop talking. He pulled Klaus into bed with him and began whispering into one of her silky white ears.

“I shall go in the cart, Klaus,” he murmured, “and I shall see all the things the children have made. But Annette’s is the best, and I shall see her get a lovely prize, and I’ll clap as loud as I can. And I shall wear my best braces.”

Klaus yawned. So did Dani. After all, it was very early in the morning. When Annette came down later, she found them curled up into two little balls, fast asleep in the sun.

One and a half hours later they were off, with Dani dressed in his best clothes. Papa pulled the cart and Annette walked beside him, feeling dull and sad and rather cross.

What could be making Annette so miserable on such a morning? The sun was shining, the river was glistening, and Annette was going to win a prize. There was everything to make them happy, and anyhow Dani never felt sad or cross except when he had a pain in his leg.

“Have you got a tummy ache, ’Nette?” asked Dani suddenly.

“Of course I haven’t, Dani,” answered Annette sharply. “Why should I have a tummy ache?”

“I just thought you might,” replied Dani. “Oh, ’Nette, look. There’s a blue butterfly sitting on my shoe.”

But Annette did not even turn around to look at the blue butterfly. She walked on, staring at the ground.

Whatever could be the matter with Annette? Already the schoolroom was filling when they arrived. The desks had been stacked on one side and the children’s work was laid out on long tables knitting, embroidery, lace, and crochet work—making a very pretty show. Parents walked around admiringly while children jostled and nudged each other, pointing and chattering like magpies.

Pierre, the postman’s son, was standing by the wood-carving table, close to his own piece of work: a wooden inkstand with a bear standing over the inkwell. It was quite a good piece of work for a child of his age. Pierre, who was a nice boy, blushed a little and looked the other way as his friends slapped him on the back and congratulated him.

Still, he was pleased with that little bear himself, and he looked up and smiled proudly at his mother, who was coming toward him across the room.

Lucien was there, too, wandering around by himself as usual, for his mother had not finished getting the hay in and had not come down. He stared gloomily at the inkstand and compared the heavy-looking bear with his own sprightly galloping horse. If only that accident had not happened, the children would have been standing around him instead of round Pierre. He felt a great angry stab of jealousy for Pierre, who was clever and good-looking and good at games, and who now was going to win the prize that belonged to Lucien. He drifted away into a corner by himself and stared gloomily at the crowd.

Annette, surrounded by a group of chattering friends, was strangely silent. Some thought she would get the prize; others thought Jeanne might win. There was much guessing and running to and fro, and much putting together of heads, some saying one thing and some another. Only Annette, usually so bright and talkative, said nothing.

Dani, his hand clasped tightly in his father's, hopped around inspecting everything, and everyone made way for him and gave him a kind word as he passed. Then, having seen all he wanted to see, he went to stand at the end of the long table close to Annette's entry so that he might be right on the spot when the prizewinner was announced.

The door opened and a sudden hush fell on the chattering crowd. The man from the town by the lake had arrived to judge the work. The children and parents stood quietly against the walls as the tall man walked slowly around, picking up and examining first one thing and then another. He praised a great many of the entries and spoke kindly about all of them. He had come prepared to see a good exhibition, he said, and he was not disappointed. He looked through the children's exercise books, piled on a table at the far end of the room, and talked about their work. He was a kind, patient man, but very slow. All that the children wanted to know was who was going to get the prize.

He was going to make up his mind about the girls first. He walked over to Marcelle's lace and examined it carefully, then went back to Annette's knitted sweater and turned it over in his hands. The room was so silent you could have heard a pin drop.

Then suddenly the silence was broken. "My sister made that," said a clear, distinct child's voice.

The big man jumped and peered over the end of the table. He saw a small brown face with round blue eyes lifted to his, alight with hope and eagerness.

"Then your sister is a very clever girl," replied the big man gravely, and as he spoke he noticed the crutches.

"I think it's the very best of all, don't you?" went on Dani earnestly, not noticing at all that everyone in the room was listening to him. All he knew was that he wanted Annette to win.

The big man had not quite made up his mind when Dani first spoke, but now he suddenly felt quite certain.

"Yes, I do. I think it's the very best," answered the big man, and Dani immediately turned round on his crutches and faced his sister, who was blushing deeply at his bad behaviour.

"You've got the prize, 'Nette," called out Dani, and everybody burst out laughing and started clapping. And so, in this unusual and unexpected fashion, the prizewinner for the girls was announced.

Pierre won the boys' prize. It was announced properly after a suitable speech to which none of the children listened. Then there was tea and rolls and gingerbread and macaroons, and then Pierre went home with a crowd of admiring friends, who all bought chocolate sticks for him for winning.

Lucien went down to the village alone to collect the bread, and when he came back past the school, the playground was deserted and the children had all gone home. He climbed the hill slowly, but it was not the weight of the bread basket on his back that bowed his shoulders and made him walk with his eyes on the ground.

Lucien was very unhappy. Why was it that one day it seemed easy to be brave and cheerful, and the next day it seemed impossible to be anything but angry and jealous? Yesterday, on the way home from visiting the old man, he had thought that he wouldn't mind seeing Pierre win the prize. But today he hated Pierre.

The old man had talked about trying to become what God meant you to be, but somehow, however hard you tried, it seemed impossible to change yourself for long.

And yet the old man had become different, and Lucien found himself wondering how. The old man had talked about God. Perhaps God could make nasty people nice if they asked Him. Lucien felt he didn't know very much

about God. Anyhow, God was probably very angry with him for being so wicked to Dani.

But could God really love him much? Surely God wouldn't forgive something so bad in a hurry. And even if He did, nobody else would. His unhappiness came over him again, and he gave a great sniff and kicked angrily at the stones on the path.

He was passing the corner where the path divided, not far from Annette's chalet, and as he branched off toward his home he suddenly heard a little child singing. He turned to look.

Dani and Klaus were sitting on a hollowed-out pile of new hay, like two birds in a nest, and Dani's bright head was bent low over something. His crutches lay on the ground beside him.

Because he was feeling so lonely, Lucien drew a step nearer and stood watching. Suddenly his cheeks flushed with pleasure and he drew a sharp little breath. Dani had dug out a sort of cave in the wall of his hay nest, and inside it were grouped all the little wooden animals that Lucien had carved with such care.

"So she did give them to him," thought Lucien to himself with a little thrill of happiness. "And he does like them!" Then, aloud, he said, "What are you playing at, Dani?"

Dani jumped and looked up, and saw the boy who had tried to kill his kitten. His first reaction was to seize Klaus around the middle tightly and say, "Go away, you horrid boy!"

But as he said it, he, although he was only five years old, could not help noticing that Lucien looked very unhappy, and unhappiness was a thing that his friendly little heart could not bear. So, still holding the struggling Klaus very tightly, he added after a moment's pause, "I'm playing with my fairy Noah animals But 'Nette said I mustn't talk to you."

"I wouldn't hurt you," answered Lucien very gently. "And I'm sorry about your leg. That's why I made those animals for you."

"You didn't make them," answered Dani cheerfully. "I found them behind the woodpile. The fairies put them there."

Lucien was just about to answer when Annette's voice came sharp and shrill from the door of the chalet.

"Dani," she shouted, "come in at once. Supper's ready."

Lucien turned away. "So she didn't tell him," he thought rather bitterly. Still, it was nice to know that Dani loved them and played with them. One day he might get the chance to explain, and then perhaps he and Dani would be friends. He climbed the path between the hay fields feeling a bit more cheerful.

Dani hopped into the kitchen and climbed into his seat, his nose twitching joyfully like a rabbit's at the smell of Grandmother's potato soup.

"'Nette," began Dani, "Lucien said that he made my fairy Noah animals, but he didn't, did he? The fairies put them behind the woodpile, didn't they? He wasn't speaking the truth, was he?"

"I've told you not to talk to Lucien, Dani," said Annette crossly. "He'll only hurt you again. He's a horrid boy."

"Yes," answered Dani, "and I only talked to him a teeny, weeny bit. But he didn't, did he, 'Nette? Tell me!"

Annette hesitated. She was a truthful child, and she did not want to tell a lie. But if Dani knew, he would be so grateful that he would forgive Lucien at once, and go and thank him. And there was no telling where it would all end.

They would become friends in a few minutes. It was hard enough as it was to make Dani unfriendly with anybody, but if he knew about the animals it would be quite impossible.

“You know you found them in the woodpile,” she replied, looking away, “so how could he have made them? Don’t be silly, Dani.”

“He said he did,” answered Dani, “but I know he didn’t. It must have been the fairies, mustn’t it, ’Nette?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Dani,” replied poor Annette wearily. “How you do chatter! Eat up your soup quickly. It will be all cold.”

Dani obediently buried his nose in his bowl, but Grandmother, whose dim old eyes saw more than most people’s, looked very hard at Annette. She, too, had heard and wondered at the story of the animals in the woodpile.

Annette, knowing that Grandmother was looking hard at her, went very red. Going over to the stove, she pretended to help herself to more soup. But she only took a little, for somehow she wasn’t a bit hungry. The day she had looked forward to for so long was all spoiled. She had got the prize she wanted so badly, but it hadn’t made her a bit happy. In fact, she was really miserable.

She washed up the supper things in silence, tucked up, and kissed a warm, sleepy Dani. Then she slipped out alone into the summer evening. She usually loved being out alone on summer evenings to do just as she pleased—just her and the still blue mountains.

But tonight it was different. Nothing pleased her, and she could think of nothing but that smashed little horse lying trampled on the ground, and of the light that had died in Dani’s face when she had spoken so crossly to him.

“Perhaps I shall never like being alone again,” thought poor Annette, and she turned back toward home. “I wish I could tell someone! It wouldn’t be so bad then. I wish Mummy was still alive. Oh, I wish, I wish, I wish I hadn’t done it!”

15 Christmas Again—and Gingerbread Bears

Autumn came, and the cows returned from the high pastures. Dani was growing taller every day, and by October the village cobbler had to make him a new pair of boots. He went to the infant school, too, every day, and Monsieur Burnier paid two big boys one franc each a week to pull him home in the cart.

And now Christmas had come around again. The snow lay over a foot deep on the chalet roofs, and Papa had to dig a path from the front door to the main sled track. The little stream was silent and frozen, and icicles hung like bright swords from the rocks. Annette and Dani went to school on the sled every morning by starlight, but came home in the sunshine under a deep blue sky, the snow sparkling like jewels.

Christmas was a very special time to Dani, for all the great events of his life had happened at Christmas. His mother had died on Christmas Eve, and though Dani had never known his mother, he sensed a certain gentle sadness in his father’s face and felt a special tenderness toward him and Annette. Dani himself had had all the mothering he needed from Grandmother and Annette, and the only time he ever thought about his mother was when Grandmother read about heaven in the Bible. Then he would gaze up into her photograph on the wall, and think that when his time came to go to heaven it would be nice to see her kind face, so like Annette’s, looking out for him and smiling to welcome him.

It was his own birthday, too, and this year he was six. He had thought for a long time about being six, and he expected to wake up quite a new child on the morning of Christmas Eve. So it was rather disappointing to find, as he lay in the warm, shuttered darkness, that he really felt no bigger or stronger or more important than before. Then he remembered that he was going to see the Christmas tree in the church, and Grandmother had made a special cake for his birthday, and after that there was no room for disappointed thoughts any longer.

Of course, according to Dani, Christmas was Klaus's birthday, too. It wasn't really Klaus's birthday because Klaus must have been at least a fortnight old when she crept into Dani's slipper, but Dani had never thought of that.

Best of all, it was the birthday of the Lord Jesus, and although Dani did not talk about it very much, he thought about it a lot. It made him strangely happy to know that he shared the birthday of the perfect child.

"What could I give to the little Lord Jesus for a birthday present?" he had asked, resting his elbows on Grandmother's knee and looking up into her face.

"You can give your own self to Him," Grandmother had answered, pausing a moment in her knitting. "And you can ask Him to make you very loving and obedient. That will please Him better than anything."

So throughout Christmas, Dani tried to be loving and obedient in order to please the child whose birthday he shared, and his love just overflowed to everyone. He tidied Grandmother's workbox and wiped the dishes for Annette. In the afternoon he went out to the shed and visited the cows in turn, wishing Happy Christmas into their silky ears. And at the end of the day, when he said his prayers, he whispered, "I hope I am giving you a happy birthday, little Lord Jesus."

So Dani had a perfect birthday, and when evening came and it was time to wrap up warmly and go down to the church, his happiness was complete.

To begin with, there was the ride on the sled between Papa and Annette, with the cold air making his nose feel as though it wasn't there. It was almost full moon, and the white mountains looked quite silvery. All the trees in the forest were weighed down with snow, and the lower branches trembled as they rushed past. Annette held him tightly around the middle, which made him feel very warm and safe.

Out of the wood, over the bumpy little bridge and down across the last field with a cold rush, there was the little church with the rosy light of hundreds of candles streaming from the windows and door, and the villagers greeting each other in the porch. Dani was carried up the aisle in Papa's arms and placed on the front bench with the other children from the infant school—thirty little rosy-faced children in woolly hoods gazing in wonder at the tree. Only three days ago it had been weighed down with snow in the cold forest near Dani's house. Now it was decorated and sparkling, covered with oranges, chocolate sticks, and shining gingerbread bears.

Dani was glad he was sitting in front, partly because he could see the tree, and partly because he could see his picture. It hung behind the pulpit—a great big picture of the Good Samaritan. It was hung in a wooden frame and had been drawn by a famous Swiss artist. Dani loved the kind face of the Good Samaritan, and he loved the little donkey. But best of all he loved the big St. Bernard dog that trotted along beside them. It was exactly like Rudolf, the St. Bernard dog that pulled the milk cart around the market square. He actually belonged to the milkman, but all the little children in the village thought he belonged to them. They climbed on his back and flung their fat, tight arms around his fluffy neck, and he licked them and patted them and was so patient with them, as though they were a crowd of naughty puppies. That was why every toddler in the church loved to come to church and see the picture of the Good Samaritan, with Rudolph trotting beside him.

The older children sang a carol first. Annette was singing it with the others, and her thoughts flew back to that Christmas night when she had first held Dani in her arms. How they had welcomed him and watched him. Yet no one but His mother had welcomed Baby Jesus. "They laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

The carol finished, the older children went back to their seats and the infant school trotted to the front. Dani got left behind because crutches do not move as fast as sturdy legs, but they waited for him, and everyone in the

audience smiled as he reached his place with a final hop and turned his happy face toward them.

Dani glanced up at the bright star on top of the Christmas tree and saw it reflected on the shining gingerbread bears below, and forgot what he was singing because he was wondering which particular bear was going to belong to him. There was one that looked as if it was laughing. The baker had accidentally given a little twist to its snout. Dani decided he would like that one.

As the children went back to their seats, the old pastor climbed into the pulpit. He had been pastor in that village for forty-five years and everybody loved him. His shoulders were bowed and his skin tanned, for he still climbed the mountain in all weather to visit his church members. His beard was so long and white that Dani got him mixed up in his mind with Father Christmas.

He looked down on the people he loved and knew so well.

He was a very old man. This might be his last Christmas message. He prayed that he might speak words that would not be forgotten.

Annette listened rather dreamily to the story she knew so well, half thinking of other things, until the old man suddenly repeated the words that had haunted her every Christmas.

“There was no room for them—no room for Him!”

In the slow manner of some very old people, he repeated it three times, and each time Annette thought the words sounded sadder. How quickly she would have opened her door!

“And yet,” went on the old man, “tonight the Savior is standing at closed doors. There are still hearts that have never made room for Him. This is what He says: ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in.’

“What will you do about Him this Christmas? Will you open the door, or will you leave Him standing outside? Will those sad words be said about you, ‘There was no room for Him’?”

“I should like to ask Him to come in,” thought Annette. “I wonder what it all means. The clergyman spoke about asking Him to come into our hearts. I wonder if I could ask Him into my heart.”

Just for a moment Annette thought it rather a nice idea, and looked around to see whether other people thought it was, too. As she looked around, she suddenly noticed Lucien sitting on the other side of the church with his mother and sister.

As she caught sight of him she realized that she couldn’t ask Jesus to come into her heart because her heart was full of hatred for Lucien. Jesus would not want to come into an angry, unforgiving heart. Either she would have to forgive and be kind, or else the Lord Jesus would have to stay outside.

She didn’t want to forgive and be kind. Not yet. There was something else, too. She had broken Lucien’s carving and let him think it was the cat, and cheated him of his prize. If the Lord Jesus came into her heart, He would have something to say to her about that, and she didn’t want to listen.

The sermon was over, but she had not heard much of it because she had been so busy with her thoughts. Dani nudged her to make her see that it was time for him to go up and get his gingerbread bear.

The church was full of a low murmur of conversation, and the little ones were pushing forward toward the tree. Monsieur Pilet, the woodcutter, was handing out bears. Dani gave his sleeve a firm tug and pointed to the bear at the top, which he wanted.

“Please, I want that one,” he whispered, “that one up there. Please, I want it very badly!”

Because of the crutches, and because it was Christmas, Monsieur Pilet moved the ladders, moved the children, and moved the lower lights, and with great difficulty he climbed up and took hold of the bear that Dani wanted.

Dani was dragged home through the starlight and the snow with the bear he had specially chosen close to him. Every time he looked down at that merry curved snout he chuckled, as though he and his bear had some private Christmas joke between them that nobody else knew about.

16 Klaus Goes Missing

Christmas Day was over, and Dani was asleep with his flushed cheek lying on his arm. Papa was in the stable, and Annette and Grandmother sat one each side of the stove. Grandmother was knitting white woolen stockings for her grandchildren, and Annette was supposed to be patching her pinafore. Actually, her pinafore had slipped to the ground and she was simply staring in front of her with her head resting on her hands.

“Annette,” said Grandmother suddenly, without looking up from her knitting, “have you had a happy Christmas?”

“Yes, thank you, Grandmother,” replied Annette rather dully, because that’s what she thought she ought to say. Then she added suddenly, “Grandmother, what does it mean when it says that Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts?”

“It means,” said Grandmother, laying down her knitting and giving Annette her whole attention, “that Jesus sees that your life is full of wrong things and dark thoughts. He came down and died on the cross so that He could be punished for all those wrong deeds and dark thoughts instead of you. Then He came back to life again so that He could come into your life and live in you, and turn out all those wrong thoughts, and put His good loving thoughts in you instead. It’s like someone knocking at the door of a dirty, dark, dusty house and saying, ‘If you will let me in I will take away the dust and the darkness and make it beautiful and bright.’ But remember, Jesus never pushes His way in—He only asks if He may come in. That is what knocking means. You have to say, ‘Yes, Lord Jesus, I need you and I want you to come and live in me.

’ That’s what opening the door means.”

Annette’s eyes were fixed on Grandmother. There was a long, long pause.

Annette broke the silence.

“But Grandmother,” she said, drawing her stool nearer and leaning against the old woman’s knee, “if you hated someone, you could not ask Jesus to come in, could you?”

“If you hate someone,” said Grandmother, “it just shows how badly you need to ask Him to come in. The darker the room, the more it needs the light.”

“But I couldn’t stop hating Lucien,” said Annette softly, fingering her long plaits thoughtfully.

“No,” said Grandmother. “You’re quite right. None of us can stop ourselves thinking wrong thoughts, and it isn’t much good trying. But Annette, when you come down in the morning and find this room dark with the shutters closed, do you say to yourself, ‘I must chase away the darkness and the shadows first, and then I will open the shutters and let in the sun’? Do you waste time trying to get rid of the dark?”

“Of course not,” said Annette.

“Then how do you get rid of the dark?”

“I pull back the shutters, of course, and then the light comes in!”

“But what happens to the dark?”

“I don’t know. It just goes when the light comes!”

“That is just what happens when you ask the Lord Jesus to come in,” said Grandmother. “He is love, and when love comes in, hatred and selfishness and unkindness will give way to it, just as the darkness gives way when you let in the sunshine. To try to chase it out alone would be like trying to chase the shadows out of a dark room. It would be a waste of time.”

Annette did not answer. She only sat for a little time staring at the wall. Then she picked up her pinafore with a sigh and worked at it in silence. After a while she got up, kissed her grandmother good night very quietly, and went up to bed.

But she could not go to sleep for a long time. She lay in the dark, tossing and turning and wondering.

“It’s quite true,” she said to herself. “If I asked Him to come in, I should have to be friends with Lucien, and I don’t want to be. I suppose I should have to tell how I broke his carving, and I could never, never do that. I shall just have to try and forget about the knocking. And yet I feel so terribly miserable.”

She did not know yet that the child who hears the Lord Jesus knocking, and shuts Him out, is also shutting out happiness. She thought she could forget all about it and find some other way of being happy. So she turned over her pillow, and made herself count the goats running to pasture until she fell asleep.

In her sleep she dreamed of a dark house with no welcome lights in the windows, and the door barred and bolted. Somebody came to it at night across the waste of snow, and she could see his footprints all the way. This visitor knocked at the door, slowly and patiently, but nobody came to open it. He felt for a handle, but there wasn’t one. He went on knocking and knocking and knocking. He went on knocking until Annette woke up, but still nobody answered, and there were still no lights in the windows.

“Perhaps there’s nobody there,” thought Annette to herself in a half-asleep sort of way. But somehow she knew perfectly well that there was. They just didn’t want to come to the door.

The sadness of the dream lingered with her, and she dressed and went down to breakfast feeling rather upset, only to find everything in a turmoil. Dani had lost Klaus, and was refusing to eat his breakfast until she was found.

“She always wakes me in the morning,” explained Dani excitedly. “She comes and purrs at me.

But this morning she wasn’t there. She went out last night before I went to sleep, and she hasn’t come back.”

Dani was upset, and everyone tried to help him. Papa searched in the barns, Grandmother rummaged about in the kitchen, and Dani explored perfectly impossible places. Annette went upstairs and searched the bedrooms, but it was all in vain. Klaus was nowhere to be found. Papa had last seen her stalking toward the barn with her tail in the air, picking her way gingerly across the soft snow. No one had seen her since.

It was a miserable day. Dani was really upset at dinner, and between his sobs declared that he could not eat anything because Klaus was hungry. His tears trickled down into his soup and no one had any power to comfort him, although neither Papa nor Grandmother seemed particularly worried. “She will come back, Dani,” said Papa quietly. “She’s only hiding for today.”

There was no sun either. Grey clouds hung low, hiding the mountains, and fresh, soft snow began to fall. At night it would harden into a crust, and next day would be dangerous for walking. Papa pulled on his cape and got out the big sleigh to haul in logs. Grandmother went to sleep in the armchair by the stove, and Dani came and leaned against Annette and looked up into her face.

“’Nette,” he said pitifully, “I want to go to bed.”

“Why, Dani?” asked Annette, astonished. “It’s ever so early—only just beginning to get dark. And you haven’t had your supper!”

“But I want to go to bed, ’Nette,” persisted Dani.

“You see, I want it to be time to say my prayers.”

Annette gave a little laugh. “You don’t have to go to bed to say your prayers, Dani,” she replied. “You could say them just as well now, and then have your supper and go to bed at the normal time.”

But Dani shook his fair head. “No,” he said, “I want them to be my proper prayers, in my nightgown. Please put me to bed, ’Nette.”

“Oh, all right,” answered Annette, beginning to unbutton his sweater. “But you know, Dani, it doesn’t really make any difference being in your nightgown.” And then she kissed him because his small face looked so terribly sad and his mouth dropped at the corners.

When he was safely buttoned into his white nightshirt, he knelt down and folded his hands and prayed for Klaus.

“Dear God,” he prayed, “please bless Klaus. Please find her and bring her back to me quickly. Don’t let her be cold or hungry or frightened. Show her the way home tonight. Please, please, dear God. Amen.”

“Aren’t you going to pray for anyone else?” protested Annette in a slightly shocked voice.

“No,” replied Dani, getting up from his knees in a hurry, “not tonight. I don’t want God to think of anyone but Klaus tonight!” And then, thinking that perhaps he was being a little unkind, he added, “You can pray for the other people later.”

Having asked God to look after Klaus, Dani climbed into bed with a peaceful heart and rested his cheek on his hand.

But he opened his eyes and said drowsily, “’Nette?”

“Yes,” answered Annette.

“You’ll wake me when she comes, won’t you?”

“When who comes?”

“Klaus, of course!” And with that, Dani fell asleep.

Annette wandered round the room restlessly, and then, because her cheeks felt hot and because she had been indoors all day, she opened the door and went out onto the balcony.

It had stopped snowing. A west wind was blowing up the valley, piling the snow in drifts against the walls of the chalet. It was not a bitterly cold wind. It felt pleasant on her hot cheeks, and she decided to go for a walk up to the streambed. She might meet Klaus.

She slipped on her cloak and set off. It was a full moon and very light. As Annette reached the top of the field, she turned and looked back over the snow and could see her footprints just like the footprints of the man in her dreams—only his had stretched a long way. He seemed to have traveled right across the world to reach that dark little house—and all for nothing.

17 An Open Door

Annette wandered quite a long way, and at last she reached the little bridge that crossed the stream. The railings were hung with icicles and the stream was almost silent. It was very still up there. The wind had stopped and it had begun to freeze. The little bridge was extremely slippery and Annette never noticed the sheet of ice below the soft snow. Suddenly her foot slipped and she stumbled forward with a little cry of pain.

For a moment the pain in her ankle made her feel faint and sick, and she lay for a minute or two in the snow without moving. Then she tried to get up,

but sank down again with another cry, for she had sprained her ankle badly and could not stand on it at all.

For a few minutes she felt terribly frightened. She was alone on the mountainside, and no one was likely to come down that lonely path that night. It was getting colder and colder. Unless she could reach shelter she would certainly freeze to death.

Then she remembered that there was a chalet a little farther up the mountain around the bend in the path, just inside the forest. A young woodsman and his wife lived there. If she could drag herself on her hands and knees to their door, they would take her home on their sled. It was not very far. She would start at once.

She began crawling through the snow, painfully dragging her poor swollen foot behind her. It ached dreadfully at every jolt, and before long she began to get terribly tired. Her hands kept sinking into the snow and her eyes filled with tears. Would she ever get there?

She reached the hairpin bend in the path where the forest started, and to her relief she could see the chalet, not very far away, with one little light in the window.

She struggled on slowly until she reached the steps of the little house. She gave a low call, hoping that someone would come out and carry her up them, but no one came. So she struggled up herself and sank down in an exhausted heap on the doorstep.

Then with a sigh of relief she stretched up and knocked on the door.

There was no answer. The little house seemed as silent as the snow. Annette reached up again and knocked as loudly as she could.

But there was still no answer; Nothing stirred in the little house. No friendly footstep came toward her.

Feeling very afraid, she staggered up on one foot and beat her fists upon the door until they were sore, shouting at the top of her voice and rattling the latch.

Then, as the horrid truth dawned on her, she sank down on the steps and burst into frightened tears. The door was locked and the house was empty. The little light had only been left on to scare burglars. There was no one there at all.

For a few minutes she felt in a real panic. She was a mountain child and had often heard stories of people being frozen to death in the snow. But then her panic left her and she began to think more clearly.

If they had left the passage light on, they probably meant to come back that night.

But if they had gone down the valley, they might be a long time coming, and then perhaps it would be too late. Already she could feel the cold creeping into the tips of her fingers.

Perhaps if she rested a little she might be able to crawl back. But the next chalet was a long, long way down, and the snow drifts were soft and deep.

Anyhow, she would wait a little longer and then try. It was her only chance.

She looked hopelessly out into the snowy scene in front of her. Once again she thought of her dream, where there had been footprints all the way to the door of the silent house.

As she sat there waiting, she thought of something else. She knew now, for the first time, what it felt like to knock at a closed door and get no answer.

She had knocked for only a few minutes, but the Lord Jesus went on knocking for years and years. She knew He did.

She had stopped knocking because she knew the house was empty. But just supposing Monsieur and Madame Berdoz had been inside all the time. Suppose they had heard her knocking out in the night and had looked at each other and said, “Somebody’s knocking, but we won’t let them in just now. We’ll pretend not to hear. We won’t take any notice!”

How angry she would have been with them. How much she would have hated them for being so unkind!

Yet that was exactly how she was treating the Lord Jesus—and He didn’t hate her. He still loved her dearly, or He wouldn’t go on knocking and still want to come in. Grandmother had said so.

She was thinking so hard about this that for a moment she almost forgot her fear and loneliness. But she suddenly lifted her head and strained her ears, for she thought she heard a sound.

It was a very gentle sound, but one that all mountain children know well—the sound of skis running through soft snow. Then she heard the sound of a boy’s voice, singing.

Someone was coming down through the wood on skis. In a few seconds they would come around the bend and shoot right past the front of the chalet. If they were going very fast, they might not see her.

A little figure came into sight, swaying toward the valley. Annette kneeled upright and shouted at the top of her voice. “Help!” she cried, cupping her hands in front of her mouth. “Stop and help me!”

The skier turned swiftly and brought his skis to a standstill. Then he unstrapped them and ran lightly up the slope toward her.

“What’s the matter?” he cried. “Who is it? Are you hurt?”

It was Lucien. He had been up the mountain to visit his old friend, and now he was on his way home.

He had been startled by Annette’s cry, and when he saw who it was kneeling there in the moonlight, he stood still and stared as though he had seen a ghost.

But Annette was too pleased to see anyone to care about who it was. Just for a moment she forgot everything except that she was found and saved. She stretched out her hands and seized hold of his cloak as though she was afraid he might run away.

“Oh, Lucien,” she cried in a rather shaky voice. “I am so glad you’ve come. I’ve hurt my foot, and I can’t walk, and I thought I might freeze to death before Monsieur and Madame Berdoz came home. Can you take me home, Lucien? I’m getting so cold.”

Lucien’s big mountain cloak was around her in an instant. He squatted down beside her and rubbed her cold hands.

“I can’t take you on the skis, Annette,” he said gently, “because you’re too big to carry. But I can be home in five minutes, and then I’ll come straight back with the big sled and a rug. I’ll have you at your chalet in less than half an hour.”

Lucien’s heart was so full of sudden joy that he felt he must run and shout and sing. His dream had come true. He was doing something useful for Annette. She needed him. Now perhaps she would forgive him and forget that terrible quarrel.

“Won’t you be cold without your cloak, Lucien?” asked Annette in a small, exhausted voice.

Lucien promptly took off his jacket and wrapped it around her head, and wished he might give her his shirt as well—although it wouldn’t have been the slightest use. He could feel the bite of the frost on his body and raced back over the snow. A moment later he had his skis on and sped off. He felt

so happy he hardly noticed the cold. He stumbled into his front door and his mother cried out at the sight of his bare arms and blue nose!

Annette, left alone, snuggled up in the warmth of Lucien's rough cloak. He would be back in about twenty-five minutes, and in those twenty-five minutes there was a good deal to make up her mind about.

First, she was safe. Lucien had come out of the wood just at the right moment, and he had heard her cry. So all the time she had thought she was alone, God had been caring for her and had sent Lucien to save her.

Secondly, she had discovered something about closed doors. She was not quite sure yet just what would happen when she opened the door, but one thing she was quite certain about. She could not leave Jesus outside any longer. She leaned her head against the snowy step rail and closed her eyes.

"Lord Jesus," said Annette, "I'm opening the door now. I'm sorry it's been shut such a long time and you had to wait so long. Please come in now. I'm sorry I've hated Lucien. Please make me love him, and if I've got to tell him about that little horse, please make me brave enough. And thank you for sending Lucien to find me. Amen."

And so the Lord Jesus, who had been waiting outside the door of Annette's heart and life for such a long time, came in. He would forgive her and help her to change. There was no one there to see that wonderful thing happening. Even Annette did not really feel any different.

But up in heaven that night, Annette's name was written in God's Book of Life, and the angels rejoiced because another child on earth had opened the door and made room for the Lord Jesus.

18 Things Start to Come Right

Well," thought Annette, "I've done it, and now I know what's got to happen."

She found her heart beating very fast, and she looked up at the vast starry sky and the great mountains to steady herself. How big they were, how old and unchanging! They made her and her fears feel very small and unimportant. After all, it would soon be over and forgotten about, but the mountains and the stars would go on and on forever.

A small black figure appeared, running around the curve in the path, dragging a sled behind him. He had found another coat, and was so out of breath with hurrying that he could hardly speak.

"Come on, Annette," he gasped. "I've brought the big sled so there's plenty of room for you to stretch out your leg. We'll be home in a few minutes."

He held out his hand to help her get up, but she drew back. "Just a minute, Lucien," she said in a hurried, rather shaky voice. "I want to tell you something before we go home. Lucien, it wasn't the cat that knocked over your horse that day. It was me. I did it on purpose because I didn't want you to get the prize—because you hurt Dani. I'm sorry, Lucien."

Lucien stood and stared at her, too surprised and, strangely enough, too happy to speak. For instead of feeling angry, he felt tremendously relieved. Annette had done something wrong as well as him, and if he had to forgive Annette, perhaps it would be easier for Annette to forgive him. Of course a little smashed horse was nothing compared with a little boy's smashed leg, but even so, it seemed to bring them somehow nearer together.

But he couldn't put all that into words, so he just gave a gruff little laugh and said shyly, "Oh, it's all right, Annette. You needn't worry. Get on the sled." Then he tucked the coat around her, sat down in front of her, and together they sped down the mountainside and arrived at the Burniers' front door, powdered all over with the snow that flew up from the runners.

Annette climbed the steps on her hands and knees and stood on one leg in the doorway. Then she looked at Lucien, who was turning away slowly with the sled.

She had opened the door of her heart to the love of the Lord Jesus, and that meant opening the door to Lucien as well, for Jesus' love never shuts anyone out.

"Come up, Lucien," she called. "Come in and see Grandmother. She will be so pleased that you found me."

She opened the front door as wide as it would go, and she and Lucien went in.

Grandmother jumped up with a cry of joy at the sight of Annette. They had been very worried, and Papa had gone up the mountain to search for her. Grandmother was opening her mouth to be cross when she noticed the lame foot, so she shut her mouth, helped Annette onto the sofa, and went to look for cold-water bandages.

As she turned, she noticed Lucien standing shyly in the doorway, wondering what to do, and for a moment they stood looking at each other. She could see in his face how much he wanted to be accepted, so she put both hands on his shoulders and drew him to the warmth and blaze of the open stove.

"You are welcome, my child," she said firmly. "Come and sit down and eat with us."

The door opened again, and Papa entered, shaking the snow from his cloak. He had guessed Annette was safe, for he had seen the sled and the forms of two children whizzing across the fields. When he had heard her story and scolded her a little for going so far alone at night, he too sat down by the open stove, and Grandmother served out hot chocolate and crusty bread thickly spread with golden butter. On top of each hunk she placed a thick slice of cheese full of holes, and everyone sat munching in silence.

A sleepy, contented silence! The warmth of the stove after the night air made them all feel drowsy. Lucien sat blinking at the flames and wished that this moment could last forever when suddenly the silence was broken by a strange scratching noise at the door.

"It's Klaus," shouted Annette, and she sprang forward. But her bad foot held her back, and it was Grandmother and Papa and Lucien who all opened the door at once.

Klaus marched into the room with her tail held proudly high and in her mouth she carried a perfectly new, blind tabby kitten. She took no notice of any of them, but walked straight across to the little bed where Dani lay sleeping and jumped up onto the feather quilt. She dropped her precious bundle as near as possible to Dani's golden head, and then hurried back to the door and meowed.

"She'll be coming back with another," said Papa, letting her out.

"Then we had better leave the door open," said Grandmother. They all sat shivering in an icy draft until Klaus reappeared in a great hurry and dropped a white kitten with tabby smudges in the same place, and streaked off back into the night.

"Let's hope that will be the last," murmured Grandmother, thinking partly of the draft and partly of life in a small chalet with Dani and more than three kittens. But nobody else said anything at all because their eyes were fixed on the door. Dani's Klaus could do exactly what she liked, and no questions asked.

Back she came around the corner of the barn, but this time she walked slowly and grandly. Her work was done. She carried in her mouth a pure white kitten, exactly like herself, gathered all three between her front paws, laid herself across Dani's chest, and started licking and purring for all she was worth.

"Shut the door, Lucien," said Grandmother with a little sigh of relief. "Pierre, you had better find a basket for all those cats. The child will suffocate!"

Papa chuckled. “In the morning, Mother,” he replied. “Tonight they can stop where they are. Klaus knows where they’re welcome, and Dani won’t mind.”

Very gently he moved Klaus’s right paw from Dani’s chin, then he went off to lock up the cowshed.

Lucien got up to go. He went over to Grandmother and held out his hand.

“I must go,” he said simply, “but thank you for letting me come in. I hope Annette’s foot will soon be better.”

Grandmother, looking down into his face, held his hand for a moment in both of hers. “Yes, you must go,” she replied, “but you must come again. You will always be welcome.”

Annette said nothing about waking Dani because Grandmother might have said no, but after all, a promise was a promise. She waited until Grandmother was washing up the chocolate cups and then she hopped to his side.

“Dani,” she whispered, smoothing the damp hair back from his forehead. Dani sighed and flung his arms above his head but he did not wake.

“Dani,” said Annette more loudly, and this time she pinched him. He opened his eyes, bright with sleep, and stared at her.

“Look, Dani,” said Annette, “she’s come … and she’s brought you a present!”

Dani stared at the jumble of fur in his arms, too half-asleep to be astonished, and not quite sure whether he was dreaming or not.

“She’s found three rats,” he remarked.

“No, no, Dani,” cried Annette. “Those aren’t rats. They are three dear little kittens. She had them in the barn and now she’s brought them to you. They’re yours, Dani—a present from Klaus.”

Dani blinked at them. “I knew she’d come,” he murmured. “I asked God.”

Annette knelt by the bed and gathered the whole bundle of Dani and Klaus and the kittens into her arms.

“I asked the Lord Jesus to come in,” she whispered. “And He did. That’s two prayers answered in one night!”

But Dani did not hear. He had fallen asleep again, with the tip of Klaus’s tail in his mouth.

19 Annette Wins a Battle

Grandmother’s cold-water bandages were so successful that when Annette woke next morning the pain and swelling in her ankle were almost gone. It had snowed in the night, too, and the snow drifts were so deep that Papa had to dig a path to reach the cowshed, so it was not a day for going out.

But Annette and Dani and Klaus and three kittens were just too much for Grandmother, and by afternoon she suggested they should all go over to play in the hay barn.

Dani carried the kittens across in a basket, and Annette lay comfortably on her tummy in the hay with Grandmother’s big Bible propped up in front of her.

She wanted to find the verse about Jesus knocking at the door, and she found it quite quickly, as the pastor had said it came in the last book of the Bible. It was Revelation, chapter 3 and verse 20:

“See, I stand knocking at the door. If anyone hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.”

Annette learned it so she could say it without looking, and wondered what the last bit meant about eating together. She must remember to ask

Grandmother when she next got a proper chance. Then she lay and watched Dani with his kittens.

She had opened the door to the Lord Jesus and He had come in and was living in her heart, and it had turned out just as Grandmother had said. The hard, angry thoughts had gone away like shadows before the light, and it had suddenly not seemed difficult to forgive Lucien. In fact, the Lord Jesus had shown her how selfish and unloving and untruthful she had been, and what she was really worrying about now was whether Lucien would forgive her.

She had told him about the horse, and he had not seemed cross, but after all, he had lost his prize, and Annette knew now that there was still something more she could do about it, if she really wanted to.

There were the Noah's ark animals. If she took them to the schoolmaster and told him all about it he would see how beautifully Lucien could make things. He would probably give Lucien another prize even now, if he really knew what had happened.

She was so afraid of what the master would think and what the other children would say that she decided not to do any more about it. But as soon as she decided that, she found she did not want to think about her new book anymore. It had stopped making her happy.

Darkness came early, and the children went in to their evening meal. There was a lot of fuss at bedtime because Dani wanted the kittens to sleep in his bed, and Grandmother wanted them in the barn. In the end they both gave way a little and the kittens ended up sleeping under the bed. Grandmother felt quite tired and sank into her chair with a sigh. As Annette drew up her stool beside her, there was a knock at the door.

Annette got up to open it and Lucien was standing in the doorway, twisting his hands together shyly. Annette felt shy, too, and they both stood there rather awkwardly waiting for each other to say something.

Grandmother looked up, surprised at the silence. "Come in, Lucien," she called. "We are glad to see you."

They sat down obediently and Lucien said he had come over to see how Annette's foot was. Annette said, "Much better, thank you," while staring at the floor. Grandmother looked at them both very hard over the top of her glasses.

"Annette and Lucien," said Grandmother suddenly, "you must stop this quarrel and behave like sensible children. Lucien, you did a terrible thing, but you did not really mean to do it, and you have suffered for it.

It's no good thinking about the past.

Now you must be brave and start again. Annette, you must learn to forgive and be kind, and stop thinking that you are better than other people."

"I don't," said Annette, rather surprisingly. "I have forgiven him—out on the mountain last night. It wasn't very difficult to forgive, because I did something nasty to him as well, and when I told him about it, he said he'd forgive me too, didn't you, Lucien? So we're as bad as each other."

"Yes," replied Lucien simply. "But it wasn't such an awful thing as I did. I can make another horse, but I can't make Dani new legs. And anyhow, everyone says you're good, and likes you, but nobody likes me."

"Perhaps," replied Annette, "it's because they all know what you did, and nobody knows what I did. This afternoon I was thinking I ought to tell the schoolmaster, but somehow I don't think I should ever dare."

They were talking to each other, and Grandmother sat listening, but because it was Grandmother, they did not really mind. Now she spoke.

"Annette," she said suddenly, "how did you come to feel that you could forgive Lucien? Two nights ago you told me you never could."

“Well, Grandmother, I opened the door, like you said, and then it all happened just like you said. When I asked Jesus to come into my heart, somehow it didn’t seem so difficult.”

“Yes,” said Grandmother, “I knew it would be like that if you would only open the door. When Jesus with His great love comes into our hearts, there just isn’t room for unkindness and selfishness. There is something else He can get rid of, too. Fetch me my Bible, Annette.”

Grandmother turned the pages slowly until she arrived at 1 John, chapter 4, verses 18 and 19. Annette read them aloud, slowly and clearly:

because God first loved us.”

“That’s right,” said Grandmother. When Jesus brings His perfect love into our hearts, it drives out unkindness and selfishness, and it can also drive out fear. If He loves us perfectly—and He does—He will never let anything really bad hurt us, so there is nothing to be afraid of.”

Annette and Lucien sat thinking for a moment, then they smiled at each other. Annette went to the cupboard and fetched her Christmas bear, broke it in half, and gave half to Lucien as a peace offering. They sat on their stools, Lucien munching happily, but Annette still thoughtful and worried. She knew more clearly than ever now what was right, but still she didn’t want to do it.

Lucien didn’t stay very long, and when he was gone Annette got up to go to bed.

“Annette,” said Grandmother, “remember that when Jesus comes in, you must do what He tells you, and not what you want any longer.”

“Yes, Grandmother,” said Annette rather sadly. She went upstairs and knelt down by her bed to pray.

“Lord Jesus,” she said, “I do want to do what You say. If I’ve really got to tell, please make me brave and stop me being afraid.”

Annette got into bed with a lighter heart and soon fell asleep. In the morning she woke early, and as she lay sleepily in the darkness she saw a light creeping through a hole in the shutter. Jumping out of bed, she flung back the shutters and the light streamed in. It filled the little room that had been so dark with the sweet, cold freshness of early morning.

“It’s like Grandmother said, thought Annette. Hating Lucien is like shadows, and being afraid of owning up is like shadows.

But letting Jesus in is like opening the shutters.”

Then, limping a little, she dressed and went to the kitchen, where Grandmother was stirring the coffee.

“Grandmother,” she said firmly, “I want to go and see the schoolmaster this morning.”

“What’s this all about?” said Papa, who was knocking the snow off his boots in the doorway. “If Annette wants to see the schoolmaster she can come down with me. I’m taking the cheeses down to the train in the mule cart. I’ll drop Annette at his house and pick her up on the way back from the station.”

Annette’s face brightened. If she had had to wait, she might have started feeling terribly afraid again.

Sitting beside Papa in the mule cart, with the cheeses bumping about behind her, and the Noah’s ark animals wrapped carefully in a hanky, she didn’t feel quite so happy. She couldn’t imagine what she would say to the schoolmaster! What if he was very, very angry with her? He might easily be.

“What do you want to see the schoolmaster for?” asked Papa suddenly. “Are you tired of having no lessons to do?”

Annette leaned her head against his coat. “No,” she replied shyly. “It’s just something I want to tell him. It’s a secret, Papa.”

She slipped her hand into his as he held the reins. As he was a good, wise man, he just smiled and asked no more questions. He was a very busy man, working hard from early morning till late at night to make his little farm pay enough to keep his children. He did not often have time to talk to them seriously. He left that to Grandmother. But he usually knew what they were thinking by watching their faces and listening to their chatter. In the quiet of the cattle sheds and the forests as he worked for them, he thought about them and prayed for them. He knew that his little daughter had been miserable, and that something had happened and that she felt happy and peaceful, and he was glad.

They jogged on in silence until the white house came in sight. “Down you get,” said Papa, “and I’ll be back for you in about half an hour.”

The mule trotted on, and Annette, with her heart beating very fast, walked up the path, and stood for a long time without daring to knock. She might have stood there until it was time to go home again if the schoolmaster had not seen her out of the window and come and opened the door without her knocking.

“Come in, come in,” he said kindly, taking her into the little room where they had so often sat and done lessons together. He loved his students, and in holiday time he missed them and liked them to call on him. Annette went straight to the table and undid her handkerchief and arranged the little Noah’s ark animals in a row.

“Lucien made them,” she announced firmly. “Aren’t they good?”

The master picked them up and examined them with interest. “They are beautifully done,” he replied. “They are really exceptional for a boy of his age. He will soon be able to earn his living. I had no idea he could carve like that. Why didn’t he enter the handwork competition?”

“He did,” answered Annette, still very firmly. “That’s what I came to tell you about. He made a little horse, and I smashed it when he wasn’t looking because I was so angry about Dani. But I’m sorry now, and I wondered if he couldn’t have a prize after all—now that you know all about it.”

The schoolmaster looked at her thoughtfully. Her cheeks were scarlet and her eyes fixed on the ground.

“But I haven’t another prize,” said the school-master at last. “There were only two. One was given to Pierre and one to you.”

“Then Lucien ought to have the one that was given to Pierre. It was for the best boy, and Lucien’s carving was much better than Pierre’s.”

“Oh, no,” replied the schoolmaster, “we couldn’t do that. After all, Pierre won quite fairly. We couldn’t take his prize away. If you really want him to have a prize, you will have to give him yours. It was your fault that he lost, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Annette. And she sat in silence for three full minutes, thinking. Her prize was a beautiful book full of pictures of all the mountains in Switzerland. It lay in her drawer, wrapped in tissue paper, and was the most precious thing she had.

Of course she could easily say no, and she knew the master would never force her to give it. But Grandmother had talked about perfect love. The Lord Jesus with his perfect love was living in her heart now, and He wouldn’t want her to keep anything back.

“All right,” said Annette at last. “Good,” replied the schoolmaster, and there was a look of triumph in his eyes because in those three minutes he knew that Annette had won a very big battle. “You shall bring it to me when school begins, and I will present it to him in class, and the children shall see his carvings.”

“Very well,” said Annette. She looked up shyly into his face to see if he thought her very, very wicked. But he only smiled down at her, and she went

away knowing quite well that the old man loved her just as much as he did before.

Back up the hill the empty mule cart bumped and jolted over the snow. Home again, Annette climbed the steps and stood on the veranda, and Dani came and stood beside her with his arms full of kittens. Behind her, Grandmother was cooking the dinner, and in front of her the sun had reached the valley.

“This morning the valley was full of shadows,” thought Annette to herself, “and now it’s full of sunshine.” She knew it was like the Lord Jesus coming into her heart and filling her with love and light and courage.

20 Lucien Has an Idea

Lucien climbed the hill with a light step, and Annette walked by his side. They had never walked home from school together before, but now it was different.

It had been a very happy morning for Lucien. The schoolmaster, without explaining why, had suddenly said that he had seen such a good piece of wood carving over the holidays that he had decided to award another prize. To everyone’s astonishment Lucien had been called out to receive it. Annette had expected the schoolmaster to tell the whole story, so she almost fainted with relief when he said nothing about it. Then all the children gathered around to admire the little wooden animals, and freckle-faced Pierre had admired them louder than anyone else, remarking cheerfully that it was lucky for him they were turned in so late or he would never have won the prize. Everyone agreed.

They all wanted to see Lucien’s book, and the girls cried out, “Why, it’s just the same as Annette’s book” – and Annette waited uncomfortably for him to say, “It is Annette’s book.”

But Lucien only replied, “Is it really?” And when no one was looking, he winked at Annette.

When they were well out of sight of the other children, he held it out to her.

“It was nice getting a prize after all,” he said, “but I don’t want to keep it. Truly I don’t, Annette. It’s your book, and I should hate to take it away from you.”

Annette shook her head. “No, you’ve got to keep it,” she said.

“It’s your book now.”

“Well,” said Lucien, “it really belongs to both of us, so I think we’d better share it. Suppose I have it this month and you have it next month, then me the month after that?”

Annette brightened up. She really wanted her book very badly.

“All right,” she replied. “On the first day of every month we’ll change.”

“Let’s sit down on this woodpile and look at it together,” said Lucien. They brushed the snow away from the logs and sat down and turned the pages, for Lucien had never seen it before. He was keen on mountains and often studied guidebooks, and now he pointed out to Annette the different ways of climbing them.

They sat there for a long time with the hot midday sun beating down on them and the powder-blue sky behind the white peaks. It was such fun looking at the pictures that they forgot about being late for dinner, until a little voice quite close to them said, “Annette, Granny said I should come and meet you. Dinner’s been ready a long time, and I’ve finished mine.”

It was Dani, leaning heavily on his crutches, looking flushed and tired. Annette jumped guiltily off the woodpile.

“Dani,” she cried, “you mustn’t come so far down the mountain. You’ll never get back. We must go home at once.”

They started slowly up the road, but Dani was very tired.

He had never been so far alone on his crutches before, but he had kept thinking he would see his sister around the very next corner and had hobbled on. In the end Lucien picked him up and carried him, and Annette carried the crutches.

Lucien carried him right to the door of the chalet, but nobody spoke. A sort of shadow seemed to have come between Lucien and Annette because both were thinking that however much they made up their quarrel Dani was still lame and nothing would give him back his legs.

“My leg aches so,” said Dani as Annette carried him up the steps. “Put me on my bed, ’Nette.”

So Annette laid him on his bed and gave him all his cats to play with, and she sat down and ate her bowl of cold potato soup. Papa had gone back to his work, and Grandmother, after scolding her for being so late, went to the kitchen where Annette soon joined her. Grandmother was standing at the table skimming rich cream from bowls of milk, and Annette started to help her.

“What is the matter, Annette?” asked Grandmother suddenly. “You look unhappy.”

Annette didn’t answer for a long time. Then she said, “Grandmother, you said that if I asked Jesus to come into my heart He would make me fond of Lucien, and last week it was all right. But now when I see Dani with his leg hurting so, and remember he used to be so strong, all the bad thoughts come back again.”

“Yes,” said Grandmother, “I expect they do. Every day of your life, ugly, angry, selfish thoughts will knock at the door and try to get in again. Don’t try and push them back yourself. Ask Jesus to help you by filling you with His love. Read about the love of the Lord Jesus every day in your Bible. If you keep your heart full of it, there just won’t be room for those bad thoughts to stay.”

“Where in the Bible especially?” asked Annette.

“All through the Bible,” answered Grandmother. “Read carefully to yourself all the story of the life of Jesus, and think about the way He loved all kinds of people, and remember that it’s that same love that came into your heart when you asked Him to come in.”

“Yes,” answered Annette, and to herself she thought, “I’ll start today, and every morning when I wake up, I’ll read a story about how Jesus loved someone.”

Lucien had gone home to his chalet, also thinking.

The sight of Dani so tired made him sad. It was all very well for Annette—she had made up for the wrong things she had done and had put it right. But he could never make Dani’s legs right.

“Why had Annette forgiven him and been so different?” he wondered for the hundredth time. At first he had thought it was just because he had found her in the snow, but now he knew it was more than that. She had talked about opening a door to Jesus, and Grandmother had said something about the love of Jesus turning out selfishness and unkindness. The old man up the mountain had talked about mercy and forgiveness, too.

Anyhow, opening the door had made a very great difference to Annette. She used to be so proud and unforgiving. Now she was quite humble and kind. It made Lucien think that Jesus was not just someone who lived a long time ago in Bible stories, but someone who really could do things now.

He had been walking slowly, but he had nearly reached the chalet. Twenty minutes before, when he and Annette had sat down on the woodpile, the sky

had been blue and still. But now large clouds were massing up behind the mountains, and a cold wind had begun to blow.

“It’s blowing up for snow,” said Lucien to himself. “There’ll be a blizzard tonight.”

The cows were stamping restlessly in their stalls at the sound of the wind that had sprung up. Lucien went indoors quickly and joined his mother, who was already eating dinner.

“Come along,” said his mother. “You’re late. I’m glad you’ve no afternoon school because it’s clouding over and I think we are in for a blizzard. What’s that book you’ve got there?”

“It’s a prize,” replied Lucien. “The schoolmaster gave it me for carving. He saw something I did over the holidays.”

“Well, that was nice of him,” said his mother. “Did he know about the other one being smashed?”

“Yes,” answered Lucien, and changed the subject. He did not want to answer awkward questions. He was going to keep Annette’s secret for her.

His thoughts kept going back to her as he sat in the front room whittling away on some wood held over a newspaper. His mother was ironing in the kitchen so he was alone.

“I asked Jesus to come in.” That was what Annette had said. And then Grandmother had read some verses out of the Bible. Perhaps he could find them. He would like to read them again.

He went to the shelf and lifted down the dusty old family Bible. His mother did not often read it, and he only knew what he had learned about it at school. He thought Grandmother’s verses had been somewhere near the end. He looked through and found the gospels with the stories he had heard in school about Jesus the healer—how He had made blind men see, and lepers clean, and dead men live; yes, and there was even a story about how He had made someone walk!

Well, if Jesus was really alive today and had changed Annette’s heart, surely He could make Dani walk, too.

Lucien had never really said his prayers since he was a tiny boy and had sometimes said them to his mother. But now he slipped over to the cowshed and ran up into the loft and knelt down on the same spot where all those months before he had hidden and wept so bitterly.

He did not understand yet what it meant to open the door to Jesus, but he believed now that God was near and would listen when he prayed. Now he prayed with all his heart that God would heal Dani and make him walk properly again, as He healed people in the Bible.

He stayed there quite a long time and then slithered down and milked the cows. When he opened the door to cross with the buckets, he was nearly thrown back by the snow driven almost horizontally by the wind. His mother was at the window looking out rather worriedly into the dusk.

“There’s a real blizzard on,” she said. “You’d better take the storm lantern and go to eet your sister. It’s got dark early.”

But at that moment the door was flung open and Marie, with snow frozen on her hair and clinging to her coat, stood breathless and laughing in the doorway.

“It was a real fight with the wind getting up that slope,” she panted as she shook out her wet clothes and changed her boots. “I’m nearly worn out! Lucien, why didn’t you come and meet me with the lantern? Mother, I hope supper’s ready, because I’m starving.”

They sat down at the table, Marie still chattering gaily, with her cheeks as red as apples.

“What a day I’ve had,” she exclaimed. “People have been coming and going all day at the hotel— not that they’ll get much winter sport this weather, poor things! I’ve been run off my feet, but I got a good tip this evening. Look, Mother.”

She pulled out a coin and handed it to her mother. Madame Morel took it with pleased surprise. She, like her neighbors, had difficulty in making the little farm pay, and Marie was a good girl about bringing home her wages.

“Who gave you all that?” she inquired.

“Oh, such a nice man,” cried Marie, “and I believe he’s very famous, too. The owner’s wife was telling me about him at dinner. He’s a very clever doctor and he can cure almost anyone with broken bones. He’s got a hospital down by the lake, and people go there from all over Switzerland and he cures them.”

Lucien nearly choked in his excitement. He leaned across the table. “Marie,” he burst out. “Could he cure little Dani Burnier?”

Marie stared at him in astonishment. She did not know that Lucien still worried about Dani Burnier.

“I don’t know,” she answered quite kindly. “They’d have to take him down to the lake if they wanted Monsieur Givet to see him. But they’d never have the money. Those clever men charge huge fees, Lucien, as much as all the Burnier cows put together, I should think.”

Down to the lake? To Lucien, who had never left the valley, it seemed like the other end of the world.

He tried again. “But, Marie, couldn’t they take him to the hotel in the morning?”

“He’s leaving on the early train. All his luggage was brought down tonight.”

“Couldn’t they take him tonight?”

Marie felt quite sorry for him, but said, “Of course they couldn’t, Lucien. Fancy taking a little child out in this blizzard! Anyhow, the last train went hours ago, and the road over the Pass would be blocked on a night like this. It’s quite impossible. Besides, I tell you, they haven’t the money. Stop worrying yourself about Dani Burnier, Lucien. You didn’t mean to harm him, really, and he’s quite happy hopping about on that crutch and getting thoroughly spoiled by that grandmother of his!”

Lucien said no more, and his sister went on to talk about the other visitors, but Lucien didn’t hear a word. He had quite made up his mind what he was going to do, but there were three mighty difficulties in his way.

The doctor’s fees were very high, and Lucien had no money.

His thoughts flew to the old man up the mountain.

He had plenty of money if he could be persuaded to give it.

The Pass was probably blocked.

Well, he could try. If he failed, he would know at least that he had done his best.

Would the doctor come? Would he leave the train that would carry him to his important hospital by the lake, and take a local train with a boy he didn’t know, and climb the mountain in a blizzard to see a peasant child?

It was all most unlikely, but there was just a chance that he would. Marie had called him a nice man.

“I’ve finished my supper, Mother,” said Lucien. “I’m going upstairs.”

21 An Unforgettable Night

Once in his room Lucien moved with great speed. There wasn't a minute to be lost.

He put on his cloak, his woolly hat that came down over his ears, and his strongest boots. Then he wrote a note to his mother telling her he would not be back till morning.

He tiptoed down the stairs into the kitchen and filled his pockets with bread and cheese and a box of matches. Then he silently lifted the latch of the back door and crept to the barn. The storm lantern hung on the wall, and Lucien lit it. The steady light comforted him. He wondered whether to take his skis, but decided it was too dark. He opened the far door of the barn and stepped out into the windy snow meadows, and the blizzard nearly knocked him over. He was safely away. His great adventure had begun.

If the wind was like this in the field, he wondered what it would be like on the Pass. Surely he would be blown over and buried in the drifts! Well, he would see when he got there. In the meantime he must think hard about reaching the old man.

It was a relief to reach the wood. Here at least he was sheltered and the snow on the path was not so deep, even though the trees made spooky noises. He could move more quickly without falling over.

Up he went through the tossing trees until he could see the orange glow of light in the old man's window. He struggled to the door and knocked.

"Who's there?" said the old man very cautiously from within.

"Me, Lucien."

The door was flung open at once, and the old man helped him inside.

"Lucien, my boy," he cried, peering at him in astonishment, "whatever brings you here in this weather, and at this time of night? What has happened?"

Lucien sank down on the bench for a moment to get his breath back. He did not like asking the old man for his money, but he really needed it badly.

"You once said," began Lucien, looking up into the old man's face, "that you had a lot of money to give to someone if they really needed it. I've found someone who really needs it. If you will give me your money, I think that little Dani Burnier's leg might be made better."

"How could that be?" asked the old man, looking very closely at the boy.

"There's a doctor at the hotel where my sister works," explained Lucien, "who can cure lame people and heal broken bones. I'm going now to ask him to come and see Dani. But my sister said he would want a lot of money."

"You're going now?" repeated the old man. "In this weather? You must be mad, boy! You could never cross the Pass in this weather."

"I think I could," replied Lucien, "on my skis.

The blizzard started only a few hours ago, and the fresh snow won't be deep yet, if I hurry. But it's no good going unless I have the money!"

The old man did not answer for a minute. He seemed to be thinking very hard.

"I would give it if I was sure of the man," he said doubtfully. "But I don't want to waste or lose it. How do I know that he is an honest man? What is his name, Lucien?"

"His name is Monsieur Givet. My sister says he's a famous man."

"Monsieur Givet."

The old man repeated the words softly in a strange voice, as though he thought he must have made a mistake about them. He seemed to have turned rather pale. But without another word he turned away, took a key

from one of his own carved boxes, and opened a little cupboard in the wall behind his bed. He took out an old sock stuffed with bills.

"Take it all," he said, "and give it to Monsieur Givet. Tell him it is all his if he will cure the child. Tell him … Tell him, Lucien, that it is the payment of a debt."

His voice shook a little, and Lucien glanced at him in surprise, but he was too glad to wonder much. He had never seen so much money before in his life. He put the whole bundle inside his shirt, buttoned his coat and cloak over it, and made for the door.

"Thank you very much," he said hastily at the door. "I'll come and tell you what happens."

The old man came to the door to watch him go and held his lantern high to light the path. Lucien had gone only a few steps when the old man called to him loudly above the wind. "Lucien!"

Lucien ran back. "Yes, Monsieur?"

"You won't forget the message, will you?"

"No," replied Lucien carefully. "I'm to say it's the payment of a debt. I won't forget. Good-bye, Monsieur."

He was making off again into the night when the old man called again. "Lucien."

The boy ran back, feeling impatient now. He wanted to get going. "Yes, Monsieur?"

"You won't tell him anything about me, will you? Don't tell him my name, will you, Lucien?"

"I don't know your name," Lucien reminded him.

"And don't tell him where I live!"

"No, Monsieur," Lucien answered him, too impatient to wonder why. "I'll just say it's the payment of a debt. Good-bye, Monsieur."

He sped off as fast as he could through the deep, soft snow, afraid that the old man might call him again. At the edge of the wood he turned and waved his lantern. Through the whirling snow he could still see the dim figure of the old man, black against the light of his open door.

He must be very quick. The snow was still falling. Very soon the Pass would be impossible to cross, if it was not so already.

He thought it probably would be impossible to cross on foot, so he decided to stop in at the wood-shed on his way down and get his skis.

He had just lifted his skis down when the far door of the cowshed was flung open and his mother and Marie came in, waving a lantern.

Lucien propped his skis against the wall and fell flat on his face on the dirty floor behind the largest cow.

"He's not here," said his mother in a sharp, worried voice, flashing her lantern around the shed. "I believe you're right, Marie. He's got some mad idea about going to that doctor. He'll be stumbling along that mountain road by now, and the stupid boy hasn't even taken his skis. I wonder if we could persuade Monsieur Burnier to go after him and fetch him back. He can't have got far on foot."

"I think we'd better," agreed Marie. Her voice sounded worried, too. "Monsieur Burnier will easily catch up with him on skis and stop him before he gets anywhere really dangerous. Let's go now and ask him."

They went off hastily, and Lucien, pressed against the cow's body, jumped to his feet. There wasn't a moment to lose.

It would take them two or three minutes to get on their coats and boots. In this weather it would take them fifteen minutes to reach the Burnier chalet. Another ten minutes while they told their story and Monsieur Burnier collected his lantern and boots and skis. Lucien worked out he had roughly half an hour's start. It should be enough, but then he was only a light child, and Monsieur Burnier was a heavy, skillful man who could ski much faster than Lucien.

Very, very carefully he crept out from the cowshed, relit the lantern, and fastened on his skis. Carefully he started off, keeping his head down because the blizzard was blinding.

Down over the meadows, he once again reached the friendly shelter of the forest path where he could look in front of him. Out across the low fields he sped, and here the wind was less furious and he could look straight ahead.

He made his way through the deserted village, looking around worriedly in case anyone should see him and want to know what he was doing. But everyone was indoors on such a night. He crossed the silent market square with its frozen fountain, past the dairy, over the bridge, and then he paused for breath. He glanced back fearfully in case Monsieur Burnier should be following, but there was no one in sight.

Now he had reached the lowest part of the valley and must start the climb up over the Pass that ran between two mountains. He suddenly felt terribly lonely, and for a moment he almost wished Monsieur Burnier would catch up. But he pushed the thought away and began his climb.

The snow on the valley road was not too bad. Lucien put his skis over his shoulder and found he could walk without much difficulty. The blizzard seemed to be stopping.

Once again he went into the woods and climbed, weary and afraid. These were dark, strange woods that he did not know and he was not even sure if he was on the right path. If he wasn't, it might lead to a precipice. He could hear the howling wind and a rushing stream above him, and his skis seemed heavier and heavier.

He climbed through the woods for three hours, his mind full of fears and horrors of all the dangers that were to be found on the mountains: avalanches, treacherous snow drifts, breaking tree boughs. He thought of the St. Bernard dogs trained to rescue lost travelers.

Of course, he could go back.

He stopped for a moment wondering why that thought had not occurred to him before. How simple it would be to buckle on his skis and zigzag down the forest path and go home.

"I did my best," he would tell them, "but I couldn't get through.

" The Burniers would no doubt think he was very brave to have even tried.

The wind was roaring horribly now, and the great trees seemed to be crying aloud and tossing their arms. He was nearly at the top of the forest, out on the wild wastes of the Pass where the wind might pick him up and whirl him over the rocks like a snowflake. He found his teeth were chattering, and he was crying.

"I'm so frightened," he sobbed to himself. "I can't go on. I know I'll be killed on the Pass. I wish Monsieur Burnier would come."

As he stooped to buckle on his skis, he suddenly remembered that warm, sheltered moment when he and Annette and Grandmother sat around the stove together and Grandmother had talked about being afraid.

"Perfect love drives out fear. If we really believe Jesus loves us perfectly there is nothing left to be afraid of. If he loves us perfectly He will never let anything really harm us."

Lucien realized he was not alone after all. Grandmother had said that Jesus loved him perfectly, and if He loved perfectly He would not leave a child alone in darkness and danger. It was just as though someone stronger than the night, the wind, the terror, and the darkness had suddenly come to him and taken his hand and pointed up the mountain. Lucien decided to go on.

"Perfect love drives out fear," he murmured to himself over and over again. It was true, too. He had stopped feeling so terribly frightened because he had stopped feeling alone.

He had reached the top of the forest and come out into the open, and now he could think of nothing at all except how to go on.

He struggled on, foot by foot, bent nearly double because the pain of the cold wind on his face was more than he could bear. At times the snow was over his knees, but he kept going. One icy blast knocked him onto his back and he feared he wouldn't be able to get up again, but a little strength seemed to return and he struggled to his feet again. At last he found that the ground in front of him sloped gently downward and he knew he had crossed the Pass.

Soon he reached forest again and the wind dropped. He felt numb with cold. Thankfully he realized he had not missed his way. God had certainly been guiding him.

He zigzagged carefully through the trees on the forest track, feeling glad to be sheltered from the wind that had beaten the sense and feeling out of him.

Down – down – down. The forest was almost quiet now, for he was traveling toward a deep valley. When at last he glided out into the open, the fields lay still and silver in the moonlight, and the dark town was below him. In half an hour's time he would be there, knocking on the door of the great hotel, and then …

"If Jesus really loves me perfectly," thought Lucien, "He can't have let me come all this way for nothing." Too tired to think anymore, he set out across the meadows toward the town.

22 Lucien Finds Monsieur Givet

Monsieur Givet woke very early, and the first thing he thought of was that the storm had stopped and the valley was still. The second thing he remembered was that he was going home today.

He was glad he was going home. He had been ill and had come up to the mountains for a week's rest and mountain air. Now he felt strong again and ready for work, and today he would travel on the early train and reach his lakeside home before midday—and what a welcome there would be!

What a noise the children would make. He smiled as he thought of them. He had two boys and two girls, who wore their poor mother out. He wished he could find someone who would help her with them.

He got out of bed and whistled while he shaved.

Just as he was finishing there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," called Monsieur Givet, surprised, for it was much too soon for the early breakfast he had ordered. It was only about half past five.

The door opened and the night porter came in. He looked as though he had some rather mysterious news.

"Excuse me, sir," he began, tilting his head to one side, "but you weren't by any chance expecting a visitor?"

"A visitor?" echoed Monsieur Givet, even more surprised, "at this hour and in this weather? I certainly am not."

"Well, sir," said the porter, "it's like this. Just a quarter of an hour ago I heard a little tap on the door, and when I opened it, there on the steps stood a boy

on skis, about twelve years old, sir, white as a sheet and looking more like a ghost than a boy. 'I want Monsieur Givet,' he said, without even stopping to say good morning. Then he sat down on the step and leaned his head against the doorway.

"'Well,' I said to him, 'you can't come calling on people at this hour of the morning, laddie. He's asleep in his bed.'

"'I'll wait, then,' he said, and his head sank down onto his knees.

"Well, I don't like to see a child like that, so I took off his skis and dragged him in and sat him on a chair. 'Where have you come from?' I asked him.

"'From Pré d'Oré,' he said. "'How's that?' I asked. 'The early train isn't in yet.'

"'I came over the Pass,' he said. And Monsieur, the more I look at that boy the more I feel like believing him. He's sitting down in the hall now, and when I passed your door, sir, and saw the light on, I thought I'd come in and ask if you'd like to see him."

"I'll come and see him, certainly," answered Monsieur Givet, "but I really can't believe that story about him coming over the Pass. I don't believe the mountain guides themselves could have crossed last night. It must have been terrible up there."

The porter shrugged his shoulders and led the way downstairs When they reached the hall they both ran forward with a cry of dismay.

The boy had slithered off the chair and lay in a dead faint on the floor. His face looked strangely white.

Monsieur Givet picked the unconscious child up in his arms. "I'll take this boy to my room," he said to the alarmed porter. "You bring me some hot water bottles and some brandy and coffee, and be as quick as you can."

Upstairs in his room he laid the boy on his bed, removed his sodden boots and socks, and rubbed his numb feet. Then he took off his snowy clothes and wrapped him in blankets. By this time the night porter had arrived, puffing very hard, with the bottles and the brandy and the steaming coffee.

Monsieur Givet arranged the bottles and held a teaspoonful of brandy to Lucien's white lips. He did not open his eyes, but gave a tired sigh and swallowed the brandy.

"That's right, laddie," said Monsieur Givet.

"You'll soon be around."

When Lucien opened his eyes a few minutes later, he looked straight up into a kind brown face, and couldn't think where he was. He felt so warm and comfortable and sleepy, he thought he would never want to move again as long as he lived. But he would like to know who the man with the kind brown face was, who looked at him so closely.

"Who are you?" he murmured.

Monsieur Givet didn't answer at once. He raised Lucien's head and gave him hot coffee.

Lucien swallowed very slowly because it seemed too much of an effort to swallow just at the moment. When he had finished, he said again, "Who are you, and where am I?"

"I'm Monsieur Givet," replied the doctor. "I don't know you, but I understand that you wanted me."

Lucien stared at him rather stupidly. He had been so tired that he had almost forgotten what he had come for. But with the warmth and the food things were beginning to get clear again, and at last he spoke.

“Are you a great, clever, famous doctor?” “No, I’m just a doctor.” “But can you make lame children walk?” “It depends on why they are lame. Sometimes I can.”

“He’s lame because he fell over a precipice. He walks with a crutch and a big boot.”

“Who does?” asked the bewildered Monsieur Givet.

“Little Dani Burnier. He’s six. He lives in the chalet next to mine. I came to ask if you could make him well. I’ve got enough money to pay you.”

“How did you hear of me?” “My sister told me about you last night. My sister is a maid here.”

“How did you get here in that storm?” “I came over the Pass on my skis.” “You couldn’t have done that, boy, not in that blizzard.”

“But I did. There’s no other way to come.” It was quite true. Monsieur Givet sat looking at the boy as though he were something from another planet As the doctor stared, Lucien’s hand crept under the shirt he was still wearing and took out the fat stocking.

“Please, sir,” he said, “would this be enough to make him better?”

Monsieur Givet emptied the stocking and gave a cry of astonishment.

“My boy,” said Monsieur Givet quite gently but very firmly, “before we go any further you must tell me where you got all this money from. Do you know how much there is?”

“No,” said Lucien rather drowsily. “But my sister said you’d want a lot. Is it enough?”

“That depends on whether you want to buy my clinic as well,” replied the doctor. “It’s far too much. Where did you get it from?”

“An old man I’m friends with gave it to me,” murmured Lucien, who felt he could not keep his eyes open another minute, “and there was a message. He said it was the payment of a debt, and you were to take it all.”

“Who was this old man?” asked Monsieur Givet. “Just tell me that, and then you shall go to sleep. What is his name?”

“Please, sir, I don’t know.” “Where does he live?” “He made me promise not to tell you.” With that, Lucien’s eyes closed and his head rolled over to one side. He fell fast asleep.

Monsieur Givet was in rather an awkward situation. His train was due to leave in three-quarters of an hour. But the boy lying on the bed had risked his life to come to him. It might be all for nothing, but he couldn’t disappoint such a brave child by refusing to see the little cripple.

Yet the lad would probably sleep for hours now.

He left the room softly, went downstairs to the telephone, and rang his wife.

“Are you there, Marthe?” he began. “Darling, I’m so sorry, but I shan’t be home till tomorrow. Such a strange thing has happened.” And he told her the whole mysterious story.

As he left the office he was nearly knocked over by a red-eyed, pale-faced girl in outdoor clothes. She caught hold of his hand.

“Oh, sir,” she cried, “Porter tells me you’ve got my little brother safe upstairs. Mother and I thought he was dead in the drifts. I must go home quick and tell my mother he’s here.”

Monsieur Givet sat down beside her on a sofa and tried to get some sort of explanation out of her, but she could talk of little but the terrible night she and her mother had passed through.

Marie could tell Monsieur Givet very little about Dani. She was too upset to work, and now that she knew Lucien was safe she was in a hurry to take him home. She would telephone the post office now, and they would get a child to run up the mountain with the news so that her mother would hear more quickly.

But Monsieur Givet would not hear of Lucien going home just yet. Marie could go home by herself, and when Lucien woke he would bring him on the train. Marie had better get someone to send a mule sleigh to the station, as Lucien would probably be too stiff to walk.

Marie agreed to everything and made off as fast as she could while Monsieur Givet went back to his room. Lucien still lay just as he had left him, with his cheek resting on his hand But there was a faint tinge of color in his face. He looked much better. Monsieur Givet sat down and watched him and wondered again how the boy had got all that money. Who was the old man who had sent such a strange message?

“The payment of a debt!” Monsieur Givet decided to look into the matter very closely.

Lucien woke at midday, and once again could not remember where he was for quite a long time. He was aching all over and didn’t want to move. Monsieur Givet heard a little movement and came to see what was happening.

“Well,” he asked kindly, “how do you feel?” “All right, thank you,” answered Lucien. Then he remembered that he’d been to sleep and added worriedly, “Will you have time to see the little boy I told you about, sir?”

“Yes,” said Monsieur Givet, sitting down beside him. “We’ll go after dinner. I’ll ring now for them to send up dinner for two, and while we eat you can tell me all about this little boy and all about this old man whom you say sent the money.”

“I can’t tell you about the old man, sir,” replied Lucien, “because I promised not to. He’s a sort of secret, and no one ever goes to see him except me. He said I was just to tell you it was the payment of a debt and nothing else at all, sir. And he’s been so kind to me, I couldn’t break my promise.”

“All right,” said Monsieur Givet. “You shan’t break your promise. I won’t ask you anything more about him. Tell me about this little cripple. When did he hurt himself, and how did it happen?”

Lucien went very red. He didn’t answer for a few minutes. He didn’t want to tell his new friend what had really happened, but as Monsieur Givet would be sure to find out from the Burniers, it might be better if he heard it first from Lucien. So he replied, “It was my fault, really. It was last spring.

I was teasing him. I pretended to drop his kitten over the ravine, then by mistake I really did drop it. Dani tried to rescue it and fell and hurt his leg, and since then he’s never walked properly—only with crutches—and I thought perhaps …”

His lips trembled and his voice trailed off miserably into a whisper. But he had said enough. For the doctor loved and understood children, and in those few broken sentences he had understood the whole story. He knew that this tired boy lying on the bed had been punished very bitterly.

“Lucien,” he said, “we’ll see this child together. It may be that God is going to make you the means of curing him. You know, Lucien, you have a great deal to thank God for. I think He must have been looking after you in a very special way last night or you would never have come across the Pass alive.”

“Yes, I know,” answered Lucien shyly and eagerly. “You see, only yesterday I prayed that God would make Dani better. Then when I heard about you, I thought it was the answer. But when I got to the forest, I felt frightened and nearly went back, but I remembered something I heard at Christmas and thought I’d go on instead.”

“What did you remember?” asked Monsieur Givet gently.

“I remembered some verses in the Bible that Dani’s grandmother read to us,” answered Lucien slowly. “I can’t remember it all, but it said that perfect love drives out fear. And Grandmother said Jesus’ love was perfect, so I wasn’t afraid and I went on. I can’t remember much about the journey, but I got here safely.”

“Yes,” replied Monsieur Givet. “I don’t think anything but the perfect love of the Lord Jesus could have sheltered you in that storm or guided you on the right road or kept you from being too afraid to go on. He’s been very, very good to you, Lucien. Let’s thank Him now, before our dinner comes.”

Lucien buried his face in the pillow, and Monsieur Givet knelt by the bed and prayed. He thanked God for His perfect love that is stronger than storm or blizzard, which had guided Lucien’s steps through the darkness and saved him from fear and death. Then he prayed for little Dani, that God would give him, the doctor, skill to heal that lame leg.

Lucien, with his face in the pillow, prayed as well, only not out loud “Lord Jesus,” he cried in his heart, “You were near me on the mountain and I wasn’t afraid. Don’t go away again. I want to open my door like Annette did. Please come in.”

23 Dani Meets the Doctor

Monsieur Burnier met the mule train himself, with his own mule sleigh, and drove Monsieur Givet and Lucien up to the chalet. All the villagers came to their front doors to see the famous doctor pass, as everyone had heard the story. They were all talking about Lucien as if he was a great hero for being so brave to cross the Pass as he did.

Monsieur Burnier sat silently in the driver’s seat, not knowing what to think about it all. It was rather a responsibility having such a famous man on that sleigh. He only hoped the mule, who was very frisky that day, wouldn’t tip the sleigh over the edge on one of the bends, which often happened.

He was worried about the money, too. Of course he would give every penny he had to see Dani cured, but he didn’t have many pennies, and what if they weren’t enough? Perhaps this very famous man would accept a young bull by way of payment.

Fortunately, they reached the chalet without any adventures or upsets, and Monsieur Burnier helped the doctor get down and then lifted poor Lucien in his strong arms and carried him up the steps and into the front room, where he laid him on the couch. He, too, was pleased to see Lucien, for he had spent a long, weary night searching for him in the drifts.

Grandmother, Annette, and Dani looked rather odd, as though they were about to have their photo taken. They were all dressed in their very best clothes, sitting in a stiff little group on the edge of the best chairs. They

looked as though they had been sitting there expecting the very famous man for a long time.

When he came in, Annette and Dani looked at Grandmother and stood up politely.

Dani was not at all pleased. He had thought that a very famous man would be dressed in a red robe like the governor who made William Tell shoot the apple off his son’s head, in Annette’s Swiss history book. This stranger who came in behind Papa didn’t look very special at all.

The doctor sat on a chair as far away as possible from the group and smiled at them. He had a nice broad smile, and Dani forgot his disappointment and smiled back.

Monsieur Givet put his hand in his pocket, took out a sweet, and held it out.

“Would you like a sweet, Dani?” he asked.

Dani grinned happily and nodded his head hard.

“Come and fetch it, then,” said Monsieur Givet, and Dani hopped delightedly across the room while the doctor watched him very closely. When the child reached him, he lifted him onto his knee and put the sweet in his mouth.

He really liked this family—especially this chuckling, friendly, blue-eyed little boy who sat noisily sucking a sweet on his lap. He noticed, too, that there was no mother, and wondered whether it was the old woman or the little girl who kept the chalet looking so neat and tidy.

“Does your leg hurt?” asked Monsieur Givet.

“No,” answered Dani.

“No, Monsieur,” corrected Grandmother.

“Monsieur,” added Dani. “Only sometimes, when I walk without my crutches. My crutches have got bears’ heads on them. Would you like to see them?”

“Very much indeed,” said Monsieur Givet, and as Dani hopped over to fetch them he again watched him very closely.

“I can do enormous great hops on my crutches,” announced Dani proudly. “Would you like to see me?”

“Very much indeed,” answered the doctor again.

“Be careful of the chairs, Dani,” said Grandmother quickly, for she had forbidden Dani to do enormous great hops in the house. Annette quickly picked up two kittens, as she wasn’t sure where Dani would land.

The hop was a hugh success, and the doctor clapped his hands. “Well done,” he cried. “That was exactly like a kangaroo I once saw at the zoo. Now put down your crutches and walk to me without them.”

Dani limped toward him, smiling, but dragging his lame leg rather pitifully. Monsieur Givet smiled back, lifted the little boy very gently onto his knee again, and gave him another sweet.

Grandmother, who had been watching very closely, turned to Annette.

“Annette,” she said, “put the kettle on and make a pot of tea and bring out the biscuit tin.”

While Annette was getting the tea, Monsieur Givet laid Dani flat on the table and twisted and turned his leg about for a long time. In fact, when he had finished the tea was ready and Grandmother invited him to sit down and drink with them. He seemed to be thinking hard.

“Well,” said Grandmother at last, rather sharply, “can you do anything for him?”

Every eye in the room was fixed on him as they waited for his answer—except for Dani, whose eyes were fixed on the biscuits, because they had forgotten to pass him one and Grandmother would be cross if he got up and helped himself. They were special bricelet biscuit—thin, crisp, golden and delicious, and Grandmother made them once a month on a special grill.

Monsieur Givet did not answer at once. He turned to Dani instead.

“Dani,” he said, “would you like to be able to run about like other little boys?”

Dani hesitated. He was not quite sure. He was the only boy in the village who had bear crutches, and it made him a very special person. Then he remembered that spring was coming, and unless he could run about he would not be able to chase the baby goats in the meadows as he had done last year.

And chasing baby goats was such good fun.

o he said, “Yes, thank you, I would. And please, Grandmother, may I have a bricelet biscuit?”

No one answered. Lucien and Annette were sitting with their cups held in midair and both were rather pale. Everyone was still staring at Monsieur Givet.

“Dani,” said the doctor suddenly, “where’s that fine cat gone?”

“To the woodshed,” said Dani. “Would you like to see her? She’s got three kittens.”

“Yes, please,” answered Monsieur Givet, and Dani limped off to find Klaus, helping himself to two bricelet biscuits as he passed the table, but nobody seemed to notice.

As soon as the door had closed on Dani, Monsieur Givet turned to Papa.

“I think I may be able to help you,” he said, leaning forward and speaking very earnestly, “although I can’t tell for certain until I’ve seen an X-ray of it. I think the bone was never set properly and has joined up wrongly, but I could break it again and pull it out straight. It would mean an operation and a long stay in the hospital. Would you be willing to let him come?”

Papa rubbed his hands together miserably and looked helplessly, first at Grandmother and then at Annette. He had no experience with operations and the word sounded horrible. Besides, he had been told that operations were expensive, and he wouldn’t be able to pay.

“How much would it cost?” he asked at last, scratching his head.

“It wouldn’t cost you anything,” replied Monsieur Givet. “Lucien has paid for it himself, in any case. I can’t explain now because Dani will be back and we must decide before he comes. Will you let me take him?”

“Yes,” replied Grandmother, who hadn’t been asked.

“When?” inquired Annette.

“Tomorrow morning,” replied Monsieur Givet. “I shall be catching the early train, and can take Dani with me.”

“Where am I going on the train?” said a clear voice. Dani had come in quietly through the back door and no one had noticed him. Now he stood at Monsieur Givet’s elbow with an armful of kittens, looking pleased. He had only been on a train once in his whole life just for ten minutes, but he had never forgotten it.

No one answered. They were still staring at Monsieur Givet.

“Where, Grandmother?” asked Dani again. The doctor turned to Dani. “Dani,” he said, “you’re coming with me down to the lake, and you’re going to stay with me for a while, and I hope I’m going to make your leg better. Would you like that?”

Dani looked as if he wasn’t too sure about it. “And Annette?” he asked firmly. “And Grandmother and Papa and Klaus and the kittens? Yes, Monsieur, we shall all like it very much.”

“Oh, no, Dani,” cried Annette. “We can’t all go; You’ve got to be good and go by yourself. Monsieur Givet will look after you and you’ll soon come back.” She was nearly crying herself.

The effect of these words was terrible. Dani flung himself, kittens and all, into Annette’s arms and burst into tears, making the most deafening noise.

Never had they heard such a row. Annette hugged and kissed him, Grandmother tried to soothe him, and Papa pressed handfuls of bricelet biscuits into his clenched fists, but nothing helped.

The family looked at each other helplessly. Monsieur Givet knew he had to think of something very quickly.

He turned to Grandmother. “Does the little girl know anything about looking after children?” he shouted above the din.

“She brought up this one,” shouted back Grandmother.

“You had better send her with her little brother then,” yelled Monsieur Givet. “She can help my wife.”

“Dani,” shouted Annette, shaking him to make him listen, “I’m coming, too!”

Dani stopped at once, gave three hiccups, and smiled. Monsieur Givet did not smile back. He picked up the little boy and spoke to him seriously.

“I’m afraid you are very spoiled, Dani,” he said.

“When you come to my hospital, you will have to do what you are told without any fuss or screaming.” He put Dani down. “I am going to take Lucien home if you can lend me a sled,” he said. “So I will say good-bye for now. The two children will meet me on the platform at 8:30 tomorrow morning with all that they need for the next two or three months. Annette shall help my wife in the mornings and go to evening classes for her schooling. In the afternoons she can be free to be with her little brother.”

Papa shook hands dumbly and wiped his brow. Things were moving so fast that he felt he had been left behind. But he was beginning to understand that for two months, starting tomorrow, he had to live without Annette and Dani in a silent, tidy chalet. He went stumbling over to the cowshed to milk and try to think things out.

Grandmother said good-bye at the door, and held the doctor’s hand for some moments. “You are a good man,” she said suddenly. “God will reward you.”

Monsieur Givet looked at the brave old woman in front of him. He saw her with her two happy, healthy grandchildren behind her and the clean, peaceful home of which she was the guardian angel. He knew she was strengthened by love and courage and realized she was a very special person.

“You, too,” he replied, “are a good, unselfish woman and will most certainly find your reward.”

Monsieur Givet pulled Lucien to his own chalet on a borrowed sled and carried him to his mother. She pretended to be very angry with him.

“You naughty boy, Lucien,” she cried, “going off like that and giving us all such a dreadful fright. How could you do such a thing? You deserve a beating.” She took him almost roughly from Monsieur Givet’s arms, helped him up the stairs, and put him to bed herself. Then she came back, sat down at the table, flung her black apron over her face, and began to cry.

“You have a very brave son, Madame,” said Monsieur Givet.

“He’s a very naughty boy,” snapped Madame, and because she was so terribly proud of him and so glad to see him safe, she began to cry worse than before.

She and Marie had been baking a big batch of Lucien’s favorite cakes all morning, and the house was full of the good smell. They invited Monsieur Givet to sit and eat with them, but he refused because he still had something important to do and time was getting on.

“I believe,” he began rather sharply, “that Lucien knows some old man around here. Can you tell me where he lives?”

“An old man?” repeated Marie. “Oh, yes, that would be the old man up the mountain who teaches Lucien wood carving. They spend hours together, although what Lucien sees in him, goodness knows! Most people say he’s crazy.

“Can you tell me the way to his house?” asked Monsieur Givet.

“Why, yes,” replied Marie, surprised. “It’s straight up through the forest. But I shouldn’t go up there if I were you, sir. The path will be bad after all this snow.”

“I have business with him,” replied Monsieur Givet. “Perhaps you will point out the path to me from the door. On the way down I will come and say good-bye to Lucien.”

Monsieur Givet thought how beautiful the forest looked as he toiled up the track that late afternoon. What must it be like, he thought, to be that old man and live alone among all this silence and peace, sharing the secrets of the forest. He began to look forward to meeting him and found his heart was beating faster than usual.

As he left the forest he could see the hut standing halfway up the meadow, with the snow piled high against its walls. The old man had dug a little path as far as the trees—almost as though he was expecting a visitor, thought Monsieur Givet, picking his way along it.

He knocked softly on the door and went in without waiting for a reply. The old man sat hunched up over his stove, whittling wood and smoking his pipe. A goat and a cat sat one each side of him for company, and Monsieur Givet sat on the chair on the other side of the stove.

“Well,” said the old man, still not looking up, “did you get there safely, Lucien?”

“It’s not Lucien,” replied Monsieur Givet softly, and the old man jumped and looked up. They sat staring at each other as though they had each seen a ghost—and yet uncertainly, as though the ghost might possibly be real after all.

“I have come to give you back this money,” said Monsieur Givet at last. “I don’t want money to help that child. Under the circumstances I will do it free, if it can be done.”

“Then the boy broke his promise,” growled the old man. He leaned his chin on his stick and stared and stared and stared.

“He did not break his promise,” replied Monsieur Givet. “He told me nothing except that it was given him by an old man and that it was the payment of a debt. But I do not accept large sums of money from peasant boys without making sure that they were come by honestly. I had no difficulty in finding out from other people who you were and where you lived.”

There was another long, long silence. “Is that all you came to say?” said the old man at last. His voice sounded suddenly old and weary and hopeless.

Monsieur Givet got up quickly and knelt down beside the bowed figure of the old man.

“Need we pretend any more?” he asked. “Surely we are both quite sure of each other. I’ve come to take you home, Father, and to tell you how much we’ve missed you and wanted you.”

24 Jesus’ Love Makes All the Difference

A few hours later Annette sat in a big wooden rocking chair, smiling at Lucien, who was sitting up in bed. He was still rather pale and tired, but otherwise well and happy.

“Tell me all about it,” urged Annette, her eyes big with admiration and astonishment. “Everyone says it was so brave of you. Tell me right from the beginning, Lucien, and what it was like on the top of the mountain.”

It was nice to be called brave, and Lucien would have liked to make a good story of it, but somehow it all seemed very far away and difficult to talk about—almost as if it had been a dream.

“Well,” he began, “I went up to the old man first and asked him for some money, and then I got my skis on the way down and skied down the valley and climbed through the woods across the river, and then I went down the other side.”

“Of course you did,” interrupted Annette impatiently, “or you’d never have got there. But tell me about it properly, Lucien.

What did you feel like? Did you have any adventures? Were you frightened, and did you nearly die? What was it like on the top?”

Lucien was silent for a few moments. All afternoon he had been wondering whether there would be a chance to tell Annette, but now the chance was here and he didn’t know how to begin.

“Yes,” he said at last, rather slowly, “I was very frightened a little way before the top. I nearly came back. Annette, do you remember telling me how you used to hate me so much, and how you asked Jesus into your heart and He made you like me instead?”

“Yes,” replied Annette eagerly, “of course I remember. Why, Lucien?”

“Because,” went on Lucien shyly, “something like that happened to me when I was feeling so frightened. I remembered those verses your grandmother taught us about perfect love driving out fear, and I asked Jesus to take away mine, and I stopped feeling so terribly afraid almost at once.”

“Did you really?” asked Annette, deeply interested. “Then I suppose Jesus came into your heart as well as mine, and then your being afraid had to go away just like my hating had to go away. I suppose it’s all really the same, Lucien. Whether you’re afraid or don’t like people, or whether you cheat or don’t speak the truth, or you are lazy or cross—whatever’s the matter with you, when Jesus comes in, I suppose there just isn’t room for it anymore.”

“Yes,” agreed Lucien thoughtfully, and they sat and talked about it for quite some time.

It was not until Annette was walking home across the snow that she fully realized that this was her last evening at home for a long time, and it suddenly made her feel very sad. She ran home quickly.

Papa was still over in the cattle shed, but Grandmother was sitting sewing a button on Annette’s clean pinafore dress. Their clothes, neatly folded and mended, were tied in two bundles on the table all ready for morning. Dani lay fast asleep in the bed in the corner with all his kittens on top of him as a last treat.

“Grandmother,” cried Annette, and she ran straight into the old woman’s arms and burst into tears.

Grandmother let her cry for a little, then she pulled up the stool and Annette sat down and leaned against Grandmother’s knees while the old lady talked. She talked about the home Annette was going to, the work she would have to do, and how good it would be to see Dani made well. She talked so bravely that Annette never knew that deep down in her heart Grandmother was saying to herself, “What shall I do tomorrow night and all the nights after when the stool at my feet is empty and there’s no sleeping little boy in the bed in the corner?”

Then, because it was getting late and they must be up early, Annette fetched the big Bible down from the shelf, as she always did at bedtime, and read aloud to Grandmother.

“We’ll read first Corinthians chapter thirteen tonight,” said Grandmother as Annette rested the great Book on her knees. “It’s a chapter I would like you to remember all the time you’re away.”

Annette read it right through, and when she had finished, Grandmother said, “The verse I want you to really remember is verse four—

“Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud.”

“Now,” said Grandmother, looking at Annette over her glasses, “you tell me you have asked Jesus into your heart, and He has come in and brought His love with Him—the kind of love we were reading about. You are going to

look after children, and they won't always be good. When they are naughty and you feel cross and impatient with them, ask Jesus to help you.

"You are going to a big house, Annette, and you will see nice things that you will probably never have yourself. Sometimes you may feel jealous and unhappy about it. But remember, if your heart is full of love, there won't be room for jealousy.

"You are going to be a little servant in a busy household. I don't expect you will get much notice taken of you. But remember, the love of Jesus in you never pushes itself forward and never looks for attention. His love can make you go on doing your work quietly and faithfully whether anyone notices you or not. Remember, He is your master and you are working to please Him."

"I'll try to remember, Grandmother," said Annette thoughtfully, then she kissed her and ran across to the cattle shed to spend the last half an hour before bed with Papa.

Early next morning the whole family drove to the station in the mule cart and arrived half an hour too early because they were so afraid of missing the train. They stood on the platform among the milk churns waiting for Monsieur Givet, who soon joined them. Annette carried their luggage in a brown paper parcel, and her hand was clasped tightly in her father's.

Dani, in his cloak and hood, seemed unusually shy and kept edging off behind the milk churns. He seemed nervous and didn't want to be hugged when it came to say good-bye. The train was far down the valley before Annette understood why. Then she noticed strange movements under Dani's cloak, as if he was having hiccups.

"What is that under your cloak, Dani?" she asked, gazing in astonishment at it.

Dani went pink. "It's only one, 'Nette," he replied nervously. "One what?" inquired Annette, glancing worriedly up at Monsieur Givet. But the doctor was reading a book and not listening.

"Just him," explained Dani, and he undid a button. The face and whiskers of a white kitten appeared in the gap for a moment, then pulled back inside.

"Dani," cried Annette, horrified, "you're a very, very naughty boy! You know Grandmother said you couldn't have kittens in the hospital. I don't know what we shall do with him."

Dani gazed thoughtfully out of the window and said nothing. He couldn't think of a single excuse for his wickedness, but under his cloak he gave the white kitten a secret squeeze. The white kitten curled its warm body against Dani's and purred like a little steam engine, and neither of them felt the least bit sorry about it.

25 Getting Better

Dani went straight to bed when they reached the town. He was taken to a large room full of lame children like himself, with a tired-looking nurse in charge. He took one look at them and decided they needed cheering up, so he offered to do kangaroo hops on his bear crutches all down the ward. It was a great success, and within an hour Dani was friends with everybody. The white kitten was given a basket in the kitchen and was allowed in during visiting time.

Annette's arrival was not quite so happy. She was welcomed kindly by Madame Givet, who was young and pretty and jolly, and taken to her room at the top of the house. When she was left alone, she ran across to the window and looked out to see houses and slushy snow in the streets and low grey skies. She gazed out for a moment and then flung herself on the bed and wept bitterly for her home.

Here Madame Givet found her half an hour later when she came up to see what had happened to her. She said nothing but slipped away and returned with baby Claire in her arms, and laid her down on the bed beside Annette. It was the best thing she could have done. Five minutes later Annette was sitting up smiling, with baby Claire chuckling and giggling on her lap, and in another minute Annette was chuckling back.

She was happy and busy at Monsieur Givet's house. In the mornings she helped Madame and looked after the children, in the afternoons she sat with Dani, and in the evenings she did her lessons. The children were not always good with her, and often, to begin with, Madame Givet would have to be sent for to keep the peace. Although she sometimes felt cross and impatient with them, she tried hard to remember what Grandmother had said. Gradually the love of Jesus in her began to make her patient and kind and unselfish, and she found that she could speak gently and keep her temper.

Dani was in the hospital a week before he had his operation. He went off to the operating room feeling quite excited. But when he woke up hours later, he was very upset to find that his bed had been tipped up and there were large iron weights on the end of his leg, which hurt dreadfully. He felt sick and hot, and screamed for Annette.

All that week Dani lay on his back, with the weights hanging on his leg, feeling feverish and miserable. Annette came every day and read to him and told him stories and tried to make him forget how badly his leg was hurting him. But it was a miserable week. Dull clouds hung low over the grey waters of the lake, and Dani tossed and fretted and tried to be brave but couldn't manage it.

In those long days there was just one thing that comforted Dani. On the wall opposite him was a picture with some writing under it that Dani couldn't read. When he was tired of the pain, and tired of stories, and tired of the grey lake and the other children, he looked at his picture, because he never got tired of it.

It was a picture of the Lord Jesus sitting in a field of flowers, and the children of the world were standing around him, looking up into his face. On the grass at his feet sat a black boy, and on his knee was an Indian child.

His arms were around a little girl in a blue dress, and the children of China and the South Seas were nestling up to him.

It was about a week after the operation when Dani and Annette first talked properly about that picture. The lights were on, and most of the children were asleep, but Annette still sat beside Dani. She had stayed late the past few nights because he was so restless without her.

Now he lay with his arms flung around his head on his pillow. His eyes were very bright. He was very, very tired and wanted badly to go to sleep, but the pain in his leg kept him awake. So he rolled his head around to look at the picture with the writing underneath.

"What does it say, 'Nette?" asked Dani suddenly.

"It says, 'Let the little children come to me,'" replied Annette, who was looking tired, too.

"I know that story," went on Dani, in a tired little voice; "Grandmother told it to me. Are those the children in the Bible?"

"No," said Annette, "they're not the children from the Bible story, Dani. They are other children from all over the world—India and Africa, and I think the little girl in the blue dress is probably from Switzerland."

"Why?" asked Dani.

"I suppose to show that all children can come to Jesus, and not just the ones in the Bible."

"How?" asked Dani.

“I don’t know quite how to explain. You just say you want to come, Dani, and then you’re there. I suppose Jesus sort of picks you up in His arms, like the children in the Bible, even though you can’t see Him.”

“Oh,” said Dani, “I see. Annette, my leg hurts so badly. I wish I could go to sleep.”

He began to cry fretfully and throw his arms about. Annette shook up the pillows and gave him a drink, and he sank back with a tired sigh.

“Sing to me,” he commanded, and Annette sang very softly because she was shy of the nurse hearing.

As she sang, Dani closed his eyes.

In the few seconds before he fell asleep, Dani thought he saw the picture again, but instead of the Indian child sitting on Jesus’s lap, he recognized himself, with his bear crutches lying in the grass at his feet.

“It’s me,” said Dani to himself, and he fell fast asleep, full of joy.

While Dani lay sleeping, Monsieur Givet came and lifted one of the weights off his leg, and his fever left him. When he woke up he thought he must somehow have gotten into a new world, and he lay quite still thinking about it for a long time. He felt cool and comfortable, and his leg had stopped hurting. The big glass doors of the ward had been flung open, and through them Dani could see, for the first time, sparkling blue water, misty blue mountains on the other side of the lake, and blue sky.

“I’m going to get well,” said Dani to himself.

The door opened, and Annette clattered up the ward, warm and rosy from the wind. She usually popped across after breakfast just to see how he was.

“Isn’t it a lovely day, Dani?” she cried. “Look at the lake and the mountains on the other side, and the little ships.”

Dani turned his face seriously toward her.

“Annette, where are my bear crutches?”

“Here, Dani, behind your locker. Why?”

“Well, you know that poor little boy in the corner?

He might like them. Give them to him.”

“Why, Dani? You like them so much yourself.”

“I know. But I shan’t want them ever anymore. I’m going to get better and run about in ordinary boots.”

And he was quite right. He never did want them anymore. He became perfectly well.

26 A New Start

Just as the weeks passed in the valley, so the weeks passed in the mountains. The snow began to melt, and the little streams became torrents, and the first crocuses pushed up in the fields along the river. The cattle and goats shut up in the stables began to stamp restlessly and cry for freedom. Spring was coming to the mountains.

Grandmother was busy with the spring cleaning and Papa was busy with the new calves. This was a good thing, for when they were busy they did not miss the children quite so badly. Grandmother, who was really much too old and blind to be spring cleaning, would often sit down suddenly and imagine she heard the hop and clatter of one boot and one crutch climbing the steps, and the cheerful sound of a little boy singing out of tune. How they missed the children!

Lucien missed them, too. He lived farther up the mountain than any other child, and he never walked home alone without wishing Annette was walking beside him. But he was not lonely or unhappy at school any longer. He had

proved to them that he was sorry for what he had done by his brave journey across the mountain, and they had accepted him back as one of themselves.

And Lucien himself was different. Ever since that night when he had asked Jesus to come into his heart, he had known that there must be a difference. The old bad temper and laziness and unhappiness could not stay for long in a heart that was open to the love of Jesus. Gradually Lucien began to find that, as long as he kept close to Jesus by praying and reading his Bible every day, the love was stronger than the bad temper and the laziness, and that he was growing into a nicer sort of boy.

Often when school was over he would go across to Grandmother's chalet and help with the spring cleaning. They were great friends now. Indeed, Grandmother would hardly have known what to do without him, for he chopped her wood and did her shopping and brought letters up from the village. This he liked best of all, for they were usually from Annette, and Grandmother always got him to read them aloud to her. There was sometimes a picture from Dani, too. Grandmother kept them all safely in the front of her Bible and often spread them out on the table to look at them. By the end of February she had quite a collection, called "Me in Bed," "Me Chasing Goats," "Me Having Medicine," "Me and Nurse," "Me and Annette," "Me and Snowball-Kitten." Grandmother thought they were all lovely, of course.

Another sadness came into Lucien's life. His friend, the old wood carver, was going to leave the mountain to go and live down by the lake with his son, Monsieur Givet, and his family. It had all been arranged that afternoon when they first recognized each other.

He was to leave at the beginning of March, and the day before he went Lucien climbed up through the forest to help him pack. He had given away the goat, the cat, and the hens, and sold nearly all his little figures. But he was not selling the house. He was just shutting it up to wait till he came back.

"I shall often come back, Lucien," he explained. "I couldn't leave the mountain for long. I'll stop down there for a while, but then I shall hear the mountains calling me, and back I'll come for a bit of a holiday."

He looked thoughtfully across the valley, then glanced around the bare shelves of the hut.

"I'm taking a few of my figures for the children," he remarked. "They may like them. One, Lucien, I kept for you. I came across it when I was sorting through them the other night.

It's one I thought I couldn't part with, but I'd like you to have it if you'd like it."

Lucien looked up eagerly. "I'd love to have one, Monsieur," he replied. "It will remind me of you, and besides, I might be able to copy it."

The old man went to the cupboard and took out the gift he had laid aside for Lucien. He put it in the boy's hands and watched him closely as he examined it.

It looked simple enough at first sight. It was a wooden cross made of two pieces of rough wood, but the crossbeam was fixed to the post by beautifully carved ropes, twisted in knots. Lucien's fingers touched the perfect carving gently, and he lifted shining eyes to his old master.

"It's beautiful," he cried. "I can't think how you carved those ropes without breaking the wood." Then he added rather shyly, "It's the cross where Jesus was crucified, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied the old man simply. "I carved it the night my master died—the night he spoke to me about the love and mercy of God—and the night I believed I could be forgiven. Once you and I had a talk about loving. The cross is the place where we see love made perfect."

Lucien looked up again quickly.

“Perfect love,” he repeated. “That’s what it says in Grandmother’s verse. It keeps coming. It’s what Annette and I talked about the night before she went away.”

“Yes,” agreed the old man. “You’ll often hear it. Perfect love. It means love that goes on doing until there isn’t any more to be done, and that goes on suffering until it can’t suffer any more. That’s why, when Jesus hung on the cross, He said, ‘It is finished.’ There wasn’t one sin left that couldn’t be forgiven, not one sinner who couldn’t be saved, because He had died. He had loved perfectly.”

The old man seemed to have forgotten Lucien and to be talking to himself. But Lucien was listening all the same. He said good-bye to his old friend and promised to come up early next morning and carry his pack to the station on the way to school. Then he ran home. He was in a hurry because he wanted to write to Annette so that the old man could take a letter with him next morning. But the first thing to do was to hang his little cross carefully above his bed. Then he ran out to the kitchen to find a pen and paper.

The kitchen was in rather a mess. His mother was over with the cows and had not had time to wash the pans or empty the bucket. Lucien usually helped her, but tonight he was in a hurry. If he slipped back into his bedroom he could write without being disturbed, and she would clear the mess and not know he had come in.

He hurried off and curled himself up on the floor by his bed. He was just starting to write when he happened to glance up and caught sight of the carved cross hanging on the wall.

He stared at it for a moment or two, thinking hard. What was it the old man had said? “Perfect love goes on doing until there isn’t anything more to be done.”

He in some small way wanted to be like Jesus and to love perfectly, too. And there were all those dirty pans out in the kitchen waiting to be washed.

He went rather pink and got up slowly. When his mother came in half an hour later, she found the kitchen all clean and tidy and a happy-hearted Lucien writing at the table.

He went up to the old man early next morning while the forest was still dark, and they came down together, leaving the lonely hut waiting for his return.

The old man went off on the train that had carried away Annette and Dani, and his eyes fixed sadly on the mountains.

“When the narcissi begin to come out, I shall come back,” he reminded Lucien as the train was starting off. “You write and tell me when they’re out in the valley, and that will give me plenty of time to get back before they flower in the mountain. Don’t forget, Lucien.”

It was not very long after this that Lucien collected a letter for Grandmother from the post office and hurried up the hill to give it to her, for he knew it was from Annette. He clattered up the veranda steps shouting the good news, and Grandmother came eagerly out.

“Read it to me, Lucien,” she said, and sat down in the sunshine, folding her hands and shutting her eyes so she could concentrate on the words.

It was a very short letter, and Lucien read it all in one breath.

“Dear Papa and Grandmother,” it said, “Dani and I are coming home the day after tomorrow. Dani is quite well again. We are longing to see you, and Dani says please bring Klaus to the station. Your loving Annette.”

There was also a note from Madame Givet giving the exact time of their arrival, and a picture from Dani called, “Me Coming Home in the Train.”

Just for a few minutes Grandmother began to cry —the shaky little cry of a very weak old woman— but she quickly wiped away her tears and pretended

to become a very strong old woman, because there was such a lot to be done.

“Go over to the shed and give that letter to Monsieur Burnier, Lucien,” she said firmly, “and then come back here and help me right away. There’s a lot to be done—beds to air, cakes to cook, and the furniture to be rubbed up. We must have everything looking its best for the children.”

Papa, on receiving the news, said, “Oh!” and scratched his head. Then for the first time in his life he upset the milk pail, and shortly afterward disappeared into the forest and didn’t come back for a long time.

The next day dawned clear and beautiful. There was no school. Lucien was up at daybreak picking flowers. He arranged them in a bowl on the veranda table and then set out for the station, walking slowly because there was plenty of time and plenty to think about. Grandmother, Papa, and Klaus had gone in the mule cart.

It was such a lovely spring morning, not unlike the day just over a year ago when Dani had fallen, thought Lucien. What a dark day that had been. The memory of it spoiled his happy thoughts. It had all been his fault they had ever had to go away, and perhaps after all they wouldn’t be very pleased to see him. Annette had said Dani was well, but Lucien could hardly believe it.

He reached the station feeling very nervous, and stood away from the others, with his hands in his pockets, because he suddenly felt a little afraid of meeting them, and wished he hadn’t come.

Papa kept his eyes fixed on the far point down the valley where the train would appear between the mountains, and Grandmother struggled with Klaus, who seemed to want to set off down the line and meet the train on her own.

“It’s coming,” cried Papa.

Lucien suddenly felt shier than ever.

When it came, Annette and Dani were at the window, rosy with excitement and longing to get out.

Dani gave one glance at the well-loved faces that had come to welcome him, and in that glance he noticed Lucien standing apart. For an instant he wondered why. His loving, happy little heart wanted to gather everyone together about him, and he jumped off the train and ran straight to Lucien.

“Look, Lucien,” he shouted, “I can walk! The doctor you found made me better, and I can run just as though I never fell over the ravine. Look, Grandmother! Look, Papa! I’m running without my crutches! And look, Klaus, here’s your kitten.

Isn’t he big, Grandmother? Nearly as big as Klaus!”

Klaus and the kitten simply hated each other, and snarled and scratched and swore dreadfully. Dani and Grandmother struggled to keep them apart, everyone laughed, the train rattled off, and Annette clung to her father as though she would never let go of him again.

Only Lucien turned away, because he found there were tears in his eyes. He had been honored above everybody. The wrong he had done had been forgiven and forgotten forever. Dani could walk as if he had never fallen.

Spring had come. The winter was over and gone. With the flowers appearing and the birds singing again, joy had returned to their hearts.