

Heidi



HEIDI

Johanna Spyri



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CHAPTER 1

UP THE MOUNTAIN

FROM the old and pleasantly situated village of Maienfeld, a footpath winds through green and shady meadows to the foot of the mountains. The land grows gradually wilder as the path ascends, for the way is steep and leads directly up to the summits above.

On a sunny morning in June two figures might be seen climbing the mountain path ; one a tall strong-looking girl, the other a child whom she was leading by the hand, and whose little cheeks were so aglow that the crimson colour could be seen even through the dark, sunburnt skin. And this was hardly to be wondered at, for in spite of the June sun the child was clothed as if to keep off the bitterest frost. She did not look more than five years old and she had on apparently two, if not three dresses, and over these a thick red woollen shawl wound round about her. The two must have left the valley a good hour's walk behind them, when they came to the hamlet known as Dorfli, which is situated half-way up the mountain. Here the wayfarers met with greetings from all sides, for the elder girl was now in her old home. She did not, however, pause in her walk to respond to her friends' welcoming cries and questions, but passed on without stopping for a moment, until she reached the last of the scattered houses of the hamlet. Here a voice called to her from the door: "Wait a moment, Dete; if you are going up higher, I will come with you."

The girl thus addressed stood still.

"Are you tired, Heidi?"

"No, I am not," answered the child.

"We shall soon get to the top now. You must walk bravely on a little longer, and in another hour we shall be there," said Dete in an encouraging voice.

They were now joined by a stout, good-natured-looking woman, who walked on ahead with her old acquaintance, while the child wandered on behind them.

"And where are you off to with the child?" asked the one who had just joined the party. "I suppose it is the child your sister left?"

"Yes", answered Dete. "I am taking her up to Uncle, where she must stay."

"The child stay up there with Alm-Uncle! You must be out of your senses, Dete! The old man, however, will soon send you packing off home again!"

"He cannot very well do that, seeing that he is her grandfather. I have had the charge of the child till now. I am not going to give up the chance which has just fallen to me of getting a good place. It is for the grandfather now to do his duty by her."

"That would be all very well if he were like other people, but what can he do with a child, especially with one so young! But where are you thinking of going yourself?"

"To Frankfurt, where an extra good place awaits me," answered Dete. "The people I am going to were down at the Baths last summer, and it was part of my duty to attend upon their rooms."

"I am glad I am not the child!" exclaimed Barbel, with a gesture of pity. "Not a creature knows anything about the old man up there! He never sets his foot inside a church from one year's end to another. When he does come down once in a while, everybody clears out of the way of him. The mere sight of him, with his bushy grey eyebrows and his immense beard, is alarming enough."

"Well, and what of that?" said Dete, in a defiant voice, "he is the grandfather all the same, and must look after the child. He is not likely to do her any harm, and if he does, he will be answerable for it, not I."

"I should very much like to know," continued Barbel, in an inquiring tone of voice, "what the old man has on his conscience that he lives up there on the mountain like a hermit. All kinds of things are said about him. You, Dete, however, must certainly have learnt a good deal concerning him from your sister."

"You are right, I did, but I am not going to repeat what I heard; if it should come to his ears I should get into trouble about it."

Barbel was determined not to lose this good opportunity of satisfying her curiosity. She put her arm through Dete's in a confidential sort of way, and said: "I know I can find out the real truth from you, and the meaning of all these tales that are afloat about him. Now do just tell me what is wrong with the old man, and if he was always shunned as he is now."

"How can I possibly tell you whether he was always the same, seeing I am only six-and-twenty and he at least seventy years of age. If I was sure, however, that what I tell you would not go the whole round of Prattigau."

"Nonsense, Dete, what do you mean?" replied Barbel, somewhat offended, "I am quite capable of holding my tongue when it is necessary."

"Very well then, I will tell you," replied Dete with animation; "he was owner once of one of the largest farms in Domleschg. He was the elder of two brothers; the younger was a quiet, orderly man, but nothing would please the other but to play the grand gentleman and go driving about the country and mixing with band company. He drank and gambled away the whole of his property, and when this became known to his mother and father they died, one shortly after the other, of sorrow. The younger brother went off in his anger, while Uncle himself, having nothing now left to him but his bad name, also disappeared. For some time his whereabouts were unknown, then someone found out that he had gone to Naples as a soldier; after that nothing more was heard of him for twelve or fifteen years. At the end of that time he reappeared in Domleschg, bringing with him a young child, whom he

tried to place with some of his kinspeople. Every door, however, was shut in his face, for no one wished to have any more to do with him. Embittered by this treatment, he vowed never to set foot in Domleschg again, and he then came to Dorfli, where he continued to live with his little boy. His wife was probably a native of the Grisons, whom he had met down there, and who died soon after their marriage. He could not have been entirely without money, for he apprenticed his son, Tobias, to a carpenter. He was a steady lad, and kindly received by everyone in Dorfli. The old man was, however, still looked upon with suspicion, and it was even rumoured that he had been forced to make his escape from Naples, or it might have gone badly with him, for that he had killed a man, not in fair fight, you understand, but in some brawl."

"And what happened to Tobias?" asked Barbel, who was listening with deep interest.

"Tobias was taught his trade in Mels, and when he had served his apprenticeship he came back to Dorfli and married my sister Adelaide. But their happiness did not last long. Her husband met with his death only two years after their marriage, a beam falling upon him as he was working, and killing him on the spot. And two months after Tobias had been carried to the grave, his wife followed him. Both in private and public the general opinion was expressed that it was a punishment which Uncle had deserved for the godless life he had led. Our minister endeavoured to awaken his conscience and exhorted him to repentance, but the old man grew only more wrathful and obdurate and would not speak to a soul. All at once we heard that he had gone to live up the Alm and did not intend ever to come down again, and since then he has led his solitary life on the mountain side at enmity with God and man. Mother and I took Adelaide's little one, then only a year old, into our care."

"And you are going to give the child over to the old man up there? It surprises me beyond that you can think of doing such a thing, Dete," said Barbel, in a voice full of reproach.

"What do you mean?" retorted Dete. "I have done my duty by the child, and what would you have me do with it now? I cannot certainly take a child of five years old with me to Frankfurt. But where are you going to yourself, Barbel; we are now half way up the Alm?"

"We have just reached the place I wanted," answered Barbel. "I had something to say to the goat-herd's wife, who does some spinning for me in the winter. So good-bye, Dete, and good luck to you!"

Dete shook hands with her friend and remained standing while Barbel went towards a small, dark brown hut, which stood a few steps away from the path in a hollow that afforded it some protection from the mountain wind. The hut was situated half way up the Alm, reckoning from Dorfli, and it was well that it was provided with some shelter, for it was so broken-down and dilapidated that even then it must have been very unsafe as a habitation.

Here lived Peter, the eleven-year-old boy, who every morning went down to Dorfli to fetch his goats and drive them up on the mountain, where they were free to browse till evening on the delicious mountain plants.

Then Peter, with his light-footed animals, would go running and leaping down the mountain again till he reached Dorfli, and there he would give a shrill whistle through his fingers, whereupon all the owners of the goats would come out to fetch home the animals that belonged to them. It was generally the small boys and girls who ran in answer to Peter's whistle, for this was the only hour of the day through all the summer months that Peter had any opportunity of seeing his young friends. He had a mother and a blind grandmother at home, it is true, but he was always obliged to start off very early in the morning, and only go home late in the evening from Dorfli; and so he had just time enough at home, to swallow down his bread and milk in the morning, and again in the evening to get through a similar meal, lie down in bed and go to sleep. His father, who had been also known as the goat-herd, had been accidentally killed while cutting wood

some years before. His mother, whose real name was Brigitta, was always called the goat-herd's wife, for the sake of old association, while the blind grandmother was just "grandmother" to all the old and young in the neighbourhood.

Dete had been standing for a good ten minutes looking about her in every direction, for while she had been talking she had seen little Heidi wander off to speak to Peter. With no sign of them she climbed to a higher spot, whence she could get a fuller view of the mountain. Meanwhile, the children were climbing by roundabout way, for Peter knew many spots where all kinds of good food, in the shape of shrubs and plants, grew for his goats, and he was in the habit of leading his flock aside from the beaten track. The child, exhausted with the heat and weight of her thick armour of clothes, panted and struggled after him at first with some difficulty. She said nothing, but her little eyes kept watching first Peter, as he sprang nimbly hither and thither on his bare feet, clad only in his short light breeches, and then the slim-legged goats that went leaping over rocks and shrubs and up the steep ascents with even greater ease. All at once she sat herself down on the ground, and as fast as her little fingers could move, began pulling off her shoes and stockings. This done she rose, unwound the hot red shawl and threw it away, and then proceeded to undo her frock. It was off in a second, but there was still another to unfasten, for Dete had put the Sunday frock on over the everyday one, to save the trouble of carrying it. Quick as lightning the everyday frock followed the other, and now the child stood up, clad only in her light short-sleeved under garment, stretching out her little bare arms with glee. She put all her clothes together in a tidy little heap, and then went jumping and climbing up after Peter and the goats as nimbly as any one of the party. At last, after some time, they and the goats approached the hut and came within view of Cousin Dete. Hardly had the latter caught sight of the little company climbing up towards her when she shrieked out : "Heidi, what have you been doing!

What can you have been thinking of, Heidi; where are all your clothes?"

The child quietly pointed to a spot below on the mountain side and answered, "Down there." Dete followed the direction of her finger; she could just distinguish something lying on the ground, with a spot of red on the top of it which she had no doubt was the woollen wrapper.

"You good-for-nothing little thing!" exclaimed Dete angrily, "what could have put it into your head to do like that? What do you mean by it?"

"I don't want any clothes," said the child, not showing any sign of repentance for her past deed.

"You wretched, thoughtless child! have you no sense in you at all?" continued Dete, scolding and lamenting. "Who is going all that way down to fetch them; it's a good half-hour's walk! Peter, you go off and fetch them for me as quickly as you can."

"I am already past my time," answered Peter slowly, without moving from the spot where he had been standing with his hands in his pockets, listening to Dete's outburst of dismay and anger.

"Well, you won't get far if you only keep on standing there," was Dete's cross reply; "but see, you shall be having something nice," and she held out a bright new piece of money to him that sparkled in the sun. Peter was immediately off down the steep mountain side, and in an incredibly short space of time had reached the little heap of clothes, which he gathered up under his arm, and was back again so quickly that even Dete was obliged to give him a word of praise as she handed him the promised money.

"You can carry the things up for me as far as Uncle's," went on Dete. After a climb of more than three-quarters of an hour they reached the top of the Alm mountain. Uncle's hut stood on a projection of the rock, exposed indeed to the winds, but where every ray of sun could rest upon it, and a full view could be had of the valley beneath. Behind the hut stood three old fir trees, with long, thick, unlopped branches.

Against the hut, on the side looking towards the valley, Uncle had put up a seat. Here he was sitting, his pipe in his mouth and his hands on his knees. Heidi was at the top first. She went straight up to the old man, put out her hand, and said, "Good-evening, grandfather."

"So, so, what is the meaning of this?" he asked gruffly, as he gave the child an abrupt shake of the hand, and gazed long and scrutinizingly at her from under his bushy eyebrows.

"I wish you good-day, Uncle," said Dete, as she walked towards him, "and I have brought you Tobias' and Adelaide's child."

"And what has the child to do with me up here?" asked the old man curtly.

"The child is here to remain with you," Dete made answer. "I have, I think, done my duty by her for these four years, and now it is time for you to do yours."

"That's, is it?" said the old man, as he looked at her with a flash in his eye.

"I know I had to put up with her without complaint when she was left on my hands as an infant, and with enough to do as it was for my mother and self," retorted Dete. "Now I have to go and look after my own earnings. You will be answerable for the result if harm happens to her, though you have hardly need, I should think to add to the burden already on your conscience."

Now Dete was not quite easy in her own conscience about what she was doing, and consequently was feeling hot and irritable, and said more than she had intended. As she uttered her last words, Uncle rose from his seat, looked at her in a way that made her draw back a step or two, then flinging out his arm, he said to her in a commanding voice: "Be off with you this instant, and do not let me see your face again in a hurry."

Dete did not wait to be told twice. "Goodbye to you then, and to you too, Heidi," she called, as she turned quickly away and started to descend the mountain at a running pace, which she did not slacken till she found herself safely again at Dorfli.

GRANDFATHER'S HUT

When Dete had disappeared the old man went back to his bench, and there he remained seated, staring on the ground without uttering a sound, while thick curls of smoke floated upward from his pipe.

"I want to see what you have inside the house," said Heidi.

"Come, then!" and the grandfather rose and went before her towards the hut.

"Bring your bundle of clothes in with you," he bid her as she was following.

"I shan't want them any more," was her prompt answer.

The old man turned and looked searchingly at the child, whose dark eyes were sparkling in delighted anticipation of what she was going to see inside. "She is certainly no wanting in intelligence," he murmured to himself. "And why shall you not want them any more?" he asked aloud.

"Because I want to go about like the goats with their thin light legs."

"Well, you can do so if you like," said grandfather, „but bring the things in, we must put them in the cupboard."

Heidi did as she was told. The old man now opened the door and Heidi stepped inside after him; she found herself in a good-sized room, which covered the whole ground floor of the hut. A table and a chair were the only furniture; in one corner stood the grandfather's bed, in another was the hearth with a large kettle hanging above it; and on the further side was a large door in the wall — this was the cupboard.

"Where am I to sleep, grandfather?"

"Wherever you like," he answered.

Heidi was delighted, and began at once to examine all the nooks and corners to find out where it would be pleasant to sleep. In the corner near her grandfather's bed she saw a short ladder against the wall; up she climbed and found herself in the hay-loft. There lay a large heap of fresh sweet-