

Toni, the Little Woodcarver eBook

Toni, the Little Woodcarver by Johanna Spyri

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Page 1

AT HOME IN THE LITTLE STONE HUT

High up in the Bernese Oberland, quite a distance above the meadow-encircled hamlet of Kandergrund, stands a little lonely hut, under the shadow of an old fir-tree. Not far away rushes down from the wooded heights of rock the Wild brook, which in times of heavy rains, has carried away so many rocks and boulders that when the storms are ended a ragged mass of stones is left, through which flows a swift, clear stream of water. Therefore the little dwelling near by this brook is called the stone hut.

Here lived the honest day-laborer Toni, who conducted himself well in every farmhouse, where he went to work, for he was quiet and industrious, punctual at his tasks, and reliable in every way.

In his hut at home he had a young wife and a little boy, who was a joy to both of them. Near the hut in the little shed was the goat, the milk of which supplied food for the mother and child, while the father received his board through the week on the farms where he worked from morning until night. Only on Sunday was he at home with his wife and little Toni. The wife Elsbeth, kept her little house in good order; it was narrow and tiny, but it always looked so clean and cheerful that every one liked to come into the sunny room, and the father, Toni, was never so happy as when he was at home in the stone hut with his little boy on his knee.

For five years the family lived in harmony and undisturbed peace. Although they had no abundance and little worldly goods, they were happy and content. The husband earned enough, so they did not suffer want, and they desired nothing beyond their simple manner of life, for they loved each other and their greatest delight was little Toni.

The little boy grew strong and healthy and with his merry ways delighted his father's heart, when he remained at home on Sundays, and sweetened all his mother's work on week-days, when his father was away until late in the evening.

Little Toni was now four years old and already knew how to be helpful in all sorts of small ways, in the house and the goat's shed and also in the field behind the hut. From morning until night he tripped happily behind his mother for he was as content as the little birds up in the old fir-tree.

When Saturday night came the mother scrubbed and cleaned with doubled energy, to finish early, for on that day the father was through his work earlier than other days, and she always went with little Toni by the hand, part way to meet him. This was a great delight to the child. He now knew very well how one task followed another in the household. When his mother began to scrub, he jumped around in the room, with delight and cried out again and again: "Now we are going for Father! Now we are

going for Father!" until the moment came when his mother took him by the hand and started along.

Saturday evening had come again in the lovely month of May. Outdoors the birds in the trees were singing merrily up to the blue sky; indoors the mother was cleaning busily, in order to get out early into the golden evening, and meanwhile now outside, now in the house, little Toni was hopping around and shouting:

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"Now we are going for Father!"

It was not long before the work was finished. The mother put on her shawl, tied on her best apron and stepped out of the house.

Toni jumped for joy and ran three times around his mother, then seized her hand and shouted once more:

"Now we are going for Father!"

Then he tripped along beside his mother in the lovely, sunny evening. They wandered to the Wild brook, over the wooden bridge, which crosses it, and came to the narrow foot-path, winding up through the flower-laden meadows to the farm where the father worked.

The last rays of the setting sun fell across the meadows and the sound of the evening bells came up from Kandergrund.

The mother stood still and folded her hands.

"Lay your hands together Toneli," she said, "it is the Angelus."

The child obeyed.

"What must I pray, Mother?" he asked.

"Give us and all tired people a blessed Sunday! Amen!" said the mother devoutly.

Toneli repeated the prayer. Suddenly he screamed: "Father is coming!"

Down from the farm some one was running as fast as he could come.

"That is not Father," said his mother, and both went towards the running man. When they met, the man stood still and said, gasping:

"Don't go any farther, turn around, Elsbeth. I came straight to you, for something has happened."

"Oh, my God!" cried the woman in the greatest anguish, "has something happened to Toni?"

"Yes, he was with the wood-cutters, and then he was struck. They have brought him back; he is lying up at the farm-but don't go up there," he added, holding Elsbeth fast, for she wanted to start off as soon as she heard the news.

“Not go up?” she said quickly. “I must go to him; I must help him and see about bringing him home.”

“You cannot help him, he is—he is already dead,” said the messenger in an unsteady voice. Then he turned and ran back again, glad to have the message off his mind.

Elsbeth threw herself down on a stone by the way, unable to stand or to walk. She held her apron before her face and burst into weeping and sobbing, so that Toneli was distressed and frightened. He pressed close to his mother and began to cry too.

It was already dark, when Elsbeth finally came to herself and could think of her child. The little one was still sitting beside her on the ground, with both hands pressed to his eyes, and sobbing pitifully. His mother lifted him up.

“Come, Toneli, we must go home; it is late,” she said, taking him by the hand.

But he resisted.

“No, no, we must wait for Father!” he said and pulled his mother back.

Again she could not keep back the tears. “Oh, Toneli, Father will come no more,” she said, stifling her sobs; “he is already enjoying the blessed Sunday, we prayed for, for the weary. See, the dear Lord has taken him to Heaven; it is so beautiful there, he will prefer to stay there.”

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"Then we will go too," replied Toneli, starting

"Yes, yes, we shall go there too," promised his mother, "but now we must first go home to the stone hut," and without a word she went with the little one back to the silent cottage.

The proprietor of the Matten farm sent word to Elsbeth the following day that he would do everything necessary for her husband, and so she need not come until it was time for the service, for she would not recognize her husband. He sent her some money in order that she would not have too much care in the next few days, and promised to think of her later on.

Elsbeth did as he advised and remained at home until the bells in Kandergrund rang for the service. Then she went to accompany her husband to his resting place.

Sad and hard days came for Elsbeth. She missed her good, kind husband everywhere, and felt quite lost without him. Besides, cares came now which she had known little about before, for her husband had had his good, daily work. But now she felt sometimes as if she would almost despair. She had nothing but her goat and the little potato field behind the cottage, and from these she had to feed and clothe herself and the little one, and besides furnish rent for the little house.

Elsbeth had only one consolation, but one that always supported her when pain and care oppressed her; she could pray, and although often in the midst of tears, still always with the firm belief that the dear Lord would hear her supplication.

When at night she had put little Toni in his tiny bed she would kneel down beside him and repeat aloud the old hymn, which now came from the depths of her heart, as never before:

Oh, God of Love, oh Father-heart,
In whom my trust is founded,
I know full well how good Thou art—
E'en when by grief I am wounded.

Oh Lord, it surely can not be
That Thou wilt let me languish
In hopeless depths of misery,
And live in tears of anguish.

Oh Lord, my soul yearns for thine aid
In this dark vale of weeping;
For thee I've waited, hoped and prayed
Assured of thy safe keeping.

Lord let me bear whate'er thy Love
May send of grief or sorrow,
Until Thou, in thy Heaven above
Make dawn a brighter morrow.

And in the midst of her urgent praying, the mother's tears flowed abundantly, and little Toni, deeply moved in his heart by his mother's weeping and earnest prayer, kept his hands folded and wept softly too.

So the time passed. Elsbeth struggled along and little Toni was able to help her in many ways, for he was now seven years old. He was his mother's only joy, and she was able to take delight in him for he was obedient and willing to do everything she desired. He had always been so inseparable from his mother that he knew exactly how the tasks of the day had to be done, and he desired nothing but to help her whenever he could. If she was working in the little field, he squatted beside her, pulled out the weeds, and threw the stones across the path.

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If his mother was taking the goat out of the shed so that she could nibble the grass around the hut, he went with her step by step, for his mother had told him he must watch her so that she would not run away.

If his mother was sitting in winter by her spinning-wheel, he sat the whole time beside her, mending his winter shoes with strong strips of cloth, as she had taught him to do. He had no greater wish than to see his mother happy and contented. His greatest pleasure was, when Sunday came and she was resting from all work, to sit with her on the little wooden bench in front of the house and listen as she told him about his father and talk with her about all kinds of things.

But now the time had come for Toni to go to school. It was very hard for him to leave his mother and remain away from her so much. The long way down to Kandergrund and up again took so much time, that Toni was hardly ever with his mother any more through the day, but only in the evening. Indeed he always came home so quickly that she could hardly believe it possible, for he looked forward with pleasure all day long to getting home again. He lost no time with his school-mates but ran immediately away from them as soon as school was over. He was not accustomed to the ways of the other boys since he had been constantly alone with his quietly working mother and used to performing definite tasks continually without any noise.

So it was altogether strange to him and he took no pleasure in it, when the boys coming out of the school-house, set up a great screaming, one running after another, trying to see which was the stronger, and throwing one another on the ground, or wrestling so that their caps were thrown far away and their jackets half torn off.

The wrestlers would often call to him:

“Come and play!” and when he ran away from them they would call after him: “You are a coward.” But this made little difference to him; he didn’t hear it long, for he ran with all his might in order to be at home again with his mother.

Now a new interest for him arose in the school: he had seen beautiful animals drawn on white sheets, which the children of the upper classes copied. He quickly tried to draw them, too, with his pencil and at home continued drawing the animals again and again as long as he had a bit of paper. Then he cut out the animals and tried to make them stand on the table, but this he could not do. Then suddenly the thought came to him that if they were of wood they could stand. He began quickly with his knife to cut around on a little piece of wood until there was a body and four legs; but the wood was not large enough for the neck and the head; so he had to take another piece and calculate from the beginning how high it must be and where the head must be placed. So Toni cut away with much perseverance until he succeeded in making something like a goat and could show it with great satisfaction to his mother. She was much delighted at his skill and said:

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“You are surely going to be a wood-carver, and a very good one.”

From that time on Toni looked at every little piece of wood which came in his way, to see if it would be good for carving, and if so he would quickly put it away, so that he often brought home all his pockets full of these pieces, which he then collected like treasures into a pile and spent every free moment carving them.

Thus the years passed by. Although Elsbeth always had many cares, she experienced only joy in her Toni. He still clung to her with the same love, helped her in every way as well as he could and spent his life beside her, entirely at his quiet occupation, in which he gradually acquired a quite gratifying skill. Toni was never so content as when he was sitting in the little stone hut with his carving and his mother came in and out happily employed, always saying a kindly word to him and finally sat down beside him at her spinning-wheel.

CHAPTER SECOND

A HARD SENTENCE

Toni was twelve years old in the winter, and now his school days were over, and the time had come to look about for some kind of work which would bring him in some money and by which he could learn something necessary for future years.

Spring had come and work had begun in the fields. His mother thought it would be best to ask the proprietor of the Matten farm, if he had some light work for Toni; but every time she spoke about it he would say beseechingly:

“Oh, Mother, don’t do that; let me be a wood-carver!”

She would have had no objection to this, but knew no way to bring it about, and she had known the farmer up on the Matten farm ever since her husband had worked there, and ever since his death, from time to time he had sent her a little wood or meal.

She hoped that he would employ Toni at first for light tasks in the field, so that he would gradually learn to do the heavier work.

So on Saturday night after the day’s work was ended and she sat down with Toni to their scanty supper, she said once more:

“Toni, now we must take a decided step; I think it is best for me to go up to the Matten farm to-morrow.”

“Oh, Mother, don’t do that!” said Toni quite beseechingly. “Don’t go to the farmer! If you will only let me be a wood-carver, I will work so hard, that I will earn enough, and you

will not have to do so much, and then I can stay at home with you. Besides you would be all alone, and I can't bear it, if I have to be always away from you. Let me stay with you; don't send me away, Mother."

"Oh, you good Toni," said his mother, "what wouldn't I give to be able to keep you always with me! But that really cannot be. I know of no way for you to be a wood-carver; some one would have to teach you, and when you had learned, how should we sell the carvings? You would have to know people and go about, or else your work wouldn't bring any money. If only I could talk with some one, who could give me good advice!"

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“Don’t you know any one, Mother, you can ask?” said Toni anxiously and racked his brain to try to think of some one. His mother too began to consider.

“I think I will go to the pastor, who has already given me advice,” said his mother, delighted to have found a way out of the difficulty.

Toni was quite happy and now was determined that early the next morning they should go down to the church and then his mother could go in to see the pastor and Toni would wait outside.

Everything was carried out on Sunday morning as they had planned. His mother had put two of the little carved animals in her pocket to show the pastor as examples of her boy’s good ability. The pastor received her very cordially, had her sit down beside him and enquired with interest about her affairs, for he knew Elsbeth and how bravely she had helped herself through all the hard times.

She told him now the whole story, how Toni from a very early age had worked at the carving with so much interest and now wished for nothing so much as to carry on this work, but how she knew of no way for him to learn, nor how, later, the work could be sold. Finally she showed him the two little animals as examples of Toni’s skill.

The pastor replied to the mother that the plan would be very difficult to carry out. Although the two little goats were not badly carved, yet in order to perform the work right and to earn his bread by it, Toni would have first to learn from a good carver, because making only little animals or boxes would not amount to anything or bring in any money, and he would only be wasting his time.

However, down in the village of Frutigen there was a very skillful, well-known wood-carver, who made wonderful large works which went far into the world, even to America. He carved whole groups of animals on high rocks, chamois and eagles and whole mountains with the herdsman and the cows. Elsbeth could talk with this carver. If Toni studied with him he could help him to sell the finished work, for he had ways open for it.

Elsbeth left the pastor with gratitude and new hope in her heart. In front of the house Toni was waiting in great suspense. She had to tell him at once everything the pastor had said, and when she finally related about the wood-carver in Frutigen Toni suddenly stood still and said:

“Then come, Mother, let us go to the place at once.”

However, his mother had not thought it over—she made many objections, but Toni begged so earnestly, that she finally said:

“We must go home first and have something to eat, for it is very far away; but we can do that quickly and then start off again right away.”

So they hurried back to the house, took a little bread and milk and started on their way again. They had several hours to travel, but Toni was so busy with his plans and thoughts for the future, the time flew like a dream and he looked up in great surprise, when his mother said:

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"See, there is the church tower of Frutigen!"

They were soon standing in front of the wood-carver's house, and learned from the children before the door, that their father was at home.

Inside in the large, wainscotted room, sat the wood-carver with his wife at the table, looking at a large book of beautiful colored pictures of animals which he would be able to make good use of in his handicraft. When the two arrived he welcomed them and invited them to come and be seated on the wooden bench, where he and his wife were sitting and which ran along the wall around the entire room. Elsbeth accepted the invitation and immediately began to tell the wood-carver why she had come and what she so much desired of him.

Meanwhile Toni stood as if rooted to the floor and stared motionless at a single spot. In front of him next the wall was a glass case, in which could be seen two high rocks, carved out of wood. On one was standing a chamois with her little ones. They had such dainty, slender legs, and their fine heads sat so naturally on their necks that it seemed as if they were all alive and not at all made of wood. On the other rock stood a hunter, his gun hanging by his side, and his hat, with even a feather in it, sat on his head, all so finely carved, that one would think it must be a real hat and a real little feather, and yet all was of wood.

Next the hunter stood his dog, and it seemed as if he would even wag his tail. Toni was like one enchanted and hardly breathed.

When his mother finished speaking, the wood-carver said it seemed to him as if she thought the affair would half go of itself, but it was not so.

If a thing was to be done right, it cost much time and patience to learn. He was not averse to taking the boy, for it seemed to him that he had a desire to learn; but she would have to pay for his board for a couple of months in Frutigen, besides paying for his instruction, which would be as much as his board, and she herself must know whether she could spend so much on the boy. On the other hand he would promise that the boy would be taught right, and she could see there in the glass case, what he could learn to do.

At first Elsbeth was so disappointed and dismayed she was unable to speak a word. Now she knew that it would be absolutely impossible for her to fulfill her boy's greatest wish. The necessary expense of board and instruction was beyond anything that she could manage, so much so that it was quite out of the question. It was all over with Toni's plans.

She rose and thanked the wood-carver for his willingness to take the boy, but she would have to decline his offer. Then she beckoned to Toni, whose eyes were still so fastened

to the glass case that he paid no attention. She took him by the hand and led him quietly out of the door.

Outside Toni said, drawing a deep breath:

“Did you see what was in the case? Mother, did you see it?”

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“Yes, yes, I saw it, Toni,” replied his mother with a sigh, “but did you hear what the wood-carver said?”

Toni had heard nothing; all his mind had been directed to one point.

“No, I didn’t hear anything; when can I go?” he asked longingly.

“Oh, it is not possible, Toni, but don’t take it so to heart! See, I can’t do it, although I would like to so much,” declared his mother; “but everything would come to more than I earn in a year, and you know how hard I have to work to manage to make the two ends meet.”

It was a hard blow for Toni. All his hopes for many years lay destroyed before him; but he knew how his mother worked, how little good she herself had, and how she always tried to give him a little pleasure when she could. He said not a word and silently swallowed his rising tears, but he was very much grieved that all his hopes were over, since for the first time he had seen what wonderful things could be made out of a piece of wood.

CHAPTER THIRD

UP IN THE MOUNTAINS

The next morning, the farmer on the Matten farm sent word to Elsbeth, to come up to see him towards evening, as he had something to talk with her about. At the right time she laid aside her hoe, tied on a clean apron, and said:

“Finish the hoeing, Toni; then you can milk the goat and give her some fresh straw, so she will have a better bed. Then I will be back again.”

She went up to the Matten farm. The farmer was standing in the open barn-door gazing with satisfaction at his beautiful cows, wandering in a long procession to the well. Elsbeth stepped up to him.

“Well, I am glad you have come,” he said, holding out his hand to her. “I have been thinking about you on account of the boy’s welfare. He is now at an age to do some light work and help you a little, at least to take care of himself.”

“I have already been thinking about that,” replied Elsbeth, “and wanted to ask you, if you could give him a little light work in the fields?”

“That is fortunate,” continued the farmer. “I have a little job for him, healthy and not very hard, that is to say not hard at all. He can go up to the small mountain with the cows. The herdsman with his boys is on the big mountain and a man is also there to come

every morning and evening for the milking, so the boy will not be entirely alone and will have nothing to do but watch the cows so that none wander off, that they don't hook each other or do anything out of the way. While he sits there on the mountain he is master and can have all the milk he wants. A king couldn't have anything better."

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Elsbeth was a little frightened by the offer. If Toni had been more with the farm men, and had been with cows, or if he had naturally a different disposition, wilder and more roving and commanding-but as he was so quiet and shy, and besides without any knowledge of such things, to be for the first time all alone for several months, away from home, up on the mountains, watching a herd of cows, this seemed to her too hard for Toni. What would the poor boy, who was not particularly strong, do if anything happened to him or to the herd? She expressed all her thoughts to the farmer, but it made no difference; he thought it would be good for the boy to get out for once, and up on the mountain he would be much stronger than at home, and nothing could happen to him, for he would be given a horn and if anything went wrong he could blow lustily, and immediately the farm man would come from the other mountain; in a half hour he would be there.

Elsbeth finally thought the farmer understood it much better than she, and so it was decided that the next week, when the cows went up to the mountain pasture, Toni should go with them.

“He shall have a good bit of money and a new suit of clothes when he comes down. That will be a help for the winter,” said the farmer finally.

Elsbeth thanked him as she said good-by, and turned homeward.

Toni was at first opposed to this, when he heard that he would be away so long without being able to come home a single time; but his mother explained to him how easy the work would be, that he would grow stronger up there, so as to be able to do better things later on, and that the Matten farmer would give him a new suit and a good bit of money as pay. So Toni objected no longer, but said he would be glad to do something and not let his mother work alone.

Then it occurred to Elsbeth that, if Toni was going to be away the whole summer she could perhaps go to one of the big hotels in Interlaken where so many strangers go for the summer. There she could earn a good sum of money and meet the coming winter without anxiety. She was already known in Interlaken for she had served as chambermaid in one of the hotels for several summers before her marriage.

When the day came for the big herd of cows to be taken up to the mountain pasture, Toni's mother gave him his little bundle and said:

“Go now, in God's name! Don't forget to pray, when the day begins, and when it ends, and the dear Lord will not forget you, and His protection is better than that of men.”

So Toni started off with his little bundle behind the herd up the mountain.

Immediately after this Elsbeth closed her cottage. She took the goat up to the Matten farm. When the farmer heard that she was going to Interlaken, he promised her to take the goat, and thought when Elsbeth came home again, she would give twice as much milk, and what he made from her, he would give back to Elsbeth in cheese. Then she started down to Interlaken.

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The herd had already been climbing the mountain for several hours. The herdsman turned off to the left with the big herd, and the man went with Toni up towards the right, followed by the smaller herd, which consisted of fewer cows but many young cattle, for not many cows could be kept on the small mountain pasture, because the milk had to be carried across to the big one where the herdsman's hut stood.

They now reached the highest point of the pasture. There stood a little hut. All around there was nothing but pasture, not a tree, not a bush. In the hut on one side was a narrow seat fastened to the wall in front of which stood a table. On the other side stood a bed of hay. In the corner was a little, round stool and on this a wooden jug.

Toni and the man stepped inside. The latter placed on the floor the big wooden milk-pail, which he had brought up on his back, took out of it a round loaf of bread and a huge piece of cheese, laid both on the table and said: "Of course you have a knife," to which Tony assented.

Then the man took the wooden jug, swung the milk-pail on his back and went out. Toni followed him. The man lifted a wooden basin out of the big pail, seated himself on the little round stool which he had brought out of the hut and began to milk one cow after another. If one was too far away, he would call out: "Drive her here!" and Toni obeyed. When the basin was full he poured it into the big pail and silently went on until all the cows had been milked. At the last the man filled the jug with milk, handed it to Toni, took the pail on his back, the basin in his hand and saying "Good night!" went down the mountain.

Then Toni was all alone. He put his jug of milk in the hut and came out again. He looked around on every side. He looked over to the big mountain, but between that and his pasture was a wide valley so one had to descend in order to climb up to the big one. But all around both pastures great dark masses of mountains looked down, some rocky, gray and jagged, others covered with snow, all reaching up to the sky, so high and mighty and with such different peaks and horns and some with such broad backs, that it almost seemed to Toni as if they were enormous giants, each one having his own face and looking down at him. It was a clear evening. The mountain opposite was shining in the golden evening light, and now a little star came into sight above the dark mountains, and looked down to Toni in such a friendly way that it cheered him very much.

He thought of his mother, where she was now and how she was in the habit of standing with him at this time in front of the little cottage and talking so pleasantly. Then suddenly there came over him such a feeling of loneliness that he ran into the hut, threw himself down on the cot, buried his face in the hay and sobbed softly, until the weariness of the day overcame him and he fell asleep.

The bright morning lured him out early. The man was already outside. He milked the cows, spoke not a word and went away.

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Now a long, long day followed. It was perfectly still all around. The cows grazed and lay down around in the sun-bathed pasture. Tom went into the hut two or three times, drank some milk and ate some bread and cheese. Then he came out again, sat down on the ground and carved on a piece of wood he had in his pocket, for although he no longer dared to cherish the hope of becoming a wood-carver, yet he could not help carving for himself as well as he could. At last it was evening again. The man came and went. He said not a word, and Toni had nothing to say either.

Thus passed one day after another. They were all so long! so long! In the evening, when it began to grow dark it always seemed terrible to Toni, for then the high mountains looked so black and threatening, as if they would suddenly do him some harm. Then he would rush back into the hut and crawl into his bed of hay.

Many days had passed like this, one exactly the same as the other. The sun had always shone in a cloudless sky; always at evening the friendly little star had gleamed above the dark mountain. But one afternoon, thick, gray clouds began to chase one another across the sky; now and then blinding lightning flashed, and suddenly frightful thunder-bolts sounded, which echoed roaring from the mountains, as if there were twice as many and then a terrible storm broke. It was as dark as night; the rain beat against the hut, and meanwhile the thunder rolled with fearful reverberations through the mountains; quivering lightning lighted up the black, frightful giant-forms, which seemed quite specter-like to come nearer and look down menacingly. The cattle ran together in alarm and bellowed loudly, and great birds of prey flapped around with piercing shrieks.

Toni had long since fled into the hut, but the lightning showed him the frightful forms and it seemed every minute as if the rolling thunder would overthrow the hut to the ground. Toni was so alarmed he could hardly breathe. He climbed up on the table expecting every minute that the hut would fall and crush him. The storm lasted for hours, and the man never came over. It was now really night but still the blinding lightning flashed and new peals of thunder rolled and the storm howled and raged as if it would sweep the hut away.

Toni stood half the night stiff with fright, clinging to the table, and with no thought, only a feeling of a frightful power, which was crushing everything. How he reached his bed he did not know, but in the morning he lay stretched across the hay, so exhausted he could hardly rise. He looked anxiously out of the window. How must it look outside after such a night? Then he went out to see about the cows. The ground was still wet, but the animals were peacefully grazing.

The sky was gray, and thick, black clouds were passing over it. Gloomy and frightful the high mountains stood there. They had come so near and looked more threateningly than ever at Toni. He ran back into the hut.

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Many days of thunder storms followed, one after another and if the sun came out between, it burned unbearably, and new storms followed so unceasingly and violent, that the herdsman, on the other mountain often said that he had not known such a summer for years, and if it didn't change he wouldn't make half so much butter as in former summers, because the cows gave no milk, as they didn't like the fodder.

During this time the man-servant chose the most favorable time to come over to the small pasture, milked the cows as quickly as possible and did not look after the boy at all; only now and then, when he thought Toni had no more milk, he would bring the jug out quickly, fill it and put it back again. Then he often saw Toni sitting on his bed of hay, and would call out in passing:

"You are lazy!"

But then he ran right away in order to get back without being wet, and did not trouble himself further about the boy.

So June had passed, and already a good part of July. The thunder storms had become less frequent, but thick fog often so enveloped the mountain that one could hardly see two steps away, and only here and there a black head appeared, looking gloomily through the mist. The cattle often wandered so far that the man found some of them between the two mountains and brought them up again. This would not do. He called up to the boy, but received no answer. He ran to the hut and went in. Toni crouched in the corner was sitting on his bed and staring straight before him.

"Why don't you look after the cows?" asked the man.

He received no answer.

"Can't you speak? What is the matter with you?"

No answer.

Then the man looked at the bread and cheese, to see if Toni had eaten everything and was suffering from hunger. But more than half the bread was there and the larger part of the cheese. Toni had taken almost nothing but milk.

"What is the matter with you, then? Are you sick?" asked the man again.

Toni gave no answer. He seemed not to hear anything and stared so motionless before him that the man was quite alarmed. He ran out of the hut. He told the herdsman how it was with the boy and they decided that when one of the herdsman's boys went down with the butter, he must tell the Matten farmer about it.

Another week passed. Then the news was brought to the farmer. He thought the boy would be happy again, that the heavy thunderstorms had only frightened him a little. But he sent word for the herdsman to go over; he had boys of his own and would understand better about this than the hired man. If anything was wrong with Toni he must be brought down.

Some days later the herdsman really went over with one of his boys and found Toni still crouched in the corner just as the man had seen him. Toni made no sound to anything the herdsman said to him, did not move and kept staring always before him.

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"He must go down," said the herdsman to his boy, "go with him right away, but take care that nothing happens to him and be good to him; the boy is to be pitied," and he looked at Toni with sympathy, for the herdsman had a good heart and took delight in his own three big, healthy boys. The one he had with him was a strong, sturdy fellow of sixteen years. He went up to Toni and told him to stand up, but Toni did not move. Then the lad took him under the arms, lifted him up, like a feather, then swung him on his back, held him firmly with both hands, and went with his light burden down the mountain.

When the Matten farmer saw Toni in such a sad condition, which remained just the same, he was alarmed, for he had not expected such a thing. He did not know at all what to do with the boy. His mother was far away, no relatives were there, and he himself did not want to keep Toni while in this condition. He could take such a responsibility, but he did not want to do so. Suddenly a good thought came to him, the same as the people there in every difficulty, in every need and every trouble, always have first of all:

"Take him to the Pastor," he said to the herdsman's boy, "he will have some good advice to give, which will help."

The lad immediately started off and went to the Pastor, who allowed the boy to tell him as much as he knew about the details of the case, how Toni came to be in this condition and how long it had lasted; but the lad knew very little about it all. The Pastor first tried every means to make Toni speak, and asked him if he would like to go to his mother, but it was all in vain, Toni did not give the least sign of understanding or interest.

Then the pastor sat down, wrote a letter and said to the herdsman's boy:

"Go back to the Matten farm and tell the farmer to harness his little carriage and send it to me, and then I will see that Toni goes to-day to Bern. He is very sick; say that to the farmer."

The farmer harnessed immediately, glad that further responsibility was taken from him and he had only to carry Toni as far as the railway. But the Pastor sent down to his sexton, an older, kindly man, who had given him a helping hand for years in many matters of responsibility. He was commissioned to take Toni with all care to the great sanitarium in Bern and to give the letter to the doctor there, a good friend of the Pastor's. A half hour later, the open carriage with the high seat drove up in front of the Pastor's house. The sexton climbed up, placed the sick boy beside him, held him carefully but firmly and thus Toni drove out into the world, with a horse, for the first time in his life. But he sat there with no sign of interest. It was as if he were no longer conscious of the outer world.

CHAPTER FOURTH

IN THE SANITARIUM

The doctor of the sanitarium was sitting with his family around the family table, engaged in merry conversation on various subjects. Even the lady from Geneva, who spent several hours a day with the family, seemed to-day a little infected by the children's gayety. She had never before taken so lively a part in the discussion, which the school-children carried on about different interests.

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This lady's beloved and gifted son had died not long before; on this account she had fallen into such deep sadness that her health had suffered greatly and therefore she had been brought to the sanitarium to recover.

The animated conversation was suddenly interrupted by a letter which was handed to the doctor.

"A letter from an old friend, who is sending me a patient to the sanitarium. He is a young boy, hardly as old as our Max—there, read it." Whereupon the doctor handed the letter to his wife.

"Oh, the poor boy!" exclaimed his wife. "Is he here? Bring him in. Perhaps it will do him good to see the children."

"I think he is quite near," said the doctor; he went out, and soon came in again with the sexton and Toni. He led the former into a bay window and began talking with him in a low tone. Meanwhile the doctor's wife drew near to Toni, who on entering had pressed into the nearest corner. She spoke kindly to him and invited him to come to the table and eat something with her children. Toni did not move. Then lively little Marie jumped down from her chair and came to Toni with a large piece of bread and butter.

"There, take a bite," she said encouragingly.

Toni remained motionless.

"See, you must do so," and the little girl bit a good piece from the bread and held it to him, then again a little nearer, so he only needed to bite into it. But he stared in front of him and made no motion. This silent resistance frightened Marie and she drew back quietly.

Then the doctor came, took Toni by the hand and went out followed by the sexton.

Poor Toni's appearance had made a great impression on the children. They had become perfectly quiet.

Later when they had gone to bed and the two women were sitting alone together, the doctor came back again. In reply to their urgent questions he informed them about all that the sexton had told him concerning Toni's illness and his life with his mother, and that no one had ever noticed anything wrong with the boy before, only he had always been a quiet, gentle child and more slenderly built than any of the other village children.

The women asked how he had come into this condition in the summer up on the beautiful mountain, and the doctor explained that it was not so strange, if one knew how terrible the thunder storms were up in the mountains. "Besides," he concluded, "a delicate child, such as this boy, all alone without a human being near, for whole weeks,

even months long, without hearing a word spoken, might well be so terrified through fear and horror in the awful loneliness that he would become wholly benumbed.”

Then the lady from Geneva, who took an unusual interest in poor Toni’s fate, exclaimed in great excitement:

“How can a mother allow such a thing to happen to her child! It is wholly inconceivable, quite incomprehensible!”

“You really can have no idea,” replied the doctor soothingly, “what poor mothers are obliged to let happen to their children. But don’t believe that it causes them less pain than others. You see how many suffer that we know nothing about, and how hard poverty oppresses.”

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"Will you be able to help the poor young boy?" asked the lady from Geneva.

"If I can only bring out the right emotion in him," he replied, "so that the spell, which holds him imprisoned, can be broken. Now everything in him is numbed and lifeless."

"Oh, do help him! Do help him!" begged the sick lady imploringly. "Oh, if I could do something for him!" And she walked to and fro thinking about a way to help, for Toni's condition went deeply to her heart.

It was the second week of August, when Toni came to the sanitarium. Day after day, week after week passed and the doctor could only bring the same sad news to the two women, who every morning awaited his report with great anxiety. Not the slightest change was noticed. Every means was tried to amuse the boy, to see if he would perhaps laugh. Other attempts were devised to disturb him, to make him cry. They performed all kinds of tricks to attract his attention. All, all were in vain; no trace of interest or emotion was aroused in Toni.

"If he could only be made to laugh or to cry once!" repeated the doctor over and over again.

When he had been four weeks in the sanitarium all hope disappeared, for the doctor had exhausted every means.

"Now I will try one thing more," he said one morning to his wife. "I have written to my friend, the Pastor, and asked him if the boy was very much attached to his mother, and if so, to send for her right away. Perhaps to see her again would make an impression on him."

The two women looked forward in great suspense to Elsbeth's arrival.

In the first week of September the last guests left the hotel in Interlaken where Elsbeth had spent the summer. She immediately started on her way home, for she wanted to get everything in order before Toni came down from the mountain. She never thought but that he was still up there, and had no suspicion of all that had happened. When she reached home, she went at once to the Matten farm to enquire for Toni and to bring the goat home.

The farmer was very friendly, and thought her goat was now by far one of the finest, because she had had good fodder so long. But when Elsbeth asked after her Toni, he broke off abruptly and said he had so much to do, she must go to the Pastor, for he would have the best knowledge about the boy. It immediately seemed to Elsbeth that it was a little strange for the Pastor to know best what happened up on the mountain and while she was leading home the goat, and thinking about the matter, a feeling of anxiety came over her and grew stronger and stronger. As soon as she reached home, she



quickly tied the goat, without going into the cottage at all, and ran back the same way she had come, down again to Kandergrund.

The Pastor told her with great consideration, how Toni had not borne the life on the mountain very well and they had been obliged to bring him down, and since it seemed best for him that he should go at once to a good physician for the right care, he had sent the boy immediately to Bern.

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His mother was very much shocked and wanted to travel the next day to see for herself if her child was very ill.

But the Pastor said that would not do, but that she should wait until the doctor allowed a visit, and she could be sure that Toni was receiving the best care.

With a heavy heart Elsbeth went back to her cottage. She could do nothing but leave it all to the dear Lord, who alone had been her trust for so many years. But it was only a few days later when the Pastor sent her word that she was to go to Bern at once, as the doctor wished her to come.

Early the following day Elsbeth started. About noon she reached Bern and soon was standing in front of the door of the sanitarium.

She was led to the doctor's living-room and here received with great friendliness by his wife and with still keener sympathy by the lady from Geneva, who had so lived in the history of poor Toni and his mother that she could hardly think of anything else but how to help these two. She had had only the one child and could so well understand the mother's trouble. She had even asked the doctor to allow her to be present when he took the boy to his mother, in order to share in the joy, if the poor boy's delight at seeing her again would affect him as they hoped.

Soon the doctor appeared, and after he had prepared the mother not to expect Toni to speak at the first moment, he brought him in. He led him by the hand into the room, then he let go and stepped to one side.

The mother ran to her Toni and tried to seize his hand. He drew back and pressed into the corner staring into vacancy.

The women and the doctor exchanged sad looks.

His mother went up to him and caressed him. "Toneli, Toneli," she said again and again in a tender voice, "don't you know me? Don't you know your mother any more?"

As always before Toni pressed against the wall, made no motion and stared before him.

In tender tones the mother continued mournfully:

"Oh, Toneli, say just a single word! Only look at me once! Toneli, don't you hear me?"

Toneli remained unmoved.

Still once again the mother looked at him full of tenderness, but only met his staring eyes. It was too much for poor Elsbeth, that the only possession she had on earth, and the one she loved with all her heart, her Toni, should be lost to her, and in such a sad



way! She forgot everything around her. She fell on her knees beside her child, and while the tears were bursting from her eyes, she poured out aloud the sorrow in her heart:

Oh God of Love, oh Father-heart,
In whom my trust is founded,
I know full well how good Thou art—
E'en when by grief I am wounded.

Oh Lord, it surely can not be
That Thou wilt let me languish
In hopeless depths of misery
And live in tears of anguish.

Toni's eyes took on a different expression. He looked at his mother. She did not see him and went on imploring in the midst of her tears:

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Oh Lord, my soul yearns for thine aid
In this dark vale of weeping;
For Thee I have waited, hoped and prayed,
Assured of thy safe keeping.

Suddenly Toni threw himself on his mother and sobbed aloud. She threw her arms around him and her tears of sorrow turned to loud sobs of joy. The child sobbed aloud also.

"It is won," said the doctor in great delight to the women, who, deeply moved, were looking on at the mother and boy.

Then the doctor opened the door of the next room and beckoned Elsbeth to go in there with Toni. He thought it would be good for both to be alone for a while. In there after a while Toni began to talk quite naturally with his mother and asked her:

"Are we going home, Mother, to the stone hut? Shan't I have to go up on the mountain any more?"

And she quieted him and said she would now take him right home, and they would stay there together. Soon all Toni's thoughts came back again quite clearly, and after a while he said:

"But I must earn something, Mother."

"Don't trouble about that now," said Elsbeth quietly; "the dear Lord will show a way when it is time."

Then they began to talk about the goat, how pretty and fat she had grown, and Toni gradually became quite lively.

After an hour the doctor brought them both into the living-room back to the ladies. Toni was entirely changed, his eyes had now an earnest but quite different expression. The lady from Geneva was indescribably delighted. She sat down beside him at once, and he had to tell her where he had been to school and what he had liked to study.

But the doctor beckoned to Elsbeth to come to him.

"Listen, my good woman," he began, "the words which you repeated made a deep, penetrating impression on the boy's heart. Did he know the hymn already?"

"Oh, my Lord," exclaimed Elsbeth, "many hundred times I have repeated it beside his little bed, when he was very small, often with many tears, and he would weep too, when he didn't know why."

“He wept because you wept, he suffered because you suffered,” said the doctor. “Now I understand how he was aroused by these words. With such impressions in early childhood it is no wonder he became a quiet and reserved boy. This explains to me much in the past.”

Then the lady from Geneva came up for she wanted to talk with the mother.

“My dear, good woman, he certainly must not go up on the mountain again. He is not fit for it,” she said in great eagerness. “We must find something different for him. Has he no taste for some other occupation? But it must be light, for he is not strong and needs care.”

“Oh, yes, he has a great desire to learn something,” said his mother. “From a little boy he has wished for it, but I hardly dare mention it.”

“There, there, my good woman, tell me right away about it,” said the lady encouragingly, expecting something unheard-of.

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“He wants so much to be a wood-carver, and has a good deal of talent for it, but the cost of board and instruction together is more than eighty francs.”

“Is that all?” exclaimed the lady in the greatest surprise, “is that all? Come, my boy,” and she ran to Toni again, “would you really like to become a wood-carver—better than anything else?”

The joy which shone in Toni’s eyes, when he answered that he would, showed the lady what she had to do. She had such a longing to help Toni, that she wanted to act immediately that very hour.

“Would you like to learn at once, go to a teacher right away?” she asked him.

Toni gladly replied that he would.

But now came a new thought. She turned to the doctor. “Perhaps he ought to recover his health first?”

The doctor replied that he had been already thinking about that. The mother had told him that she knew a very good master up in Frutigen. “Now I think,” he went on to say, “that carving is not a strenuous work, and one of the most important things for Toni is to have for some time good, nourishing food. In Frutigen there is a very good inn, if he only could—”

“I will undertake that, Doctor, I will undertake that,” interrupted the lady. “I will go with him. We will start to-morrow. In Frutigen I will provide for Toni’s board and lodging and for everything he needs.” In her great delight the lady shook hands with both the mother and the boy repeatedly, and went out to instruct her maid about preparations for the journey.

When the mother with her boy had been taken to their room, the doctor said with great delight to his wife:

“We have two recoveries. Our lady is also cured. A new interest has come to her, and you will see she will have new life in providing for this young boy. This has been a beautiful day!”

On the following morning the journey was made to Frutigen, and the little company were so glad and happy together that they reached there before they were aware of it.

At the wood-carver’s the lady was told everything that would be needed for the work, and after he had showed them all kinds of instruments, he thought a fine book with good pictures, from which one could work, would be useful.



After the lady had charged him to teach Toni everything in any way necessary for the future, they went to the inn. Here the lady engaged a good room with comfortable bed, and herself arranged with the host a bill of fare for every day in the week. The host promised, with many bows, to follow everything exactly, for he saw very well with whom he had to deal.

Then Toni and his mother had to eat with the lady in the inn, and during the meal she had much more to say. She was going now, she said, the next day, home to Geneva, where there were large shops, in which nothing was sold but carvings. There she would immediately arrange for Toni to send all his articles, so he could begin to work with fresh zeal. Moreover, she insisted that Toni should remain, not two, but three months with the carver, so that he could learn everything from the foundation. He could go from here to visit his mother on Sundays, or she could come to him.

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Elsbeth and Toni were so full of gratitude, they could find no words to express it, but the lady understood them nevertheless and bore home a happy heart, such as she had not had for a long time.

It came about just as the doctor had foreseen. The lady, who had not been able to think any more about her home now desired to return to Geneva. She had so many plans to carry out there, that she could hardly wait for the day when she was to go back.

The doctor was delighted to consent to her going soon.

Toni, who had hardly begun with his new teacher, applied himself with so much zeal and skill to his work, that the carver said to his wife in the fourth week:

“If he goes on like this, he will learn to do better than I can.”

The three months had come to an end, and Christmas was drawing near. One morning Toni waded through the deep snow up to his home. He looked round and fresh, and his heart was so happy he had to sing aloud as he came along.

But when after a long walk, he suddenly saw the stone hut with the fir-tree thickly covered with snow behind it, tears of joy came to his eyes. He was coming home, home for all time. He ran to the little house, and his mother, who had already seen him, hurried out, and which one of the two was the more delighted, no one could tell; but they were both so happy, as they sat together again in the cottage, that they could think of no greater fortune on earth. Their highest wish was fulfilled. Toni was a wood-carver, and could carry on his work at home with his mother. And with what blessings besides the dear Lord was still overwhelming them! From Geneva such good things kept coming to Elsbeth, that she no longer had to dread anxious days, and with each package came new assurance of the ready acceptance of Toni's work.

Such a Christmas festival as was celebrated two days later in the stone hut, neither Elsbeth nor Toni had ever known before, for the candles which his mother had lighted shone out upon a quantity of things, which Toni had received to wear, and also a whole set of the most beautiful knives for carving and a book with pictures, of a size and beauty such as Toni had never in all his life seen before. His master's book was a mere child's toy beside it. Elsbeth too was lovingly provided for. The lady from Geneva had planned everything, and the bright reflection from it fell back radiantly into her own heart.

The most beautiful deer and huntsman and the wonderful eagles on the rock, standing in the high show-window in Geneva was carved by Toni, and was considered by him to be a particularly successful piece, so it went, not to the dealer in Geneva, but to the lady for whom Toni preserved a thankful heart all his life long.

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