

The Ice Maiden

I

Little Rudy

Let's visit Switzerland, let's take a look at the wonderful mountainous country where the forests grow up the steep walls of rock; let's climb up onto the dazzling fields of snow, and then descend to the green meadows where rivers and streams rush away as if they did not have enough time to reach the sea and disappear. The sun shines hot in the deep valley, as it also does up on the heavy masses of snow, so that over the years they melt into gleaming blocks of ice and turn into rolling avalanches, towering glaciers. Two such lie in the broad ravines beneath the '*Schreckhorn*' and '*Wetterhorn*', by the small mountain town of *Grindelwald*; they are a remarkable sight, and that is why, during the summer, many foreigners come to this spot from every country of the world; they come over the high, snow-covered mountains, they come from down in the deep valleys, and then they have to climb for several hours, and as they climb, the valley sinks deeper and deeper, they gaze down into it as if seeing it from a balloon. High up, the clouds often hang like thick, heavy curtains of smoke round the mountain peaks, while down in the valley, dotted with many brown wooden dwellings, a ray of sunlight is still shining, lighting up some small area in glittering green, as if it was transparent. The water rushes, roars and drones down there, the water purls and murmurs high up – there it looks as if silver ribbons were fluttering down over the rock face. On both sides of the road up to here lie log houses, each house has its own small kitchen garden, and that is a necessity here, for inside there are many mouths to feed, here there are lots of children with very healthy appetites; they swarm out of all the houses, crowd around any strangers, whether they arrive on foot or by carriage; the whole horde of children do business; the youngest offer well-carved small houses for sale, like those that can be seen here in the mountains. Come rain or shine, the teeming mass of children come out with their wares.

Twenty or so years earlier, a little boy who also wanted to do some business used to stand there from time to time, but always at some distance from the other children; he would stand there with such a serious face and with both hands firmly grasping his woodchip box as if he would never let go of it; but precisely this seriousness, and the fact that the lad was so little, was why people noticed him, called out to him, and he was often the one who made the best deals, although he himself didn't know why. Higher up the mountain lived his grandfather, who carved the fine, well-crafted houses, and up there in his living room there stood an old cupboard crammed with all types of carvings, there were nutcrackers, knives, forks and boxes decorated with lovely foliage and leaping chamois; there was everything that could make children's eyes open wide, but the small boy, known as *Rudy*, used to gaze with greater desire and longing at the old gun up under the beam that one day was going to be his, grandfather had said, but first he had to get big and strong enough to use it.

Although the lad was so little, he was set to tending the goats, and if being able to clamber over rocks with them meant being a good goatherd, then *Rudy* was certainly a good goatherd; he even climbed a little higher, he liked taking bird's nests high up in the trees, he was a bold and spirited lad, but was only seen to smile when he stood by the roaring waterfall, or when he heard an avalanche rolling. He never played with the other children; he only mixed with them when his grandfather sent him down to do business, and this *Rudy* was not all that keen on, he would rather clamber around alone in the mountains, or sit beside grandfather and hear him tell stories of the old days and of the people nearby in *Meringen*, where he came from; that people had not been there from the beginning of history, he said, they had migrated here, they had come from high up in the North, where a race lived called 'Swedes'. That was quite some knowledge, and this *Rudy* knew, but he gained even more knowledge from another form of good company, and this was the various animals that belonged to the house. There was a large dog, *Ajola*, inherited from *Rudy's* father, and a tom cat; this cat in particular meant a great deal to *Rudy*, as it had taught him how to climb.

'Come up onto the roof with me!' the cat had said, and had done so quite clearly and understandably, for when one is a child and as yet unable to speak, one understands hens and ducks, cats and dogs perfectly well; they are just as easy for us to understand when they speak as when father and mother do, all one needs to be is really small; even grandfather's stick can whinny, turn into a horse, with head, legs and tail. With some children this type of understanding disappears later than for others, people say about such children that they are very backward, remain children a terribly long time. People say so many things!

'Come up onto the roof with me, little *Rudy*!' was one of the first things the cat said, and *Rudy* understood. 'It's complete rubbish all that about falling down; one doesn't fall if one is not scared of doing so. Come on, put your one paw like this, your other like that! hold on with your two front paws! use your eyes, and keep your limbs supple! if there's a gap then leap, and hold on tight, that's what I do!'

And that was what *Rudy* also did; that's why he often used to sit on the ridge of the roof with the cat, he sat with it in the tree-top, even high up on the edge of the mountain crags where cats never came.

'Higher, higher!' the trees and bushes said. 'Just look at how we climb up! how high we reach, how we hold on tight, even on the farthest narrow jutting out piece of rock!'

And *Rudy* would make his way up the mountain early, often before the sun reached up there, and there he would take his morning drink, the fresh, invigorating mountain air, the drink that only *Lord God* can make, and humans read the recipe of, and what is written there is this: the fresh scent of mountain herbs and the mint and thyme of the valley. Everything that is heavy the overhanging clouds absorb, and then the winds carry them over to the pine forests, the essence of the scent becomes air, light and refreshing, ever more refreshing; this was *Rudy's* morning drink.

The sun's rays, the sun's daughters that convey its blessing, kissed his cheeks, and *Vertigo* stood lurking but did not dare approach, and the swallows down from grandfather's house – there were no fewer than seven nests – flew up to him and the goats, singing: 'We and thee! and thee and we!' They brought greetings with them from home, even from the two hens, the only birds in his home, but *Rudy* did not want to have anything to do with them.

Even though he was very small, he had travelled, and no short distance for such a little lad; he had been born over in the canton of *Valais* and carried here over the mountains; recently he had on foot visited the '*Staubbach*' falls close by, which billows like a silver veil in the air in front of the snow-clad, dazzling white *Jungfrau* mountain. And in *Grindelwald* he had been up to the large glacier, but that was a tragic story, his mother had found her death there, 'that was where little *Rudy*,' grandfather said, 'had all his childhood gaiety shorn off him.' 'When the boy was still not one year old, he laughed more than he cried,' mother had written, 'but from the time he sat trapped in the crevasse, another state of mind had taken over.' Grandfather was not one to speak about this much, but people around the whole mountain knew about it.

Rudy's father, as we know, had been a mail coach driver; the large dog in the living room had always followed him on his journey over the *Simplon* pass down to Lake Geneva. In the Rhone valley in the canton of *Valais* *Rudy's* paternal relatives still lived, his uncle was a skilful chamois huntsman and a well-known guide; *Rudy* was only one year old when he lost his father, and his mother now wanted to return home with her small child to her own family in *Berner-Oberland*; a few hours' journey from *Grindelwald* lived her father; he carved wood that was thus able to earn enough to make a living. In the month of June she was walking homewards, carrying her young child and accompanied by two chamois huntsmen, across *Gemmi* to reach *Grindelwald*. They had already come most of the way, had passed over the high ridge to the field of snow, could already see her home valley with all its well-known scattering of wooden houses; all that remained was the difficult task of crossing the uppermost part of the one huge glacier. The snow, newly fallen, hid a crevasse, not all the way down to the bottom where the water roared, but deeper than the height of a human even so; the young woman, who was carrying her child, slid, sank into it and was gone, one heard not a single scream or sigh, but one could hear a small child crying. It took more than an hour for the two accompanying her to fetch ropes and poles from the nearest house below with which they could possibly help, and with a great deal of difficulty they brought up from the crevasse in the ice what appeared to be two bodies. Every means was employed, and they managed to revive the child, but not the mother; and in that way the old grandfather ended up with the son of a daughter instead of the daughter herself, the infant that smiled more than he cried, although it now seemed that he had grown out of that, that change had probably taken place in him in the crevasse in the glacier, in the cold, strange world of ice in which the souls of the damned are trapped until Judgment Day, as the Swiss farmer believes.

Not unlike rushing water that has frozen and been packed into green blocks of ice, lies the glacier, with one huge piece of ice toppled over onto the next; down in the depths roars the rapid current of melted ice and snow; deep cavities, huge clefts soar up inside, it is a wonderful glass palace, and in it lives the *Ice Maiden*, the queen of the glacier. She, the killer, the crusher, is half a child of the air, half the mighty ruler of the great river, which is why she is able to soar up with the speed of a chamois onto the uppermost peak of the snow mountain, where the boldest mountaineers have to hack steps in the ice as footholds; she sails on the thinnest of pine branches down the swift-flowing river, leaps there from boulder to boulder, with her long, snow-white hair and blue-green mantle that shines like the water of the deep Swiss lakes fluttering and streaming around her.

'Crush, hold fast! All power is mine!' she says. 'A lovely boy was stolen from me, a boy I had kissed, but not kissed to death. He is once more among humans, he guards the goats on the mountain, clambers upwards, always upwards, away from the others, not from me! He is mine, I shall fetch him!'

And she asked *Vertigo* to take care of the matter; when it was summer, it was too sultry for the *Ice Maiden* out in nature where the curled mint thrives; and *Vertigo* rose up and dipped down; one came, three came; 'Vertigo' has many sisters, a whole band; and the *Ice Maiden* chose the strongest of the many who ruled indoors and outdoors. They sit on the banisters and on the tower railings, they run like a squirrel along the edge of the mountain, they leap out off them and tread air as a swimmer treads water and entice their victims out and down into the abyss. Both *Vertigo* and the *Ice Maiden* grab hold of humans as the polyp grabs hold of everything that moves around it. *Vertigo* was to grab hold of *Rudy*.

'Grab him, you say!' *Vertigo* said, 'I'm not able to. The cat, the wretch, has taught him its skills! That human child has an inner strength that pushes me away; I can't get near to the young lad when he hangs on a branch out over the abyss, and I'd love to tickle the soles of his feet, or give him a ducking in the air! But I can't!'

'We could do it!' the *Ice Maiden* said. 'You or I could! !! !!'

'No, no!' rang out to them as like the mountain echo of the chiming church bells, but it was song, it was speech, it was a mixed chorus of other spirits of nature, gentle, loving and good, the daughters of the sun's rays; every evening they encamp in a circle on the mountain peaks, spread out their rose-coloured wings which, as the sun sinks, turn redder and redder, the high summits gleam – people call this 'the Alpine glow' – and when the sun has set, they withdraw into the mountain tops, into the white snow, sleep until the sun rises, when they re-emerge. In particular, they love the flowers, butterflies and mankind, and among the last-named they had especially chosen little *Rudy*.

'You shall not catch him! You shall not get him!' they said.

'I have caught and won greater and stronger!' the *Ice Maiden* said.

Then the sun's daughters sang a song about the wanderer whose cloak was ripped off by the whirlwind and carried off in tempestuous flight; the wind took away the outer husk but not the man; 'you children of power could seize him but not hold him; he is stronger, more spirit-like than even we are! he rises higher than the sun, our mother! he knows the magic spell that binds wind and water, so that they have to serve and obey him. If you release the heavy, burdensome weight of his body, he will rise yet higher!'

So delightful was the sound of the bell-chiming chorus.

And every morning the sun's rays shone in through the sole small window in grandfather's house, down onto the motionless child; their rays kissed him, they wanted to thaw out, to warm up, to even take away the kiss of ice that the royal maiden of the glaciers had given him when, in the lap of his dead mother, he lay in the crevasse of ice, and *there* was saved, as if by a miracle.

II

The journey to the new home

And now *Rudy* was eight years old; his uncle in the Rhone Valley, on the other side of the mountains, wanted to have the boy live with him, there he could be better trained and get on; his grandfather also realised this and was therefore prepared to let go of him.

Rudy was to leave. There were more to say goodbye to than grandfather, first of all *Ajola*, the old dog.

'Your father was a mail coach driver, and I was his mail dog,' *Ajola* said. 'We have journeyed up and down, I know the dogs and humans too on the far side of the mountains. I was never much of a one for words, but now that we have but little time left to talk to each other, I will say a bit more than I usually do; I will tell you a story that I have already turned over in my mind a great deal; I can't understand it, and nor can you, but that is no matter, for this I have got out of it, that things are not divided equally among either dogs or humans in this world! Not everyone is created to lie in someone's lap or slurp up milk; I have never got used to it, but have seen a puppy be driven round in a mail coach and be given the place of a human; the lady who was his mistress, or maybe he was her master, had a bottle of milk with her, from which she fed him; he was given bread sprinkled with sugar, but he couldn't even be bothered to eat it, just sniffed at it, and then she ate it herself; I ran in the mud alongside the coach, as hungry as a dog can be, chewing over my own thoughts, it wasn't right somehow – but there are lots of things that aren't either! I hope you may be taken up onto someone's lap and ride in a fine carriage, but that is not something one can bring about oneself, I haven't been able to, either by barking or yawning!'

That was *Ajola's* speech, and *Rudy* hugged the dog by the neck and kissed him right on his moist muzzle, then he took the cat in his arms, but it tried to squirm out of his embrace.

'You're getting too strong for me, and I don't want to have to use my claws on you! Just you crawl off over the mountains, I've taught you to crawl, after all! Don't ever believe you are going to fall and you will manage to keep hold!' And then the cat ran away, for it didn't want to let *Rudy* see that its eyes glistened with grief.

The hens ran around on the floor, one of them had lost its tail; a traveller who wanted to be a huntsman had shot off its tail when he mistook it for a bird of prey.

'*Rudy* wants to be off over the mountains!' one of the hens said.

'He's always in a hurry!' the other one said, 'and I don't like saying goodbye!' and both of them scampered off.

The goats also said farewell, and cried out: 'Meeetoo! Meeee! Meeeh!' and it was all so sad.

Of those living in the area, there were two fine guides who were about to cross the mountains, they wanted to come down on the far side near *Gemmi*, *Rudy* went with them, on foot. It was a tough march for such a young lad, but he had plenty of strength, and courage that never tired.

The swallows followed them part of the way: 'We and thee! and thee and we!' they sang. Their path crossed the fast-flowing '*Lütschine*', which with its many tributaries gushes out

of the black cleft of the *Grindelwald* glacier. Loose tree-trunks and rubble serve as a bridge here; now they were across at the alder thicket and started to climb up the mountain, close to where the glacier had come away from the mountain slope, and then they walked out onto the glacier over the blocks of ice and around them; *Rudy* had to crawl a bit, walk a bit; his eyes shone with pure pleasure, and then he put down his iron-studded mountain shoe, as firmly as if he intended to leave a mark wherever he had trodden. The deposit of black earth that the mountain current had poured out over the glacier gave it a calcified look, but the blue-green glassy ice still managed to shine through; the small pools of water hemmed in by forced-up blocks of ice had to be avoided, and during their walk they came close to a large boulder that lay rocking on the edge of a crevasse in the ice, it lost its balance, fell, rolled down and a resounding echo could be heard down from the deep, hollow passages of the glacier.

Upwards, their path was ever upwards; the glacier itself soared up towards the sky, like a river of wildly stacked masses of ice, squeezed between two steep cliffs. *Rudy* thought for a moment about what had been told him, how he had lain with his mother at the bottom of one of these crevasses that breathed coldness, but he soon put aside such thoughts, it seemed to him like one of the many stories he had heard. From time to time, when the men thought it was a bit too difficult for the young fellow to go on climbing, they reached a hand out to him, but he wasn't tired, and on the slippery ice he stood as sure-footed as a chamois. They now came onto rocky ground, at times between stones without moss, at times among low pines, and at other times out onto the green pastureland, always alternating, always new; around them were snowy summits which he, like every child here, knew by name: '*Jungfrau*', '*Mönch*' and '*Eiger*'. *Rudy* had never been so high up before, never walked out onto the vast expanses of the snow-sea; it lay there with its motionless waves of snow from which the wind blew off clusters of snow crystals, as if blowing foam off the waves of the sea. Glacier upon glacier seemed, so to speak, to hold each other hand in hand, each one a glass palace for the *Ice Maiden*, whose power and will is: to capture and bury. The sun was hot, the snow was so dazzling and as if strewn with blue-white glittering diamonds. Innumerable insects, particularly butterflies and bees, lay dead on the snow in countless numbers, they had risked flying too high, or the wind had borne them up until they expired in this cold. Around the *Wetterhorn*, like a finely carded tuft of wool, hung a menacing cloud; it dropped down, bulging with what was concealed within it, a *Föhn*, violent in its force when unleashed. The impression of the entire walk, their stopover for the night, and the rest of their path, the deep clefts in the rock, where the water had hewn its way through the huge blocks of stone during mind-boggling aeons of time, left an indelible trace in *Rudy's* memory.

A deserted stone building on the far side of the sea of snow offered them shelter for the night; here they found charcoal and pine branches; a fire was soon lit, their bed for the night prepared as best they could, the men sat round the fire, smoked their tobacco and drank the hot, spicy drink they themselves had brewed; *Rudy* was given some too, and they spoke about the mysterious beings of the Alps, of the strange huge serpents in the deep lakes, of the night-folk, the ghost-army, that carried the sleeper through the air to the wonderful swimming city of Venice; the wild shepherd that drove his black sheep across the pastures; if one had not seen them, one would even so have heard their bells, heard the flock's fearful roaring. *Rudy* listened with great curiosity but without any fear, for that was unknown to him,

and as he listened, he thought he heard that ghostly, hollow roar; yes! it became increasingly audible, the men heard it too, stopped talking, listened and said to *Rudy* that he must not fall asleep.

It was a *Föhn* blowing, the violent storm wind that hurls itself down from the mountains into the valley, snapping trees in its violence as if they were reeds, shifting log cabins from one bank of the river to the other, as humans move a chess-piece.

An hour had passed, then they told *Rudy* that now it was all over, now he could sleep, and tired out from his march, he slept as if obeying an order.

They struck camp early next morning. The sun lit up new mountains for *Rudy* that day, new glaciers and fields of snow; they had entered the canton of *Valais* and were on the other side of the mountain ridge one could see from *Grindelwald*, but still a long way from his new home. Other mountain clefts, other pastures, forests and mountain paths unfolded, other houses, other people came into view, but what sort of people did he see, they were misshapen beings, ghastly, fat, pasty faces, their necks a heavy clump of flesh, hanging down in folds; they were cretins, in sickly fashion they dragged themselves along, gawping at the arriving strangers with stupid eyes; the women looked worst of all. Were these the people who lived in his new home?

III

Uncle

In uncle's house, which *Rudy* now came to, the people – thank God – looked like *Rudy* was used to seeing them; there was only one single cretin here, a poor, imbecile lad, one of those unfortunate creatures who, in their poverty and desolation, always in the canton of *Valais*, are passed round in families, staying a couple of months in each house, poor *Saperli* happened to be precisely here when *Rudy* arrived.

Uncle was still a powerful huntsman, in addition he knew the craft of coopering; his wife was a small, lively person with a face almost that of a bird, eyes like an eagle, neck long and quite downy.

Everything was new to *Rudy*, clothing, habits and customs, the language itself, but this his child's ear was quick to learn to understand. Everything looked prosperous compared to grandfather's home. The main room they lived in was larger, the walls adorned with chamois antlers and brightly polished guns, above the door hung a picture of the Virgin Mary; fresh Alpine roses and a burning lamp stood in front of it.

Uncle, as mentioned, was one of the most able chamois huntsmen in the area as well as the most experienced and proficient guide. Here in the house *Rudy* was now to be the favourite, although there already was one here – it was an old, blind, deaf hunting dog that no longer could be of any use, but that it had already been; the animal's proficiency in early years had been remembered, so now it was one of the family and was to enjoy its old age. *Rudy* patted the dog, but it wouldn't have anything to do with strangers, and that was what *Rudy* still was of course, but not for long; he soon put down roots in both home and hearts.

'Things are not that bad here in the canton of *Valais!*' uncle said, 'We've chamois, they don't die out as quickly as ibex! it's much better here than in the old days; no matter how much is said in praise of them, our age is better even so, a hole has appeared in the bag, fresh air has entered our stuffy valley. Something better always emerges when what's antiquated is over and done with!' he said, and when uncle was really in a talkative mood, he would tell of his childhood years and of his father's heyday, when Valais was, as he called it 'a closed bag' with far too many sick people, wretched cretins; 'but the French soldiers came, they were the real doctors, they immediately killed off the disease, and the patients too. They could strike hard, those Frenchmen, strike a blow in many ways, and the girls could strike too!' and here uncle nodded to his French-born wife and laughed. 'The French could strike solid stones till they split! they struck a road through the rock at the Simplon Pass, so that now I can say to a three-year-old child, you just walk down into Italy! just stay on the main road, and the youngster can find his way down into Italy as long as he sticks to the main road!' and then uncle sang a French song and shouted Hurrah for *Napoleon Bonaparte*.

Then *Rudy* heard for the first time about *France*, about *Lyon*, the great city on the *Rhone* river, and uncle had been there too.

Within a few years, *Rudy* was to become a skilful chamois hunter, he had a talent for it, uncle said, and he taught him how to hold a gun, aim, and fire; during the hunting season he took him with him up into the mountains, let him drink the warm chamois blood to cure the hunter of vertigo; he taught him to know the time when, on the various mountain slopes, the avalanches would start to roll, around midday or the evening, according to how the sun's rays shone there; he taught him to pay close attention to the chamois and from them to learn their leap, so that one landed firmly on one's feet, and if there was no support for the foot in the cleft of rock, one had to make sure to support oneself with one's elbows, cling on with the muscles one had in thigh and calf; one could even latch on with one's neck if need be. The chamois were clever, they put out their advanced posts, but the huntsman had to be cleverer and scent them out; he could fool them, he hung up his hat and coat on an alpenstock and the goat would mistake the coat for the man. Uncle carried out this trick one day when *Rudy* was with him on the hunt.

The mountain path was narrow, well, there was practically no path at all, it was a mere strip of ledge on the edge of a plunging abyss. The snow there had half thawed out, the rock crumbled when one took a step there, so uncle lay down at full length and crept forwards. Each piece of rock that broke off fell, struck, sprang and banged and rolled down further, making many a leap from rockface to rockface before ending up motionless in the depths. A hundred paces behind uncle *Rudy* stood on the outermost knoll of firm rock, and he saw approaching in the air, hovering above uncle, a huge bearded vulture that with its beating wings wanted to fling the creeping worm into the abyss and turn him into carrion. Uncle's eyes, though, were firmly fixed on the chamois, which was visible with its young kid on the far side of the cleft; *Rudy* kept an eye on the bird, understood what its intention was, and so took up his gun to fire it; then the chamois gave a leap, uncle shot, and the animal was hit by the lethal bullet, but the kid shot off as if it had spent its whole life twisting and turning, fleeing from danger. The immense bird sped off, frightened by the gunshot; uncle had not realised he had been in danger himself, heard about it later from *Rudy*.

As they now set off homewards in the best of spirits, with uncle whistling a song from his boyhood, they suddenly heard a sound not far off, they looked on both sides, they looked upwards, and high up, on the sloping ledge of rock the snow covering lifted itself, it bulged like waves as when the wind gets in under a spread-out piece of linen. The crests of the waves cracked, as if they were sheets of marble that broke and dissolved into foaming, crashing waters, resounding like muffled thunder; it was an avalanche that came crashing down, not on top of *Rudy* and uncle, but close, much too close to them.

'Hold on tight, *Rudy!*' he shouted. 'Tight, with all of your strength!'

And *Rudy* grabbed the trunk of a nearby tree; uncle climbed up above him into the tree's branches, and held on tight while the avalanche tumbled down at quite some distance from them, but the suck of air, the storm-fins in its wake, snapped and smashed trees and bushes all around as if they were but dry reeds, and flung them all over the place. *Rudy* lay pressed flat against the ground; the tree trunk he was clinging to was as if sawn in two, and the top of the tree flung a great distance away; there, among the broken branches, lay uncle, his head smashed, his hand still warm, but his face unrecognisable. *Rudy* stood there pale and shuddering; this was the first great shock of his life, the first moment of dread he had experienced.

In the early evening, he arrived home with the tidings of his uncle's death – a home now filled with grief. The uncle's wife stood there without a word, without a tear, it was not until the body was brought back that her sorrow erupted. The poor cretin crept into his bed and was not seen the whole day long, towards evening he came over to *Rudy*.

'Write letter for me! *Saperli* can't write! *Saperli* can go with letter to post!'

'A letter from you?' *Rudy* asked. 'Who to?'

'To Lord *Christ!*'

And the half-wit known as the cretin fixed *Rudy* with a touching gaze, joined his hands in prayer and said solemnly and devoutly:

'*Jesus Christ!* *Saperli* wants to send him letter, ask him to let *Saperli* lie dead and not master of the house here!'

And *Rudy* squeezed his hand. 'That letter will not reach up there! That letter will not return him to us!'

It was difficult for *Rudy* to explain why this was impossible.

'You are now the pillar and support of the house!' his foster-mother said, and *Rudy* became just that.

IV

Babette

Who is the best marksman in the canton of *Valais*? Well, the chamois knew. 'Be on your guard against *Rudy!*' they could say. 'Who is the handsomest marksman?' 'Well, that's *Rudy!*' the girls said, but they didn't say 'Be on your guard against *Rudy!*', not even the serious-minded mothers said that; for he nodded in just as friendly a fashion to them as to the young

girls, he was so spirited and glad, his cheeks were tanned, his teeth were dazzling white and his eyes gleamed jet-black, he was a handsome young man and only twenty years old. Ice-cold water didn't freeze his flesh when he swam; he could turn in the water like a fish, climb like none other could, cling like a snail to the rockface, there were good muscles and sinews in him; this he also showed when he leapt, the cat had taught him first and then the chamois. The best guide one could confide in was *Rudy*, he could earn an entire fortune in that capacity; the craft of a cooper that uncle had also taught him was not something he gave a thought – his one desire and longing was to shoot chamois, and that also brought in money. *Rudy* was a good match, as people said, as long as he did not look above his station. He was a dancer in the dance that the girls dreamt of, and several of them also went around thinking of when awake.

'He kissed me when we danced!' the schoolmaster's *Annette* told her dearest girlfriend, but she shouldn't have said that, not even to her dearest girlfriend. It's not easy to keep such a thing secret, it is like sand in a bag with a hole in it, it trickles out; soon, no matter how well-behaved and respectable *Rudy* was, people knew that he kissed when dancing; and yet he had never kissed the one person he most of all wished to have kissed.

'Keep an eye on him!' an old huntsman said, 'he's kissed *Annette*, he's started with the letter A and is going to work his way through the whole alphabet.'

A kiss during a dance was still the only subject of gossip about *Rudy*, but he had kissed *Annette*, and she wasn't the flower of his heart at all.

Down near *Bex*, among the great walnut trees, close to a swift-flowing mountain stream, lived the rich Miller; his dwelling was a large, three-storey building with small towers, clad with shingles and covered with sheets of tin that glistened in the light from the sun and moon; the largest tower had as a weathervane a gleaming arrow piercing an apple – an allusion to *Tell's* arrow-shot. The mill looked prosperous and elegant, could be both depicted and portrayed, but the Miller's daughter could not be depicted or portrayed, that was what *Rudy* would say at any rate, but in spite of this her picture was engraved on his heart; both her eyes gleamed there so that there was a whole conflagration; it had come there suddenly as such fires come, and the strangest thing about it all was that the Miller's daughter, the lovely *Babette*, was quite unaware of him, she and *Rudy* had not exchanged as much as two words together.

The Miller was wealthy, and his wealth meant that *Babette* was very high up for one to try and reach; but nothing sits so high, *Rudy* said to himself, that one cannot reach up to it; one must climb, and one doesn't fall if one doesn't believe one will. That piece of wisdom he had from home.

It so happened that *Rudy* had some business in *Bex*, it was quite a journey to get there, the railway here had not yet been established. From the Rhone glacier, past the foot of the Simplon Mountain, between many varying mountain summits the broad Valais valley stretches with its mighty river, the *Rhone*, which often swells and overflows its banks out across fields and roads, destroying everything. Between the towns of *Sion* and *St. Maurice* the valley describes a curve, bending like an elbow, and below *Maurice* it becomes so hemmed in that it only has enough space for the river bed and the narrow carriage road. An old tower, as a sentry for the *Valais* canton which ends here, stands on the mountain side looking out across the brick-built bridge to the customs house on the far side, where *Vaud*

canton begins, and the closest town, which does not lie far from here, is *Bex*. Over here, for every step one takes, everything swells with abundance and fertility, it is as if one is in a garden of chestnut and walnut trees; here and there, cypresses and pomegranate blooms peep out; it is also warm as in the south here, as if one had entered Italy.

Rudy reached *Bex*, took care of his business, took a look around, but not a single Miller's man did he see, let alone *Babette*. Things were not as they should be.

Evening came, the air was full of the fragrance of wild thyme and the blossoming linden trees; there was what seemed to be a gleaming, sky-blue veil around the forest-green mountains, a silence lay everywhere, not that of sleep, not that of death, no, it was as if all of nature was holding its breath, as if it felt itself positioned so that a photograph could be taken of it against the vault of the blue sky. Here and there among the trees, across the green field there stood poles that held the telegraphs wire that had been led through the quiet valley; against one of these leant an object so motionless that one might have thought it to be a dead tree-trunk, but it was *Rudy*, who stood there just as still as everything around him at that moment; he was not asleep, nor was he dead, but just as great world events, moments of vital importance in the life of the individual, often fly along the telegraph wire without the wire revealing this by the slightest quiver or sound, so did thoughts, his life's happiness, his henceforth '*constant thought*', pass through *Rudy*. His eyes were fixed on a point between the leaves, a light in the Miller's living room, where *Babette* lived. As still as *Rudy* was standing, one would have thought he was taking aim to shoot a chamois, but at that moment he was actually like the chamois that can stand for minutes as if carved out of the rock, and suddenly, at the rolling of a stone, it makes its leap and shoots off; as did *Rudy*, it was a thought that rolled through his mind.

'Never say die!' he said. 'Visit the mill! Good evening to the Miller, good day to *Babette*. One doesn't fall if one doesn't believe one will! *Babette* will have to see me after all, if I am ever to be her husband!'

And *Rudy* laughed, was in good spirits and went to the mill; he knew what he wanted, he wanted to have *Babette*.

The river with its white-yellow water rushed away, willows and linden trees hung out over the swift-flowing water; *Rudy* went along the path, and, as it says in the old children's song:

'...off to the Miller's house,

But no one was at home there

except a poor wee puss!'

The Parlour Cat was standing on the steps, it arched its back and said: 'Miaow!' but *Rudy* wasn't in the mood to exchange comments; he knocked; no one heard him, no one opened the door. 'Miaow!' the cat said. If *Rudy* had been a child, he would have understood animal language and heard that the cat was saying 'There's no one at home!' now he had to go over to the mill and ask; there he was told that the master was away on a journey, far away in the city of *Interlaken*, '*inter lacus*, between the lakes', as the school master, *Annette*'s father had explained from his fount of wisdom. The Miller was far off there and had *Babette* with him; there was a great shooting competition about to start the following day that would last a whole week. Swiss from all the German-speaking cantons used to go to it.

Poor *Rudy*, one could say, it wasn't the best of times to come to *Bex*, he could just as well turn around, and that is what he did, took the road via *St. Maurice* and *Sion* to his own valley,

his own mountains, but he was not downhearted. When the sun rose the following morning, his good spirits had already been up quite some time, they had never been down.

'*Babette* is in *Interlaken*, many days' journey from here!' he said to himself. 'It's a long way there if one follows the beaten track, but not so long if one cuts across the mountains, and that's just the path for a chamois hunter! I've been that way before, on the far side is my home region, where I was a lad with grandfather! and they have a shooting competition in *Interlaken*! there I want to be the winner, as I also do when it comes to *Babette* once I have made her acquaintance!'

With his light knapsack, his Sunday best in it, his gun and huntsman's bag, *Rudy* climbed up the mountain, the short route that even so was quite long, but the shooting competition had only just begun that day after all and would last past the end of the week; for all that time, they had told him, the Miller and *Babette* would be staying with their relations in *Interlaken*. Up over *Gemmi Rudy* went, he planned to come down at *Grindelwald*. –

Hale and hearty he set out, up into the fresh, light, invigorating mountain air. The valley sank deeper below him, the view grew more panoramic; here a snowy peak, there a snowy peak, and soon the gleaming white row of the Alps. *Rudy* knew every snow-clad mountain; he set off towards *Schreckhorn*, which raised its white-powdered finger of stone high into the blue sky.

At last he had passed over the mountain ridge, the pastureland sloped down towards his home valley; the air was light, his spirits were light; mountain and valley were a profusion of blossom and greenness, his heart was full of the thought of youth: one never grows old, one will never die; live, hold sway, enjoy! as free as a bird, as light as a bird was he. And the swallows flew past him and sang as in his boyhood: 'We and thee! and thee and we!' Everything was flight and joy.

Down there lay the velvet-green meadow, with a scattering of brown wooden houses, the *Lütschine* river hummed and foamed. He saw the glacier with its glass-green edges in the grimy snow, the deep crevasses, he saw the uppermost and lowermost glaciers. The bells chimed over to him from the church, as if they wanted to ring Welcome Home to him; his heart beat more strongly, swelled so much that *Babette* inside it was gone for a moment, so large did his heart become, so full of memories.

Once more he walked along the road where as a little fellow he had stood with the other children by the side of the ditch and sold carved wooden houses. Up there behind the pine trees grandfather's house still stood, strangers lived there. Children came running down the road, they wanted to sell things, one of them stretched out an Alpine rose, *Rudy* took it as a good omen and thought of *Babette*. Soon he would be down over the bridge where the two tributaries of the *Lütschine* meet, the hardwood trees increased in number; the walnut trees offered shade. Now he could see fluttering flags, the white cross on a red background that the Swiss and the Danes both have; and in front of him lay *Interlaken*.

It really was a magnificent town like none other, *Rudy* felt. A Swiss town in a Sunday dress; it was not like the other provincial towns, a heap of solid stone houses, heavy, foreign and fine, no! here it looked as if the wooden houses up in the mountains had run down into the green valley, by the clear arrow-swift river and had placed themselves in rows, a little bit out and in, to form a street; and the most magnificent of all the streets, yes, it really had grown a great deal since *Rudy*, as a young lad, had last been here, it seemed to have come into being by

all the charming wooden houses grandfather had carved, and with which the cupboard back home was full, having transplanted themselves here and grown in strength, like the old, the oldest chestnut trees. Each house was a hotel, as they are called, with carved woodwork around windows and balconies, jutting out roofs, so trim and attractive, and in front of each house a whole garden of flowers, out to the broad, macadamised main road; along it, only on one side, stood the houses that would otherwise have hidden the fresh green meadow straight ahead, where the cows went with bells that sounded like those on the high Alpine pastures. The meadow was enclosed by high mountains which right at the centre seemed to step to one side so that one could properly see the gleaming, snow-clad '*Jungfrau*', the most beautifully shaped of all Switzerland's mountains.

What a crowd of finely dressed men and women from foreign countries, what a throng of fellow countrymen from the various cantons. The marksmen wore their shooting number in a band round their hats. Here there was music and singing, hurdy-gurdies and wind instruments, shouting and noisiness. Houses and bridges were decorated with verses and emblems; flags and pennants fluttered, shot upon shot was fired, it was the finest music in *Rudy's* ears. In all of this he completely forgot *Babette*, even though it was for her sake that he had come here.

The marksmen gathered for target shooting, *Rudy* was soon among them and the most proficient, the most fortunate of them all, he hit the black bull's eye every time.

'Who can that stranger, that youthful huntsman be?' people asked. 'He speaks French as it is spoken in the *Valais* canton! and he is also perfectly understandable in our German!' others said. 'As a child he is said to have lived here in the *Grindelwald* area!' one of them knew.

The fellow was full of life: his eyes gleamed, his gaze and arm were sure, which is why he was on target. Good luck gives courage, and *Rudy* was never lacking in courage; soon he already had a large circle of friends around him, he was both honoured and praised, *Babette* had almost been completely banished from his thoughts. Then a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a rough voice addressed him in the French language.

'Are you from *Valais* canton?'

Rudy turned round and saw a ruddy, happy face, a stout person, it was the rich Miller from *Bex*; with his broad body he concealed the elegant, dainty *Babette*, who soon peeped out, however, with her gleaming dark eyes. The rich Miller made great play of the fact that it was a huntsman from his canton that was shooting best and collecting the honours. *Rudy* was really a child of fortune; what he had set out on account of but at that moment had almost forgotten now sought him out.

Whenever, far from one's home, one meets people who come from one's home area, one gets to know each other, one talks to each other. At the shooting competition *Rudy* was the top shooter, just as the Miller back home in *Bex* was the top man with his money and his fine mill; and so the two men shook each other by the hand, which they had never done before; and *Babette* also took *Rudy* so straightforwardly by the hand, and he shook her hand and looked at her in such a way that she blushed deeply.

The Miller spoke of the long journey they had made to get there, the many large towns they had seen; it was quite some trip: they had sailed on a steamship, travelled by steam and by mail coach.

'I took the shorter route!' *Rudy* said, 'I walked over the mountains; no way is too high for a man to take!'

'But also to break his neck!' the Miller said. 'And it looks precisely as if you some day will break your neck, as venturesome as you are!'

'One doesn't fall if one doesn't believe one will!' *Rudy* said.

And the Miller's relations in *Interlaken*, whom the Miller and *Babette* was staying with, asked *Rudy* to pay them a visit, for he was from the same canton as their family. This was a fine invitation for *Rudy*, luck was on his side as it always is for those who trust in themselves and remember: 'Our Lord gives us the nuts, but he doesn't crack them for us!'

And *Rudy* sat, as if a member of the family, with the Miller's relations, and a toast was proposed for the finest marksman, and *Babette* clinked her glass too, and *Rudy* thanked them for the toast.

Towards evening, they all walked along the beautiful road past the attractive hotels under the old walnut trees, and there was such a crowd of people, a milling throng of them, that *Rudy* had to offer *Babette* his arm. He was so glad to have met people from *Vaud*, he said. *Vaud* and *Valais* were good neighbouring cantons. He spoke of his happiness so fervently that *Babette* felt she had to squeeze his hand for doing so. They walked along almost like old acquaintances, and she was amusing, the charming little person; it suited her so well, *Rudy* felt, to point out the ridiculous and exaggerated way in which the foreign women dressed and the way they walked, and it was not at all in order to make fun of them, for they could well be honourable people, yes indeed! sweet and lovable, as *Babette* well knew, she had a godmother who was such a highly distinguished English lady. Eighteen years earlier, when *Babette* was christened, she had been in *Bex*; she had given *Babette* the precious pin she wore at her breast. Twice *Godmother* had written letters, and this year, here in *Interlaken*, they were to have met her with her daughters, who were old spinsters, getting on for thirty, *Babette* said, – for she was only eighteen.

Her sweet little mouth didn't stand still for a moment, and everything that *Babette* said sounded to *Rudy* to be things of the greatest importance, and he told her in return what he had to tell, told her: how often he had been in *Bex*; how well he knew the mill, and how often he had seen *Babette*, but she of course had most likely never noticed him, and most recently when he had been at the mill, and been there with many thoughts that he could not say aloud, she and her father were gone, gone and far away, but no further than one could still crawl over the wall that made the road long.

Yes, he said *that*, and he said so much; he said how much he liked her – – and that it was for her sake and not for the shooting competition that he had come.

Babette fell completely silent; it was almost too much for her to bear what he confided in her. And as they walked on, the sun sank behind the high face of the mountain. The '*Jungfrau*' stood in all its glory and splendour, fringed by the forest-clad greenness of the mountains nearby. The many people stood still and gazed at this; *Rudy* and *Babette* too stood gazing at all that magnificence.

'Nowhere is lovelier than here!' *Babette* said.

'Nowhere!' *Rudy* said and looked at *Babette*.

'Tomorrow I must be away!' he said shortly after.

'Visit us in *Bex*!' *Babette* whispered, 'that would please my father!'

V

On the way home

Oh, *Rudy* had such a lot to carry when, the following day, he set out across the high mountains. Yes, he had three silver cups, two excellent guns and a silver coffee pot, useful for when he settled down; though this was not the weightiest thing – he bore something yet weightier, mightier, or it bore him across the high mountains. But the weather was raw, drab, rainy and heavy; the clouds dropped down like a mourning veil over the summits, enveloping the gleaming peaks. From the depths of the forest the last axe-blows resounded, and down along the mountain side rolled tree-trunks, looking like kindlewood from that height, but mast-heavy trees seen at close quarters. The *Lütschine* was a monotonous murmur, the wind soughed, the clouds sailed. Close to *Rudy* a young girl was suddenly walking, he had not noticed her before she was very close by; she too wanted to cross the mountain. Her eyes had a power of their own, one felt forced to gaze into them, they were as strangely clear as glass, so deep, bottomless.

‘Do you have a sweetheart?’ *Rudy* asked her; all his thoughts were taken up with having a sweetheart.

‘I have none!’ she said and laughed, but it was as if she did not speak a single true word.

‘Let us not make a detour!’ she went on. ‘We must more to the left, it’s quicker!’

‘Yes, quicker to fall down a crevasse in the ice!’ *Rudy* said. ‘You should know a better way if you would claim to be a guide!’

‘I know the way perfectly well!’ she said, ‘and I have all my wits about me. Your thoughts are somewhere down in the valley; up here one ought to think about the *Ice Maiden*, she is not good to humans, or so people say!’

‘I am not afraid of her!’ *Rudy* said, ‘she had to let go of me when I was a child, I shall escape her now too that I am older!’

And it grew darker, the rain fell, the snow came, it shone, it dazzled.

‘Give me your hand, and I will help you climb!’ the girl said, and she touched him with ice-cold fingers.

‘You help me!’ *Rudy* said. ‘I haven’t needed a woman’s help to climb yet!’ and he started to walk faster, away from her; the swirling snow enveloped him like a curtain, the wind roared, and behind him he heard the girl laugh and sing; it sounded so strange. It was probably evil spirits in the *Ice Maiden’s* service; *Rudy* had heard of such when as a small boy he had spent the night up here on his trek over the mountains.

The snow eased off, the clouds lay beneath him; he looked back, there was no one now to be seen, but he could hear laughter and yodelling, and it did not sound as if it came from a human being.

When *Rudy* at last reached the uppermost part of the mountain, where the mountain path descended towards the *Rhone* valley, he saw in the clear blue streak of light, in the direction towards *Chamonix*, two bright stars, they sparkled and shone, and he thought of *Babette*, of himself and his good fortune, and these thoughts warmed him.

VI

The visit to the mill

'What grand things you have brought home with you!' his old foster-mother said, and her mysterious eagle-eyes flashed, she moved her scrawny neck even faster in strange weaving turns. 'Good luck is on your side, *Rudy!* I must kiss you, my sweet boy!'

And *Rudy* allowed himself to be kissed, but his face showed that he was putting up with the situation, these small domestic inconveniences. 'How handsome you are, *Rudy!*' the old woman said.

'Get along with you!' he said and laughed, but he couldn't help but feel pleased.

'I say it again!' the old woman said, 'Good luck is on your side!'

'Yes, I believe you in *that!*' he said, thinking of *Babette*.

Never before had he longed as now for the deep valley.

'They must have got home by now!' he said to himself. 'It's already more than two days after they expected to arrive back. I must go to *Bex!*'

And *Rudy* went off to *Bex*, and the Miller and his family were home. He was well received, and was also given greetings from the family in *Interlaken*. *Babette* did not say much, she had fallen so silent, but her eyes spoke, and that was more than enough for *Rudy*. The Miller, who was fond of the sound of his own voice, being used to people always laughing at his ideas and plays on words, for he was the rich Miller, he seemed to prefer to hear *Rudy* tell hunting adventures, difficulties and dangers that the chamois huntsmen were exposed to up on the high mountain peaks, and how they had to crawl along unsafe cornices of snow glued only by wind and weather to the rockface, how they had to crawl over the hazardous bridges the whirling snow had thrown across the deep chasms. *Rudy* looked so spirited, his eyes shone while he told of the huntsman's life, of the wiliness and bold leaps of the chamois, of the mighty Föhn wind and the rolling avalanches; he was well aware that with every new description he was winning over the Miller more and more, and what particularly appealed to him was the account of the bearded vultures and the intrepid golden eagles.

Not far from there, inside the canton of *Valais*, there was an eagle's nest, cunningly built in under a projecting section of rock; there was an eaglet up there – it was not to be taken! A few days earlier, an Englishman had offered *Rudy* a whole handful of gold to procure the eaglet alive for him, 'but there is a limit to everything,' he said; 'the eaglet is not to be taken, it would be madness to attempt such a thing!'

The wine flowed and the conversation flowed, but the evening was all too short, *Rudy* felt, even though it was past midnight when he left after this his first visit to the mill.

The lights continued to gleam for a short while through the windows and between the green branches; out of the open skylight on the roof emerged the Parlour Cat and along the gutter came the Kitchen Cat.

'Heard the latest from the mill?' the *Parlour Cat* asked. 'there is a tacit engagement in the house! The old man doesn't know yet; *Rudy* and *Babette* have been treading on each other's paws all evening under the table; they trod on me twice but I didn't miaow, that would have caught people's attention!'

'I would have done!' the *Kitchen Cat* replied.

'What's suitable in the kitchen isn't suitable in the parlour!' the *Parlour Cat* said. 'But I just wonder what the Miller will say when he hears about the engagement!'

Yes, what would the Miller say, *Rudy* was wondering precisely that, but he couldn't bring himself to wait for long; so not many days after, when the omnibus rumbled over the Rhone bridge between *Valais* and *Vaud*, *Rudy* was sitting inside it in good spirits, as always, and full of pleasant thoughts of consent being given that very evening.

And when evening had come and the omnibus was driving the same way back, well, *Rudy* was also sitting in it once more, but in the mill the *Parlour Cat* had more news to tell.

'Have you heard the latest, you from the kitchen! The Miller knows everything. And it was some ending it took! *Rudy* came here towards evening, and he and *Babette* had a great deal to whisper about, they stood in the passage outside the Miller's room. I lay at their feet, but they had neither eyes nor thoughts for me. "I'll go straight in to your father!" *Rudy* said, "we've nothing to be ashamed of." "Shall I come with you?" *Babette* asked, "it will give you some courage!" "I've no lack of courage!" *Rudy* said, "but if you're with me, he'll have to take a milder view of things, whether he wants to or not." And in they went. *Rudy* trod violently on my tail! *Rudy* is so awfully clumsy! I miaowed, but neither he nor *Babette* had ears to hear with. They opened the door, went in the both of them, me in front of them, but I leapt up onto the back of a chair, I couldn't know where *Rudy* might kick out. But it was the Miller who kicked out! It was a good kick! out the door, up onto the mountain with the chamois! *Rudy* can aim at them now and not at our little *Babette*!

'But what was said?' the *Kitchen Cat* asked?

'Said!' – 'Everything was said that they have to say when they go courting: "I love her and she loves me! and when there is milk in the pail for one, there is also milk in the pail for two!" "But she is way above you!" the Miller said, "she sits on grain, on golden grain, you understand! She is out of your reach!" "Nothing is so high up that one can't reach it if only one will!" *Rudy* said, for he's a jaunty fellow. "But the eaglet is out of your reach, as you mentioned the other day! *Babette* sits even higher!" "I'll take the both of them!" *Rudy* said. "Well, I'll give her to you when you give me the live eaglet!" the Miller said and laughed so the tears streamed down his cheeks. "So thank you for your visit, *Rudy*! If you come tomorrow, there will be nobody at home! Goodbye *Rudy*!" And *Babette* also said goodbye, as wretched as a little pussy cat that cannot see its mother. "A word is a word, a man is a man!" *Rudy* said. "Don't cry, *Babette*, I will bring back the eaglet!" "You'll break your neck, I hope!" the Miller said, "and that will spare us from having you running around here!" Now that is what I call a kick! and off sets *Rudy*, and *Babette* sits here crying, but the Miller sings German songs he's learnt on the journey! I won't grieve about it, it won't do any good!

'But there's such a thing as appearances!' the *Kitchen Cat* replied.

VII

The eagle's nest

From the mountain path came the sound of yodelling so cheerful and strong that it implied good spirits and dauntless courage – it was *Rudy* on his way to his friend *Vesinand*.

'You must help me! we must also enlist *Ragli* – I have got to take the eaglet up on the rockface edge!'

'Why not take the black off the moon first, it's just as easy!' *Vesinand* said. 'You are in a good mood!'

'Yes, for I'm thinking of holding a wedding! But, seriously, you must know how things stand with me!'

And soon *Vesinand* and *Ragli* knew what it was *Rudy* wanted to do.

'You're a daredevil of a fellow!' they said. 'It's impossible! You'll break your neck!'

'One doesn't fall if one doesn't believe one will!' *Rudy* said.

They set out at midnight with poles, ladders and rope; the path passed through scrub and bushes, across scree, always up, up into the dark night. The water roared below, the water purred above, moist clouds drifted through the air. The huntsmen reached the rockface edge, it grew darker here, the walls of rock almost met each other, and only high up in the narrow cleft was the air lighter; close by, beneath them, was a deep abyss with a roaring torrent. The three of them sat there in silence, they were going to wait until dawn, then the eagle would fly out, it had to be shot before one could think of getting hold of its young. *Rudy* squatted there, as motionless as if he were part of the rock on which he was sitting, he had his loaded rifle at the ready in front of him, his eyes constantly fixed on the uppermost cleft, where the eyrie lay concealed in under the projecting rock. The three huntsmen waited for a long time. Then high up above them there was a creaking, swishing sound; it grew dark there because of a large, hovering object. Two barrels aimed at the back figure of the eagle flew out of the nest; a shot rang out; for a moment the outspread wings moved, after which the bird slowly descended, as if with its size and its wing-span it was going to completely blot out the cleft and in its fall take the huntsmen with it. The eagle sank down into the abyss; there was a crashing of branches and bushes broken by the fall of the bird.

And now the three of them got busy; three of the longest ladders were bound together, they must be long enough to reach up; they were placed on the outermost foothold of the edge of the abyss, but they were not long enough; and the cliff face was as smooth as a wall a long way further up where the nest was concealed in the shelter of the uppermost overhanging rock. After some deliberation, they agreed that nothing better could be done than to lower two ladders bound together from above and get these connected to the three already in position from below. With great difficulty the two ladders were dragged to the top and bound together with ropes; the ladders were pushed out over the jutting-out section of the cliff and they hung there poised right above the abyss; *Rudy* was already sitting there on the bottom rung. It was an ice-cold morning, the mists of cloud lifted themselves down from the black cleft. *Rudy* sat out there like a fly on a swaying straw that a bird building its nest has dropped on the edge of the tall factory chimney, but the insect can fly if the straw works loose, *Rudy* could only

break his neck. The wind whistled round him, and down in the abyss the fast-flowing water roared from the thawed glacier, the palace of the *Ice Maiden*.

He now caused the ladder to swing back and forth, like the spider that from its long gyrating thread wishes to grab hold, and when *Rudy* for the fourth time touched the top of the bound ladders from below, he caught hold of them, they were lashed together with a sure and powerful hand, although they still dangled as if on worn-out hinges.

The five long ladders were like a swaying reed that reached up to the nest, leaning vertically against the rockface; but now came the most dangerous part, the catlike ascent, but *Rudy* mastered that technique too, the cat had taught him it; he did not sense *Vertigo* that trod the air behind him, and stretched out its tentacle-like arms to grasp him. Now he was standing on the top rung and noted that even here he was not high enough up to be able to look into the nest, he could only reach up to it with his hand; so he checked how firmly fixed the bottom thick, interwoven branches that made up the bottom part of the nest were, and when he had made sure of a heavy, unyielding branch, he swung himself up from the ladder towards the branch and now had his chest and head above the nest, but now he was met by a choking stench of carrion – ripped pieces of rotten lamb, chamois and birds lay there. *Vertigo*, which could not touch him, blew the toxic fumes into his face so as to daze him, and down in the black, gaping depths, on the swift-flowing water, the *Ice Maiden* herself sat with her long, pale-green hair, staring with eyes as deadly as two gun barrels.

‘Now I’ve got you!’

In a corner of the nest he saw a large, powerful eaglet sitting, one that was still unable to fly. *Rudy* fixed his gaze on it, held on with one hand with all his might and with his other hand threw the noose out round the young eagle; there it was, caught alive; its legs were in the constricting cord, and *Rudy* flung the noose with the bird over his shoulder, so that the creature hung well under him, while with the aid of a dangling rope he held on tight until the tip of his foot once more reached the top rung of the ladder.

‘Hold on tight! one doesn’t fall if one doesn’t believe one will!’ that was the old maxim, and he obeyed it, held on, crawled, was sure he would not fall, and did not fall.

Now yodelling was heard so powerful and joyful. *Rudy* was standing on the firm rock with his eaglet.

VIII

What news the Parlour Cat was now able to relate

‘Here’s what was asked for!’ *Rudy* said as he entered the Miller’s house in *Bex* and placed a large basket on the floor, then took the cloth off, and out gleamed two yellow, black-rimmed eyes, so flashing, so wild, ready to burn and bite themselves onto whatever they looked at; the short, strong beak opened ready to strike, the neck red and downy.

'The eaglet!' the *Miller* cried. *Babette* gave a shriek and leapt to one side, but could not take her eyes off either *Rudy* or the eaglet.

'You're not one to be scared off!' the *Miller* said.

'And you always keep your word!' *Rudy* said, 'every man has his hallmark!'

'But why did you not break your neck?' the *Miller* asked.'

'Because I held on tight!' *Rudy* replied, 'and I still do! I hold on tight to *Babette*!'

'Make sure you've got her first!' the *Miller* said and laughed; and that was a good sign, *Babette* knew that.

'Let's get the eaglet out of the basket, it glowers in frightening fashion! where did you get hold of it?'

And *Rudy* had to tell his story, and the *Miller* looked on with eyes that grew wider and wider.

'With your courage and your luck, you can provide for three wives!' the *Miller* said.

'Thank you! Thank you!' *Rudy* shouted.

'Well, *Babette* isn't yours yet!' the *Miller* said and good-humouredly slapped the young Alpine huntsman on the back.

'Heard the latest from the mill!' the *Parlour Cat* said to the *Kitchen Cat*. '*Rudy* has brought us the eaglet and is taking *Babette* in exchange. They have kissed each other and let the father see them do it! and that is as good as an engagement; the old man didn't kick out this time, he pulled his claws in, took an afternoon nap and let the two sit and spoon – they've so much to tell each other, it'll take to beyond Christmas!'

And they weren't finished by Christmas either. The wind made the brown leaves whirl, the snow swirled in the valley as up in the high mountains; the Ice Maiden sat in her proud castle that increased in size during the winter; the rock walls stood coated with glazed frost and fathom-broad, elephant-heavy icicles where in summer the mountain streams let their watery mists wave; ice garlands of fantastic ice-crystals gleamed over the snow-powdered pines. The Ice Maiden rode on the whistling wind over the deepest valleys. The carpet of snow stretched all the way down to *Bex*, she could come there and see *Rudy* indoors, more than he was used to, he sat with *Babette*. The wedding was to take place in the summer; their ears often rang, so often did friends talk about it. There was sunshine, the loveliest Alpine roses glowed, *Babette* was cheerful and smiling, as lovely as the spring that came, the spring that let all the birds sing of summer, of the wedding day.

'How those two could sit canoodling with each other!' the *Parlour Cat* said. 'Now I'm tired of all that miaowing!'

IX

The Ice Maiden

Spring had unfolded its lush-green garland of walnut and chestnut trees, it swelled out especially from the bridge at *St. Maurice* to the shores of Lake Geneva along the Rhone, which at breakneck speed hurtled from its source beneath the green glacier, the Ice Palace, where the *Ice Maiden* lives, where she lets herself be borne on the keen wind up to the

highest snowfields and, in the strong sunlight, stretches out on the drift-formed cushions; there she sat and with her long-sighted gaze looked down into the deep valleys where the humans, like ants on the sun-caught stone, hurried and scurried around.

'Mental powers, as the sun's children call you!' the *Ice Maiden* said, 'You are mere vermin! A rolling snowball and you and all your houses and towns are flattened and eradicated!' And she lifted her proud head higher and gazed all around her and deep down with her death-flashing eyes. But from the valley came a rumbling, the blasting of rock, work of human hands; roads and tunnels for railways were being laid down.

'They play at being moles!' she said, 'they dig passages, which is why one hears sounds like flintlock weapons. Were I to move my castles, it would roar louder than the crashing of thunder!'

From the valley rose smoke, it moved forwards like a fluttering veil, a swaying plume from the locomotive that on the newly opened railway line was pulling the train, that winding snake whose joints are carriage upon carriage. It shot forward as swiftly as an arrow.

'They are playing at being masters, those mental powers down there!' the *Ice Maiden* said. 'But the powers of Nature are those that hold sway!' and she laughed, she sang, so it resounded in the valley.

'An avalanche has just started to roll!' the people down there said.

But the children of the sun sang even louder of human *thought*, which rules, which tames the sea, moves mountains, fills valleys; human thought that is the master of natural forces. At that very moment, a group of travellers came over the snowfield where the *Ice Maiden* sat; they had joined themselves together with rope so as to be like one larger body on the slippery ice surface close to the deep abysses.

'Vermin!' she said. 'Call yourselves masters of Nature!' and she turned away from them and looked derisively down into the deep valley where the railway train was rushing past.

'There they sit, those *thoughts*! they sit at the mercy of their powers! I see each and every one of them! – One sits as proud as a king, alone there they sit in a cluster! half of them are asleep! and when the steam dragon stops, they get out, and go about their business! The thoughts go out into the world!' And she laughed.

'That was another avalanche starting!' they said down in the valley.

'It won't reach us!' said two on the back of the steam dragon, 'two minds with but a single thought' as it's called. It was *Rudy* and *Babette*, and the Miller was also with them.

'As luggage!' he said. 'I'm here as just the bare necessity!'

'There the two of them sit!' the *Ice Maiden* said. 'Many a chamois have I crushed, millions of Alpine roses I have mashed and smashed, not one root was left! I eradicate them! Those thoughts! Those mental powers!' And she laughed.

'Yet another avalanche!' they said down in the valley.

X

Godmother

In *Montreux*, one of the nearest towns, which with *Clarens*, *Vernex* and *Crin* form a garland round the north-eastern part of Lake Geneva, lived *Babette's* godmother, the fine English lady, with her daughters and a young relative; they had only recently arrived, although the Miller had already paid them a visit, announced *Babette's* engagement and told them about *Rudy* and the eaglet, about the visit to Interlaken, in short the whole story, and it had greatly pleased and stimulated interest in *Rudy* and *Babette*, and for the Miller as well; they really must come all three of them – and so they came. *Babette* was to see Godmother, Godmother to see *Babette*.

At the small town of *Villeneuve*, at the end of the Lake of Geneva, the steamship lay ready which took half an hour to travel to *Vernex*, just below *Montreux*. It is a stretch of coastline much praised by poets; here, under walnut trees down by the deep, turquoise waters, *Byron* wrote his melodious verses about the prisoner in the forbidding cliff-castle of *Chillon*. Here, where *Clarens* mirrors itself in the water along with the weeping willows, *Rousseau* once walked, dreaming of *Héloïse*. The Rhone glides out under the high, snow-covered mountains of *Savoie*, here, not far from where it runs into the lake, lies a small island, so small indeed that from the coast it looks like yet another vessel out there. It is a piece of rocky ground that a century earlier a lady had had walled around with stones, covered with earth and had three acacia trees planted that now overshadow the entire island. *Babette* took immense delight in the small isle, it was her favourite spot on the entire journey, one had to go there, simply had to, it would be the most exquisite place to visit, in her opinion. But the steamship sailed past and moored, as it should, at *Vernex*.

The small company walked up from here between the white, sun-drenched walls that surround the vineyards in front of the small mountain village of *Montreux*, where the fig trees offer shade in front of the farmer's house, and laurels and cypresses grow in the gardens. Halfway up lay the guest house where her godmother was staying.

They received a very warm welcome. Godmother was a large, friendly woman with a round, smiling face; as a child she must have had a truly Raphael-like angelic head, but now she had an old angelic head, around which a mass of silver-white hair curled. The daughters were elegant, fine, tall and slender. The young cousin who was with them, clad in white from top to toe, with golden hair and golden whiskers so profuse that they could have been divided among three gentlemen, immediately showed a most attentive interest in little *Babette*.

Richly bound books, sheets of music and drawings lay scattered on the large table, the balcony door facing the delightful expanse of the lake stood open, and it was so gleaming and calm that the mountains of *Savoie* with their small towns, forests and snowy peaks were reflected there.

Rudy, who otherwise was a spirited, healthy and cheerful young man, did not feel himself at all in his element, as the saying is; here he went around as if over a slippery floor and treading on peas. How sluggishly time moved, as if in a treadmill! and now they were to go for a walk! this went equally slowly; *Rudy* had to take two steps forward and one back to stay abreast

of the others. They went down to *Chillon*, the sinister old castle on the rocky island, to take a look at the torturing stake and the death cells, rusty chains in the rock-wall, a stone bench for the condemned, trap-doors through which the unfortunate ones plunged and were impaled on iron-spikes in the surf. They said it was a real pleasure to see all this. It was a place of execution, elevated into the world of poetry through *Byron's* verse. *Rudy* had an acute sense of the place of execution; he leant against the large stone window ledges and gazed down into the deep turquoise water, across to the small lonely island with the three acacias, that was where he wanted to be, free of all this chattering company; but *Babette* felt quite exhilarated. She had had a quite wonderful time, she said later; she found the cousin perfect. 'Yes, a perfect pup!' *Rudy* said; and that was the first time *Rudy* said anything that didn't please her. The Englishman had presented her with a small book in memory of *Chillon*, it was *Byron's* poem: '*The Prisoner of Chillon*' translated into French, so that *Babette* could read it. 'The book may be well enough!' *Rudy* said, 'but the finely combed fellow who gave it to you didn't make much of a hit with me!' 'He looked like a sack of flour with no flour in it!' the Miller said, and laughed at his pleasantry. *Rudy* joined in and said that was well and aptly put.

XI

The cousin

When, a couple of days later, *Rudy* visited the mill, he found the young Englishman there; *Babette* was just serving him boiled trout which she had garnished with parsley herself, so that they looked more handsome. That was quite unnecessary. What was the Englishman doing here? What was his business? Be treated and pampered by *Babette*? *Rudy* was jealous, and that amused *Babette*; it pleased her to see every aspect of his heart, both the strong and the weak. Love was still a game, and she played with all of *Rudy's* heart, and yet, it must be stated, he was her happiness, her life's single thought, the best and the most wonderful in the whole world, but the darker his looks became, the more her eyes laughed, she could gladly have kissed the blond Englishman with the golden whiskers if it meant that *Rudy* would run off in a rage that showed her precisely just how much she was loved by him. But it was not right, not wise of little *Babette*, but she was only nineteen years old, after all. She didn't think about it, thought even less about how her behaviour might be interpreted, more merrily and lightly by the young Englishman than was exactly fitting for the Miller's modest, newly betrothed daughter.

Where the road from *Bex* runs beneath the snow-covered cliff-face which in the local dialect is called *Diablerets*, the mill lay not far from a fast-flowing mountain stream that was whitish grey, like whisked soapy water; this did not drive the mill, that was done by a smaller one which plunged down from the cliff on the other side of the river and passed through a stone channel under the road, lifting itself by means of its force and speed, and then ran into a closed timber reservoir, a broad trench, across the fast-flowing river, and turned the large mill-wheel. The trench was so full of water that it overflowed, creating a wet, slippery path for

anyone who might get the idea of reaching the mill more quickly, and that idea a young man had, the Englishman; clad in white like a Miller's apprentice, he climbed up one evening, led by the light shining from *Babette's* room; climbing was not something he had learnt and he had almost landed up on his head in the river, but escaped with wet sleeves and spattered trousers; soaked through and muddy he reached the spot under *Babette's* windows, where he climbed up the old linden tree and there imitated an owl, which was the only bird he was able to sound like. *Babette* heard it and looked out through the thin curtains, but when she saw the white man and had worked out who it was, her little heart pounded with fright, but also with anger. She hastily put out the light, checked that all the window catches were fastened, and left him to hoot and to howl.

It would be terrible if *Rudy* had been here now at the mill, but *Rudy* was not at the mill, no, it was much worse, he was standing right outside down below. There was shouting, angry words; there would be a fight, perhaps someone killed.

Babette opened the window in fright, called out *Rudy's* name, asked him to leave, she could not tolerate his staying there, she said.

'You can't tolerate my staying here!' he exclaimed, 'so it is a previous arrangement! You are expecting good friends, better than I am! for shame, *Babette!*'

'You're detestable!' *Babette* said. 'I hate you!' and now she started crying. 'Go! go!'

'I've haven't deserved this!' he said, and he went, his cheeks were aflame, his heart was aflame.

Babette threw herself onto her bed and wept.

'When I love you as much as I do, *Rudy!* and *you can still think ill of me!*'

And she was angry, very angry, and that was a good thing, for otherwise she would have been exceedingly sad; now she could fall asleep and sleep the invigorating sleep of youth.

XII

Evil powers

Rudy left *Bex*, set out for home, went up into the mountains, into the fresh, cooling air where the snow lay, where the *Ice Maiden* reigned. The hardwood trees stood deep below, as if they were just the tops of potato plants, pines and bushes grew smaller, the Alpine roses grew close to the snow which lay there in isolated patches, like linen laid out to bleach. A blue gentian stood there, he crushed it with the butt of his gun.

Higher up, two chamois came into view. *Rudy's* eyes gleamed, his thoughts raced elsewhere; but he was not close enough to get a good shot; he climbed higher, where only coarse grass grew among the blocks of stone; the chamois moved calmly over the snowfield; he hurried on eagerly; the mists of cloud sank down around him, and suddenly he was standing in front of the precipitous cliff face, the rain started to pour down.

He felt a raging thirst, his head was hot, the rest of his limbs were cold; he grabbed his hunting flask, but it was empty, he hadn't thought about that before storming up into the mountains. He had never been ill, but now he felt as if he was; he was tired, he felt an urge

to fling himself onto the ground and sleep, but everything was streaming with water, he tried to pull himself together; objects quivered strangely in front of his eyes, but then he suddenly saw something he had never seen here before, a low cabin newly timbered that leant up against the cliff, and in the doorway stood a young girl, he thought it was the schoolmaster's *Annette*, whom he had once kissed during a dance, but it was not *Annette*, and yet he had seen her before, perhaps at *Grindelwald* that evening after he returned from the shooting competition in *Interlaken*.

'Where do you come from?' he asked.

'I am at home!' she said. 'I keep watch over my herd!'

'Your herd, where is it grazing? There is nothing but snow and crags!'

'A fine lot you know!' she said and laughed. 'Right behind here, a little further down, is fine pasture! that's where my goats are! I take great care of them! I do not lose a single one, what is mine stays mine!'

'You're high-spirited!' *Rudy* said.

'So are you!' she replied.

'If you have any milk, give me some! My thirst is intolerable!'

'I've something better than milk!' she said, 'you shall have that! yesterday travellers came by with their guide, they forgot half a bottle of wine, such as you have never tasted before; they won't come back for it, I won't drink it. You drink it!'

And she came forward with the wine, poured it into a wooden bowl and gave it to *Rudy*.

'It's good!' he said. 'I've never tasted such a warming, such a fiery wine before!' and his eyes gleamed, he felt so much life, such a glow, inside him as if all his sorrows and troubles simply evaporated; he felt fresh, exuberant human nature stirring within him.

'But you are the schoolmaster's *Annette*, aren't you!' he exclaimed. 'Give me a kiss!'

'Well, give me first the beautiful ring you're wearing on your finger!'

'My engagement ring?'

'Precisely!' the girl said and poured out more wine into the bowl, put it up to his lips, and he drank. The joy of life streamed into his blood, the whole world was his, he felt, why torment oneself! Everything exists to give us pleasure and bliss! The stream of life is the stream of joy, if one lets oneself be caught by it, be borne off by it, that is bliss. He looked at the young girl, it was *Annette* and yet not *Annette*, even less the magic phantom he had called the girl he met near *Grindelwald*; the girl here on the mountain was as fresh as the new-fallen snow, as full-blooming as the Alpine rose and as light as a kid; though still created from Adam's rib, a human being just like *Rudy*. And he took her in his arms, gazed into her strange, clear eyes, it was only a second and in this second, yes explain, relate, tell us in words – was it the life of the spirit or of death that filled him, he was lifted up or sank down into the deep, lethal chasm of ice, deeper, ever deeper; he saw the walls of ice like blue-green glass; endless crevasses yawned around him, and the water dripped, ringing like a carillon and so limpid as well, gleaming in blue-white flames, the *Ice Maiden* gave him a kiss that sent ice-cold shivers down his spine and into his forehead, he gave a scream of pain, tore himself away, tumbled and fell, everything went black in front of his eyes, but he opened them again. Evil powers had done their work.

Gone was the Alpine girl, gone the sheltering cabin, the water ran down the naked wall of rock, the snow lay round about; *Rudy* shivered with cold, drenched to the skin, and his ring

was gone, the engagement ring that *Babette* had given him. His gun lay in the snow beside him, he picked it up, wanted to fire it, it clicked. Damp clouds lay like thick masses of snow in the cleft, *Vertigo* sat there lying in wait for the helpless prey, and beneath her there was a sound in the deep crevasse as if a boulder fell, crushed and ripped away everything that would halt it in its fall.

But in the mill *Babette* sat crying; for six days *Rudy* had not been there; he who had been in the wrong, the one who ought to have asked for her forgiveness, for with all her heart she loved him.

XIII

In the Miller's house

'There's a terrible fuss and bother with those humans!' the *Parlour Cat* said to the *Kitchen Cat*. 'Now *Babette* and *Rudy* have fallen out once more. She cries, and he probably doesn't think about her any longer!'

'I don't like the sound of that!' the *Kitchen Cat* said.

'Me neither!' the *Parlour Cat* said, 'but there's no point in crying over spilt milk! *Babette* can take the one with the red whiskers as a sweetheart! he hasn't been here either since he wanted to clamber onto the roof!'

Evil powers do their work, outside us and inside us, this *Rudy* had felt and thought about; what had taken place around him and within him, high up on the mountain? Was it delusions or a feverish dream, he had never had a fever or illness in his life before. He had glimpsed inside himself when he passed judgment on *Babette*. He thought about the wild hunt in his heart, the warm Föhn that had recently broken out. Could he confess everything to *Babette*, every thought that in the moment of temptation could turn within him into a deed. He had lost her ring, and precisely in that loss she had regained him. Could she confess to him? It was as if his heart would break when he thought of her; so many memories rose up, he saw her full of life, smiling, a light-hearted child; many a loving word she had spoken out of the fullness of her heart flew like a ray of the sun into his breast, and soon there was a whole sun inside him for *Babette*.

She must be able to confess to him, and she should do so.

He went to the mill; it resulted in a confession, it began with a kiss and ended with *Rudy* as the sinner, *his* great mistake was to be able to doubt *Babette's* faithfulness, it was almost loathsome of him! such distrust, such vehemence could bring about the misfortune of both of them. Yes indeed! and therefore *Babette* preached him a little sermon, it pleased her to do so and it suited her well, although *Rudy* was right about one thing, Godmother's relation was a loud-mouthed young pup! she wanted to burn the book he had given her, not own the slightest thing that could remind her of him.

'Now it's all been cleared up!' the *Parlour Cat* said. '*Rudy* is here again, they understand each other and that, they say, is the greatest happiness.'

'I heard last night,' the *Kitchen Cat* said, 'the rats say that the greatest happiness is to devour tallow candles and fill oneself up with tainted pork. Who should one believe, rats or sweethearts?'

'Neither!' the *Parlour Cat* replied. 'That's always the safest thing!'

The greatest happiness for *Rudy* and *Babette* was just about to take place, the loveliest day, as it is called, still lay ahead, their wedding day.

Not, though, in the church in *Bex*, not in the Miller's house, was the wedding to be held; Godmother wanted the wedding where she lived, and that the ceremony should take place in the beautiful little church in *Montreux*. The Miller agreed to meet this request; only he knew what *Godmother* had intended to give the newly-weds; her wedding present was definitely worth such a small concession. The day had been set. Already the evening before, they would travel to *Villeneuve*, then take the boat early the following morning to *Montreux*, so that Godmother's daughters could dress the bride.

'The day after the wedding will probably be held here in this house!' the *Parlour Cat* said.

'Otherwise, I won't give a miaow for the whole proceedings!'

'It'll be some party!' the *Kitchen Cat* said. 'The ducks have been slaughtered, the pigeons had their necks wrung, and a whole deer is hanging on the wall. My teeth itch just looking at it! – Tomorrow they set off on their journey!'

Yes, tomorrow! – That evening *Rudy* and *Babette* sat for the last time at the mill as an engaged couple.

Outside was the glowing Alpine evening, the church bell rang, the sun's rays' daughters sang: 'The best is about to be!'

XIV

Visions in the night

The sun had set, the clouds were sinking in the Rhone valley between the high mountains, the wind was coming from the south, an African wind, down over the high Alps, a *Föhn* that tore the clouds apart, and when the wind had passed everything was completely still for a moment; the shreds of clouds hung in fantastic shapes among the forest-clad mountains and across the fast-flowing Rhone river; they hung in shapes like sea creatures from a primeval world, like eagles hovering in the air and like frogs leaping in the marsh, they settled on the rushing current, sailed on it and yet sailed in the air. The current carried with it a pine tree torn up by the roots, the water swirled and whirled in front of it; it was *Vertigo*, more than one, twisting and twirling on the rushing river; the moon gleamed on the snow of the mountain summits, on the dark forests and the strange white clouds, visions of the night, spirits of natural forces; the mountain farmer saw them through his window pane, they sailed down there in hosts in front of the *Ice Maiden*; she came from her glacier palace, she sat on the frail craft, an uprooted pine tree, the glacier water bore her downstream to the open lake.

'The wedding guests are arriving!' it murmured and sang in air and water.

Visions out there, visions within. *Babette* was dreaming a strange dream.

It seemed to her as if she was married to *Rudy*, and already had been for many years. He was away hunting chamois, but she was in her home, and sitting with her was the young Englishman with the golden whiskers; his eyes were so warm, his words had a magical power, he held out his hand to her, and she had to follow him. They left the home. Downwards, always downwards! – and it seemed to *Babette* as if a burden weighed down her heart, one that got heavier and heavier, it was a sin against *Rudy*, a sin against God; and suddenly she stood there all on her own, her clothes had been ripped to pieces by thorns, her hair was grey, she looked up in pain, and on the edge of the mountain she caught sight of *Rudy*; - she stretched out her arms towards him, but did not dare call out or pray, and that would not have helped either, for soon she saw that it was not him, but only his hunting jacket and hat hanging on the alpenstock that huntsmen place out to deceive the chamois! And in excessive pain *Babette* moaned: 'Oh, if only I had died on my wedding day, the happiest day of my life! Lord God, it would have been an act of mercy, life's greatest joy! then the best had happened that could happen for me and *Rudy*! No one knows what is to come!' and in ungodly pain she threw herself down into the deep mountain cleft. A string broke, a mournful note was heard -!

Babette woke up, the dream was over – and erased, but she knew she had dreamt something terrible and dreamt about the young Englishman whom she had not seen for several months, not thought about. Could he possibly be in *Montreux*? Would she get to see him at her wedding? A shadow flitted round her fine mouth. Her brows furrowed, but soon a smile came and a gleam in her eye, the sun was shining so beautifully outside, and the next day was her and *Rudy*'s wedding day.

He was already standing in the living room when she came down, and soon they set off for *Villeneuve*. They were so happy, the two of them, and the Miller as well, he laughed and was in the very best of moods; he was a good father, an honest soul.

'Now we are in charge in the house!' the *Living Room Cat* said.

XV

The ending

Evening had not yet come when the three happy people reached *Villeneuve* and ate their meal. The Miller sat down in the armchair with his pipe and took a little map. The young bridal couple went arm in arm out of the town, along the road beneath the bush-clad rocks, following the shore of the blue-green, deep lake; sinister *Chillon* reflected its grey castle walls and heavy towers in the clear water; the small island with the three acacias lay even closer, it looked like a bouquet on the lake.

'It must be lovely over there!' *Babette* said, she once more had the greatest desire to visit it, and this wish could be immediately fulfilled; there lay a boat by the shore, the rope that held it could easily be loosened. They could not see anyone whose permission they could ask, so they simply borrowed the boat, *Rudy* knew how to row.

The oars sheared like fish's fins through the accommodating water, it is so pliant and yet so strong, with a whole back for carrying, a whole mouth for swallowing, gently smiling, softness itself and yet frightening and capable of destroying. A foaming wake followed the boat which in just a few minutes took the two over to the island, where they stepped ashore. Here there was little more space than enough for two to dance.

Rudy swung *Babette* round a few times, and then they sat down on a small bench beneath the drooping acacias, gazed into each other's eyes, held each other's hands, and everything around them glittered in the gleam of the setting sun; the pine forests on the mountains took on a mauvish tint just like flowering heather, and where the trees ended and the rockface could be seen, it shone as if the rock was transparent, the clouds in the sky gleamed like red fire, the whole lake was like the fresh, blushing petal of a rose. As the shadows crept up the snow-covered mountains of *Savoie*, they turned deep-blue, but the highest peak glimmered like red lava, they re-saw a moment from the very formation of the mountains, when these glowing masses rose up from the lap of the earth and as yet had not cooled. It was an Alpine glow of which *Rudy* and *Babette* had never seen the like. The snow-covered *Dent du Midi* had a gleam like the disc of the full moon when it rises above the horizon.

'So much beauty! so much happiness!' the two of them said. – 'Earth cannot give me more than this!' *Rudy* said. 'An evening like this is no less than a whole life! how often have I sensed my happiness as I sense it now and thought that even if everything ended now, how happy my life has been! and the day ended, but a new one began, and I thought that *this one* was even more beautiful! *The Lord God* is exceedingly good, *Babette*!'

'I am so happy!' she said.

'Earth cannot give me more than this!' *Rudy* exclaimed.

And the evening bells sounded from the mountains of *Savoie*, from the mountains of Switzerland; in a golden gleam the black-blue Jura rose up to the west.

'May God grant you what is most wonderful and best!' *Babette* exclaimed.

'That he will!' *Rudy* said. 'Tomorrow I shall have it! Tomorrow you will be completely mine! My own lovely little wife!'

'The boat!' *Babette* suddenly shouted.

The boat that was to take them back had come loose and was drifting away from the island.

'I'll fetch it!' *Rudy* said, stripped off his jacket, tore off his boots, leapt into the lake and made off for the boat with swift strokes.

The clear, blue-green ice-water from the mountain's glacier was cold and deep. *Rudy* looked down into it, just one short look and it was as if he could see a gold ring wheeling, winking and spinning, – he thought of his lost engagement ring, and the ring grew larger, widened out into a glittering circle and within it gleamed the clear glacier; there were endless deep chasms yawning on every side, and the water dripped tinkling like a carillon and shone with white-blue flames; in a trice he saw what it takes us many a long word to say. Young huntsmen and young girls, men and women who had once sunk down in the glacier's crevasses now stood alive here, with open eyes and smiling mouths, and deep beneath them from buried towns the sound of church bells could be heard; the congregation kneeled under the vaulted ceiling, shafts of ice formed organ pipes, the mountain stream played as if an organ; the *Ice Maiden* sat on the clear, translucent bed, she rose up towards *Rudy*, kissed his feet, and a

deathly cold shot through his limbs, an electric shock – ice and fire! one cannot distinguish between them at so short a touch.

'Mine! mine!' it rang around him and inside him. 'I kissed you when you were little! kissed you on your mouth! now I kiss you on your toe and on your heel, you are completely *mine!*' And he vanished into the clear, blue water.

Everything was silent; the church bells stopped ringing, the last notes disappeared with the glow in the red clouds.

'You are mine!' it resounded in the depths; 'you are mine!' it resounded on high, from eternity. How wonderful to fly from love to love, from earth to heaven.

A thread broke, there was a dirge-like note, the ice-kiss of death vanquished what was corruptible; the prelude ended so that the drama of life could begin, the dissonance was resolved in harmony.

Do you call that a sad story?

Poor *Babette*. for her it was a time of great anguish! The boat drifted further and further away. No one on land knew that the bridal couple were on the small island. The evening waned; the clouds sank down; the darkness came. She stood there alone, in despair, moaning. A terrible storm hung over her; lightning flashed over the Jura mountains, over Switzerland and over *Savoie*; flashes from every side, roll upon roll of thunder that formed a single cannonade lasting several minutes. Soon the lightning flashes were as bright as the sun, one could see every single vine as at noon, and immediately afterwards there was the brooding darkness. The flashes formed loops, entanglements, zigzags, struck around the lake, lighting up from all sides, while the rolling thunder was swollen by the rumbling echoes. On land, people hauled boats up onto the shore; everything alive sought shelter! – and now the rain poured down.

'Where can *Rudy* and *Babette* be in this terrible storm!' the Miller said.

Babette sat with folded hands; her head down in her lap, dumb with pain, crying and moaning. 'In the deep water!' she said to herself. 'He is deep down, as if under the glacier!'

She came to think of what *Rudy* had told her about his mother's death, about his being saved when he was lifted like a corpse from the crevasses of the glaciers. 'The *Ice Maiden* has taken him again!'

And there came a flash of lightning as bright as sunlight reflected on white snow. *Babette* leapt into the air; the lake rose in this instant like a glittering glacier, the *Ice Maiden* stood there, majestic, bluish pale, gleaming, and at her feet lay *Rudy's* body; 'Mine!' she said and all around was gloom and darkness, rushing water.

'Terrible!' *Babette* moaned. 'Why on earth should he die when our day of happiness was nigh! oh God! enlighten my mind! shine into my heart! I do not understand your ways! grope my way in your almighty power and wisdom!'

And God shone into her heart. A blink of thought, a ray of grace, her dream the night before, as large as life, shot through her; she remembered the words she had spoken: The wish for the very *Best* for herself and *Rudy*.

'Woe is me! was it the seed of sin in my heart! was my dream a life in the future the string of which had to be severed for the sake of my salvation! Oh misery me!'

She sat there moaning in the pitch-black night. In its deep stillness she seemed once more to hear *Rudy's* words; the last he had said here on earth: 'Earth cannot give me more happiness than this!' They resounded in the fullness of joy, were repeated in the fount of pain.

Several years have passed since then. The lake smiles, the shores smile; the vines produce swelling grapes; the steamships with fluttering flags chase past, the yachts with their two taut sails skim like white butterflies over the surface of the water; the railway above *Chillon* has opened, it takes one deep into the Rhone valley. At every station strangers get out, they arrive with their guidebooks bound in red leather and read about the remarkable things that lie in store for them to see. They visit *Chillon*, they see out in the lake the small island with the three acacias, and read in the book about the bridal couple who sailed over to it one evening in 1856, the death of the bridegroom, and: 'not until the next morning did people on the mainland hear the desperate cries of the bride'.

But the guidebook does not say anything about *Babette's* quiet life with her father, not at the mill, where strangers now live, but in the beautiful house near the railway station where, from the window, she many an evening still looks past the chestnut trees at the snowy mountains where *Rudy* once used to roam; in the evening she gazes at the Alpine glow, the sun's children gather up there and repeat the song of the wanderer whose coat was removed by the whirlwind and borne off: it took the outer husk but not the man.

There is a rosy glow on the mountain snow, there is a rosy glow in every heart where the thought lies: 'God grants us what is best for us!' but this is not always revealed to us, as it was for *Babette* in her dream.