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HEIMATLOS

TWO STORIES FOR CHILDREN, AND FOR THOSE WHO LOVE CHILDREN

BY

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PREFACE

In the translation of "Heimatlos" an effort has been made to hold as far as possible to the original, in order to give the reader of English the closest possible touch with the story as it stands in the German. This method retains the author's delightful simplicity, and it leaves revealed, even in her roundabout way of telling things, her charming adaptability as a writer for children.

The adult reader will pardon the repetitions, where the same thought is expressed in different ways, when it is remembered that the author is making doubly sure of reaching the understanding of the young mind. The literal rendering has been sacrificed only in a few instances, and then because of local idioms and national standards.

It is the hope of the translator that these two stories, so widely read by the children of Germany, will help our own little ones, in these days of general prosperity, to appreciate the everyday comforts of home, to which they grow so accustomed as often to take them for granted, with little evidence of gratitude.

E. S. H.

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HEIMATLOS

LAKE SILS AND LAKE GARDA

CHAPTER I

THE QUIET HOME

In the Upper Engadine Valley, on the road leading up to the Maloja Pass, lies a lonely town called Sils. Taking a diagonal path from the street back to the mountains, one comes to a smaller village known as Sils-Maria. Here, a little aside from the highway, in a field, two dwellings stood opposite each other. Both had old-fashioned doors and tiny windows set deep in the wall. One house had a garden, where herbs and vegetables and a few straggling flowers were growing. The other, which was much smaller, had only an old stable with a couple of chickens wandering in and out of it.

At the same hour every morning there came out of this forlorn little house a man who was so tall that he had to stoop in order to pass through the doorway. His hair and eyes were very dark, and the lower part of his face was hidden by a heavy black beard. Familiar as this man's figure was to the people of Sils, they always spoke of him as "the Italian." His work took him regularly up the Maloja, where the roads were being improved, or down the Pass to St. Moritz Bath, where some new houses were going up.

Each morning a boy followed the man to the door and stood looking wistfully after him. It would have been hard to say just what those great dark eyes were fixed upon, their gaze seemed so far reaching.

Sunday afternoons, when the weather was favorable, the father and son would go for a walk together. So striking was the likeness between them that no one could help noticing it, although in the bearded face of the man the sadness was less apparent. They seldom spoke, but sometimes the man would hum or whistle a tune, and then the boy would listen eagerly. It was easy to see that music was their chief pleasure. When they were kept in the house by bad weather, the father would play familiar airs on a mouth organ or on a whistle that he had made himself—perhaps on a comb or even on a leaf from a tree. Once he brought home a violin, which delighted the boy beyond measure. He watched the father intently as he played, and later tried to bring out the same notes himself. He must have succeeded fairly well, for the man laughed, and laying his own fingers over the little ones, played several melodies from beginning to end.

The next day, while the father was away, the boy practiced until he succeeded in playing his favorite tune, but after that the violin disappeared and was never brought back again. Sometimes, however, the father would sing in his deep voice,—softly, perhaps, at first, but louder as he caught the spirit of the music. Then the boy would sing, too, and when the words failed him —for the songs were in Italian, which he did not understand—he could still hum the air. There was one tune that he knew better than all the rest, for it was one his father had sung over and over again. It had many verses, and this was the way it began:

"Una sera
In Peschiera—"

Though the music was sad, this song was the boy's favorite. He would always sing it with much feeling, his clear, bell-like voice blending smoothly with the father's rich bass. Often when they had finished all the verses, the man would put his hand on his son's shoulder and say, "Good, Enrico! that went very well." Only his father called him "Enrico"; to all others he was simply

"Rico."

There was still another person who lived in the little cottage. This was Rico's aunt, who kept house for the father and himself. In the winter, when she sat spinning beside the stove and it was too stormy to be out of doors, Rico had to be very careful of his behavior. Everything he did seemed to annoy her. The faultfinding made the loneliness still harder to bear when, as often happened, the father's work kept him away from home for days at a time.

Sometimes when Rico tried to escape from the presence of his aunt, she would say sharply: "Shut the door and sit down, Rico. You are forever letting the cold air into the house."

He was thankful that his bed upstairs offered a safe retreat after supper; and then he always had the pleasant anticipation that his father would probably soon come home again.

CHAPTER II

IN SCHOOL

Rico was nearly nine years old and had attended school two winters. There was no school in the mountains in the summer, for every one, including the teacher, was busy farming. Rico did not mind this, however, for he had his own way of passing the time. In the morning he would go out to the doorsteps where he would remain watching the house opposite until a girl with laughing eyes beckoned him to come across. They always had much to say to each other of all that had happened since they were together before. Her name was Stineli, and she and Rico were nearly the same age. They had always gone to school together, were in the same classes, and from the first had been the best of friends.

Rico extended his intimacy to no one else. It was little pleasure to him to be with the boys of the neighborhood. When they wrestled in the school yard, Rico either walked away or paid no attention to them. If, however, they attacked him, he would face them with such a strange look that they ceased troubling him.

With Stineli he was perfectly contented. She had a lovely face with merry light-brown eyes. Her fluffy golden hair was gathered into two heavy braids which hung loosely from her shoulders. She was scarcely nine years old, but there were seven younger brothers and sisters. For these she had to do a great many things, so that her time for play was sadly limited. The other children were Trudt, Sam, Peter, Urschli, Anna, Kunzli, and the baby. Calls for Stineli seemed to come from every direction, and she willingly helped wherever she could. The mother said that Stineli could put on three pairs of stockings for the little ones while Trudt, the younger sister, was getting a child's foot in place for the first one.

Stineli went to school gladly, for there was always the pleasant walk going and returning with Rico. So many duties fell to her share during the summer that she had no leisure except on Sunday afternoons. Then she and Rico, who had usually been waiting on the doorsteps opposite, would go hand in hand over the wide meadow to the wooded hill beyond that stretched far out into the lake. There they would sit and look down into the water and watch the waves beat against the shore. Here they enjoyed themselves so much that Stineli was happy all the week in looking forward to the pleasure of the next Sunday.

There was some one else who contributed greatly to Stineli's pleasure. This was her aged grandmother, who made her home with the family. She noticed how much was expected of Stineli and often gave her bits of money to brighten a hard day's work. She was very fond of Rico and occasionally made it possible for Stineli to play with him by taking the household duties upon herself.

The grandmother frequently spent the summer evenings sitting in the front yard, and Stineli and Rico liked to sit with her and listen to the stories she told them. When the vesper bell rang she would say, "Remember, that is the signal for our evening worship." Then the three would devoutly repeat the Lord's Prayer.

"Your evening devotion ought never to be neglected," the grandmother continued one evening; "I have lived many more years than you have, and I have known many people, but I have observed that there is a time in the life of every one when prayer is needful. I have some in mind who did not pray, but when troubles came they had nothing to comfort them. I want you to know that you need not worry so long as you use this prayer."

It was May and the school was still in session, although it could not be kept open much longer, for the trees were beginning to show green tips, and great stretches of ground were entirely free from snow. Rico was standing in the doorway, observing these facts while waiting for Stineli. Earlier than usual the door across the way opened and she ran to him.

"Have you been waiting long? No doubt you've been building air castles at the same time," she said, laughing. "We shall not be late to-day, even if we walk slowly. Do you ever think about that pretty lake any more?" asked Stineli, as they walked along.

"Indeed I do," replied Rico; "I often dream of it, too, and I see large red flowers near the violet-colored hills I told you about."

"But dreams don't count," broke in Stineli. "I have dreamed that Peter climbed up the tallest tree, but when he got to the topmost branch I thought it was only a bird, and then he called to me to dress him. That proves how impossible dreams may be."

"This one of mine is possible," asserted Rico. "It makes me think of something that I have really seen, and I know that I have looked at those flowers and the hills. The picture is too real to be a dream only." As they neared the schoolhouse a company of children ran to meet them, and they all entered the schoolroom together.

In a few moments the teacher came. He was an old man who had taught in this room many years, and his hair had grown thin and gray as the years passed by. This morning he began the exercises with a number of questions on previous work, following this with the song, "Little Lambs."

Rico was looking so attentively at the teacher's fingering of the violin strings that he forgot to sing. The children, being accustomed to depending upon Rico's voice, sang out of tune, and the notes from the violin became more and more uncertain until all was in confusion. The song was abruptly ended by the teacher's throwing the violin on the table in disgust. "What are you trying to sing, you foolish children?" he exclaimed. "If I only knew who gets so out of tune and spoils the whole song!"

A lad sitting next to Rico ventured to say, "I know why it went that way; it always does when Rico doesn't sing."

"What is that I hear about you, Rico?" began the teacher, sharply. "You are a very obedient little fellow, but inattention is a serious fault, the result of which you have just seen. Let us try again. Now, Rico, see that you sing this time."

The children joined heartily, and Rico's voice sustained the song to the end. Then the teacher gave the violin a few final strokes and laid it on the table. "A good instrument that!" he said, and rubbed his hands with evident satisfaction.

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S VIOLIN

After school Stineli and Rico found their way out of the mass of children and started for home.

"Were you dreaming about your lake when you forgot to sing this morning?" asked Stineli.

"No, something quite different," answered Rico. "I was watching the teacher, and I am sure that I can play 'Little Lambs,' if I only had a violin."

The wish must have been a heartfelt one with Rico, for he said it with such a deep sigh that Stineli's sympathy was at once aroused and she said: "We will buy one together. I have ever so many pennies that grandmother gave me—I think twelve in all. How many have you?"

"Not one," said Rico, sadly. "My father gave me some before he went away, but my aunt took them. She said that I would only squander them anyway. I know we can't get those."

"Maybe we have enough without them," said Stineli, consolingly. "Grandmother will give me more soon, and it can't be, Rico, that a violin costs much. You know it is only a piece of old wood with four strings drawn across it. That ought not to cost a great deal. Ask the teacher to-morrow how much one costs, and then we will try to get one."

So the subject was left, but Stineli secretly resolved to get up early to build the fires, because grandmother would notice it and give her some more pennies.

The following day, after school, Stineli went out without Rico and stood at the corner of the building waiting for him. Rico was to ask the teacher concerning the violin. She waited so long that she wondered what could be keeping him, but finally he appeared.

"What did he say? How much does it cost?" inquired Stineli, eagerly.

"I didn't dare ask him," said Rico in a dejected tone.

"Oh, what a shame!" she exclaimed; but noticing Rico's sadness, she added, "It doesn't matter, Rico; you can ask him to-morrow." Then, in her cheerful way, she took his hand and they walked home without further mention of the subject.

Rico had no better success, however, on the second day nor on the third. He remained nearly half an hour at the teacher's entrance, not finding the courage to ring the bell. The fourth evening Stineli said to herself, "If he doesn't ask the teacher to-night, I will." This time, however, as Rico was standing at the door, the teacher came out suddenly and noticed the boy's hesitating attitude.

"What does this mean, Rico?" he asked, standing surprised and perplexed before him. "Why do you come to a person's door without rapping? If you have no business here, why don't you go home? If you wish to tell me something, you may do so now."

"What does a violin cost?" asked Rico, timidly.

The teacher's surprise and mistrust increased.

"Rico," he said severely, "what am I to think of you? Have you come purposely to ask useless questions, or what is your idea? Will you tell me what object you have in asking me what you did?"

"I only wish to find out what a violin costs," said Rico, still trembling at his own boldness.

"You do not understand, Rico; now listen to what I say. One asks something for a reason, otherwise it would be a useless question. Now answer me truthfully, Rico, did you ask me this out of curiosity, or did some one who wishes to buy a violin send you?"

"I should like to buy one," said Rico, a little more bravely.

"What did you say?" broke out the teacher, impatiently. "Such a senseless boy—and an Italian besides—to wish to buy a violin! You scarcely know what a violin is. Can you imagine how old I was before I was able to buy one? I was twenty-two years old and ready to enter my life work as teacher. What a child, to think of buying a violin! Now, to show you how foolish you are, I will tell you the price of one. Six solid dollars is what I paid for mine. Can you grasp an idea of the amount? We will put it into pennies. If one dollar contains one hundred pennies, then six dollars would contain six times one hundred, which is—Now, Rico, you are not dull at your studies; six times one hundred is—"

"Six hundred pennies," supplemented Rico, softly, for his voice nearly failed him as he compared Stineli's twelve pennies with this large sum.

"But further, Rico," continued the teacher, "do you suppose that one need only to buy a violin in order to play it? One has to do much more than that. Just step in and let me show you."

The teacher opened the door as he spoke and took down the violin from its place on the wall.

"There, take it on your arm and hold the bow in your hand; so, my boy. Now, if you can sound *C, D, E, F,* I will give you a half dollar right away."

Rico actually had the violin on his arm! His face flushed, as with sparkling eyes he played firmly and correctly, *C, D, E, F*.

"You little rascal!" exclaimed the teacher. "Where did you learn that? Who taught you so that you can find the notes?"

"I know something else too, if I might play it," Rico ventured to say.

"Play it," directed the teacher.

Rico played the melody of the song, "Little Lambs," with the greatest confidence, his eyes speaking his pleasure.

The teacher had taken a chair and put on his spectacles. He had looked attentively at Rico's fingers, moving with easy grace, then at his joyous countenance, and again at his fingers. The boy had played correctly.

"Come to me, Rico," said the teacher, as he moved his chair to the window and put Rico directly in front of him; "I want to talk a little with you. You see, your father is an Italian, Rico, and they do all sorts of things down there, they say, that we know nothing of up here in the hills. Now look me in the eyes and tell me the truth. How is it that you are able to play this tune correctly on my violin?"

Rico looked steadily at the teacher and said frankly, "I learned it from you in school, where we sing it so often."

The teacher got up and paced the floor. This put the matter in an entirely different light. So he was himself the cause of this wonderful intelligence! All his suspicions vanished, and he good-naturedly took out his pocketbook.

"There is the half dollar, Rico; it belongs to you. You had better go now, but keep on being attentive to the violin playing. It may be that you can make it amount to something, so that in twelve or fourteen years you can buy a violin for yourself. Good night."

Rico had looked longingly at the violin when he realized that he must go, and he now laid it very tenderly on the table. He was pondering the last words of the teacher, when Stineli came running to meet him.

"How long it did take you!" she exclaimed. "Did you ask him?"

"Yes, but it is all of no use," said Rico with frowning brow. "A violin costs six hundred pennies, and in fourteen years, when everybody will probably be dead, he thought I could perhaps buy one. Who wants to live fourteen years from now? There, you may take that; I don't want it," and he put the half dollar into Stineli's hand.

"Six hundred pennies!" repeated Stineli in amazement. "And how did you get this money?"

Rico told Stineli what had passed between him and the teacher, and again said, "It is of no use."

Stineli urged Rico to keep the money, but he would not take it again.

"Then I will keep it and put it away with the pennies, and it shall belong to us both," she said.

Even Stineli felt discouraged, but happier thoughts came to her as they turned the corner to enter the field and she saw the indications of spring on every hand.

"See, Rico, it will be summer in a short time, and we can go to the woods once more. Let us go this Sunday so that you will be happy again."

"I shall never be happy again, Stineli, but if you would like to go, I will go with you."

They arranged their plans so that they could go the following Sunday. It was not an easy task for Stineli to get away, for Peter, Sam, and Urschli had the measles, and a goat was sick at the stable. She was kept busy from the time she returned from school until late at night. Saturday she worked all day and much later than usual, but did it so willingly and was so cheerful that her father said: "Stineli is a perfect treasure. She makes us all happy."

CHAPTER IV

THE DISTANT LAKE WITHOUT A NAME

When Stineli awoke the following morning, she instantly realized that it was Sunday. The grandmother's words of the previous evening were still fresh in her memory, "You deserve the whole afternoon to-morrow, and you shall have it."

After dinner, when Stineli had finished all the necessary duties and was prepared to join Rico, Peter called from his bed, "Stineli, come, stay with me!"

The two others who were ill shouted, "No, no, Stineli, we want you!"

The father said, "I should like to have you go to the barn and take a look at the goat first."

"Hush, everybody!" broke in the grandmother. "Stineli shall go in peace. I will look after these things myself. Remember, dear, that when the vesper bell rings, you are to come home like good children." The grandmother knew that there would be two of them.

Stineli flew away like a bird for whom the door of its cage had been opened, and went directly to Rico, who was waiting as usual. The sun was shining pleasantly, and the heaven was an unbroken blue above them as they crossed the meadow to reach the hill beyond. They still found patches of snow in the shaded places, until they got up where the whole surface had been exposed to the sun; from here they could see the waves beating steadily against the rocks on the shore. They searched for a dry place on a cliff directly over the water, and here they sat down. The wind was blowing a sharp gale at this height; it whistled in their ears and swayed the woods above them like a living mass of green.

"Oh, see, Rico, how beautiful it is here!" exclaimed Stineli as she looked about. "I am so glad that spring has come again. See how the water sparkles in the sunlight. There really cannot be a prettier lake than this one."

"I should say there is!" exclaimed Rico. "You ought to see the one I mean! No such black fir trees with needles grow by my lake. We have shining green leaves and large red flowers there. The hills are not so high and black, nor so near, but show their violet colors from a distance. The sky and water are all a golden glow, and there is such a warm, fragrant air that one can always sit on the shore without being cold. The wind never blows like this, and there is no snow to cover one's shoes as ours are covered now."

This description convinced Stineli that Rico was not speaking of a place that he had simply

dreamed about, so she said half sadly: "Perhaps you can go there sometime and see it again. Do you know the way?"

"No," answered Rico, "but I know that you have to go up the Maloja. I have been as far as that with my father, and he showed me the road that leads ever and ever so far down toward the lake. It is such a long way that you could hardly get there."

"It would be easy enough," remarked Stineli. "All you have to do is just to keep right on going farther and farther and at last you *must* get there."

"Yes," said Rico, "but father told me something else too. You have to go to hotels to eat and to sleep on the way, and it takes money for that."

"But think of the money we own together!" cried Stineli.

Rico frowned and said: "That doesn't amount to anything. I found that out when I wanted to buy a violin."

"Then you had better stay at home and not go, Rico. It is always nice to be at home."

Rico sat lost in thought, his head resting on his arm. Stineli was busy gathering some moss and shaping it into pillows, which she intended to take to the sick ones when she and Rico went home. She thought nothing of Rico's silence until he said: "You say that I can stay at home, but it seems to me exactly as if that were something I did not have. I am sure I don't know where it is."

"O Rico, what are you saying!" cried the astonished Stineli, letting the moss fall unheeded in her lap. "You are at home here, of course. You are always at home where your father and mother—" Here she stopped abruptly as she remembered that Rico had no mother and that his father had not been at home for ever so long, and she shuddered as she thought of his aunt, of whom she had always been afraid. She scarcely knew how to continue, yet it grieved her to see Rico so sadly silent. She impulsively took his hand and said, "I should like to know the name of the lake where it is so beautiful."

Rico meditated a moment. "I don't know it, Stineli. I wonder what it can be and why I can't remember it!"

"Let us try to find out," suggested Stineli; "then, when we get money enough, you will be able to find your way to it. We might ask the teacher about it, and possibly grandmother could tell us."

"I think my father will know, and I will ask him just as soon as he comes back."

They heard the vesper bell ringing in the distance. They rose immediately and ran through the bushes and snow, down the hill and across the meadow. In a few moments they were panting beside the grandmother, who stood at the door waiting for them. She greeted them hastily and motioned for Stineli to pass into the house; then she added to Rico: "I think that you had better go in when you get to the house to-night, instead of waiting awhile outside. It may be better."

No one had ever spoken like that to him before, and he wondered why she asked it of him. He wished to obey the grandmother, but he could not help entering the house reluctantly.

CHAPTER V

THE LAKE HAS A NAME

The aunt was not in the living room when Rico entered, so he went to the kitchen door and opened it. There she stood, but before Rico had time to take a step nearer, she raised her finger in warning: "Hush! don't open and shut all the doors as if there were four of you coming. Go into the other room and keep still. Your father was brought home in a wagon, and he is sick upstairs."

Rico went to the bench by the window, where he sat motionless for fully half an hour. Then he decided that he would go up quietly and look at his father; it was past supper time, and perhaps the sick man might be needing something. He heard the aunt walking about the kitchen, so he silently slipped behind the stove and up the narrow stairway into his father's room.

In a moment he was again in the kitchen, saying faintly, "Come, aunt!"

She was about to take him by the shoulders to shake him, when she caught sight of his frightened face. She shrank from him, exclaiming, "What has happened?"

"If you will go to my father," said Rico, "I will see if the grandmother can come over. My father must be dead."

"I will run for the pastor!" cried the aunt, and rushed out ahead of the trembling boy.

Later he heard his aunt tell the pastor that for several weeks his father had been working down in the St. Gall district on a railroad. He had received a bad wound on his head while blasting stone. The journey home, part of which had to be taken in an open wagon, had proved too much for him.

The following Sunday the man was buried. Rico was the only mourner to follow the coffin. A few neighbors joined him through sympathy, and thus the procession moved through Sils. Here Rico heard the pastor read aloud during the service, "The dead man was called Enrico Trevillo and was born in Peschiera on Lake Garda."

It seemed to Rico that he was hearing something he had known very well but had not been able to recall. He understood now why he had always had the lake in mind when he and the father had sung his favorite song:

"Una sera
In Peschiera."

As Rico was returning alone from the funeral, he noticed that the grandmother and Stineli were waiting in the yard. When he drew near they beckoned him to come to them.

The grandmother gave the boy and girl some bread, saying: "Now go and take a walk together. Rico had better not be left alone to-day."

She looked pityingly after the boy as the children walked away. When she could see them no longer, she repeated softly:

"Whatever in His care is laid
Shall have a happy end."

CHAPTER VI

RICO'S MOTHER

The teacher was coming down the path from Sils, leaning heavily on his cane. He came directly from the funeral of Rico's father. He was coughing and panting as he greeted the grandmother, and he sank heavily to the seat beside her.

"If you are willing," he said, "I will rest here a few moments. My throat troubles me, and my chest is very weak. Of course, now that I am seventy years old I must expect such things. What a pity that a man of such powerful strength as the Italian must give up life! He was not yet thirty-five years old."

"Yes," said the grandmother, "I, too, have been thinking how much better I might have been spared than he."

"I know how you feel," replied the teacher, "but I suppose the older people have their place in life to fill as well as the younger ones. Where would they find precept and example but for us? What will become of the boy yonder?"

"What will become of him?" repeated the grandmother. "I have been asking the same question, and I cannot tell you. I only know that there is a Heavenly Father whom he still has, and he will doubtless find a place for the homeless one."

"Tell me, neighbor, how it ever happened that an Italian should get a wife up here. There is no knowing what those strangers are."

"I will tell you about them," said the grandmother. "You remember that the girl's mother had lost her husband and several children, leaving her only this one daughter. She was a charming maiden, with whom the mother lived for years alone. I think that it is about twelve years since the handsome young Trevillo first came here. He had joined a group of men who were working on the Maloja. It was a case of love at first sight with the young people. I am glad to be able to say that Trevillo was not only a very handsome man but also very capable. The mother was proud of her son-in-law and wanted them to remain with her. They meant to do as she wished, but the daughter had a longing to see the place that Trevillo described to her when they walked up the Maloja. The mother objected strongly at first, but when she heard that Trevillo owned a house and farm, having left it simply to see something of the hills, she gave her consent and they moved away. She heard from them regularly through the mail, but the daughter preferred to remain in the new home, where they were very happy.

"A number of years later, Trevillo came back to the mother, carrying a little boy. 'There, mother,' he said, as he held the boy for her to take, 'we have come back to you without Marie. She and the other baby were buried a few days ago, and we cannot bear to live without her down there. If you don't mind, we will stay here with you.'

"It brought both happiness and sorrow to the mother. Rico was four years old and extremely lovable and good. He was a comfort to her and her last great pleasure, for she died a year later. People advised Trevillo to get the aunt to keep house for him and the boy, and thus they have lived ever since."

"So that is their story!" remarked the teacher, when she had finished speaking. "I never could imagine how it came about. It is possible that some relative of Trevillo's may come to take the child."

"Relatives!" said the grandmother, scornfully. "The aunt is a relative, and what does he get from her? Few enough kind words, I am sure."

The teacher rose stiffly. "I am rapidly getting old, my friend," he said. "I feel my strength leaving me to such an extent that I can scarcely get about."

"You should still feel young in comparison with me," said the grandmother, and she wondered at his feebleness as he walked away with slow, unsteady steps.

CHAPTER VII

A PRECIOUS LEGACY AND A PRECIOUS PRAYER

The pleasant summer days were at hand. The grandmother did not forget Rico's loneliness, and she helped Stineli with the work as much as possible, so that she and Rico might play together.

In the early days of September, when every one made an effort to stay out of doors for the last of the warm evenings, the teacher was forced to remain in the house, for he was growing weaker and coughed more and more. One morning, when he tried to rise as usual, he fell back upon his pillow, exhausted. This brought to his mind serious thoughts of how things would be left in case he died. He had lived among these mountain people all his life and loved both his home and his work, but he had no children, and his wife had been dead many years. The only one who lived with him was a faithful old servant. He had made no plans for disposing of his property. He loved his violin more than all his other possessions, and it grieved him to realize that the time was at hand when he must leave it. He remembered the day that Rico had been there and had held it so lovingly, and the desire came to him to leave it with the boy, so that it might always have the care it deserved. It seemed a shame that he must actually give away things for which he had worked so hard and cared so much. Many plans for disposing of them presented themselves, but each was put aside as he faced the grim messenger and realized that earthly things had served him all they could.

A fever was taking firm hold upon him. All the evening and through the long night he lay restless, thinking of his past and the little he had done for the world. He was seized by a longing to do some one a real kindness before it was too late. He reached for his cane and tapped the wall for his servant, whom he directed to summon the grandmother to him. It was not long before she stood by his bedside. Without waiting to extend his hand in greeting, he said: "Please be so kind as to take the violin from the wall and carry it to the little orphan, Rico. I want to give it to him. Tell him that I hope he will take good care of it."

The grandmother understood the restless impatience of the sick one, so she immediately lifted the violin from its place, saying: "That is truly good of you. How astonished he will be! I will come in later to see how you are feeling."

Rico was standing on the doorsteps when he saw the grandmother coming, and he ran to meet her.

"I have come with good news for you, Rico," she said. "The teacher has asked me to bring you this violin. He wishes to give it to you. Take it, Rico. It is your own now."

Rico seemed suddenly petrified. The grandmother touched his shoulder, repeating: "It is yours; take it, child, and be happy. The teacher wants you to have it."

Rico trembled as she laid the gift in his arms. "If that is true, I will take it," was all he could say.

"You will always be careful of it, won't you?" asked the grandmother, to fulfill the teacher's request, but she smiled as she thought how unnecessary the caution was. "Now, Rico," she added, "I will go home, but I hope that you will not forget about the teacher's kindness, for he is

very sick."

Rico went up to his room, where he could be alone with his treasure. Here he examined it carefully and played softly to his heart's content. So absorbed was he in his pleasure that he forgot to think of the time until it began to grow dark.

His aunt met him at the foot of the stairs, saying: "You may have something to eat to-morrow. You are so excited to-day that you deserve nothing."

Rico had not thought about supper. He said nothing to his aunt, but walked contentedly over to find the grandmother. Stineli was lighting the kitchen fire when he went in. Ever since she had heard the good news in the morning, she had been wishing that she had time to run over to tell Rico how glad she was. Now that he suddenly stood before her, she could contain herself no longer. She exclaimed over and over as she danced about: "It is yours, Rico! I am so glad! It is yours! It is yours!"

Before the rejoicing had subsided, the grandmother entered. Rico went up to her and said, "Grandmother, will it be right for me to go over to thank the teacher if he is sick?"

She considered a moment, because the old man had looked so ill that morning; then she said, "Yes; I will go with you."

She led the way to the sick man's room, Rico following closely with the precious violin, which had not been out of his arms since it had been given to him.

The teacher had become very weak since morning. Rico stepped to the bed with such a happy, grateful face that he did not need to say a word. The sick man gave the boy a loving caress and then asked for the grandmother. Rico stepped aside and she took his place. "Grandmother," said the teacher faintly, "I have been feeling so troubled that I shall be glad if you will pray for me."

Just then the vesper bell rang. Rico bowed his head as the grandmother prayed by the bed. After an interval of silence she gently closed the eyes of her old friend, for he had died during prayer. Then taking Rico by the hand, she led him softly from the room.

Rico understood what had happened. He and the grandmother walked in silence until they reached her home.

"Do not be unhappy, Rico," she said; "your teacher has been suffering for some time, and we should rather rejoice that he is now at rest with the Heavenly Father. I know you will always remember him for his useful life and for his loving gift to you."

CHAPTER VIII

AT LAKE SILS

During the week that followed Rico's good fortune Stineli was as happy as a bird, in spite of the fact that there seemed to be ten more days than usual before Sunday came. It arrived at last, and proved to be a glorious day of sunshine. When she found herself with Rico, under the evergreens on the hill overlooking the lake, she felt so thankful that she could only dance about the moss-covered slope. After a while she seated herself on the edge of the cliff, where she could see both the lake and the village far down the hill.

"Come, Rico," she said; "now we can sing."

Rico sat down beside her and began tuning the violin, which, you may be sure, he had not forgotten to bring with him. Then they sang together:

> "Come down, little lambs,
> From the sunniest height—"

and on through every one of the stanzas. Stineli was brimming over with fun.

"Come," she said, "let's make some more rhymes. How will this do?

"Oh, climb, little lambs,
To the beautiful green,
Where the winds are all hushed
And the clouds are unseen."

This made them laugh, and they sang the verses two or three times. "More, Stineli!" cried Rico, encouragingly, and Stineli went on:

"Little lambs, little lambs,
Under heavenly blue,
'Mong numberless flowers
Of exquisite hue.

"There's a boy who is sad,
Here's a girl who is gay;
But all lakes are alike
Made of water, they say."

They laughed again and sang their verses over several times. "I wish we had some more," said Rico; so Stineli added two more stanzas:

"Little lambs, little lambs,
So playful yet shy;
Gay and happy are they,
Though they know not just why.

"Now the boy and the girl
At the lake are so glad;
If we think not at all,
Can we ever be sad?"

Then they began from the beginning and sang all the verses over and over again, and the more they sang them the better they liked their song. They tried to sing other songs during the afternoon, but every little while they would go back to what Rico called "Stineli's song," but what she called "our own song."

Once while they were singing, Stineli stopped abruptly and clapped her hands for joy. "I have just thought of a way to get to your pretty lake without money," she said exultantly.

Rico looked inquiringly at his companion.

"Don't you see?" she added hastily. "Now that you have a violin and know a song, it is very simple. You can stop at the door of the inns to play and sing; then the people will give you something to eat and let you sleep there, for they will know that you are not a beggar. You can keep on going until you get there, and you can come back in the same way."

They were still discussing the plan when they noticed that it was growing dark. They had not heard the vesper bell. Running down the hill, they found the grandmother out looking for them.

They ran joyfully to her, taking it for granted that she knew they would have come earlier had they been aware of the time. "Oh, grandmother!" exclaimed Stineli; "you will be astonished to find how well Rico can play. We have a song all our own that we want to sing to you."

The grandmother smiled. It was a pleasure to her to see the children together. "I can see that you have enjoyed the afternoon," she said when the song was ended. "I wonder, Rico," she continued, "if you can play my favorite tune, 'With heart and voice to Thee I sing.' We will all sing if you can play for us."

The grandmother sang softly the first verses of the hymn and Rico took it up readily, for it proved to be familiar. Then the three joined in the singing, the grandmother speaking each verse before they began:

"With heart and voice to Thee I sing,
Lord of my life's delight!
O'er all the earth let love take wing
To make dark places bright!

"I know that Thou the well of grace
And everlasting art;
Thou, Lord, to whom we all can trace
The pure and true of heart.

"Why then unhappy should we live
And sorrow day and night?
Oh, let us take our cares and give
To Him who has the might.

"He never will refuse His aid
If you a prayer will send;
Whatever in His care is laid
Shall have a happy end.

"Then let the blessing onward go,
And cause it not to stay,
That you may rest in peace below
And happy be alway."

"There, that was a real benediction," said the grandmother. "You may go to rest in peace, children."

"And I believe I like the violin just as well as Rico does," said Stineli. "Aren't you glad he can play so well? And it's so nice here, wouldn't you like to have him play some more?"

"I am very glad, dear," said the grandmother, "but we will not play or sing any more to-night. We'll let Rico go now, and let us all keep in our hearts the thought of the last song. Remember the Father will care for his own. Good night."

CHAPTER IX

A PUZZLING OCCURRENCE

That evening Rico was later than usual in returning to the house, for the grandmother's singing

lesson had taken some time. The aunt met him at the door.

"So this is the way you have begun!" she said sharply. "Your supper has been waiting for you long enough, so you may go to bed without it. I am sure it will not be my fault if you become a tramp. Any drudgery would be better than taking care of a boy like you."

Usually Rico made no response to her faultfinding. To-night he met her angry look with an expression of determination that she had never seen in his face before.

"Very well," he replied quietly, "I will take myself out of your way." He said nothing more, and as he went up to his dark bedroom he heard his aunt bolt the door.

The following evening, when the neighboring household had gathered about the table for supper, the aunt surprised them by coming to the door to inquire for Rico. She had not seen him that day.

"Don't worry," said Stineli's father, cheerfully; "he'll come when he's hungry."

As soon as the aunt saw that the boy had not taken refuge at the neighbor's, she went on to explain that in the early morning she had found the door unbolted. At first she had supposed that her trouble with Rico had made her forget to fasten it, but when she saw that he was not in his room and that his bed had not been slept in, she concluded that he had run away.

"If that is the case, something has surely happened to him," said the father. "He may have fallen into a crevasse on the mountain. A boy climbing about in the dark might easily break his neck. You were wrong not to speak of it sooner, for how is any one to find him, now that the daylight is gone?"

"Of course everybody will blame *me* for it," the aunt retorted. "That is the way when a person is uncomplaining. No one will believe" (and here she told the truth) "what a stubborn, malicious, deceitful child he has been, nor how he has made my life miserable all through these long, long years. He will never be anything but an idle tramp."

The grandmother could bear no more in silence. She rose from the table, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"Stop, neighbor, for pity's sake!" she protested. "I know Rico very well. Ever since the father brought him here I have seen him almost constantly. Instead of saying harsh things about the child remember what danger he may be in this very minute. Don't you suppose that he may also have some reason to complain?"

The aunt had been thinking all day of Rico's words, "I will take myself out of your way," and trying to justify her own position. Now the grandmother's rebuke made her ashamed. "I will go back," she said, as she stepped out into the dark field. "Rico may have come home while I have been standing here." In her heart she knew that she would be glad to find this true, but the little house was empty and still.

Early the next morning the neighbors set forth to search carefully in the ravines and along the approaches to the glacier. When Stineli's father noticed that she had followed the others he said, "That is right, Stineli; you can get into places where bigger folk could not go."

"But, father," said Stineli, "if Rico went up the road he couldn't have fallen into any such place, could he?"

"Of course he could!" said the father. "He was such a dreamer that it would have been easy enough for him to lose his way. He probably paid no attention to where he was going, and wandered off toward the mountains."

A great fear entered Stineli's heart when she heard this. For days she could scarcely eat or sleep and she went listlessly about her work as if she did not know what she was doing.

No one could be found who had seen Rico since the night he left home. As time went on he was given up for dead. The neighbors tried to console one another by saying: "He is better off as it is. The child had no one to look after him properly."

CHAPTER X

A LITTLE LIGHT

Stineli became more and more depressed as the days passed. The children complained, "Stineli won't tell us any more stories and she won't laugh with us any more."

One day the mother spoke to the father about the change in Stineli, but all that he said was: "It is because she is growing so rapidly. Let her rest a little and give her plenty of goat's milk to drink."

After about three weeks had passed in this way, the grandmother went with Stineli to her room one evening and said, "I can understand, dear, how hard you find it to forget about Rico, but I am afraid that you are not resigning yourself to the inevitable as it should be your duty to do for the sake of the dear ones about you."

"But, grandmother," sobbed Stineli, "you don't know how it hurts me to think that I gave Rico the notion of going to the lake; and now that he has been killed, I am to blame for it."

A great load seemed to fall from the grandmother as she heard these words. She had given Rico up for lost, for she could not otherwise account for his complete disappearance. A strong hope of his safety now came to her.

"Tell me, child," she said, "all that you know about his going to the lake."

Stineli told of Rico's longing to see the pretty lake he remembered, and how she had advised him to make the trip. "I am sure," she said, "that Rico started for the lake, but father says that he would get killed anyway."

"We have a right to hope for something better," said the grandmother. "Have you forgotten the song we sang the last night that Rico was with us?

'Whatever in His care is laid
Shall have a happy end.'

Of course it was wrong of you to advise Rico without consulting your parents, but you did it thoughtlessly and meant no harm, so you may dare to hope that there will be a happy ending to Rico's going to the lake. I feel satisfied now that the child is alive and that he will be taken care of."

From that time on Stineli began to be her old self. To be sure, she missed her friend, but she cherished a secret hope that he would return to her. Day by day she looked up the road to see if he might not possibly be coming down the Maloja Pass, but the seasons came and went and nothing was heard from the missing boy.

CHAPTER XI

A LONG JOURNEY

When Rico was so harshly dismissed by his aunt that Sunday evening, he went up to his room and took a chair in the darkness. His intention was to stay there only until his aunt had gone to bed. It seemed a simple undertaking to him to find his lake, now that Stineli had told him her plan. He dreaded the aunt's interference, although he knew that she would be glad to have him gone. His first thought upon reaching his room was, "I will go to-night, as soon as she has gone to bed."

A feeling of relief swept over Rico as he contemplated the future when he should be able to live for days without seeing the aunt. He thought of the beautiful flowers he would gather to bring back to Stineli, for there was not the least doubt in his mind about his coming back to her. Then, as he walked in fancy on the sunny shore of the lake, and thought of its beautiful setting, he fell asleep.

His uncomfortable position awakened him at last. The violin still lay in his lap, and as he felt it his plan came to his mind. The room was still as dark as when he had entered in the early evening. He was glad that he was wearing his best suit. He put on his hat and, going softly down the stairs, he quietly pushed back the bolt and let himself out into the brisk morning air.

Over the hills he could see the first glimmer of morning. Soon he heard the cocks announcing the break of day, and he increased his pace so that he might get beyond the town before it was light enough for him to be recognized. He very much enjoyed the walk, combined with the feeling of freedom, as soon as he got to the open country. It was familiar to him, for he and the father had many times walked there together. He had no idea of the distance to the top of the Maloja, but after he had walked steadily for two hours, it began to seem like a long way.

Bright daylight came at last, and after another hour of brisk walking he reached the summit of the mountain, where he and the father had so often stood looking at the scenery about them. A sunny morning was spread over the hills. The evergreen tops shimmered in the distance as if sprinkled with gold. Rico sat down by the roadside, a very tired and hungry boy, and well he might be, for he had eaten nothing since Sunday noon. Perhaps, he thought, he should find it much easier now that his way would be going downhill, and possibly it would not be much farther to the lake.

As Rico sat by the roadside, lost in thought, the large stagecoach came rumbling by. Rico had often seen it and envied the coachman on that high seat where he could look about him so well and have control of those fine large horses. The coach halted in the driveway leading to the inn at the summit. Rico came closer and watched the driver as he came out of the inn; he had remained but a moment, and he was now carrying a huge slice of black bread and a large piece of cheese. He cut these into strips and began to eat them, occasionally giving a bite to the horses. While they were contentedly eating, the driver noticed Rico's interested attention.

"Well, little musician," he said, "will you eat with us? Come nearer and I will give you some."

Rico had not realized how hungry he was until he saw the bread and cheese, but he quickly stepped forward at the invitation. The coachman cut such a large piece of bread and put such a thick slice of cheese on it that Rico had to find a place to lay his violin in order to have both hands free to hold his liberal portion. It pleased the man to see the way in which Rico attacked his breakfast, and he took the occasion to ask him a few questions.

"You are a very young musician. Can you play anything?"

"Yes, two new songs, and a few others."

"Is that so! And where do you expect your little legs to take you?"

"To Peschiera on Lake Garda," was Rico's prompt reply.

The coachman laughed so heartily at this that Rico was puzzled.

"That is great!" said he. "Don't you know that a little one like you could wear out the soles of his shoes, and his feet too, before he would see a drop of water from Lake Garda? Who sends you down there?"

"I go of my own accord," said Rico.

"Bless me, did you ever see such a child! Where is your home?"

"I don't know; maybe it is at Lake Garda," said Rico, earnestly.

The coachman looked thoughtfully at the boy. He did not look like a runaway, neither did he have the appearance of neglect. His black curly hair hanging over his Sunday frock was very pretty and childlike. His attractive appearance and honest looks gained the man's sympathy.

"You carry your passport in your face, my lad," he said. "It is all right, even if you don't know where your home is. What will you give me if I put you on the high seat beside me and take you a long way on your journey?"

Rico stared in amazement. To think of sitting on that high seat and riding down the valley! How he longed for the experience, but what had he to pay? "I haven't anything to give but my violin, and I couldn't part with that," he said at last.

"Well," said the coachman, laughing, "I shouldn't know what to do with that if I had it, so you may keep it. Come, we will get on now, and you can play for me anyway."

Rico scarcely dared believe that the man meant what he said, but it was true, and he was hoisted up to the seat. The passengers were inside the coach, with the windows down, as the morning was cool. The driver took up the reins and they started down the hill that Rico had wanted to pass over for so long a time. In what a remarkable way was his desire fulfilled! He felt as if he were sailing between heaven and earth, and wondered how it had all come about.

"Tell me, little traveler," began the coachman, "where is your father?"

"He is dead," answered Rico.

"Is that so! Where is your mother?"

"She is dead, too," came the answer.

"That is too bad! How about grandfather and grandmother?"

"They are dead."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the man. "But you must have brother or sister?"

"They are dead," was again Rico's sad reply.

"What was your father's name?"

"Enrico Trevillo from Peschiera on Lake Garda."

This made the coachman conclude that the boy belonged rightfully to Peschiera and that possibly he had been kidnapped by a mountaineer. However that might be, he determined to help the boy to get back to where he evidently belonged, and so he dismissed the matter from his mind.

After they had descended the first hill and were riding along on a comparatively level stretch of road, the driver said, "Now, little musician, play us a lively piece of music."

Rico tuned his instrument, and feeling very grateful to the good man for letting him ride, he not only began to play but to sing with all the strength of his bell-like voice, "Come down, little lambs, from the sunniest height."

It so happened that there were on the coach three students who were taking a vacation trip in the hills. To them the music was most welcome, and Stineli's verses appealed to their sense of humor. Rico was asked again and again to sing the song, and they joined in the singing as soon as they had learned the words. Sometimes they laughed so hard that they had to go back to the beginning.

Thus the journey progressed merrily. If Rico stopped playing, they asked him for more, and threw him pieces of silver until he had quite a sum in his hat which he held safely between his knees.

All the windows were now open, and some of the passengers were leaning out, trying to get a glimpse of the musician. The fun did not cease until the noon hour brought them to an inn, where they were to stop for dinner. The driver helped Rico transfer the money from his hat to his pockets, saying, "I am glad that you have that, for now you can buy your dinner."

The students had not been able to see Rico from their position on the coach, and were much surprised to find such a little boy. Their good humor increased, and they took him in their midst, giving him a place at their table and waiting upon him as upon an honored guest. Rico could not remember of ever having seen so pretty a table or of ever having eaten so good a dinner.

"From whom did you learn that song?" asked one.

"From Stineli; it is her song, because she made it herself," answered Rico.

"That was clever of Stineli," said another. "Let us drink to her health and happiness, since her song has so richly entertained us this morning!"

The noon hour was gone all too soon. As the passengers began taking their places in the coach, a large, heavily built man, clad in a brown worsted suit and carrying a heavy cane, came to Rico and said: "See here, little man, you sang very well this morning. I heard you from my window, and I want to tell you that I am in the business of buying and selling sheep, so I want to give you something, because you sang to us about the little lambs." Then he pressed a large piece of silver into Rico's hand.

The man entered the coach, and the sturdy driver tossed Rico to his seat as if he were but a toy in his hands. A moment later they were speeding down the valley.

Later in the afternoon Rico played again for them. He went over all the tunes he knew and finally played the melody and sang the song that he had learned from the grandmother the previous evening. This dreamy air must have lulled the students to sleep, for he heard nothing more from them. He put away his violin and watched the daylight fade and the stars begin to twinkle. The evening breeze was cooling the air. Rico thought of Stineli and the grandmother, and wondered what they were doing. In imagination he heard the vesper bells, and then he wondered no longer. He seemed to be with them as he folded his hands and, looking up to the star-sprinkled heaven, prayed as they had taught him.

CHAPTER XII

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED

Rico had fallen asleep. He was awakened by the coachman, who wanted to help him from the wagon. Everybody had hurried away except the students, who came to Rico to bid him good luck for the journey and ask him to tell Stineli about them. Then with a merry "good-by" they too departed. Rico could hear them singing Stineli's song as they went.

> "If we think not at all,
> Can we ever be sad?"

The next moment found Rico standing in the darkness, without any idea as to where he was or what he should do. It occurred to him that he had not thanked the coachman for having taken him so far, and he wanted to do so before going away. The man and the horses had disappeared, and it was too dark to see where they were. Soon Rico detected a faint glimmer to his left; this proved to be the light from the lantern in the barn, and he could dimly see the horses being led through the door into the stable. Rico hurried to the place, and finding that the large man who carried the cane was standing in the doorway, apparently waiting for the driver, the boy waited there also.

The sheep buyer could not have noticed Rico at first, for suddenly he exclaimed: "What, you still here, little one? Where are you going to spend the night?"

"I don't know where," answered Rico.

"You don't know where! at eleven o'clock at night—a little one like you! What does this mean?" the man's breath nearly failed him in his astonishment, but he had no chance to finish his exclamation, for the coachman came out just at that moment, and Rico immediately stepped up to him, saying, "I forgot to thank you for bringing me so far, and I wanted to."

"Good that you did!" said the driver. "I was busy with the horses and forgot that I meant to hand you over to a friend." The coachman turned to the other man, saying: "Here, good friend, I intended to ask you if you wouldn't take this child with you down the valley, since you were going that way. He wants to go to Lake Garda, and he seems to be all alone in the world—you know what I mean."

"Stolen, perhaps," said the large man as he cast a pitying glance at Rico. "I have little doubt of his belonging to those who would do well by him if they had him. Of course I will take him with me." He motioned Rico to follow him as he bade the coachman good night.

A short walk brought them to the door of an inn; they entered and took chairs at a small table in one corner of the room. "Let us count your money," said Rico's new friend. "We can tell then how far it will take you on your journey. Where is it that you wish to go?"

"To Peschiera on Lake Garda," answered Rico. He took all the money from his pockets and piled it on the table, putting the large piece of silver on top.

"Is that large piece the only one you have?" asked the friend.

"The only one. I got it from you," answered Rico.

It pleased the man to have Rico remember this, and he was glad to know that of all the listeners he had been the most liberal. It occurred to him to add another coin, but the supper he had ordered came in just then, so he said instead: "Very well, you may keep what you have for to-morrow. I will pay for the supper and lodging to-night."

Rico was so tired that he found it difficult to eat anything. The man noticed this and let him go straight to bed. He had scarcely touched the pillow before he was fast asleep.

Early the following morning Rico was aroused from a sound slumber by his friend, who stood before him, cane in hand, ready for the journey. A few moments later Rico joined him in the breakfast room, where their coffee was awaiting them. The man helped Rico to an abundant breakfast, telling him that they had a long journey before them, so that they must be fortified against hunger on the way. "A part of our trip to-day will be taken on the water, and that always sharpens a person's appetite," said he.

The breakfast over, the travelers started on their way. They walked a short distance and then turned a corner, where Rico caught his breath in surprise, for a beautiful lake lay before them. "Aren't we at Lake Garda?" he asked.

"No, no, we are a long way from it yet," replied his friend. "This is Lake Como, where we take a steamer."

They were soon at the steamship landing, where they entered a small vessel. The sunny shore seemed to speak a welcome to Rico. He and the man had taken chairs at a table. Rico took his largest piece of silver and laid it on the table in front of his friend, who was sitting with his hands resting on his cane.

"What is that for?" he asked. "Have you too much money to suit you?"

"You told me that I must pay to-day," said Rico.

"It is good of you to remember," said the man, "but you mustn't put your money on the table like that. Let me take it and I will settle the bill for you."

He went to the ticket agent, but when he saw how full his own purse was, he could not bear to use the only large piece the child possessed, so he gave it back to Rico with his ticket, saying: "There, you had better keep this; you may need it to-morrow. I am with you now, and there may be no one to look after you when I am gone. Who knows how much you may have occasion to use later! When you get to Peschiera have you some one to whom you can go?"

"I don't know of any one," answered Rico.

The man stifled his surprise, but he had a secret fear that all might not go well with the child. He resolved to find out more about the boy on his return trip, thinking that the coachman would be able to tell him, and so he asked Rico no more questions.

When the steamer had landed her passengers, the man said, "We must hurry across to the railway station to catch our train, Rico, and I am going to take you by the hand; then I shall be sure not to lose you."

Rico had all he could do to keep up with the man, who walked on rapidly. He wished for time to look about him, but he had to wait until they reached the train, which was the first one he had ever seen. He felt very strange in it, even with the man at his side. He was glad that he was near a window, where he could look out, as everything was of interest to him.

After about an hour's ride, Rico's friend said: "We are coming into Bergamo, where I shall have to leave you, Rico. All that you have to do is to sit still until the conductor comes to help you off, and then you will know that you are in Peschiera. He has promised me that he will tell you."

Rico very earnestly thanked his benefactor, and then he and the good man parted, each being sorry to leave the other.

Sitting in the corner of the car, Rico meditated upon all that had come to pass in the last few days of his life. No one in the compartment paid any attention to him, and he was glad to spend his time looking out of the window, thinking of whatever he wished. Three hours had passed before the conductor came to him and took his hand to help him down the steps. Then pointing toward the station he said, "Peschiera." The train started on, and Rico watched it move away until it was lost to view in the distance.

CHAPTER XIII

LAKE GARDA

Rico walked a few paces away from the station and looked about him. This large white building, the open space in front of it, the winding street in the distance, were all strange to him. He was positive that he had never seen them before. He had to confess to himself, "I have not come to the right place, after all."

He sadly followed along the path between the trees until he came to a turn in the road which brought him to a sudden standstill, for before him lay the sky-blue lake, the water shimmering in the sunshine. Yonder were the towering hills in the distance, with the faint outlines of the white dwellings in the valleys. How familiar it seemed! Many a time he had stood just where he was at present. He recognized the trees, but where was the house? Oh, there should be a little white house near by, but it was gone! There was the street that led to it. How well he remembered it! There were the red flowers in the abundance he had been used to seeing. There ought to be a bridge a little farther down. In his eagerness to see it he ran toward it, and sure enough, it was there, just as memory had pictured it.

A flood of recollections overpowered him. It was here that a lovely, loving woman had held him by the hand,—his mother. In fancy he saw her face distinctly and heard the sweet words of her lips, and understood anew the love revealed in her youthful eyes. Throwing himself upon the grass, Rico wept bitterly.

The sun was setting before he dried his eyes and began to think of what he should do. The golden evening glow that his memory had cherished was on the water, the hills had taken the violet tints, and the fragrance of the roses perfumed the air. The beauty of the place comforted him, and he thought, "How I wish Stineli could see this!"

When Rico left the bridge, the sun had set and the light of day was fast fading away into darkness. It seemed more like a home than anything he had known for years, and he reluctantly left the place. His first purpose was to take a closer look at the red flowers that he had noticed in the garden. He found a path leading from the street, where he could obtain a good view of them. It seemed to Rico that there must be bushels of the buds among the trees, shrubs, and vines. Again he thought, "If only Stineli could see them!"

Rico could see a sturdy boy in the garden, cutting grapes from the vines. The side door of the attractive white house in front of the garden stood wide open. The young man noticed Rico and stopped his whistling to say, "Come here and play a tune if you can." This was said in Italian, and Rico wondered at his own understanding of the words, for he was sure that he could not *speak* like that. After the young man had asked some questions and discovered that Rico could not answer, he directed him to the house to play there.

Rico stopped at the door and played and sang Stineli's song from beginning to end. Through the open door he noticed a lady sitting beside a child's bed, sewing. When Rico was about to turn away, a little pale face was raised from the pillow and he heard a voice say, "Play some more, please."

Rico played another melody and again turned to go, but the child repeated, "Play some more."

So it happened time after time until Rico had played all the tunes he knew. When the little boy saw that Rico was really going away, he began to cry, begging Rico to come to him. The lady came out, offering a coin to Rico, who had played for the child with no thought of money. Then it occurred to him again that Stineli had said that people would give him something if he played for them, so he took it and put it into his pocket.

The lady asked where Rico came from and where he was going, but he could not answer.

"Have you parents here?" she continued, and Rico shook his head in reply, thus telling her that he could understand. Then she asked if he were all alone, and Rico nodded. "Then where will you go?" she questioned, and Rico shook his head with a little gesture to indicate that he did not know.

The lady called the young man from the garden, and Rico heard her direct him to take the child to the hotel for the night, and to tell the landlord that the bill for lodging and supper was to be sent to her. "Perhaps the people at the hotel can understand the language he speaks," she said. "He must have been away a long time to forget so much. He is too young to be out alone, and I want you to tell them to show him the way he wishes to go in the morning."

The little invalid was still crying, and the mother at last asked Rico if he would come to see him in the morning. As soon as he saw Rico nod his assent, the boy was satisfied.

It was about ten minutes' walk to the city proper. The young man led Rico directly to the landlady and explained his errand. In the meantime Rico noticed that the living room was filled with men who were smoking and talking. He heard the landlady dismiss the boy with, "Very well, I will do as you say."

She looked Rico over from head to foot as she asked him where he came from. He answered in German that he had come down the Maloja and could understand what the people said, although he could not speak in the same way. The landlord, who understood German, told Rico that he had been up to the mountains himself.

"We will talk about it later," he said, "if you will play for the guests a few moments first." They had called for music as soon as they saw the violin.

Rico was very tired, but he obediently played and sang, beginning as usual with Stineli's song. None of the guests understood German, and they talked and laughed during the song. As soon as he had finished, some one called for a lively tune, and Rico tried to think of something they might like. He had never heard the music of the dance halls, but he finally thought of

"Una sera
In Peschiera."

The men joined Rico in the singing, much to his surprise, and they made the strongest chorus he had ever heard. It was fine to lead so many voices, and he played through the whole number of verses.

When the song was ended, there was such a jubilee that Rico could not imagine what it meant. They surrounded him, shaking his hands and patting his shoulders, and then asked him to drink with them.

Rico was bewildered, for he could not understand their surprise that he, a stranger, should know their song,—the song that no one outside their locality would care to learn. Moreover, he had played it with feeling, like a loyal Peschieran; hence this hilarious gratitude and brotherly welcome.

Rico's supper, consisting of boiled rice with chicken, was brought in and put on a corner table, and the landlady rescued him from his embarrassment by explaining that the child must eat and rest. She led him to the table, remaining to serve him.

Rico was indeed hungry. It seemed as if a long time had elapsed since he had taken breakfast with his friend in the early morning, and he had tasted nothing since. He had scarcely finished eating when he found it almost impossible to keep awake. He had told them, in response to questions, that he had no home and that he was going nowhere.

"That is too bad," said the husband, kindly. "Don't worry about anything now, for you must go to bed and get a good sleep. Perhaps Mrs. Menotti, the lady that sent you here, will give you some work if you go to see her to-morrow morning. I have no doubt of her helping you, since you have no home." He did not notice that his wife was trying to keep him from saying this.

The guests called for another song, but Rico was sent to bed, the wife taking him up to an attic storeroom that contained a quantity of ear corn and had its walls decorated with harnesses. In one corner, however, stood a bed, and Rico was soon tucked away in it and asleep.

After the guests had departed, the woman said to her husband: "I don't want you to send the boy to Mrs. Menotti. I can make him useful myself. Didn't you notice how well he can play? They were all pleased with him, too. Mark my words that the boy will make a better player than any of the three that we now hire. He will learn the music easily, and we can soon get along by hiring only two men on dance days, for we shall have him for nothing, and we can hire him out besides. You would be more than foolish to let him go. I like his looks very much, and I say that we will keep him."

"Very well; I am quite willing," the husband said amiably. He could see how well she had reasoned.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW FRIENDS

The next morning the landlady was standing in the doorway of the inn, observing the signs of the weather and planning the work of the day, when suddenly Mrs. Menotti's servant appeared. This young man was manager as well as servant. He understood his work thoroughly, and the place prospered under his care. He had a habit of whistling wherever he went, and people thought it was because his life was such a happy, contented one that he could not help expressing his satisfaction.

"If the boy I brought you last evening is still here," he began, "Mrs. Menotti requests that you will send him over to her. Silvio wishes to see him again."

The landlady stiffened, but tried to say pleasantly: "Yes, to be sure, if she is not in too much of a hurry. It so happens that the boy is still in bed, and I would rather let him have his sleep out. You can go back and tell Mrs. Menotti that I will send him over later, as he is not going any farther. I have taken him for good and all. He is a little neglected orphan, but I will see that he is provided for hereafter."

When Rico at last awoke, he felt as fresh as if he had not taken the long journey the day before. The landlady admired his neat appearance as he came down the stairway. She beckoned to him to come to the kitchen, where she served him his late breakfast.

"You may breakfast as well as this every morning, if you like, Rico," she said, as she seated herself opposite him at the little table. "We have a still better dinner and supper, for we cook for the guests then. You might pay me by helping with the work and playing for us when we want you to, but of course it remains for you to decide whether you will stay or not."

The landlady had spoken in Italian, but Rico had understood her, and he found words enough to say, "Yes, I will stay."

When Rico's breakfast was over, he was taken about the premises so that he might become familiar with the house, barn, chicken shed, and yard, and also the vegetable garden, for his help would be needed about them all. He was later sent to several places of business to get soap, oil, thread, and repaired shoes, and each time returned with his errand correctly done. It was therefore evident to the landlady that Rico knew the language well enough to be of great service to her. The afternoon was half over before she said to him, "You may take your violin over to Mrs. Menotti's and stay until night, if you would like to. She is expecting you."

Rico was delighted, for that would take him near the place he loved. As soon as he reached the lake, he went to the bridge and sat down. He recognized this quiet, fragrant spot as all that was left to him of his home, for it was still associated with the tender care of his mother as no other place could be. Its restfulness appealed to him, and the beauty of the scene was a feast after the years spent in the hills. He longed to remain for the rest of the afternoon, but he realized that his time belonged to those who had given him a home, and so he resumed his way to the sick boy.

The door was open at Mrs. Menotti's, and the little invalid heard Rico's step as soon as he entered the garden. Mrs. Menotti came down the path to meet him, and welcomed him so cordially and led him to the living room in such a motherly way that she won his affection immediately.

Rico noticed how pleasantly the room opened to the garden. Each night the boy's tiny bed was rolled into an adjoining room, where the mother slept. Early every morning it was taken back to the living room, where the morning sun and pleasant outlook gladdened the heart of the little sufferer. Beside the bed were the tiny crutches with which the mother at times assisted him to move about the room, for he was lame and had never been able to walk.

As soon as the little one heard Rico, he lifted himself to a sitting posture by means of a cord which hung suspended from the ceiling. He could not raise himself without help. Rico noticed the frail hands and arms, and the pinched look of the wan face. The little frame seemed too delicate to be that of a boy. The child had seen but few strangers, though he had often longed for company, and now his large blue eyes fastened eagerly upon Rico.

"What is your name?" he asked at the first opportunity.

"Rico," was the answer.

"Mine is Silvio. How old are you?"

"I am eleven."

"So am I," said the little one.

"Why, Silvio, you are forgetting!" broke in Mrs. Menotti. "You are not quite four, so Rico can see that you have made a mistake."

Silvio changed the subject. "Play something, Rico," he said.

Rico stepped some distance away from the bed before beginning to play. Mrs. Menotti sat in her accustomed place at the head of the bed. It was hard to tire Silvio by playing for him. Rico had

exhausted his entire list of pieces, and yet the boy called for more. Mrs. Menotti tactfully brought in a plate of grapes and had Rico take her chair by the bed, where he and Silvio might enjoy them together. She slipped out of the room unnoticed by the children. She rejoiced to get out to the garden, for it had been days since Silvio would consent to her leaving him.

The children did not find it embarrassing to talk together. Rico could answer all the questions that Silvio asked, and was never at a loss to find a way of making himself understood where words failed him. The mother had time to take a long walk about the garden without Silvio's having once called for her.

It was getting dark when she returned. Rico rose to leave, but Silvio caught hold of his jacket and begged him to stay.

"Unless you promise to come to see me every day I will not let you go," he said.

"But, Silvio," said the mother, "you must remember that Rico cannot promise that, even if he would like to, for he must first ask the people with whom he is living. I will go to see them to-morrow, and perhaps we can arrange it so that Rico can come every day."

Silvio grasped Rico's hand lovingly as he said good-by. "I hope you won't forget to come every day," he said. Rico was sorry to leave them. He loved Silvio and his mother for being so good to him. A homelike atmosphere filled the place and made him wish that his work might be done for them instead of for the people at the hotel.

The next afternoon Mrs. Menotti called at the Golden Sun. The landlady was much flattered by this visit. She met her guest very cordially and led her to the parlor upstairs. Mrs. Menotti at once made her errand known, urging the landlady to let her have Rico at least a few evenings a week, saying that she should be glad to pay well for the favor.

The landlady had been thankful that Mrs. Menotti had not interfered with her keeping Rico, so she willingly promised to let him go any evening that he did not have to play for dances. She was willing, she said, to let Mrs. Menotti pay what she pleased.

It was agreed that Mrs. Menotti should clothe Rico in return for the time he would give her. This pleased the landlady immensely, for not only would she have all his help for nothing, but he would soon be earning something besides.

The days passed quickly for Rico. In a short time he was speaking Italian as if he had always known it. It came to him the more readily because he had once known it; then, too, he had a good ear, and caught the true Italian accent with wonderful ease.

The landlady found Rico much more useful than she had expected. She praised his neat way of doing his work by saying that she could not have done it better herself. If he were sent on an errand, he never failed to return promptly. He was industrious, patient, and good-tempered.

When people questioned him about his past, he was very reticent. The landlady respected his silence and did not ask any questions. Thus he never gave his reason for coming to Peschiera. A story was told around the town, however, that Rico had run away from the people who had abused him in the mountains, that he had suffered many hardships on the long journey before he came to Peschiera, and that he had found the people there so kind-hearted that he had decided to go no farther. Whenever the landlady told the story, she always added that Rico deserved the good fortune of having found a home with them.

The first week of Rico's stay at the Golden Sun more people than usual assembled for the regular dance out of curiosity to see the little boy who had had such strange experiences, and to hear him play. In fact, so many came that the capacity of the house was taxed. The landlady flitted about among her guests as rosy as if she herself were the Golden Sun. Once, as she passed her husband, she whispered, "I told you that Rico would help out our dances."

Rico listened to the music as the pieces were played, and soon found no trouble in playing with the others. When the dancing ceased, he was asked to play the Peschiera song, and the dancers sang it enthusiastically as a fitting close to their evening of fun. It seemed to Rico that they had been boisterously happy all the evening. The noise had hurt his ears and racked his nerves so that he was thankful when it was over. The crowd dispersed after the song, and Rico hurried away to his attic bed, where he could at least have quiet.

Later that evening the landlady said to her husband: "You see how well my plan works? The next time Rico can take the place of one of the players, so that we need hire but two."

The husband smiled at his wife's sagacity and added: "Yes, and he ought to be a favorite with those who give tips. There is no question of his getting something in that way."

Only two days later there was a dance in Desenzano, and Rico was sent with the other players. The people there did not sing the Peschiera song, but they were as boisterous or worse than the Golden Sun crowd had been. The coarse laughter made Rico shudder, so that from beginning to end he thought, "If it were only over!" He carried home a pocketful of pennies, which he put uncounted into the landlady's lap. She praised him for doing this and prepared a good supper for him.

Rico had been promised for another dance in Riva the following week, and he was glad to go, for it would give him the opportunity to see closely what he had always looked at from a distance. Riva lies at the opposite end of the lake from Peschiera, and the white houses of the little towns built along the shore under the towering, rocky cliffs, had always seemed to throw him a glance of welcome.

The musicians crossed the lake in an open boat under a clear blue sky. Rico's thoughts were mostly with Stineli. He wished again that she might know how pretty the lake was, especially since she had at first doubted its existence. He knew how much she would enjoy the beautiful sight, and how much it would surprise her to see it. He meant to tell her all about it when he went back to her.

The boat landed at Riva all too soon, and a few moments later Rico was playing for the same kind of people that he had played for at the two preceding dances. It occurred to him that it was much pleasanter to look at the white houses and friendly rocks from his accustomed place on the opposite shore, or to amuse Silvio at Mrs. Menotti's, than to play amid the present tumult and applause. As they were returning to Peschiera that night he found no time to look about the town, though he had long wished to see the place.

When there were no dances Rico was allowed to go to Mrs. Menotti's every evening, for the landlady wished to prove herself grateful not only to Rico but to Mrs. Menotti as well. These evenings were Rico's greatest pleasure. He invariably went to the bridge for a short time on his way over. It always gave him fresh comfort, for he knew to a certainty that it was a place that had once been a part of his home. He had found the exact spot where his mother used to sit most frequently when she held and fondled him. He would sit there and think it over and over, actually living in the spirit of the past. Each time he had to force himself to realize that Silvio needed him and would be waiting. Though it was always a little hard to leave the place, his peace of mind was restored as soon as he came to Mrs. Menotti's, for she had endeared herself to him, and he realized that from her he received more affection than from any one else except Stineli.

Mrs. Menotti had heard the story about Rico's suffering in the hills, and she considered it wise to forbear asking questions, for fear of recalling to his mind painful scenes that had much better be forgotten. She longed to take Rico away from the hotel, for she knew that it was not the place for a sensitive nature such as his, but she saw that this would be an impossibility. Once she fondly put her hand on his head and said, "You poor little orphan, I do so wish I could keep you."

To Silvi, Rico became more and more necessary. He spoke of him at all times of the day and was always listening for his coming. Rico could speak fluently by this time, and it was Silvio's greatest comfort to listen to the stories he would tell him. One day Rico told him about Stineli. Silvio was so interested that Rico enjoyed telling him about her. He told of Stineli's seeing her brother Sam fall into the creek, and how she reached the place in time to catch one of his feet, holding on to him until the father, for whom she called as loudly as she could, should get to them. The frightened boy was in the meantime screaming with all his might. The father, taking it for granted that children are always noisy, did not trouble himself to go immediately, but when he had leisurely strolled across the field to find out why they called, he found Stineli still holding her

brother.

Rico told how she drew pictures for Peter and made playthings for Urschli out of wood, moss, or rushes,—sometimes with all combined,—and how all the children wanted her when they were sick, because she could entertain them so well. He also told of the good times he and Stineli had enjoyed together, and he became so animated in the telling that one would scarcely have recognized the quiet, sober Rico. Silvio's delight in these stories made both boys forget to look at the clock in time for Rico to leave as early as usual. He was startled to see how late it was and hastily rose to go.

"Good night, Silvio," he said. "I am sorry that I cannot come to-morrow or the next day, but I must play for some dances."

This was too much for Silvio's patience, and he called to his mother, who hastily came from the garden in the greatest anxiety.

"Mother!" he cried, "Rico shall not go back to the hotel any more! I want him to stay here and I wish that you would make him. You will do it, won't you, Rico?"

"If I didn't have to help at the hotel, I would," answered Rico.

Mrs. Menotti had feared such a scene for some time, but was troubled to know how to meet it even now. She knew too well what Rico was worth to the landlady and her husband in dollars and cents to entertain the faintest hope of their letting him go from them. She tried to quiet Silvio as best she could, and affectionately drew Rico to her, saying "You poor little orphan! I wish it were so that you might stay with us."

"What is an orphan? I want to be one, too," said Silvio.

"I am afraid my little boy is naughty to-night," Mrs. Menotti admonished him. "An orphan is one who has neither father nor mother, and no place that he can call home. Don't ever wish that again."

Mrs. Menotti did not notice Rico's pathetic glance when she gave Silvio the meaning of the word. Later when she saw that Rico was gone, she supposed that he had slipped away without saying good night, for the sake of keeping Silvio quiet, and she gave it no further thought.

"Now, Silvio," she said, as she sat down by his bed, "I want to tell you something, so that you will never make such a fuss again. We have no more right to take Rico away from those people than they would have to take you away from me. How should you like never to see the garden again?"

"I would come right home if they took me," was Silvio's valiant answer, but the illustration had served to quiet him, and he was soon tucked in his little bed and willing to go to sleep.

It would be hard to tell just what passed in Rico's mind when he quietly left the house that night and went down to the bridge. "I know now that I am an orphan," he murmured, "and that there is no place that I can call home." He longed to stay on the bridge all night, for its sweet association with the past was his only comfort, but he knew that the landlady would become alarmed at his absence, so he forced himself away to his cheerless attic.

He did not need a candle to find his way to the bed, and he much preferred not to see his surroundings. An eager desire to see Stineli possessed him. He meant to tell her how it comforted him to know that she cared for him. It was late in the night before he could quiet his thoughts for sleep.

CHAPTER XV

AN EMPHATIC APPEAL

The matter, however, was not at all satisfactorily settled for Silvio. He understood that he must do without Rico for two days, but it wore upon his patience as the hours dragged along. He fretted and tossed about, wishing continually for Rico. Before the second day was over Mrs. Menotti's strength had been severely taxed.

When Rico understood that he was really homeless, his thoughts turned to Stineli more than ever before. A new feeling of satisfaction came to him as he considered how much her friendship had meant to him and how much the future might mean if they could be again together as in days past. So continually had she been in his mind the last few days, that he had scarcely reached Silvio's side before he said, "Silvio, it seems to me as if no one could be quite happy without Stineli."

"Mamma, I want Stineli," said Silvio, as he pulled himself to a sitting posture. "I want her to come

to me because I can't have Rico, and he says that no one can be quite happy without her."

Mrs. Menotti knew of whom they were speaking, for she had often heard Rico mention her during the years he had been with them. "Yes," she said, "it would be delightful if we could have her, but my little boy must not forget to be reasonable."

"But we *can* have her, mamma," broke in Silvio. "Rico knows where she is, and he can go to-morrow and bring her to us."

Mrs. Menotti had for some time secretly wished that Rico might find for her some one to assist in the care of Silvio, but she would not for a moment consider letting the boy go back to the perils from which he had so fortunately escaped. She sought to change the subject of conversation between the children, and endeavored to interest them in other things, but she failed to keep them from going back to the original subject. Silvio would invariably say, "Rico knows where she is and he must get her."

"Do you suppose that Rico will deliberately go among those wicked people to get her, when he can stay here in safety?" asked the mother.

"Will you?" said Silvio, fastening his large blue eyes upon Rico.

"Surely, I will go," said Rico enthusiastically.

"Rico, have you lost your senses?" exclaimed Mrs. Menotti. "What do you suppose I can do with you when you both begin to be unreasonable? You had better play something for Silvio, Rico, and I will go to the garden for a while. By the time I get back I shall hope to find two good, sensible boys."

The boys, however, did not care for music to-night, and they talked, instead, of possible ways of bringing Stineli to them and of how it would seem to have her there.

When she returned from the garden, where she had enjoyed the quiet evening, Mrs. Menotti had to remind Rico that it was time to go home. Silvio urged his mother for a promise that Rico might be allowed to go for Stineli, and both boys eagerly awaited her answer.

"You may feel differently about it in the morning, children," she said. "I want you to go to sleep in peace; possibly before the night is over I can think of a way to satisfy you."

Early the following morning Silvio raised himself in bed to see if his mother was awake and said, "Have you thought of a way, mamma?"

Mrs. Menotti could not say that she had, and again the child's discontent broke out. All that day and the next and for many days thereafter he would not be comforted. Mrs. Menotti thought it was only a fancy and would wear itself out, but the extra strain upon the boy began to tell upon his health to such an extent that the mother became alarmed. She was convinced that Silvio ought to have a companion, and she resolved to consult with some trustworthy person, to see if it were possible to get a child from the hills in safety. Mrs. Menotti understood that Rico had escaped from ill treatment in the hill country, and she avoided asking him questions about his past life, hoping that he was young enough to let silence efface all unpleasant memories. On this account she felt quite unwilling to let him undertake the journey, and even the consideration of such a possibility brought to her a fuller realization of how necessary he had become to their own happiness.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ADVICE

Under these conditions it was a pleasure and relief to Mrs. Menotti to see the pastor walking up the garden path. He came frequently to inquire after the health of the little one. As usual he was dressed in his long black coat.

"Silvio, the pastor is coming; isn't that nice?" said Mrs. Menotti, as she went to the door to meet him.

"I don't want to see him. I wish it were Stineli," said Silvio, pouting. Then seeing that the pastor had heard him, he covered his head with the bedclothes.

"My little boy is out of humor to-day, and I am sure he didn't mean what he said," apologized the mother.

They heard the boy under the covers say, "I did mean it."

The pastor must have suspected where the voice came from, for he walked straight over to the

bed, although there was not a bit of Silvio in sight. He said: "God bless you, my son, how are you feeling, and why do you hide yourself like a little fox? Creep out of there and tell me what you mean by Stineli."

Instantly Silvio's head was out and he said, "Rico's Stineli."

"You must be seated, pastor," said Mrs. Menotti. "I will tell you what Silvio means, for I want your advice very much."

Mrs. Menotti recited in detail all that she knew about Stineli, the reason why they wished for her, and the obstacles in the way of getting her. "I have thought," she said, "that it might be a good thing for the girl to get away from those wicked people, and I wonder if you can think of a safe way to bring her here."

"I think," said the pastor, "that you have been misinformed about those people in the mountains. I am sure that there are kind-hearted men and women living there as well as here. People travel so much in these days that I am sure that it cannot be much of a task to get up there. One thing I am positive about is that the journey can be taken in absolute safety. I know some live-stock dealers who regularly make the trip from Bergamo to the mountains, and who will be able to tell me all about it. Since you are interested, I will see one of the men as soon as I go to Bergamo and I will let you know when I return."

Silvio's eyes had grown larger as the pastor spoke, and he began to feel a great respect for the man who could so ably take his part. When the pastor extended his hand to Silvio in parting, the boy fairly plunged his little palm into the larger one, as much as to say, "You deserve it now."

Weeks passed by as Mrs. Menotti waited to hear further news from the minister, but Silvio's patience did not again fail him. He felt sure that the good man would help him to get what he wished.

When Rico heard that there was hope of his being sent for Stineli, he forgot that he had ever been sad. The expectation of having her there to enjoy the beautiful scenes and to share his companionship fairly made the world over for him. His serious expression gave way to a happy one, and his purpose so animated him that it added a new charm to his manner. He went often to see Silvio, and took pleasure in entertaining him by relating incidents of his active life among the people with whom he lived. He stopped playing the dreamy airs and substituted those more suited to his present mood. He played so well by this time that Mrs. Menotti was proud of his ability, and she often gave up a walk in order to listen to him. It was here, with those who loved him, that Rico enjoyed the music he had learned. The only regret of the day came when he had to bid them good night and go away, for it always brought afresh the longing for a home of his own.

The change in Rico was noticed at the hotel where he lived. The landlady was much astonished one morning to have him ask her to hire some one else to care for the chickens and outbuildings. He thought that he had performed those duties as long as was necessary, and he preferred to be released also from blacking shoes and from similar work. The landlady remarked that he was indeed getting fastidious, but she was too wise to remonstrate, for she knew that there would still be enough for him to do.

Mrs. Menotti had liberally provided Rico with wearing apparel. She selected as carefully in material and workmanship as if he were her own child. The landlady said that he always went about looking like a little prince, and she meant to find no fault in regard to the work he chose to do. "I am sure," she said to her husband, "that since he brings so much money from the dances where he plays, I ought not to object to the slight expense of hiring a boy to do the menial work about the house and garden. Rico has been a credit to us so far."

The years had passed rapidly since Rico came to Peschiera. The vague, dreamy look in his eyes had given place to one of purpose and determination. He had the appearance of one much older than he was.

Another autumn was at hand. The purple grapes were temptingly ripe on the vines, and the oleander blossoms sparkled in the sunshine. One morning, about the usual time for Rico to arrive at Mrs. Menotti's, Silvio was listening for his step on the garden walk. He heard the gate open, but when he raised himself to look, there was the pastor instead of Rico! Silvio did not hide under the covers; instead, he clapped his hands, shouting, "Mamma, the pastor is here," and stretched his arms to him as soon as he entered the room.

This cordial welcome pleased the minister, and he went directly to Silvio's bed, although he had seen the mother gathering some figs in the garden. He took the little one in his arms and said, "How is our Silvio to-day?"

"Well, thank you. When can Rico go?"

The good man laughed. "To-morrow morning, my son; he is to go at five o'clock," he answered.

Later the pastor explained to Mrs. Menotti that he had just returned from Bergamo, where he had spent a few days. He had looked up a stock dealer, according to his promise, and found that the man had made regular trips to the mountains for the last thirty years; every bit of the way that Rico would have to go was familiar to him. It so happened that he had made his plans to go up again, and if they would send Rico on the early morning train, he would take him along and see that he was well cared for; moreover, he had said that as he was acquainted with all the

coachmen and conductors on the way, he would arrange for a safe return trip, so that the young travelers could not possibly go astray.

"I wish that I could be certain that no harm would come to Rico," said Mrs. Menotti to the pastor, as she accompanied him to the gate on his departure that morning.

"You have no reasonable cause for worry," replied the pastor. "Let the child go in peace, and we will pray God to bless the journey."

Just at this moment Rico came in sight. Silvio saw him from the doorway and shouted: "Don't tell him! Please don't tell him! I want to tell him myself. Come, Rico; I have something wonderful to tell you."

Mrs. Menotti left the boys alone while she packed some things for the journey. In a large traveling bag she put a great piece of smoked ham, a loaf of fresh bread, a package of dried fruit, some figs fresh from the garden, and a bottle of her best fruit juice wrapped in a napkin; next came shirts, stockings, shoes, handkerchiefs, and various other things, so that one might suppose that Rico were going for a month's stay instead of a week.

"How much I have learned to care for that boy," she thought, as she looked about to make sure that nothing had been forgotten, and her heart sent up a silent prayer for a safe journey.

"I think you had better take this bag to the station now, Rico," she said to him when she came downstairs. "Silvio has told you that you are to go on the early train, and you will wish to explain matters to the landlady. You must ask her if it greatly inconveniences her to let you go so soon."

Rico was astonished to find that he was expected to take a traveling bag of such huge proportions, but knowing that loving hands had prepared it, he did not remonstrate, but took it gladly and did as he was directed.

When Rico told the landlady that the pastor had planned for him to go to the mountains in the morning to get Stineli, she took it for granted that the girl was his sister, and inferred that the sister would live with them. Rico's statement that Stineli was to live with Mrs. Menotti undeceived her. It was a disappointment, but she gave her consent, feeling thankful to Mrs. Menotti for not having tried to get Rico.

"It must be that Rico likes it here," said the landlady to some guests that evening, "because he is going back to get his sister." She meant to let those people in the hills know how good a place the boy had, so she packed a large basket with sausages, cheese, and boiled eggs, and spread a loaf of bread with fresh butter, saying: "You mustn't be hungry on the trip. If I put up more than you need, they will no doubt be glad to have some up there; besides, you must have something on the way back, for you will surely come back to me, won't you, Rico?"

"In a week I will be here again," said Rico. He took his violin and went over to bid Silvio and the mother good-by. He asked them to care for his violin, for he would not have dared to intrust it to any one else. Rico could not spend the evening with them, because he was expected to go to bed early. Mrs. Menotti's motherly farewell made his heart go out to her in gratitude, and Silvio's "Come back soon" rang in his ears again and again as he walked through the darkness to the hotel.

CHAPTER XVII

OVER THE MOUNTAINS

Long before five o'clock the following morning, Rico was at the station, impatient to be off. He had slept but little during the night, for his mind was in a whirl at the thought that he was actually going back to Stineli. How glad he was that he might bring her to his good friends on his return! When he found that sleep was out of the question, he dressed, and going to the station, paced back and forth along the narrow platform until the train came in.

When Rico selected his place in the car, he was reminded of his ride, years ago, when he sat half-frightened in a corner of the seat, with only his violin beside him. This time his luggage required more space in the compartment than he himself did.

The stock dealer did not fail to join Rico at Bergamo, and they both enjoyed the lovely daylight sail on Lake Como. The boy recognized the place where they landed and also the inn where they took the stage. He looked especially for the door of the stable, where the lantern had shown him the way to the coachman on his former trip. He had not at that time been able to see his surroundings very clearly.

The sun had set when the stage left the inn, so Rico entered the coach with his companion. He

fell asleep almost immediately and did not wake until morning, when the sun was shining over the mountain tops. To his great surprise and joy he found that they were going up the zigzag road of the Maloja, so familiar to him. He could, however, see nothing but the sharp angles in the road, until they arrived at the summit, where they alighted for breakfast and to give the horses a rest. After breakfast Rico looked for the place where he sat years ago, when he was a tired and hungry little boy. He remembered distinctly how he had watched the stage which later picked him up and took him down the valley. Everything about him was of interest now, and he said to the coachman, "Will it trouble you if I sit up there with you so that I can see better?"

"Certainly not," said the man; "come up if you want to."

The passengers had already taken their places in the coach, and it was but a moment later when they started at a lively pace down the long, sloping grade. Rico presently saw the lake, the island with its pine trees, and beyond, the white houses of Sils. Across the fields was Sils-Maria. The little church showed up most distinctly at that distance, but Rico's eyes were searching for something farther down the hill; soon he saw, as he had hoped, the two familiar houses.

Rico's heart began to beat wildly. Where and how would he find the little girl he had not seen for years? Suppose she should not be there any longer? Suppose she had forgotten him? It seemed but a moment before the stage stopped in Sils, and Rico alighted with his luggage.

Stineli had seen many hard days since Rico's disappearance. The children had grown older, so that they were less care, but the work, especially since the grandmother had died, had fallen more than ever upon her. The children were wont to say, "Stineli is the oldest, so she can do that," and the parents often said, "Stineli is young and strong, so she can do that"; thus the willing hands were kept busy. She sorely missed Rico and the grandmother, the only ones who had ever regarded her comfort, but she tried hard to keep her cheerful nature uppermost, although she often thought, "The world is not the same now that they are gone."

On this sunny Saturday morning Stineli came out of the granary with a bundle of straw which she intended to braid into a broom. As she reached the path leading to Sils, she let her eyes follow along the dry, smooth way until her glance was arrested by the appearance of a strange young man coming in her direction. She knew from his dress that he was not a Silsan. He came more rapidly as soon as he noticed her and when quite close, stopped and looked at her. She glanced inquiringly at his face and immediately recognized her long-lost friend. Dropping her bundle, she ran to him, exclaiming: "O Rico, you are not dead after all! How glad I am to see you! How very tall you have grown! I would never have known you if it had not been for your face; nobody else has a face like yours. O Rico, how glad I am that you are here again!"

Rico was pale,—the joy seemed too great,—and he had not been able to say one word. Stineli stood blushing in her pride of him, and waited for him to speak.

"You have grown, too, Stineli," he said at length; "otherwise you are the same as ever. The nearer I got to the house the more afraid I became that you would be different, so that it would not seem the same here."

"O Rico, if only grandmother could know!" said Stineli. "But I must take you to the others; they will all be so astonished to see you."

When Stineli took Rico into the house the children, unaccustomed to strangers, began to hide. The two older ones, Trudt and Sam, came in a moment later and shyly said "Good morning" in passing. The mother simply inquired if there was anything she could do for the stranger.

"Don't any of you know him?" inquired Stineli. "Why, mother, it is Rico."

They were just exclaiming in surprise when the father came in to breakfast. Rico advanced to shake hands cordially, but the man looked at him blankly and said: "Are you a relative? There are so many I may not know them all."

"Now father doesn't know him either!" exclaimed Stineli. "It is Rico, papa."

"Why, Rico, to be sure," the father said, gazing at him from head to foot. "You look prosperous, my boy; I suppose you have learned a good trade. Let us sit down to breakfast, and then you must tell us about yourself."

When Rico noticed that the grandmother did not come to breakfast, he asked for her. It was the father who answered that they had buried her beside the teacher a year ago. Rico said nothing, for the news came as a shock to him. He had counted upon the pleasure of seeing the dear old lady who had always shown him so much kindness.

Rico was immediately urged to tell about his wanderings and how he happened to go away. He began his story from the night he left, but he spoke in detail only when he told of Mrs. Menotti and of Silvio's home. This led him easily to tell them the object of his visit to the hills, and to beg them to let him take Stineli back with him when he returned.

Stineli opened her eyes wide in astonishment, for she had not even dreamed of such a possibility. How delightful it would be if she were allowed to go with Rico to that beautiful place! The best part of it, of course, would be to have him with her or near her again, and how she would love Silvio for sending Rico back to her! Thoughts like these kept surging through her brain while the father was considering the matter.

"It would, no doubt, be a good thing for Stineli," he said. "I should like to have her get out among people and learn their ways; but there is no use to talk about it, for she can't be spared. We could let Trudt go just as well as not."

"Yes," agreed the mother; "I couldn't possibly get along without Stineli. I am willing that Trudt should go if she wants to."

"Goody! goody! I am going and I am glad," and Trudt clapped her hands and danced about.

Stineli's face had clouded, but she made no protest, preferring to have Rico say what was needful.

"It so happens," said Rico, calmly, "that Silvio wants Stineli and no one else. If Trudt went down there, he would only send her away, so that is out of the question. Mrs. Menotti told me to tell you that if Stineli got along well with Silvio, she could send home two dollars and a half every month. I am just as sure that Stineli will get along with Silvio as if I had already seen them together."

Stineli's father pushed his chair away from the table and put on his cap,—a habit of his whenever he wished to think seriously about anything. The money was an important factor to him. How hard he had to work to earn a dollar, and here was an opportunity to get two dollars and a half every month without the least effort on his part! It was not long before he hung up his cap and said: "She can go if that is the case. I suppose one of the others can learn to do things here."

Stineli's face beamed, but the mother sighed as she realized what it would mean to her.

In a moment the father put his cap on again. "I had forgotten," he said, "that Stineli has not been confirmed; she will have to wait until after that."

"But, father," exclaimed Stineli, "I was not planning to be confirmed for two years. I can go now and come back when the two years are over."

This plan was at last approved, and the parents consoled themselves by thinking that they could then keep her at home if they wished.

"Just as soon as she gets back, I am going," said Trudt. They all laughed at this, while Rico and Stineli exchanged glances and were happy.

"Now, Stineli, I want to tell you something," said the father. "I know that pandemonium will reign here until you two are gone, so I say the sooner it is accomplished the better; then we can have peace and quiet." It was accordingly decided that they should leave the following Monday.

Rico realized how busy a day Stineli would have, so he asked Sam to accompany him about Sils-Maria and the neighborhood. They stopped first of all to look at the house across the way, that had at one time sheltered Rico. He was informed that strangers lived there, that the aunt had been gone several years, and that no one knew where she was.

Wherever Rico and Sam went that day they failed to find a single person who recognized the "foreign-looking young man," as they called him. On their return Rico wished to visit the grandmother's grave, but they could not find it.

It was evening before they came back to the house, carrying with them Rico's luggage from the station. They found Stineli at the well, scrubbing the pails used about the barn. "I can't believe yet that I am going, Rico," she said as they passed her.

"I can," said Rico; "but you haven't thought about it so long as I have."

Stineli was delighted with the change in Rico. "How well and forcibly he speaks," she thought. "He was timid and shy before he went away. He seems to inspire confidence, and he looks wonderfully strong and capable."

A bed was prepared for Rico in the attic. He did not unpack his lunch until the following morning, when it provided a real feast for the children. The figs were a novelty to them, and the abundance of good things assured the parents that Rico was among friends in the valley. They had no further fears about letting Stineli go with him.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO HAPPY TRAVELERS

The return trip had been fully explained to Rico, and he knew that they must leave Sils in the evening. Sam was going with Stineli and Rico as far as Sils; the rest of the family gathered about the door and waved farewell to them until they were lost to view.

"If grandmother could only see us!" said Stineli, as they neared the little church. "Let us go over to her grave for a moment." This they did, for Stineli knew exactly where it was.

"Are the two children here who are to go to Lake Garda?" they heard the coachman say as soon as he arrived.

Rico and Stineli stepped forward. "All right," said the man. "I have instructions to look after you. The coach happens to be full inside, but I am thinking that you are young enough to like it up here with me." He helped them up, tucked a large blanket around them because the night was cool, and then the stage rolled on.

This was the first time that Rico and Stineli had been alone since he came back, and they were both glad of the opportunity to sit so cozily in the starry night and feel again the sweet companionship that they had given up long ago. They had so much to say that they slept but little during the night. They reached Lake Como in the morning, and arrived in Peschiera on the same train that had carried Rico when he came before. He led Stineli by a roundabout way in order to keep the view of the lake hidden by the trees until they came to his favorite place on the bridge.

Suddenly it burst upon them in all its beauty, as Rico had often wished to describe it, only it seemed much more beautiful to Rico now that Stineli was seeing it, too. He rejoiced to hear her say presently, "Oh, it *is* prettier than Lake Sils—ever so much prettier."

They sat down on the bridge, and for the first time Rico spoke to Stineli about his mother. He told her how well he remembered her, and how often they had been together on this bridge, and how much they had cared for each other.

"Then your home must have been here," said Stineli. "Where did you go when you left the bridge? Can't you remember that?"

"Yes, I know just where we went, but I can't find the house. Everything is just as it used to be until I get to the station; I never saw that until I came here by myself, and I think they must have taken the house away."

The sun was low in the heavens before they left the bridge. Rico was secretly rejoicing over the fact that their coming would be a surprise, for they were not expected for a week and here they were at the garden!

"What a lovely place!" exclaimed Stineli. "What gorgeous flowers!"

Silvio's sharp ears heard this exclamation. He pulled himself up in bed and called to his mother, "I do believe that Rico has come with Stineli."

Mrs. Menotti hastily ran to her son, fearing that he was ill, but just at that moment Rico appeared. How glad she was to see him safely back! Her surprise and warm welcome were more

than Rico had anticipated. Before Rico had time to present Stineli the girl had gone directly to Silvio's bed, speaking to him so kindly that he put his arms around her neck and gave her the greatest hug his little arms were capable of giving. Mrs. Menotti told Rico that she was more than satisfied with the girl's appearance, and he had no fears about her conduct.

Although she spoke no Italian, Stineli found various ways in which she could immediately make herself useful. The Latin words she had learned in school helped her, and she tactfully used motions when Rico did not explain for her. She carried the tray with Silvio's supper to his bed and cut the food for him, propping him up comfortably with pillows before she joined the mother and Rico in the dining room. After supper Stineli made the others go to Silvio until she had finished the work, and then she joined them.

She began to amuse Silvio with a little gift that she had brought in her pocket so that it might be convenient when she wished to give it to him. It was simply a number of wooden figures, with faces and dresses gaily painted on them, and put together on a central piece so that they would dance comically when shaken out. This was Peter's handiwork, and it afforded Silvio unceasing amusement. Stineli also made the shapes of animals with her hands, and let Silvio watch the shadows on the wall. The mother could hear him say, "A rabbit! An animal with horns! A long-legged spider!"

The clock struck ten before they thought it could possibly be so late. Rico immediately arose, for it was his usual time to leave, but a dark cloud seemed to settle on his face as he said good night and went out.

Stineli noticed that something was wrong with Rico, so she followed him to the garden. She took his hand impulsively and said: "You have been so good to bring me here, Rico, that I shall be very sorry if you are not going to be happy. You can come over every day; don't you think we can be happy?"

"Yes, and every night, no matter how happy we are here, I have to go away and remember that I don't belong to anybody."

"But you must not think that, because you and I have always belonged to each other. If you only knew how I missed you all those long years that you were away! Many times I had to work so hard that I would rather not have lived at all, but I used to think that I would gladly bear it if I could just see you once more. Now that everything has turned out so beautifully, I am sure that we ought to be happy."

"Really, Stineli, I will try," said Rico, and the cloud vanished as they stood with clasped hands for a moment before he left the garden.

Stineli bade Silvio good night when she returned to the house, but he grasped her hand and begged her to stay with him.

"Very well," said the mother, "Stineli may stay, but to-morrow she will be ill, and you will have to do without her."

"Then go to sleep now, but come early in the morning," said the boy.

Mrs. Menotti had prepared a cozy room upstairs for Stineli. It overlooked the garden, and the outdoor fragrance greeted them as they entered. The girl went to sleep feeling assured that her new home would prove to be a happy one.

At first Stineli was handicapped in her new surroundings by her ignorance of Italian, but it was remarkable how well she and Silvio entertained each other. He was always obedient and cheerful in her presence, and complained of loneliness whenever she was gone. Mrs. Menotti noticed with gratitude how rapidly her son was gaining in strength. He enjoyed his meals more than ever before, for Stineli liked to arrange things prettily, and to plan surprises for him on his tray. Then, too, he slept better and longer than had been his custom.

Stineli was tireless in her efforts to please the sick child. She adapted everything at hand to his entertainment. Having always lived with children, she understood how to amuse them. In a remarkably short time she had learned all the Italian that Silvio used. She soon began to tell him stories, although some words failed her and others came with painful slowness for a time.

Now that Mrs. Menotti was freed from the care of Silvio, she formed the habit of going to meet Rico when she saw him coming. She was always eager to express her appreciation of Stineli.

"I hadn't supposed that a young girl could be so thoughtful," she said at one time. "She does things for Silvio from morning until night as if it were a real pleasure to her, and she knows as much about housekeeping as a woman. I feel as if it were Sunday every day." Rico never tired of hearing Stineli praised.

Any one seeing the group sitting so cozily together when Rico was there would have taken them to be a very happy family, and so they were until the hour arrived for Rico to leave them. His face darkened every night so that Stineli was worried, but Mrs. Menotti was too much absorbed in Silvio's happiness to notice it.

CHAPTER XIX

CLOUDS AT LAKE GARDA

One evening when Rico came, he said that he could not be with them again for two days, as he must go to Riva to play for a dance. This was a disappointment to them all, and especially to Stineli. "I hope the weather will be good," she said; "then you will have such a fine sail on the lake. It will be beautiful, too, coming back in the moonlight."

Everything Rico played that night was sad, and he failed, in spite of his efforts, to shake off his wretchedness. Long before it was ten o'clock he put up his violin and rose to go. Mrs. Menotti urged him to stay, but she did not notice his unhappy face.

"I will go with Rico for a little way," said Stineli.

"No, no; don't go away, Stineli!" cried Silvio.

"Stay with him, Stineli; never mind me," said Rico, with the same finality with which he had said, "There is no use to think of it," after his interview with the teacher, when he had found out the price of a violin.

Stineli whispered to Silvio, "Be a brave little boy, dearie, and don't cry for me; then I will tell you ever so many stories to-morrow." As usual he obeyed her.

When Rico and Stineli came to the garden gate he said: "Go back, Stineli; you belong there and I belong to the street. I am only a poor, homeless orphan, so just let me go and don't worry."

"No, no, you shall not leave me while you feel in this way. Where can we go to talk a little while?"

"To the bridge," answered Rico, eagerly.

They walked on in silence, and after reaching their favorite place on the bridge, stood listening to the splash of the waves below them until Rico said, "Really, Stineli, if it were not for you, I wouldn't stay here any longer. I would go ever so far away, it would make little difference where, since there is no one that cares for me and I shall always have to live in hotels, and sleep in storerooms, and play for dances where people act as if they were crazy. Since I have seen you living with these good people, I have wished that my mother had thrown me into the lake before she died, so that I need not have come to be what I am."

"O Rico, how dare you think such wicked thoughts, much less express them! It must be that you have been neglecting the Lord's Prayer or you would not be so unhappy," said Stineli.

"It is true," said Rico; "I have not said it, and I am sure I have forgotten it altogether by this time."

"But how dare you live so?" asked Stineli. "Just think how grandmother would worry about you if she knew that! You must remember how she said to us, 'The one that forgets to pray will have a hard time.' You must learn the prayer again. Let us sit down here and I will teach it to you."

After Stineli had repeated the prayer twice she said, "You can see from this that the whole kingdom belongs to God, and you can trust Him to find a home for you, because it also says that the power is His."

"If He has a home for me in His kingdom and has the power to give it, He clearly doesn't want to," retorted Rico.

"Have you asked Him to give it to you?"

"No."

"Grandmother said that we must ask for things we want. It is very likely that He thinks you can ask Him if you really want anything."

After a moment's silence Rico said, "Say the prayer once more; I will learn it."

In a short time they were walking back to the garden, where they parted for the night. On the way to the hotel Rico thought of the kingdom and the power. He felt convinced that he had neglected a sacred duty, and that night, in his cheerless attic room, he knelt by his bed and prayed.

Stineli meant to go in as soon as Rico left her, and tell Mrs. Menotti of his unhappiness, hoping that she might help the boy to find some more suitable employment, since he so disliked playing for dances, but this intention was not carried out, for Silvio had been taken suddenly ill while she was gone, and was lying exhausted on his pillow, flushed and breathing heavily. The mother sat crying softly beside him. Stineli had never seen him ill before, and she stood wondering what she should do.

Mrs. Menotti soon noticed her presence and said: "Sit down, Stineli; he is better now, and I should like to tell you about something that troubles me greatly. You are young, but I feel sure it will do me good to have you know about it.

"When Mr. Menotti and I were first married, he brought me here from Riva, where my father is still living. An old friend of my husband's lived here, but he wished to go away for a few years, because his wife had died and he found it too hard to live here without her; he wanted us to live on his place while he was away. He had a little house and a large farm of not especially good land, but since Mr. Menotti understood perfectly how to manage a farm, it was agreed between them, as intimate friends, that there was to be no rent; we were simply to keep everything in good condition so that he would find his place in order when he returned.

"A few years later the railway officials decided to build on the land, and paid much more than it was worth to get it. Mr. Menotti took the money, and being able to buy much better land, including this garden, he built this house. There was money enough to pay for it all. The land brought rich returns, and we prospered to such an extent that I was worried, for it did not belong

to us. Mr. Menotti was happy over it because he had such a pleasant surprise for his friend, to whom he meant to turn it all over as soon as he returned; but he never came.

"As Silvio grew older, and I saw how weak he was, I feared that his illness might be sent as a punishment to us for living upon the profits of another's money, and I have felt the same to-night. Mr. Menotti died four years ago. I am sure I would gladly give things over to the rightful owner, if I could, but I don't know where to find him. The man may be sick somewhere, or in need, and it worries me beyond measure."

"I think you have no reason to worry, since you have done the best you could," said Stineli. "My grandmother taught me to ask God to make things right, if it was beyond my own power.

"*I* am worried about Rico," Stineli continued, "and I can do nothing for him, so I have asked God to help him, and Rico has promised that he will do his part. I feel sure that this burden can be lifted from you in the same way, if you will only ask Him to make it right in His sight. My grandmother has taught me that we are all governed in harmony by the Creator so long as we seek the divine will. It is like a great chorus in which every member sings in tune because he is governed by the harmony of music, and so I always try to put myself back where I belong, when I feel any discord. I have never been disappointed in trusting God with the results."

"You are a wise girl, Stineli, and you have truly comforted me," said Mrs. Menotti, as she kissed Stineli and bade her good night.

CHAPTER XX

AT HOME

A glorious day dawned upon Peschiera the next morning, and Mrs. Menotti hurried to the garden to enjoy it more fully. She took her accustomed seat on a rustic bench near the gate and looked about her with appreciative eyes. The oleander bushes were in full bloom beside her, behind her was the hedge to screen the garden from the street, and yonder were the loaded fig trees, while near by were the grapevines, dotted with clusters of ripe fruit.

"I realize," she said to herself, "that I shall never find so pretty a home again."

Just at this moment Rico opened the gate. He had not been able to let the beautiful morning pass without seeing his friends, as he was obliged to go to Riva a little later. He had not noticed Mrs. Menotti, and was going directly to the house when she called to him.

"I want you to sit here with me for a few moments, Rico, if you will. What a fine day this promises to be! I have just been wondering how long I may still be here to enjoy it."

"You alarm me, Mrs. Menotti. You are not thinking of going away?"

"I beg your pardon, Rico, for speaking so thoughtlessly; I should not have mentioned it." She changed the subject, and presently, recalling what Stineli had told her the previous evening about Rico's trouble, she began to wonder what it could be. She had been so absorbed in her own affairs at the time that she had given it but a moment's thought.

"Won't you tell me, Rico, why you came to Lake Garda? Stineli told me last evening that you used to long to come here. Were you ever here before?"

"Yes, when I was a child, but I was taken away."

"How did you happen to come here as a child?"

"I came into the world here."

"You were born here? Who was your father, and why did he come here from the mountains?"

"He wasn't from the mountains; it was my mother who lived there."

"Why, Rico, your father was not a Peschieran?"

"He surely was, Mrs. Menotti; this was his home."

"How very strange! And you never have told me this in all these years! Feeling that you did not care to talk of your earlier life, I have never asked you to tell me your last name. But 'Rico' is not Italian. What was your father called?"

"The same as I, Enrico Trevillo."

Mrs. Menotti sprang from the seat as if she had been struck. "What are you saying?" she exclaimed. "What did you say just now?"

"My father's name," said Rico. "Why, what is the matter?"

Mrs. Menotti did not stay to answer him. She ran to the house and hastily said to Stineli: "Get me a wrap, please. I must go over to see the pastor, but I will be back soon and explain."

Stineli, much astonished, put a cape around the trembling form.

"Come with me, Rico, for I want to ask a few questions," said Mrs. Menotti, but she was so agitated that she could think of nothing to ask except if he were sure that Enrico Trevillo was his father. Rico returned to the house after leaving Mrs. Menotti with the pastor. Stineli and Silvio were laughing over a funny story when he arrived. As soon as Silvio saw the violin he shouted, "Let us sing 'Little Lambs' with Stineli, because Rico is here to play."

Rico had learned a great number of new songs, so that Stineli had nearly forgotten all about "her song." She had not heard it since they sang it for the grandmother the evening they had composed it. It astonished her to find that Silvio knew anything about it. How was she to know that Rico had been singing that song time after time, before he knew any others?

She gladly consented to sing it with Rico. To her great surprise Silvio began singing with them. To be sure, he did not know the meaning of a word he was saying, but he remembered the sounds from having heard them so often. He gave the words such a funny pronunciation that Stineli had to laugh. Silvio laughed because she laughed; then Rico could not help laughing, and so the song waited. They began again time after time, only to stop as before, and when Mrs. Menotti returned, she found them all still laughing and trying to sing.

She had been making a strong effort to adjust herself to the new order of things which the eventful morning had brought about. She crossed the garden hastily and came in where the children were. The laughter hushed as she sank exhausted into a chair, and they gazed at her in astonishment.

"Rico," she said, as soon as she had gathered a little composure, "I have just found out from the pastor that this home—the house, garden, farm, and everything—is yours. It is your inheritance from your father and belongs to you. Your name is recorded in the baptismal record of the church; you are the son of Enrico Trevillo, who was my husband's most intimate friend."

Stineli had almost from the first grasped the meaning of it all, and it gave her an unspeakable happiness. Her face was radiant, and Mrs. Menotti thought, "How beautiful the girl looks!"

Rico sat staring at the mother, speechless and bewildered. Silvio shouted, "All of a sudden the house belongs to Rico; where shall he sleep?"

"Where, Silvio?" repeated the mother. "In all the rooms, if he chooses. He can turn us out on the street at once if he likes."

"Then I should certainly go out on the street with you," said Rico.

"Oh, you good Rico! We will gladly stay if it will give you pleasure. I was thinking on the way home of how we could arrange it if you should wish to have us here. I could buy a half interest in the place, and then one half would belong to you and one half to Silvio."

"Then I will give my half to Stineli," declared Silvio.

"And I my half too," said Rico.

"Hurrah! now everything belongs to Stineli," shouted Silvio, gleefully. "The garden, the house, and everything in it—the chairs, the table, the violin, and you and I too are hers. Now let's sing again!"

Rico, in the meantime, had been thinking, and now hesitatingly asked, "How can it be that Silvio's father's house belongs to me, even if he was my father's best friend?"

This reminded Mrs. Menotti that as yet Rico knew none of the circumstances leading up to her discovery, so she began from the beginning and related the events in the proper order. When she finished, there was a grand jubilee among the children, because they realized that there was nothing to hinder Rico's coming to live with them immediately.

After the commotion had somewhat subsided, Rico said to Mrs. Menotti: "You must let nothing here be changed because this good fortune has come to me. I will simply come and live with you, and we shall all be at home, and you can be our mother."

"O Rico, to think it should be you of all people!" exclaimed Mrs. Menotti. "How well Stineli has advised us to let our troubles be made right, and how soon the answer came! I gladly give the property over to you, and I gladly remain here, too. I will be a true mother to you, Rico, for I have long loved you as an own son. You and Stineli must call me mother after this. We shall be the happiest family in all Peschiera."

"Now we *must* finish our song," burst out Silvio, who felt so happy that his feelings needed an outlet. Rico and Stineli were no less jubilant, and they sang merrily.

Rico was about to put up his violin, when Stineli said, "I should like to stop with a different song, Rico; can you guess which one?"

"Yes, I can." Then they sang in gratitude to God and in sweet memory of the dear old grandmother who taught it to them:

"He never will refuse His aid
    If you a prayer will send;
Whatever in His care is laid
    Shall have a happy end.

Then let the blessing onward go,
    And cause it not to stay,
That you may rest in peace below
    And happy be alway."

It is needless to say that Rico did not go to Riva that day. The situation was immediately explained to the hotel people, so that they could hire a substitute to play for the dance. How glad Rico was to be excused they could scarcely imagine.

The landlady received the information with the greatest astonishment. She hastily called her husband and told him the news. Later she congratulated Rico and said to him that she heartily wished for God's blessing upon his home. Not in the least did she begrudge him his good fortune. She had really grown very fond of him, and her pleasure was genuine. For some time the people of the hotel Three Crosses had been making Rico liberal offers to come to live with them, and she was relieved that now this could not happen. Her husband was glad for Rico, because he had known the father well; he wondered now that he had never noticed the striking resemblance between father and son.

Rico left word to have his belongings sent over to his house the next day, and then bade them a friendly farewell.

"We want you to give us your orders for all the entertaining you may do in the future," the landlady said, as he was about to leave. Rico thanked them in his usual quiet fashion and departed.

Before night nearly all Peschiera had heard of Rico's good fortune. He was a favorite in town, and the news caused much rejoicing.

Mrs. Menotti spared no pains to make Rico comfortable in his new home. The large front room upstairs was prepared for his special use. After everything had been arranged to her satisfaction, she went to gather some flowers as a finishing touch, and she had just placed them on the table when she heard Rico coming.

"Mrs. Menotti has your room ready, and she is upstairs," said Stineli. "Won't you go up to see it now?"

Rico expected to see a pleasant room, but he was not prepared to find the artistic effect which held him spellbound as he reached the threshold. Mrs. Menotti understood his nature so well that she knew what he would like, and she had arranged every detail herself. She met him at the door, and taking his hand, led him to the windows overlooking the lake. Rico wished to express his gratitude, but he could only murmur, "I am so glad to be at home."

In the sitting room downstairs, where the doors opened so pleasantly into the garden, the family, after Rico had come to stay, spent the most delightful evenings imaginable. Ten o'clock no longer brought sadness to the happy circle, and the months slipped by quite unheeded.

Rico was now supposed to manage his business, and he usually spent the days in the field and garden with his foreman. The first day they were out together the foreman thought, "I know more than my master," but that evening, when the soul-inspiring strains of the violin and voice came floating out to him across the garden, he thought, "My master does know more than I"; and thereafter he had a profound respect for Rico.

CHAPTER XXI

SUNSHINE AT LAKE GARDA

Two years had passed since Rico had come to his home, and it seemed to them all that every day was filled with more pleasure than the preceding one. Stineli knew that the time was at hand when she ought to go home, and it made her sad whenever she thought of it. There was the possibility that she might not be allowed to come back, and she could think of nothing worse than that. Rico, too, began to be unhappy about it, for he had promised that she should go back to be confirmed. It seemed to be his duty to let her go, and though he put it off from day to day, it weighed upon his mind to such an extent that he scarcely spoke except when it was necessary.

Mrs. Menotti saw that something was wrong, and inquired into the cause; she had long ago forgotten that Stineli would ever have to leave them. When they told her she said, "Stineli is still very young; it will be just as well to wait until she is older"; so they had one more year of undisturbed pleasure.

One day, about a year later, a message came from Bergamo, saying that some one was there who was to take Stineli back with him. There was no way out of it now, so the preparations for the journey began. Silvio cried and cried because his Stineli was going away.

"You must be sure to come back," said Mrs. Menotti. "Promise your father anything he wants if he will only let you come."

Rico said scarcely a word when Stineli went, but it seemed to him that she took all the sunshine in the world away with her. The clouds remained from November to the following Easter. The days had dragged along in monotonous fashion, with the zest of life completely gone.

Now it was Easter Sunday. The festivities of the day were over, the garden was one mass of bloom, and the fields gave promise of a bountiful harvest. It ought to have made everybody happy, yet here was Rico, sitting with Silvio in the midst of all this luxury and beauty, playing the most melancholy tunes he could think of. To be sure they suited Rico's mood, but they depressed Silvio and made him extremely fretful. Suddenly they heard, "Rico, haven't you a more cheerful welcome?"

Silvio screamed for joy. Rico threw the violin on the bed and rushed out. Mrs. Menotti came in from an adjoining room to see what had happened. There on the threshold stood Stineli. The sunshine was back again. She had not had the slightest notion of the hearty welcome that awaited her return. In fact, the others had not realized how necessary she was to their happiness until she was gone. They gathered about Silvio's bed as usual, and they asked questions and answered them and rejoiced that the days of separation were over.

A few years later something came about so naturally that it seemed as if it could not have been otherwise. One lovely day in May—as fine a day as Peschiera had ever seen—a long wedding procession moved from the church to the Golden Sun. The tall, handsome Rico was at the head, and by his side, with a wreath of roses on her fair brow, was the beautiful Stineli. Next came Silvio, in a softly upholstered cart drawn by two Peschiera boys. Next in line was the mother, in her rustling festive attire, looking somewhat pale and tired. The flower girls who came next were almost hidden in the roses they carried; following them came the guests, and it seemed from their number that all Peschiera must have turned out to do honor to the young bride and bridegroom.

The pride of the landlady of the Golden Sun, when she saw the procession coming, can be better imagined than described. Ever after, when anybody told about a wedding, she would say

scornfully, "That is nothing compared to Rico's wedding at the Golden Sun."

The loyal Peschierans rejoiced that Rico was to make his home among them. The sunshine never again left him, and the home nestled in the beautiful garden was always a happy one. Stineli never let the Lord's Prayer be forgotten, and the grandmother's song could be heard every Sunday night.

WISELI FINDS HER PLACE

CHAPTER I

COASTING

Directly opposite the city of Bern lies a small village beautifully situated on a hill. I cannot tell you what it is called, but I will describe it to you so that you may know it if you are ever there. On the summit of the hill there is but one house; it is surrounded by a flower garden, which meets on each side of the house the stretch of lawn at the front. This residence is called The Hill, and is the home of Colonel Ritter. A short distance down the hill, on a level stretch of ground, stands the church, with the parsonage beside it. This is where Mrs. Ritter spent her happy girlhood as the pastor's daughter. Still farther down, amid a group of houses, is the schoolhouse. On the left of these, all by itself, stands an attractive little house with a garden. In the front lawn are placed some flower beds containing roses, carnations, and mignonette. The asparagus beds at the sides of the house are screened from the front by a low raspberry hedge. The whole place presents a well-kept appearance. The road goes on down the hill to the main road that follows along the Aar River to the open country.

This long, sloping hill provided excellent coasting during the winter. The distance from the top of the hill to the Aar road below made a continuous coast of about ten minutes' duration. This incomparable sledge course gave to the children of the village the greatest pleasure of the year. No sooner was school dismissed than they ran for their sleds and hurried up the hill. The hours passed like minutes, so that six o'clock, the time when they were expected at home, came much too soon. The closing scene on the hill was usually an interesting one, for they always wanted to go down once more before they broke up for the night, and then once again, and after that just one single time more, so that it might be inferred from their excited haste that their lives depended upon making as many trips as possible.

They were usually governed by a wise rule that compelled them all to ride down and return in the same order, so as to avoid the possibility of collision and confusion; but the rule was occasionally disregarded, when the final excitement swayed them. This happened to be the case on a bright January night, when the intense cold made the snow crackle as it was crunched under the feet of the children, who came panting up the hill, drawing their sleds after them, their faces glowing from their exertions. The boys were shouting, "Once more! once more!" as they turned their sleds and fell into line.

Now it happened that three of the boys claimed the same place in the file, and not one was willing to go behind the others. During the dispute two of them crowded the big boy Chappi to one side into the snow, where his heavy sled sank into the drift. This made him angry, for it gave the others the opportunity to get ahead of him. In glancing back he noticed a little girl standing near, watching him; she had wrapped her hands in her apron to keep them warm, but she was shivering in her thin dress.

"Can't you get out of the way, you ragged thing?" he cried angrily. "What business have you here anyway, since you have no sled? I'll teach you how to get away."

He kicked a cloud of snow at her and was just ready to repeat it when some one behind him gave him a fierce blow. In great rage he doubled up his fist and turned savagely to attack his unknown foe.

It was Otto Ritter, who had just placed his sled in line and who now stood looking calmly at Chappi's clenched fist and raised arm. "Strike if you dare," was all he said.

Otto was a tall, slender boy, not nearly so stout as Chappi, but he had already proved, in previous encounters, that he possessed a skill in handling himself against which Chappi's weight counted for little. Chappi was too wise to strike, but he shook his fist in the air and snarled, "Clear out! I don't care to have anything to do with you."

"But I have something to do with you," retorted Otto. "What business have you to drive Wiseli into the drift and then pelt her with snow besides? You are a coward to attack a defenseless child."

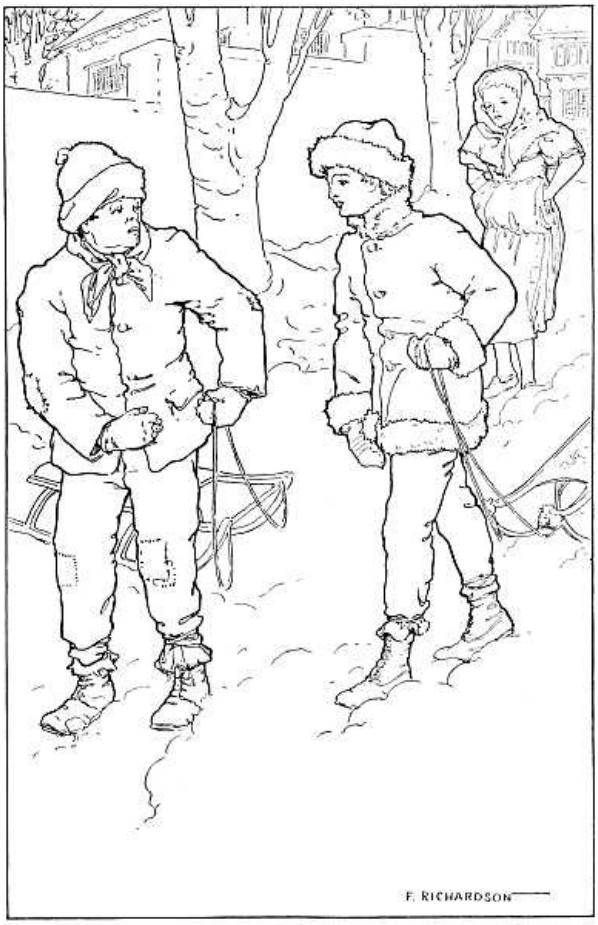
Otto disdainfully turned his back upon Chappi and went toward the girl, who was standing knee-deep in the snowdrift. "Come out of the snow, Wiseli," he said gently. "Is it true that you have no sled?"

"I was only looking at the rest," she answered timidly.

"Take mine and go down once," said Otto. "Hurry, for they are going to start in a minute."

Wiseli glanced quickly at Chappi, afraid that he would interfere with her going, but the boy seemed to have forgotten all about her. Otto helped her to seat herself on the sled, and the next minute she was going down the hill behind the others.

Wiseli had watched them for ten or fifteen minutes, and had secretly wished that she might be allowed to sit on one of the large sleds used to carry several at a time, but to go down alone was more than she had even hoped for; besides, this was the prettiest sled of all. It had a lion's head for the front decoration, and was finished with steel runners and made of light material so that it beat all the others in a race.



It seemed to Otto but a moment before the party returned, so he shouted, "Stay in line, Wiseli, and go down once more."

Wiseli immediately turned her sled and gladly led the line down the hill. She murmured timid thanks to Otto when she returned with the sled, but the happy, flushed face would have satisfied him even if she had said nothing. She heard Otto calling his sister as she started homeward through the panting crowd.

"Here I am!" and a plump, rosy-cheeked little girl came to him with her sled. Otto took his sister's warm little hand in his and they hastened home. They had spent much more than the allotted time to-night, but they had enjoyed themselves too much to entertain any regrets whatever.

CHAPTER II

THE HOME ON THE HILL

As Otto and his sister rushed into the long hall with its stone floor, they were met by Trina, an old and faithful servant, who held the lamp she was carrying high above her head to avoid getting the light in her eyes.

"You are here at last," she said half impatiently and half indulgently. "Your mother has been wanting you, and we have all waited for you until long after supper time."

Trina had been in the family before the children were born, and she exercised the same authority over them as did the parents, while she was even more indulgent. In fact, she idolized them both; but for their good, according to her views, she did not wish them to be too sure of it. Consequently she was always trying to be somewhat gruff for their especial benefit.

"Out of your shoes and into your slippers!" she commanded. She put the light down, and kneeling before Otto she unfastened his shoes and put the dry slippers on his feet. In the meantime she was urging the little sister to begin removing her wet shoes, but Miezi stood listening intently to something she thought she heard from the living room.

"Well," said Trina, "are you going to wait until next summer? Your shoes will be dry before then."

"Hush!" warned Miezi with upraised hand; "I heard something. Who is in the other room, Trina?"

"Only people with dry shoes are going in there," said Trina, still kneeling before Otto.

Just then Miezi gave a startled exclamation. "There, I heard it again! It is Uncle Max's laugh, I am sure."

"What!" exclaimed Otto, and both children rushed for the living room door. "Let me go in first, Otto; I heard him first!" cried Miezi, endeavoring to push herself ahead of him; but Trina picked her up in her arms and carried her to the hall seat, where the old servant had a hard time trying to get the wet shoes from the impatient feet. The moment the girl was released she bounded into the living room and into Uncle Max's arms, for it was really he, sitting in the large armchair, looking as happy and prosperous as ever.

The children quite worshiped Uncle Max. He was their especial friend, from whom they had no secrets. His travels kept him away much of the time, and they seldom saw him more than once a year, but this seemed to make his visits the more appreciated, especially as he always brought them remembrances from the remotest parts of the world. Each time he came seemed a holiday to the children.

To-night they were hurried to the table, where a steaming supper awaited them. The children's excitement over the uncle's coming abated somewhat before this enjoyment, for coasting always brought sharpened appetites. Miezi was industriously engaged with her soup when her father said: "I think my little girl has forgotten her papa to-night. I missed my usual kiss and handshake."

Miezi instantly let her spoon drop and pushed her chair back to run to the neglected parent, but he stopped her with, "No, no, you need not trouble now."

"I didn't mean to forget you, papa," she said.

"We will make up for it after supper, Miezchen," said the father. "What did we christen the child, anyway?" he continued. "Wasn't it Maria?"

"I was there when she was baptized," said Max, "but I cannot remember. It surely was not Miezchen."

"Of course you were there," asserted his sister. "You were the child's godfather, and we called her Marie. It was papa himself who first called her Miezchen, and Otto made it still worse."

"No, mamma, surely not worse," interposed Otto. "You see, Uncle Max, it is like this: if she is a good little girl I call her Miezchen; this she is so seldom, however, that I usually call her Miezi. When she is angry and looks like a little ruffled hen, I call her Miez."

"And when Otto is angry, what does he look like?" inquired Uncle Max, addressing Miezi.

Before she could think of a comparison, Otto answered, "Like a man!"

They all laughed so heartily that Miezi stirred her soup violently in her confusion.

Uncle Max tactfully changed the subject: "It has been over a year since I have seen you children, and I wish you would tell me what you have been doing while I have been away."

Naturally the latest news was related first, and, in their eagerness to have Uncle Max know everything, both children wished to speak at once. Among other things they told of the fun they had in school, and that led Otto to tell about his experience with Chappi and Wiseli; how she had been driven into the snowdrift and rudely treated, and how, though she had no sled, she finally had had two rides on his.

"That was right, Otto," said his father; "always take the part of the weak and the oppressed, and honor the meaning of your name. Who is this little girl you speak of?"

"I doubt if you know her," answered Mrs. Ritter, "but Max knew the mother very well. You remember the frail linen weaver that lived near us? She was his daughter and only child, and she used to come often to the parsonage. She was a pretty girl with large brown eyes, and she could sing beautifully. Do you remember whom I mean?"

Just at this moment Trina brought in a message: "Joiner Andreas begs permission to speak with Mrs. Ritter, if it will not disturb her."

Quite a commotion followed this announcement. Mrs. Ritter dropped the spoon with which she was serving, and saying hastily, "Excuse me, please," left the room.

Otto and Miezi immediately pushed back their chairs to go also, but Uncle Max held Miezi fast. Otto stumbled over something in his haste, and Miezi struggled hard to free herself. "Do let me go, Uncle Max! Let me go!" she cried.

"Why do you want to go, Miezchen?"

"To see Joiner Andreas. Let me go. Help me, papa."

"Tell me why you want to see Joiner Andreas, and I will let you go."

"My sheep has but two legs left and no tail, and only Joiner Andreas knows how to fix it. Now let me go."

Miezi's papa and Uncle Max laughed as she ran from the room.

"Who is this man that has the whole household at his command?" inquired Uncle Max.

"You ought to know better than I," answered Colonel Ritter. "Very likely he is an old playmate of yours. I am sure you would enjoy knowing him. Your sister makes us all love him. He is really the corner stone of this household, without whom things generally would go to rack and ruin. It doesn't matter what happens, for 'Joiner Andreas will fix it.' In fact he is helper, adviser, comforter, and friend, all in one."

"You may laugh," said Mrs. Ritter, who returned just then, "but I know that Joiner Andreas is a comfort."

"So do I," said the husband, playfully.

"So do I," echoed Miezi, as she seated herself at the table.

"So do I," added Otto, who was rubbing the knuckles he had bruised in his hasty exit.

"Then we are all agreed," said the mother. "Now I want you children to go to bed."

"To which we are not all agreed," said Otto, teasingly.

However, Trina came and they were obliged to go. The mother followed after a time, as was her custom, to hear the children's evening prayer and receive their last embrace for the night. This often required some time, for they were eager to tell her many things, and detained her for their own pleasure. To-night she remained until they were quiet and then returned to the gentlemen in the sitting room.

"At last," said Colonel Ritter, apparently as relieved as if he had just conquered an enemy. "You see, Max, my wife's time belongs first of all to Joiner Andreas, and then to the children; if there is any left, it belongs to me."

"Oh, it's not quite so bad as that!" corrected Mrs. Ritter. "You like Andreas just as well as the rest of us do, even though you won't admit it. That reminds me, he told me that he had received the money from his yearly profit and wanted your advice about investing it."

"Yes, it is a fact," said the colonel, "that I never saw a more trustworthy or energetic man than he. I would trust him with all I have. He is by far the most reliable and wide-awake man in our parish."

"Now you know what he thinks of him, Max," said Mrs. Ritter, laughing.

"Yes, to be sure," said the brother, "but you have said so much about this man that I am curious to see him. Did I ever know him?"

"Why, Max! to think of your asking!" his sister admonished him. "You used to go to school together and you knew him well. Don't you remember the two brothers who were in your class, the older one such a good-for-nothing boy? Not that he was stupid, but he didn't care to study, so the younger one was in the same class. The older one's name was George, and he was rather striking in appearance because of his heavy black hair. Whenever he saw us he would pelt us with stones or apples, and he invariably called us 'aristocrat-breed.'"

Uncle Max laughed. "Yes, I should say I do remember him distinctly," he said. "That word I shall never forget—'aristocrat-breed.' I should like to know how he got hold of it. I remember very well what a tyrant he was. I interfered once when I saw him unmercifully pommeling a much smaller boy, and he took his vengeance on me by calling me 'aristocrat-breed' at least a dozen times.

Now, of a sudden, I remember the other one too. Can it be that little Andreas with the violets has become your hero? Now I comprehend the intimacy, Marie."

"The violets!" broke in Colonel Ritter. "I have heard nothing about the violets."

"Why, I see that scene before me as if it were but yesterday," continued Max, "and I am going to tell you about it, Otto. You have no doubt heard Marie tell about the teacher we had in those days, who believed that the bad should be whipped out of children and the good whipped into them. Consequently he was much of the time engaged in punishing us for one or both purposes. At one time he was administering this treatment to the little Andreas, and he struck the boy such a heavy blow across the back that he screamed outright. Well, my little sister, who had just begun to go to school, and who didn't understand the teacher's well-meant methods, immediately rose from her seat and marched down the aisle to the door.

"The teacher stopped to see what had happened, holding his rod poised in the air long enough to ask, 'Where are you going?'

"Marie turned around and, with tears streaming down her face, answered loud enough for the whole school to hear, 'I am going home to tell my papa.'

"I shall never forget how the teacher left the astonished Andreas and rushed upon Marie. 'Just wait and I'll teach *you*,' he threatened. He roughly took her by the arm and forced her back to her seat, muttering, 'I'll teach *you*!' That ended the scene, however, for he sent Andreas to his seat without further punishment, and nothing more was said to Marie.

"Andreas never forgot this kind act in his behalf, and he always brought Marie a bunch of violets when he came to school; I used to notice how they perfumed the schoolroom. Occasionally there would be a cluster of strawberries or something else equally appropriate. How the friendship has extended to the present state of affairs I shall have to let my sister explain."

"My dear wife, I am eager to have this brought up to date," remarked the colonel.

Mrs. Ritter laughed with the others and began: "The strawberries and violets were given as Max said, but you have forgotten how soon Andreas left school after I entered. He went to the city to learn the joiner's trade. I didn't lose track of him, however, for he often came home. When Otto and I were married and bought this place, he came to consult us about his own purchase of some property. The owner of the place wanted cash, and Andreas, who had lost his parents, hadn't the money. Otto lent him the sum he needed and has never regretted it."

"I should say not," broke in the colonel. "He paid for that long ago, and since that time has laid by a good sum of his own. He brings his money to me, and I invest it for him. His interest is adding to his capital, and he could now afford to build a much better house and live with more comforts. It is a shame that he is all alone in the world."

"Hasn't he a wife? And where is George?" asked Max.

"Andreas lives all alone," answered the sister. "I think his history is too sad for him ever to take a wife. George led a wild life around here until Andreas refused to help him out of any more scrapes, and now he has disappeared, for he couldn't pay his debts. People were relieved to have him out of the neighborhood, but everybody respects Andreas."

"What do you mean by his sad experience, Marie?" inquired Max.

"I should like to hear about that, too," said the husband.

"Why, Otto!" said Mrs. Ritter, "I have told you about it at least a dozen times."

"Is that so? It must please me," answered the husband, laughing.

"Can you recall, Max, the girl whom we were speaking of at the table to-night when Andreas came? We could hear her father's loom from our garden, they lived so near us. I told you the girl was very pretty. She had a charming manner and her name was Aloise."

"Never in my life have I known anybody by that name," asserted Max.

"I know why you say so," corrected his sister. "We never called her that, and I am sure that you never did. We called her Wisi, much to our dear mother's disgust. You often went over to get her when we wanted to have some music, because she could sing so well."

"Oh, yes, I remember Wisi," said Max, "and I used to like the girl, too; but I don't believe that I ever knew of her being named anything else."

"I know that you used to know, Max," persisted Mrs. Ritter. "Mother so often deplored the fact that we would not use the pretty name Aloise, and she never liked what we did call her."

"What became of Wisi?" inquired Max.

"Well," continued Mrs. Ritter, "Wisi and I were much together, for we were in the same class and went from grade to grade at the same time. Andreas, through all those years, was her stanchest friend, and she willingly accepted his attentions, often finding his friendship of great advantage to herself.

"For one thing we were supposed to bring certain examples worked out on our slates when we

came to school in the morning, but Wisi's slate was usually blank. She was always light-hearted and merry, and she would put her slate on her desk in a very unconcerned way and go out to play; when she returned, the slate was filled with neatly copied examples.

"Once it was brought before the school that some one had broken a windowpane, and again, that some one had shaken the teacher's fruit trees, and I remember that we all knew it was Wisi's fault; but Andreas took the blame upon himself and the punishment also. The rest of us accepted it as a matter of course, for we all liked Wisi and were used to having her escape.

"How it happened that the quietest, most earnest boy in school should care especially about the most mischievous girl used to puzzle us, and I often wondered if Wisi were not indifferent to Andreas's interest in her. I asked mamma about it one day, and she said, 'I am afraid that Aloise is somewhat vain, and that she may live to see the bad results of her carelessness.' After that I worried about her myself.

"Some time later we had Bible studies together, preparatory to our confirmation, and she took such an interest in them that we began to think she had given up her mischievous ways. She regularly came to sing with us Sunday evenings, and we liked to have her with us, for her cheerfulness infected us all. By this time she was a very pretty young woman, not rugged, but perfectly well; and she far surpassed the other girls of the neighborhood in grace, beauty, and accomplishments. Andreas was still at his trade, but he managed to come home nearly every Sunday. We could all see how much he cared for Wisi. He was the only one that ever called her Wiseli, and he always accented the name so softly that we thought it was very pretty.

"One Sunday night, when Wisi and I were not quite eighteen years of age, she came in radiantly happy and told us that she was soon to be married. The man to whom she was betrothed had but recently come to the village and was employed at the factory. I was so astonished and grieved over the news that I could say nothing. Mother, however, asked her to take some time to consider the matter thoroughly, because it was too important a step to take hurriedly. Mother told her that she was very young and that she must not forget that there was some one else who had loved her for years, of whose intentions she could have no doubt; then, too, her father needed her, and she ought to help him a few years more.

"Wisi cried because mother talked so earnestly, but she said that her father had given his consent and it was all arranged that they were to be married in two weeks. 'Then,' said mother, 'we must make the best of it and try to be happy. I will play our favorite melody and we will sing the words.

"Commit thou all thy ways
And all that grieves thy heart
To Him whose endless days
Can strength and grace impart.

"He gives to wind and wave
The power to be still;
For thee He'll surely save
A place to work His will."'

"When Wisi left us that night she was as cheerful as ever, but I could not help feeling that her happiest days were over. Then, too, I feared for Andreas, but he said nothing, although he has never been the same since. For several years he seemed to be far from well, but he did not give up work."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Max; "and he never married?"

"Why, no, Max!" said Mrs. Ritter, impatiently, "how could he when he is faithfulness itself?"

"How was I to know that he possessed that virtue also, dear sister? He seems to have them all. How did Wisi get along? I should be sorry to hear that her marriage proved a failure."

"I can plainly see that your sympathy is with her," replied Mrs. Ritter. "To you, Andreas's fate does not matter so much."

"Not so, sister, but those pretty eyes of hers ought never to have been spoiled with tears. Isn't she happy?"

"I fear not, Max. I have seen but little of her since her marriage. There was a coarseness in her husband's nature that repelled me, and he was always cross to her. Six children were born to them, and all but one, a frail little girl, have died. She is called Wiseli, and is about the size of our Miezchen, although she is three years older. She is the little girl whom Otto defended this evening. Her mother has suffered so much during all these years, that there is little hope of her ever being well again."

"That is too bad," said Max; "we must try to do something for her. Don't you think that we might help her?"

"I am afraid that it is too late. Wisi was much too delicate for all the work and worry that fell to her lot."

"What is the husband doing?"

"I forgot to tell you, Max. About six months ago he had an arm and a leg badly crushed in the factory, and he died a few weeks after being injured. Since then Wisi has been living alone with her little girl."

"So that is her story," mused Max. "And one child is all that she has left. What would become of her in case Wisi died? It is more likely, though, that the mother will get well, and that Andreas will yet be happy."

"No, I am sure it is too late for that," asserted Mrs. Ritter. "Although Wisi repented long ago, the wrong could not be undone, and she has suffered in silence. But we are forgetting that we must have some sleep to-night."

Colonel Ritter had fallen asleep in his chair. It was past midnight. Max roguishly went behind his sleeping brother and shook his shoulders so roughly that the colonel sprang from his chair in alarm. Max laughed and patted his shoulder by way of atonement, saying apologetically, "I only intended to give you a gentle warning that my sister says we must take to our beds."

A few moments later the house stood dark and quiet in the moonlight.

At the foot of the hill was another house where it would soon be quiet also; from a tiny window a small lamp still sent a faint glimmer into the night.

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER HOME

While Otto and Miezi Ritter were going home after the coasting, Wiseli was running down the hill as fast as her little feet could take her; she realized that she was later than usual and was sorry to have kept her mother waiting. The pleasure of her coast gave an added impetus, for she could scarcely wait to tell her mother about it. In her haste she would have run against a man coming from the house, had he not quickly stepped to one side. She found her mother reclining in a chair by the window, and she wondered at it because it was so unusual. She threw her arms about her neck, saying eagerly, "Are you vexed with me, mother, for not coming sooner?"

"Why, no, child; but I am glad that you are here now."

She hastily told her mother about Otto's kindness, and how she had enjoyed two long rides on the prettiest sled in school. "But, mother," she added, "what is the matter? Why haven't you a light?"

"You may get the lamp now and bring me a glass of water. I am so thirsty."

Wiseli went to the kitchen and returned carrying the lamp in one hand and a bottle of fruit juice in the other.

"What are you bringing me?" asked the mother.

"I don't know myself. I found it on the kitchen table. See how it sparkles." The mother drew the cork. "It is raspberry juice, as fragrant as the berries fresh from the garden," she said.

Wiseli poured some of the rich juice into a tumbler and diluted it with water; this the mother drank in long draughts until the tumbler was emptied. "Leave it near me, Wiseli," she said. "It seems as if I could drink it all, I am so thirsty and it is so refreshing. I wonder who was so thoughtful as to bring it to me! It must have come from Mrs. Ritter's and very likely Trina brought it over."

"Trina always comes in when she brings anything. Was she here to-day?"

"No. No one came in."

"Joiner Andreas may have left it when he was here," said Wiseli.

"Wiseli!" exclaimed the mother. "Joiner Andreas has not been here either."

"But I saw him, mother. He came out of the house just as I came in. I nearly ran into him in my hurry. Didn't you hear any one? It seems strange that he should have been so quiet."

"I do remember that I thought the kitchen door opened, and I listened for your footsteps, but you came in a few moments later, so I thought I must have been mistaken. Are you sure that it was Andreas whom you saw?"

Wiseli was certain, but to convince the mother she described him as he invariably looked. "I shouldn't wonder," she added, "if it were he who brought that large jar of honey you liked so much, and also the cakes you found that day. Don't you remember thanking Trina for them when

she brought you the hot dinner, and she told you that she knew nothing about them? It must have been Joiner Andreas who did it."

Tears filled the mother's eyes as she said, "I think that probably you are right, Wiseli."

"Surely you are not going to be sorry about it, mother," said Wiseli, as she fondly stroked her mother's hair.

"No, but I want you to thank him for me sometime, Wiseli. I am afraid that I cannot do it myself. Tell him that it did me good; that I was glad he was so kind. Give me a little more, please."

Wiseli prepared the fruit juice and brought a pillow from the bed so that her mother could rest her head on the window seat. She drew a footstool to the window and made her mother comfortable. Then she sat down beside her and said, "It is time for me to say the verses you taught me.

Commit thou all thy ways
And all that grieves thy heart
To Him whose endless days
Can strength and grace impart.

"He gives to wind and wave
The power to be still;
For thee He'll surely save
A place to work His will."

"Remember that, Wiseli," said the mother, drowsily. "If the time ever comes when it seems as if you were not cared for, take comfort and courage from the verses you have just repeated."

The mother's regular breathing soon told Wiseli that she was asleep; but the child remained quietly by her side for fear of waking her. Thus it happened that she too fell asleep, and the lamp burned on, growing fainter and fainter until it burned itself out and left the house dark in the quiet night.

Early the following morning a neighbor passed the window on her way to the well, and, glancing in as usual, she saw Wiseli crying beside the mother, who had her head pillowed on the window seat. She ran to the child, saying, "What is it, Wiseli? I hope your mother is not worse."

Wiseli only sobbed. The neighbor bent over the mother in surprise and alarm. "Go to your uncle quickly, Wiseli," she said; "tell him to come immediately. I will wait here until you get back."

The uncle's house was about fifteen minutes' walk from the church, and Wiseli ran on obediently,

although the tears would not be kept back. Her aunt answered the knock at the door; seeing the child in tears she said gruffly, "What is the matter with you?"

"I have been sent over to get my uncle; my mother is dead," answered Wiseli, for she had reasoned it out to herself that it must be so or else the mother would speak to her.

The aunt softened perceptibly. "He is not here just now," she said almost kindly. "I will have him come as soon as possible, so you needn't wait."

It was not long after Wiseli's return that the uncle came. He directed the neighbor to look after everything so that he might take the child away at once.

"But where shall we go?" inquired Wiseli.

"You shall go home with me, for I am all that you have left now. I will take care of you."

In spite of this assurance a great dread seized Wiseli. To go home with her uncle meant to live with the aunt of whom she was so afraid that she had always dreaded even meeting her. Then there were the three rude cousins, of whom Chappi was the oldest. The thought of how Hans and Rudi were always throwing stones at children made her shudder. How could she go there to live, and yet how dared she refuse?

All these thoughts flashed through Wiseli's mind as she stood hesitating. "You needn't be afraid," said her uncle kindly; "there are a good many of us, to be sure, but you will find that all the more interesting."

Wiseli tied a few of her things in a bundle, put a shawl over her head, and joined her uncle who was waiting near the door.

"That is a good girl," said the uncle; "now let us be off. Don't cry any more; that never helps anything."

Wiseli choked back the sobs as best she could and followed the uncle, whose stern nature had never been so touched before. Thus the little home where Wiseli had lived, loving and beloved, passed out of her life forever.

They had a glimpse of Trina, who was crossing a vacant lot with a basket on her arm, and Wiseli knew that she was going to see her mother.

Trina said to the neighbor who met her at the door; "I have something good for the sick one's dinner; I hope I am not too late. We have a visitor, and everything is late when he is there."

"It doesn't matter now, for you would have been too late even if you had come early this morning; she died in the night," said the neighbor.

"Oh, what will Mrs. Ritter say!" exclaimed Trina in alarm. "She tried so hard to have me come yesterday, but we were all so taken up with the uncle's arrival that it was put off. I am so sorry to have to tell her of this because I know how she will blame herself for neglecting her friend so long."

"Yes," said the neighbor, "we are all apt to do that. Yesterday I did not suspect that she was any worse than usual."

Trina sorrowfully returned to the Ritter home.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOTTI HOME

When Wiseli and her uncle arrived at Beechgreen, the three boys rushed in from the barn and stood staring at her. Soon the mother came in from the kitchen and did the same thing. Wiseli did not know what to do except to stand and hold her bundle.

Presently the father seated himself at the table and said, "I think we had better have something to eat. I am afraid the little one has not had much to-day. Put your things down, Wiseli, and sit here with me."

Wiseli obeyed without a word. The aunt brought a large loaf of black bread and some cheese, after which she went on staring at Wiseli as if she had never seen a child before.

The uncle cut a slice of the bread, put a piece of cheese on it, and pushed it over in front of Wiseli. "There, little one," he said kindly, "eat that. You must be hungry."

The suppressed tears welled up in Wiseli's eyes, and her throat was so choked that she could

scarcely breathe. She knew that she could not swallow a single crumb. "No, thank you," she managed to say; "I am not hungry."

"But you had better try," urged the uncle. "You mustn't be afraid."

Still Wiseli left the bread untouched, and the boys and their mother continued to stare at her. Presently the aunt dropped her hands from her hips and said, "If it isn't good enough for you, then let it alone." Wiseli was glad that she went out after this rebuke.

"You had better put your slice of bread in your pocket, Wiseli, for you may want it a little later," said the uncle, and then he too went out to the kitchen, closing the door after him.

Wiseli knew that her uncle meant to be good to her, and she wanted to obey him, so she tried to put the bread in her pocket. Unfortunately this was much too small, so she laid the bread back on the table.

At this point Chappi snatched the slice saying, "I will help you." He was just in the act of taking a bite when one of the brothers struck his arm so that the bread dropped to the floor. Then the other brother tried to get it, and a general scuffle ensued.

The father opened the kitchen door to ask what the trouble was. The boys answered together, "Wiseli didn't want it."

"Unless you want me to come in with a strap you had better stop that racket," threatened the father.

He had just closed the door again when one of the younger boys seized the other by the hair, with the idea of holding him at bay while he got the bread, but this only made matters worse, and the bread disappeared bite by bite as each found an opportunity to snatch it.

The aunt was washing potatoes in the kitchen. When her husband came in she said, "What do you mean by bringing the girl home with you? I should like to ask what you intend to do with her."

"The child had to go somewhere," he answered. "I am her uncle and the only relative she has. She ought to be of some help to you. I am sure she could do the kind of work you are doing now, and you could take your time for something you like better. You have always said that the boys make work, and you can surely find something for her to do."

"Oh, bosh! So far as that is concerned, she will be no better than the boys. You can hear what is going on in there now, and she has scarcely been here fifteen minutes."

"Yes," said the uncle; "but I have heard the same thing many times before she came, and I imagine she has little enough to do with it."

"Didn't you hear them all lay it upon her when you opened the door?" she asked angrily.

"They have to blame some one," the husband calmly answered; "they always do, I notice. I am of the opinion that you will have little trouble from the girl; she acts and obeys better than the boys."

"You needn't set her up as a model for the boys already," retorted his wife. "There isn't a place for her to sleep, anyway."

"Well," said the husband, "one can't plan everything at once. She has, no doubt, had a bed to sleep on, and it can easily be brought over here. I will talk with the pastor about her to-morrow. She can sleep on the bench behind the stove to-night; it will at least be warm. Later we can partition off a part of our chamber large enough for her little bed."

"I never in my life heard of any one bringing a child and a week later her bed!" sneered the aunt. "I should like to know who is going to pay the bills if we have to go to building on her account."

"If the church agrees to let us have her, they will also pay something for her keeping," explained the husband. "I will take her for less money than any one else would ask, because I am her uncle, and she will be happier with us than with strangers. I wish you would tell Chappi that I want him at the barn."

The aunt called to Chappi, but the boys were still struggling on the floor and he did not hear. She went into the room and gruffly ordered quiet. Wiseli stood crouching against the wall, scarcely daring to move.

"I wonder that you stand by and watch such a scene without trying to stop it," scolded the aunt. "Can you knit?"

Wiseli trembled as she answered, "Yes, I can knit stockings."

The aunt handed Wiseli a large brown stocking, at the same time sending Chappi to the barn. The two brothers followed him out. "Remember that it is the foot you are knitting on, and don't make it too short," cautioned the aunt, and then she returned to the kitchen.

Wiseli was glad to be alone. She sat down on the bench behind the stove so that she might hold her work in her lap, for the stocking was so heavy that she could not otherwise manage the needles.

She had just begun her knitting when the aunt returned to say, "You had better come to the kitchen now, so that you can learn how I do the work, for I want you to do it next time."

Wiseli followed to the kitchen, where she tried to help, but there seemed to be little that she dared to do. She kept thinking how gladly she would have done any number of tasks for her mother, because she would have been kind. The comparison brought the tears, so she desperately fought against thinking about herself.

"Now pay attention!" cautioned the aunt, as she walked about doing the work while Wiseli stood by the stove; "I want you to know how to do it the next time."

They were still there when the father and sons came up the walk from the barn, stamping the snow from their heavy boots.

"They are coming; run, Wiseli, and open the door," said the aunt.

Then the woman drained a large kettle of potatoes, which she took from the stove, ran to the living room and dumped them in the middle of the warped dining table. Next she brought a large pan of sour milk, and said to Wiseli, "The knives and forks are in the table drawer; you can put them on."

Wiseli found five knives and five forks in the drawer and put them on the table; then supper was ready. The father and the boys took their places on the bench behind the table next the window. There was a chair at one end of the table, and one at the side next the kitchen, which the aunt took. The uncle motioned Wiseli to take the other chair, saying to his wife, "She can sit there, I suppose?"

"Of course," snapped the aunt, and then went out to the kitchen on pretense of being busy. She kept coming back for only a moment at a time. The uncle, understanding her, said impatiently, "I wish you would sit still and eat your supper."

"I don't find the time to sit still," she retorted; "I should like to know who is going to look after things out there if I don't." Just at that moment she noticed that Wiseli was not eating her supper.

"Why are you sitting with your hands in your lap?" she demanded.

"She hasn't anything to eat with," replied Rudi, who had already solved the problem to his own satisfaction, for he could not understand how anybody could help eating so long as there was anything on the table.

"So that is it," said the aunt. "How was I to know that all of a sudden we must have six knives and forks when we have always needed but five. I suppose we must get an extra spoon, too. Why couldn't you have said something?" she went on, turning to Wiseli. "You must know that one has to have a spoon to eat with."

Wiseli timidly answered, "It didn't matter, because I am not hungry."

"But why not?" snapped the aunt. "Are you used to something better? I haven't any notion of making a change on your account."

"I think you had better let the child alone," interrupted the husband. "I don't want you to frighten her. She will get along well enough after a while."

Wiseli sat quietly while the rest finished their meal. Then the father said that Speck, the goat, was ailing at the barn, so he would go back. He put on his fur cap, took the lantern, and went out.

Wiseli watched her aunt brush the potato peelings from the table into the empty milk pan with her hands; then she wiped the table, after which the other things were soon washed and put away. When all was finished she said, "Now you have seen how I do up the supper work, Wiseli; you can do it hereafter."

When they came into the living room, Chappi was seated at the table with his number book and pencil, as if he intended writing his sums on the table; he now began to stare at Wiseli. She had picked up the stocking on the bench by the stove, but had not dared to go near the light on the table.

"You ought to be working examples yourself," he said to Wiseli; "you aren't the smartest one in school by any means."

Wiseli did not know what to say. She had not been in school that day, and did not know what examples had been given out. In fact, she seemed to be out of harmony with everything.

"If I have to do sums, you have to," continued Chappi.

Wiseli said nothing, and did not stir.

"All right," said Chappi, "I'll not do one single example more," and he threw down his pencil.

"Goody!" exclaimed Hans; "then I don't need to either," and he put his multiplication table back in his book sack. Study was the most unpleasant thing he ever had to do.

"I shall tell the teacher who is to blame for all this laziness," said Chappi, threateningly; "you will find out what he will do to you."

This might have been carried on indefinitely had not the father returned from the barn. He brought two large mill sacks and asked Chappi to take his things from the table; then he spread out the sacks, folded them neatly, and laid them on the bench behind the stove.

"There," he said, "that is all right. Where is your bundle, little one?"

Wiseli brought it from the corner, where she had put it, and was surprised to see her uncle place it at one end of the sacks and press it flat with his hands.

"There!" he repeated as he gave the bundle a last pat. Then turning to Wiseli, he added: "You may go to sleep now; the bundle will be your pillow and the stove will keep you from getting cold. You three boys must be off to bed!"

He took the lamp and followed the boys out, but he returned presently and said: "I hope you will sleep well, Wiseli. Try hard not to think about what has happened to-day. It will all come right later." Then he left her to herself.

A moment later the aunt came, carrying a small lamp, and wished to see the bed. "Can you sleep that way?" she asked, almost kindly. "It will be nice and warm for you. Some people haven't any bed and are cold besides. It may happen to be the case with you yet, so you better be thankful that you have a roof over your head. Good night."

"Good night," answered Wiseli, but the door closed too quickly for the aunt to hear.

Wiseli was glad to know that she was to be alone for the night. The moon dimly lighted the room. She had been in such constant dread of those about her that she had scarcely dared to think of herself. Now she lifted up her heart in prayer, simply saying, "Help me, Heavenly Father, for I am afraid, and mother is not with me now."

She felt comforted after a time because she had the assurance, from her mother's teaching, that her prayer would be answered. She remembered that it was only the evening before that her mother had told her to take comfort and courage from the verses she had repeated. The real meaning came to her now as she said the lines over.

"For thee He'll surely save
A place to work His will."

The load she had been carrying all day seemed lifted. A quiet peace filled her trusting heart, and she resolved in her new-found strength never to fear her cousins and the aunt again. She was soon sound asleep.

Wiseli dreamed that she saw a path before her which was beautiful with roses and carnations on either side, and that the sun was shining pleasantly overhead. She was so happy that she danced for joy. Beside her stood the mother, holding her by the hand. She pointed down the path and said: "See, Wiseli, God is giving that to you. Didn't I tell you he would find the place?

For thee He'll surely save
A place to work His will."

Wiseli had forgotten all her sorrow and fear, and slept as well with her head on the bundle on the hard bench as if she had been dreaming in the softest bed.

CHAPTER V

HOW LIFE CONTINUES AND SUMMER COMES

When the faithful Trina returned to The Hill with the unopened basket upon her arm, a look of anxiety came over Mrs. Ritter's countenance. Trina explained that the mother was dead and that Wiseli had been taken to the home of her uncle Gotti. The news shocked the entire household, for none of them had realized that the sickness would terminate so suddenly.

"Here I have tried for several days to visit the poor, lonely woman, and now it is too late," said Mrs. Ritter. "If I had only gone I should feel more reconciled to the loss."

"It is a shame that Wiseli must go there," said Otto as he paced the floor with his hands clenched. "I tell you if I catch him abusing her, he will need to count his ribs to see if any are left."

"Of whom are you speaking in that fashion?" asked Mrs. Ritter.

"Of Chappi. Think of the mean things that he can do to her now that she has to live in the same

house with him. It is unjust and ought not to be allowed. I'll attend to him if I find out that—"

Just then Otto's voice was nearly drowned by a loud stamping behind the stove, and he paused to say, "What are you making such an outlandish noise for, you Miez behind the stove?"

Miezi came out in sight of the others, her cheeks flaming red from the heat of the stove combined with her exertions in trying to get her feet into a pair of wet shoes which Trina had but a short time before taken off with the greatest difficulty.

She continued her efforts, but managed to say, "You can see that I have to do it; no one on earth could put on these things without stamping."

"Why must they be put on, when I have just taken the pains to get you out of them?" asked Trina.

"I am going to Beechgreen to get Wiseli; she can have my bed," replied Miezi, with a finality that seemed to admit of no interference.

Her operations were nevertheless cut short by Trina, who picked her up in her arms and carried her to a chair.

"That is nice of you, Miezchen," she said, "but I had better do that errand for you. There is no reason why you should wear out your shoes getting ready. You can let Wiseli have your bed and you can go to the attic to sleep. There is plenty of room up there."

This, however, was not in harmony with Miezi's plans; she had solved the sleeping problem to her own as well as to Wiseli's advantage, for nothing else would suit her so well as never to have to go to bed. So long as she could remember, she had always been sent to bed when she wanted very much to be up.

It soon became evident to Miezi, not only that Trina was keeping her from going to Wiseli, but that she had no intention of going in her place. When Trina frankly refused to go, Miezi cried so bitterly that Otto put his hands over his ears, and the mother came to make terms of peace. She promised to talk the matter over with papa just as soon as he and Uncle Max returned from a long-contemplated visit at a friend's house some distance away.

It was four days later when the colonel and Uncle Max returned. The children brought the subject of Wiseli's coming to live with them before the father at once, and he promised to investigate the conditions the next morning.

At noon the following day the colonel came home with the information that he was too late to get Wiseli. "You know, children," he said, "her uncle Gotti really wants to help the girl. He is a highly respected man and he offered to take the child for very little money. Wiseli's mother left her scarcely anything, so somebody had to offer her a home, and it seemed natural that her uncle should do so. Everybody feels satisfied that she has been well placed. I believe it is the best arrangement that could be made, for she is much too young to go out to work. We cannot take all the homeless children unless we put up an orphanage."

"I had only hoped," said Mrs. Ritter, "that we might help to find a place more suited to the child. She has a sensitive nature as well as a frail body, and she ought to be somewhere else. She will hear a great deal that is coarse and rude where she is, and will have to work much too hard for her delicate constitution. We shall have to accept the situation, but I am sorry that we cannot help her in some way."

Miezi cried, and Otto struck the table with his clenched fist to emphasize how he would deal with Chappi if he were unkind to Wiseli. It was only a few days, however, before the children grew accustomed to thinking of the little girl in her new surroundings, and the weeks sped on as rapidly as ever.

In the meantime Wiseli was becoming reconciled to her new home. Her bed had been brought over as her uncle had planned, and it was put in a box-like apartment partitioned off from the aunt's sleeping room. This was barely large enough for the bed and the small trunk which had been brought over with the remainder of the little girl's things. Wiseli had to stand either on the bed or on the trunk when she dressed, and she had to climb over the trunk to get into bed. She had to go to the well out of doors to wash her hands and face. When it was so cold that the water would freeze, the aunt told her to let it go altogether. "I am sure," she said, "that you can wash yourself enough when it gets warmer." Since this advice was not in accordance with her mother's teaching, Wiseli did not accept it.

The life in Wiseli's present surroundings was so different in every way from that to which she had been accustomed, that the comparison often produced severe homesickness, although she was never again so unhappy as on the first evening at her uncle's house. She remembered her beautiful dream and she did not doubt that a better place would be found for her, since she had prayed for it. "My mother will not let God forget me," was the assurance that held up hope before her during those trying days, and the thought of the verses was constantly with her.

> "For thee He'll surely save
> A place to work His will."

The winter had passed and a promising spring was at hand. The trees put forth their green leaves and the meadow was dotted with primroses and anemones. In the woods the birds were merry,

and the warm sunshine changed the barren waste of winter to a living beauty that made all hearts rejoice.

Probably no one enjoyed the balmy days more than Wiseli, and she felt quite happy as she walked to and from school. At other times there was scarcely a moment to spare, not even to notice the pretty flowers, for not only did she have to work every moment, but she had to work hard. She helped with the garden, and, since the aunt worked in the field on the farm, she had to get the meals and wash dishes as well. She did the patching for the whole family, made the gruel for the little pigs, and carried it to them besides; in short, she did everything about the house, so that she often had to stay away from school in order to finish her duties.

Going to school was Wiseli's greatest pleasure. It rested her tired body and, best of all, she heard there kind and friendly words. During recess and after school hours Otto was sure to speak to her in a cordial way, and it did much to relieve the lonely feeling. Sometimes a message came from Mrs. Ritter inviting Wiseli to spend the following Sunday with her children. Wiseli was never allowed to accept these invitations to The Hill, for the aunt would say, "It is the only day that you don't have to go to school, and I can't spare you every day."

Wiseli worked all day Sunday, but it was pleasant to know that the Ritter family had invited her, and there was always the hope that some day she might be allowed to go.

There was another reason why Wiseli liked to go to school. The road went by the home of Joiner Andreas. She had not forgotten that she had the message from her mother to deliver to him. She was too timid to go to the house and ask for him, but she watched for the opportunity to see him in his garden or near his home. She never passed his place without looking over the garden fence to see if he was there. She had not yet seen him, although the garden was in the best of trim and indicated that he spent many hours there.

May and June had passed, and now the long hot summer days had come, bringing increased work on the farm. Wiseli had to go to the haymaking. She was expected either to rake the hay together or to use the fork in spreading it in the sun, working all day long until her arms ached so wretchedly that she could not sleep. This, however, was not what made her unhappy, for it did not occur to her that she ought not to work as she did. Her great trouble was that she had to miss school, except on rainy days, or occasionally when the aunt said that she might go. Chappi often said in the evening, when he was doing his examples, "Why don't you get your lessons, Wiseli? You never know anything, and you seem to think that you can live without working."

It was this that hurt Wiseli, for she could rarely go to school two days in succession, and so she was not able to keep up with the class. One day, when she failed to give a correct answer, the teacher said, "I did not expect that of you, Wiseli; you used to be a good scholar." How it shamed the child, and how she cried all the way home that night, no one but herself realized! It seemed to her that day that no one cared for her after all, and when she got into her little bed at night, she felt too miserable even to pray. But she could not sleep until she had repeated her usual prayer, although it was said almost hopelessly.

This happened in July. The following morning Wiseli was standing at the table when the boys went off to school, and she was wondering whether or not she should be allowed to go. The aunt said nothing, and the uncle was not in the room.

The aunt had a large washing on hand for that day. Would she be asked to carry it to the trough and help?

Yes, she heard her aunt calling, and she was just about to answer when her uncle came in, saying, "Hurry, Wiseli, the boys have gone already. The hay is safe in the barn, and you shall go to school now. You may tell the teacher that you will not be kept out any more for a while, and explain to him that it was because we had so much work on our hands that you had to stay away."

Wiseli felt as free as a bird that morning. She knew that she might go to school every day that week, and it was something worth living for. How beautiful the morning was! The birds warbled their care-free notes in the tree tops, the sunlight sparkled on the dewy grass, and the air was fragrant with the perfume of the wild flowers. Wiseli had no time to stop, but she noticed all this beauty as she ran along.

That afternoon, just as the school children were about to rush out to their freedom, the teacher asked, "Whose turn is it to care for the schoolroom this week?"

"It is Otto's; it is Otto's!" cried the children, and the next moment they were gone.

"Otto," said the teacher sternly, "you didn't do your duty here last night. I will overlook it this time, but I want you to see that it does not happen again, or I shall be obliged to enforce the penalty upon you."

Otto glanced around the room and saw the nutshells, apple parings, and bits of paper that he was supposed to clean up; then he looked at the children playing out of doors, and the first thing he knew he was among them. The teacher had already left the room.

Later, when the children were all gone, Otto stood for a moment watching the golden glow of the evening sky and thought, "If I could only go home now! I would pick my cap full of cherries and take a ride out to the meadow with the hired man; now I have to go to that stuffy room and sweep and dust it."

Otto's patience forsook him as he started for the schoolroom. "I shouldn't care," he said, "if a cyclone came along and shattered the old house into a thousand pieces." There was no alternative, however; he must either take his turn at cleaning the schoolroom, or he must stay in at recess to-morrow. He had no sooner entered the room than he noticed, to his great surprise, that the work was done. Not a speck of dust was to be seen, and the windows had been opened wide, letting the air enter freely, so that the room seemed as fresh as out of doors.

Just at this moment the teacher entered hastily and looked in astonishment at the staring Otto. Then he noticed the clean room and said kindly, "You may be satisfied with your work to-night. I did not expect you to do so well, although you are always good at your lessons. Good night."

Now that Otto was convinced that what he saw was real, he seized his cap and, clearing the steps in two jumps, ran all the way up the hill. It did not occur to him to seek for an explanation of what had happened, until he told his mother about it when he reached home.

"You may be sure that no one did it for you by mistake," said his mother. "You must have some good friend who has willingly sacrificed himself for you. Perhaps you can think of some one who may have done it."

"I know who it was," said Miezi, who had been listening.

"Who?" asked Otto.

"Henry, because you gave him an apple about a year ago," said Miezi, emphatically.

"Yes, or William Tell, because I didn't take his away from him about a year ago; that would be just as sensible, you little Miezi," said Otto, as he playfully stroked her cheek. Just then he saw an opportunity to ride out to the hayfields, so the subject was dropped.

In the meantime Wiseli was tripping down the hill happier than she had been for many a day. She passed Joiner Andreas's house, but retraced her steps in order to get a good view of the carnation bed.

"It is a little late," she thought, "but I shall get home before the boys, anyway, for they are probably playing somewhere."

Just as she was admiring the flowers, the joiner came out of the house and walked directly toward her. "Wouldn't you like to have a few carnations, Wiseli?" he said.

"Yes, very much," she answered. "My mother wanted me to tell you something, too."

"Your mother!" he gasped, and the carnations he had just picked fell unheeded to the ground. Wiseli darted through the gate and picked them up. "When my mother was sick and didn't eat anything any more, she drank that nice fruit juice you put in the kitchen, and it made her feel better. She told me to thank you for bringing it, and for all that you did for her. She said you were

very kind."

Wiseli was surprised to see the tears in the good man's eyes. He tried to say something, but he could not. He took Wiseli's hand in both of his, patted it gently, and returned to the house without another word.

Wiseli was amazed. Nobody else had shed any tears for her mother, and she had not allowed herself to do so when anybody could see her; yet here was a man so moved that he could not speak of her. How she loved him for it! She started homeward for fear of being later than the boys, and it was well she did so, for they had just turned in at the gate when she got there.

Wiseli felt so much better when she went to bed that night that she wondered how she could have been so discouraged the evening before. She resolved to keep herself cheerful in the future, if it were possible. The good, kind face of Joiner Andreas was the last thing she thought of before going to sleep.

The following day (it was Wednesday) Otto had a repetition of his strange experience. It had not occurred to him that the good fairy would again appear, and, as usual, he was not able to keep from rushing out with the others and frolicking until the children left the playground. When he returned to do his work, the room was again in the best of order.

He began to be really curious as to whom he had to thank for this favor. He decided to play the spy the next night and solve the mystery. Accordingly, after the school had been dismissed the following afternoon, Otto waited a moment at his seat, wondering how he could get to a hiding place unseen, when the boys began to shout, "Come on, Otto, come on; we want to play robber and you must lead."

"I have to clean up this week, so I won't play to-night," he said.

"What difference will fifteen minutes make? Come on."

He gave up his scheme of playing spy and went with the boys. Instead of the game's lasting fifteen minutes, it was half an hour before it was over, and Otto felt anxious as to whether he must still do his work. He ran panting to the schoolroom and gave the door such a vigorous kick that the teacher came in to see what had happened.

"What do you want, Otto?" he asked.

"Just to see if I did everything," stammered Otto.

"Very well done," commented the teacher, as he looked about. "Your zeal is praiseworthy, Otto, but you needn't be so boisterous when you come to the door again."

Otto went out more curious than ever. He determined to find out the next night without fail, for, with the exception of Saturday morning, it would be his last opportunity.

"Otto," called the teacher as soon as he had dismissed school the next day, "I wish you would take this note to the pastor's for me and wait for an answer; you can be back in five or ten minutes to do your cleaning."

Otto was not in the least pleased to do the teacher's errand, but he dared not refuse, so he started off at a run, hoping to be back in time to capture the good fairy, if she appeared to do his work. When he got to the parsonage, he was admitted at once, and told that the pastor would see him directly. Then the minister's wife called him to the garden to chat a moment, and it seemed an age to him before he could free himself courteously, for she asked not only about himself and his health, but that of his mother, father, Uncle Max, Miezi, and apparently all the relatives in Germany.

Finally the opportunity came to present the note to the pastor, and it was but a moment later when he was speeding back to the schoolhouse with the written answer in his hand. He fairly stumbled into the schoolroom in his eagerness to see if any one was there, but, as before, the room was in the best of order and not a soul to be seen.

"Not once this week have I had to do that disagreeable task," he thought. "Since there is some one who is doing such work without needing to, I am at least going to find out who it is."

The school closed at eleven o'clock on Saturday. Otto let all the children pass out; when they had gone, he went outside, locked the door, and stood with his back against it waiting to see who would come back to do the work. He stood there waiting until half past eleven, and still no one came.

Otto remembered that the family at home were to have lunch promptly at twelve, for an afternoon's outing had been planned and he had promised to get home as early as possible. It became evident that he was going to have to do the work himself, and he dared wait no longer. Greatly disappointed, he unlocked the door and entered the room, but—Otto could scarcely believe his eyes—the work was finished as usual.

How very strange it seemed! For a moment a superstitious fear possessed him, and he tiptoed to the door and went out, taking pains to lock it securely behind him.

Just at that moment Wiseli came quietly out of the teacher's kitchen door; she listened intently for a moment, but hearing no one, started on her way home, which led her by the schoolhouse

door. The next moment she and Otto were face to face. Each was startled at the other's presence, and Wiseli blushed deeply, as if she had been caught doing something very wrong. This partly betrayed her to Otto, who said: "Surely, Wiseli, *you* have not been doing all that work for me this week? How *could* any one who didn't have to?"

"It has given me a great deal of pleasure," said Wiseli.

"Oh, no, don't say that!" exclaimed Otto. "To do such work *couldn't* give anybody any pleasure."

"But it did, really, Otto. I was always glad when night came and I could do it again. I was all the time thinking how glad and surprised you would be to find the task finished."

"What made you do it for me, Wiseli?"

"I knew that you didn't like to do it, and I have many a time wished for an opportunity to do something for you."

"I am sure you have done a great deal more for me than I did for you, and I shall not forget it, Wiseli." Otto had taken Wiseli's hand in his and she was very happy.

"I waited to-day until everybody had gone, and even now I cannot see how you got into that room," said Otto.

"I never went out," she replied. "I hid behind my seat, for I expected you to go out as usual."

"How have you always before managed to get away without my seeing you?" asked Otto.

"You don't notice much when you are playing," said Wiseli. "Yesterday and to-day, when I was not sure where you were, I went through the teacher's room and asked his wife if she had an errand she would like to have me do on the way home. I have several times done things for her. I was behind the kitchen door yesterday when you stormed into the schoolroom."

Both children laughed heartily at the remembrance. Otto impulsively pressed Wiseli's hand and said, "I am truly grateful to you. Good-by." After they had gone their separate ways, they both rejoiced that they had discovered each other.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW FEATURE

The summer had passed, and now the late autumn was at hand. The nights were getting cold and damp. The cows were eating the last bits of grass in the chilly pastures, while the boys herding them built fires to warm themselves and to roast potatoes.

One such unpleasant evening Otto came home from school to tell his mother that he was going over to see what Wiseli was doing, for she had not been at school for a whole week. He took an apple and hurried away. As he went up the path to Beechgreen he noticed Rudi sitting on the ground in front of the door with a pile of pears beside him; he was busily engaged biting into first one and then another.

"Where is Wiseli?" asked Otto.

"Outdoors," answered Rudi.

"Where outdoors?"

"In the pasture."

"In what pasture?"

"I don't know."

"You will not suffer from overpoliteness at least," remarked Otto. He started for the large pasture near the woods. Just then he noticed some people under a pear tree near at hand, and soon he saw Wiseli gathering pears into a basket. Hans had thrown himself face upward across a filled basket and was rocking himself in a way which threatened the overturn of the pears. Chappi was perched up in the tree laughing at his brother's antics. When Wiseli saw Otto coming, her face broke into happy smiles.

"I have come to see how you are, Wiseli," said Otto, as he took her hand. "Why have you been out of school so long?"

"There was so much to be done that I couldn't go, Otto. See what a lot of pears there are! I have to pick pears from morning until night."

"Your shoes and stockings are soaked," remarked Otto. "Ugh, it is cold here. Doesn't it make you sick to get so wet?"

"Yes, sometimes; but the work usually keeps me warm."

Just then Hans gave such a violent lurch that the basket went over and the pears scattered in every direction.

"Oh," cried Wiseli, "that is too bad! Now we must gather them all over again."

"And that one too," cried Chappi, and he laughed as the pear that he threw hit Wiseli on the forehead hard enough to bring tears to her eyes.

It had scarcely happened, however, before Otto had pulled Chappi from the tree and had taken a firm grip on his throat.

"Stop, you're choking me," gurgled Chappi. He was not laughing any more.

"I will teach you that you are responsible to me when you treat Wiseli in that way," said Otto, his voice strained in his anger. He tightened his grip as he added, "Is this enough to make you remember what I told you?"

"Yes," gasped Chappi, whose face was turning purple.

"I will let you go," said Otto, "but I want you to keep in mind that I will give you such a choking as you will remember to your dying day if you ever hurt Wiseli again. Good-by, Wiseli." Then Otto was gone.

He went straight to his mother and indignantly protested against the necessity of Wiseli's having to live with those boys at her uncle's home. He declared his intention of going over to ask the pastor if complaint might be entered against the whole family, so that Wiseli might be taken from them.

"My dear son," said Mrs. Ritter; "there is no lawful way of taking Wiseli from them, and a complaint of that character would only lead the whole family to treat her more unkindly than they do now. So long as the uncle means well by her there is nothing we can do. I realize fully what a hard time Wiseli is having, and I don't want you to think that I have not taken the matter to heart, Otto. I am looking earnestly for an opening to do something for her, and I hope that in the meantime you will protect her as much as possible, without being rude and rough yourself."

Otto tried to help his mother think of a way to free Wiseli, but each plan proposed proved impracticable, if not impossible. The children had a custom of writing their Christmas wishes upon a slate, and Otto wrote, "I wish Santa Claus would set Wiseli free."

January had come and again brought to the children the great pleasure of the year by providing them with snow for the coasting. One beautiful moonlight night the idea came to Otto that it would be great sport to coast by moonlight, and the next day he accordingly suggested to the children that they assemble at seven o'clock for a moonlight ride. The suggestion was enthusiastically received. When they broke up that evening, there were cries of "All hands back at seven!" "Hurrah for moonlight!" "Good-by till seven!"

The Ritter children did not tell their mother of this plan until they came home from school toward evening. Much to their surprise she was not at all enthusiastic over what they considered such a capital idea. She spoke of the intense cold of the evening, the danger, especially to Miezi, in the uncertain light, and the likelihood of the younger ones being frightened in the shadows. In spite of these objections they wished to carry out their plan, and Otto promised not to let Miezi out of his sight if she might go with him. Their request was finally granted, and they started off as happy as birds on the wing.

It was great sport. The track had been worn as smooth as ice, and the fear of the timid ones in the dark places gave zest to the undertaking. Nearly all the children from the neighborhood were there, and the best of humor prevailed. Otto let them all precede him with their sleds, permitting only Miezi to follow him, so that there would be no danger of any one's running into her from behind, and he looked back every moment to see that she was coming safely.

After several rides in this fashion some one proposed that they ride "tandem fashion," that is, with all the sleds tied together. The idea was immediately accepted, and they began tying their sleds together in joyful anticipation. Otto, however, considered the sport too dangerous for Miezi, as the sleds sometimes became tangled and the whole company was piled up in a mass. He tied his sled last, letting his sister follow with hers untied. In this way it was expected that they would go as usual, except that Otto would not be free to stop in case Miezi did not keep up with them. Soon the children were off and went down the slippery hill with the speed of the wind.

They had gone but halfway down, when Otto heard a scream behind him in which he recognized his sister's voice, but he was powerless to stop, and he was going too fast to dare to roll himself from his sled until their speed diminished near the foot of the hill. He found Miezi halfway down the hill crying with all her might. Almost breathless, Otto gathered her in his arms, saying, "What happened, Miezchen? Tell me, what is the matter?"

"He wanted to—he wanted to—he was going to—" sobbed Miezi.

"What did he want to do? Who? Where?" asked Otto.

"The big man over there, he wanted to—he was going to kill me—and he said things."

"Never mind, Miezchen; be quiet now; he didn't kill you. Did he even hit you?" asked Otto, somewhat puzzled by the occurrence, for he knew Miezi to be a rather fearless child.

"No," sobbed Miezi, "but he had a big stick and he raised it like this and was going to strike and he said, 'You look out!' and he called me dreadful names."

"So he really didn't hurt you at all," said Otto, much relieved to find it true, although Miezi was of a different opinion.

"Yes, he did—he was going to—and you were all gone ahead and I was all alone," and from sheer self-pity came a fresh burst of tears.

"Hush now, Miezchen," coaxed Otto. "I shall never leave you like that again, so the man shall never get you. If you will be a happy little girl now, just as soon as we get home I will give you the red candy rooster I had on the Christmas tree."

This promise restored Miezi to her normal self in a moment. She wiped the tears away, but did not let go of Otto's hand for the rest of the evening. The other children had joined them and as they climbed the hill they discussed what had happened. Several of the children had noticed a large man turn out of the road to let them pass, and it was Otto's opinion that it must have made the man angry to have to step into the snow, and he had threatened Miezi because she was the only one within reach. This seemed a likely explanation to the children, and the subject was dropped. The party broke up after the next ride, as most of them had promised to be at home by eight o'clock.

"Now, Miezchen," said Otto on the way home, "if you tell mamma about your being so frightened, you may be sure that she will never let you go with me again. No harm was done, and I think we had better not say anything about it."

Miezi promised to say nothing. All traces of tears had been removed by the expectation of receiving the candy rooster, which Otto did not fail to give to her as soon as they reached home, and the children went happily to bed.

They had been in bed and asleep for some time when a loud rapping at the door startled the parents, who were sitting at the table in the living room, talking about their children. Trina had gone upstairs, but she leaned out of her window and called, "What is it you want?"

"Something dreadful has happened," came the answer from the man below. "Joiner Andreas has been killed, and we want the colonel to come over at once."

The messenger departed without waiting. Through the open window Colonel and Mrs. Ritter had heard what he said. The colonel threw his cloak over his shoulder and hurried to Andreas's home. A number of people had assembled there when he arrived. The police and the pastor had been summoned, and others, hearing of the misfortune, had come to see what could be done. Colonel Ritter worked his way into the crowd to where the joiner lay.

"Where is the doctor?" was his first question.

"What is the use of getting a doctor when the man is dead?" some one answered.

"He may not be dead," said the colonel, impatiently. "Some one must go for a doctor immediately; tell him I said that he must hurry. This call should be answered before all others."

Some one reluctantly started, then, with the help of others, the colonel lifted the apparently lifeless body and carried it to the bed.

The miller's son explained to the colonel that he had passed the house about half an hour earlier, that he had noticed a light and the open door and had decided to stop a moment to see the joiner, when, to his horror, he saw that he was dead; that Meadow Joggi was standing in the room, holding a gold piece in his hand; and that Joggi had laughed as he looked at the gold.

Meadow Joggi, so called because he lived in the meadow, was a man who had lost his reason, but whom people had always regarded as perfectly harmless. The neighborhood supported him, and he often helped them with simple work, which he managed to do fairly well. The miller's son had told him to stay where he was until some one came, and he had obeyed, still clutching his gold piece and smiling, not in the least concerned about himself.

The physician came at last and hastened to examine the body.

"He was struck on the back of his head; it is a bad wound," said the doctor.

"Do you think that he is dead, doctor?" asked Colonel Ritter.

"No; he is not dead, but he is very near it. Bring me sponges, bandages, and some water." The men searched the house in vain for the things that were needed.

"I wish there were a woman here to find things!" exclaimed the exasperated physician. "A woman knows intuitively what a sick person needs and where to find it."

"Trina can come," said the colonel. "Will some one please run over to my house and tell Mrs. Ritter to send her at once."

"I am afraid your wife will not thank you, Colonel," said the doctor, "for whoever comes must stay at least three days, and perhaps longer."

"You need not worry about that," replied the colonel. "Mrs. Ritter will gladly do more than give Trina's time if it will save the joiner."

Trina appeared sooner than they had thought it possible for her to get there, and she brought with her a basket of necessary supplies which she and Mrs. Ritter had in readiness for an emergency.

The doctor was much pleased. "Now, Colonel," he said, "please dismiss every one, and lock up the house for the night."

The policemen decided to put Joggi in jail until they could investigate matters. He walked along with them willingly, opening his hand occasionally and laughing at his gold piece.

Early the following morning Mrs. Ritter went to the home of the joiner to inquire after him. Trina met her at the door and said that toward morning the patient had recovered partial consciousness. The doctor had just left, she said, and had expressed his opinion that the man was doing better than he had dared to hope. "I have had to promise him," she added, "that I would let no one come into the room, not even my dear mistress."

"I am sure he is right about it," said Mrs. Ritter smiling. "I am glad to know that Andreas is in safe hands, and I will hurry home, so that my husband may know that he is doing well."

So eight days passed. Mrs. Ritter never failed to come every morning to inquire. She supplied Trina with whatever she needed. No one had yet been allowed in the sick room, and Trina was kept at her post.

Several days later the doctor gave his permission to have the colonel question Andreas in regard to the accident, as the police were anxious to know if he could give them any information.

The joiner received the colonel warmly; he realized how much he was indebted to him. The sick man could tell nothing about his injury except that some one had entered his room as he sat counting his money. "I was evidently struck senseless before I had time to look around to see who it was," he added.

This proved to the officers that Andreas had been injured for the sake of his gold. They wondered what had become of the rest of the money, if Joggi had committed the deed. This was the first that Andreas had heard about Joggi's being suspected.

"I want you to release Joggi immediately," he said. "I am positive that he did not do it. Why, Joggi wouldn't kill a fly if he could help it."

"A stranger might have done it," suggested the doctor; "the windows are low, and seeing them open and the pile of money at hand, he might have felt a sudden desire to possess it."

"That is very likely," replied the joiner. "I have never thought about being careful, and my house has always been unlocked."

"Well," said the colonel, "it is a good thing that you have enough saved for a rainy day, so you will not suffer from the loss of the money. The best of it all is that you yourself were saved."

"Yes, colonel," said the joiner, as he gave his hand in farewell, "I have enough to be thankful for. I shall never use all I have, anyway."

"I am sure you are more at peace with yourself than the man that robbed you," remarked the doctor.

A sad story was being told about the neighborhood concerning Joggi. He had been so reluctant to give up his gold piece, that the police had taken it from him by force after conducting him to the prison. The policeman's son was supposed to have said to him: "You just wait, Joggi; you will get your pay for this night's work. You'll see what you will get after a while."

This had so thoroughly frightened Joggi that he had moaned constantly ever since; he would not eat or sleep, but sat crouched in a corner, fearing that they would come to kill him.

The police came to see him a few days after his imprisonment, and promised him their protection if he would confess the truth to them. He said that he had looked in at the window and had seen the joiner lying on the floor. He went in, he said, and touched him with his foot and saw that he was dead. Then he saw the gold piece on the floor and picked it up a moment before the miller's son came in; other people soon came after that. This was his simple story, and every one was inclined to believe it, but Joggi did not get over his fright.

CHAPTER VII

BRIGHTER DAYS FOR THE PATIENT AND FOR SOME ONE ELSE

Since the day that Colonel Ritter had called with the physician to see the joiner after his recovery, Mrs. Ritter had daily visited the patient, and she rejoiced to see how rapidly he was gaining strength. Otto and Miezi had been over twice and taken their friend everything they could think of that might please him. They were glad to have the joiner tell them that a king could not have had better care.

One day the doctor was just leaving his patient, when the colonel came. "The joiner is doing well," said the doctor. "Your wife has spared Trina so long that she ought to go back now, but the poor fellow needs to have somebody with him a while longer. What a pity that he has no relatives! I have been wondering if Mrs. Ritter might not know of some one that we could get to take Trina's place for a couple of weeks."

"I will ask her as soon as I go back, although I am sure that she will be in no haste about taking Trina away."

The next morning, as Mrs. Ritter made her accustomed call, she said to her friend, "Do you feel like talking over a little business matter this morning?"

"Certainly; I am feeling quite like myself," replied the joiner, as he propped his head on his elbow.

"I am thinking of taking Trina away, since you are doing so well," she began.

"Believe me, Mrs. Ritter, for several days I have been urging her to go; I have realized what it meant to you to do without her."

"I shouldn't have let her in if she had taken your advice, but the doctor assures us now that it will be safe for her to leave you, in case some one can be found to take her place. It need not be any one so proficient as Trina, because we could send you your meals from our house. I have been giving the matter a great deal of thought, Andreas, and I think that you ought to have Wiseli come over to stay with you."

"No, no, Mrs. Ritter, of course not!" exclaimed Andreas in astonishment. "Do you suppose I could expect that delicate child to do my work? Oh, Mrs. Ritter, do you imagine I have forgotten for a moment about the girl's mother? Please say nothing more about it, for I would rather never get well."

"But, Andreas, you do not understand me, and I want to tell you something more about it. The child is given very hard work to do where she is, and the worst of it is that they are not kind to her. I should feel so greatly relieved to have her here, because she would at least be treated kindly. I know that Wiseli's mother would want you to take her, so that she might have a real home, and you will be surprised to see how gladly she will come to you and do the little necessary tasks."

"But how could I get the child if I wanted her?"

"I shall be more than glad to arrange that for you if you will trust me with it," replied Mrs. Ritter.

"I must make you promise that she shall be brought only on the condition that she wants to come," said the joiner.

"Yes," said Mrs. Ritter; "Wiseli shall not come unless it is her own wish. I will see you again to-morrow. Good-by."

Instead of going home, Mrs. Ritter went to find Wiseli, for she was eager to free the child from her present surroundings. When she arrived at Beechgreen, she met Mr. Gotti, who was himself just going into the house. "I am surprised to see you over here, and so early in the morning, Mrs. Ritter," he said, as he cordially shook her hand.

"Yes, I am sure you are, Mr. Gotti," she replied. "I have come to see if you could possibly spare Wiseli for about two weeks to care for Joiner Andreas. The doctor thinks that he doesn't need Trina any more, but that he must have some one. I hope that you will not refuse, and that the cure so well begun may be carried to a successful finish."

Mrs. Gotti joined them just then, and her husband explained the matter to her before answering Mrs. Ritter.

"Wiseli couldn't do anything if she went," said Mrs. Gotti.

"The child knows how to do a number of things," corrected the husband. "She is bright and learns readily. I am willing to let her go for two weeks. The spring work will soon begin, and we must have her back then. The joiner will no doubt be well by that time, so this arrangement will be satisfactory to everybody."

"It is very well for you to talk," broke in Mrs. Gotti. "I have just gone through all the trouble of teaching her everything, and when she comes back I shall have it to do over again. The joiner can afford to train a girl for himself if he needs one."

"But, wife, two weeks is not a long time. Mrs. Ritter has spared Trina much longer, and we all have to ask favors sometimes."

"I thank you for the kindness," said Mrs. Ritter, as she rose to take her leave. "I am sure, too, that the joiner will fully appreciate your sacrifice. If you will allow me, I will take the child now."

The aunt objected seriously, but the husband said firmly: "That will be the best way. The sooner she goes, the sooner she will get back, and I want it distinctly understood that it is to be for only two weeks."

Wiseli was called, and told without further explanation to tie a few belongings together; she silently obeyed, not daring to ask any questions. It was just a year since she had come to the house with her bundle. She had been given nothing new during that time except the black jacket she had on; it was thinly lined, and her skirt hung limply to her knees. It was only a moment before she appeared with her bundle under her arm. She looked timidly from her dress to Mrs. Ritter as she entered.

"You are all right, Wiseli; we are not going far," said Mrs. Ritter. Wiseli followed her down the path, after a hasty farewell to the aunt and uncle, and she could not help wondering what was going to be done with her. Mrs. Ritter cut across the fields to make the distance shorter, for she felt as if she could not get the child away fast enough.

As soon as they were out of sight of Beechgreen, Mrs. Ritter turned to Wiseli, saying, "You know who Joiner Andreas is, don't you, Wiseli?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, her face lighting up on hearing the name.

Mrs. Ritter was pleasantly surprised, and continued, "He is sick, Wiseli; do you think that you would like to stay with him a couple of weeks and wait on him so that he will get well again?"

"Of course, Mrs. Ritter, I shall be very glad to go," Wiseli said, and Mrs. Ritter wished that Andreas could have seen her as she said it.

"You must remember to tell him that you are glad to be with him, if you are," said Mrs. Ritter; "otherwise he might think we made you come."

"I shall not forget to tell him," said the little girl.

When they reached the joiner's gate, Mrs. Ritter bade Wiseli enter without her. "Since I know that you like to go to him, I shall not need to go in, but you can tell the joiner that I will be over in the morning, and you must come to me for anything you may want at any time. Good-by."

It was with a light heart that Wiseli ran up the path to the house, for she rejoiced that she was to see the man who had been so kind to her, and that this was to be her home for a few weeks. She understood what was expected of her, and she knew that the joiner was in bed, with no one else in the house, so she entered without ringing. How homelike everything seemed as she looked about! At the farther end of the room she noticed, through the parted curtains, a large bed freshly dressed with a white spread and pillows; she wondered who slept in that room. Then she tapped lightly on the joiner's door, which she opened as soon as she heard a response. The joiner raised himself on his elbow to see who was there.

"Wiseli!" he exclaimed, as if in doubt whether to be glad or sorry. "Come over here and give me your hand." Wiseli silently did as she was told.

"I am sorry that you had to come to me."

"Why?"

"I only mean that perhaps you would a little rather not have come. Mrs. Ritter is always so kind that you did it to please her, didn't you?"

"No, not at all. She never asked me to do it for her. She wanted to know if I cared to come, and I said, 'Yes.' There is no place in the whole world where I should have been so glad to go as to your house."

This must have satisfied the joiner, for his head dropped back to the pillows, and he tried to look at Wiseli, but the tears persisted in filling his eyes.

"What must I do?" asked Wiseli, when he said nothing further.

"I am sure I don't know, Wiseli," said the joiner, gently. "I shall be glad to have you do exactly as you please, if you will stay with me a while first and keep me company."

Wiseli could scarcely believe she had heard aright. Nobody but her mother had ever spoken to her like that. Her first thought was that her mother would be glad if she knew how kind he was. There was the same tenderness in his tones that she used to feel in the mother's, and she unconsciously loved him in the same way. She took his hand in both of hers and chatted with him as freely as if she had always known him.

"I am afraid I ought to be getting dinner," she said at length; "what should you like to have me cook for you?"

"I want you to have just what you like," replied the joiner.

This, however, did not satisfy Wiseli, for she desired above all else to please him, so she asked question after question until she found out what she wanted to know. She knew how to make the soup he said he liked, and she realized now that she had learned many useful things from her aunt, even if they had been taught without kindness. Wiseli prepared the joiner's dinner on a tray and carried it to him.

"I wish you would draw the little table over here and eat your dinner with me," said the joiner. "Mine will taste so much better if you will."

Wiseli was again surprised, but she said, "That is just what mamma would have said."

What a pleasant dinner that was! The joiner was so considerate of Wiseli's comfort that it made

the humblest task a pleasure to her.

"Now what are you going to do?" he asked, when they had finished dinner and Wiseli rose from the table.

"I am going to wash the dishes," she replied.

"I suppose such things have to be done," said the joiner, "but I think, since this is your first day with me, that you might stack them up and do them to-morrow; you know there are only a few."

"Why, I should be so ashamed if Mrs. Ritter should happen to come in that I shouldn't know what to do," said Wiseli, and she turned such a serious face to him that he laughed.

"All right," he said; "only remember that you are to do just as you like while you are with me."

Wiseli had not thought that it could be so much fun to do up the dinner work. When it was finished, she said to herself, "Now this kitchen is nice enough for any one to inspect."

She had been told that the alcove opening off from the living room was to be hers, so she hung her few garments in the closet opening from one corner of the room. When she returned to the joiner's room he said, "Good, I have been waiting for you a long time."

"Haven't you a stocking that I could knit while I sit here?" she asked, as she took the chair beside the bed.

"Of course not," answered the sick man; "you have already done too much, and I want you to rest now."

"But I am not allowed to sit idle except on Sunday. Besides, I can knit and talk at the same time."

"If you will be any more contented with a stocking, get one, by all means, but please remember that I don't want you to work unless you prefer to do so," said the joiner.

In this quiet way they passed one day after another. Everything Wiseli did pleased the joiner, and she was thanked for every little service as if it were of the utmost importance. The patient gained so much in strength that he was soon clamoring for permission to get up. The doctor told him that he might sit up whenever he wished, and much of his time was now spent sitting in the bay window in the living room, where the warm sunshine helped to make the days cheerful. He liked to watch his little housekeeper moving about at her household duties, and she succeeded in making his house more attractive than he had ever hoped to see it.

Wiseli so enjoyed herself in this comfortable home, where she had the assurance of being cared for and protected, that she sometimes forgot she must soon give it up and return to her uncle at Beechgreen.

CHAPTER VIII

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

In the home on the hill they talked often of the good joiner and Wiseli. Mrs. Ritter went to see them every morning, and she always brought encouraging news home with her. Otto and Miezi were planning a surprise for Andreas and Wiseli in which they meant to celebrate their friend's recovery. To-day, however, they had a celebration in their own home, for it was their father's birthday. It had seemed like a real holiday to the children ever since they got up in the morning, and now they were about to enjoy the birthday feast. They were all in the best of humor. After the first course had been served, there was placed before Mrs. Ritter a covered dish which, when the cover had been removed, displayed a cabbage head looking as fresh and natural as if it had just come from the garden.

"That dish is certainly pretty enough to be praised," said the father; "but really I was expecting to see something else, Marie. You know at every feast I am on the lookout for my favorite vegetable, the artichoke. Isn't it on the menu to-day?"

"There," broke in Miezi, "that is just what he called me! Twice he called me that, and he had his big stick raised like this, and he was going—"

Miezi had her arm raised to illustrate the man's attempt to strike her, when she suddenly caught the warning look from her brother across the table, and remembered her promise not to tell her parents about what had happened that night. In her great confusion her face grew scarlet, and she pushed her arms as far as possible under the table.

"I am surprised to have my birthday celebration take this turn," said the father. "On one side of the table my daughter speaks of something about which we have heard nothing, while, on the

opposite side, my son kicks my leg until it feels as if it might be black and blue. I should like to know, Otto, where you learned such gymnastics."

It was now Otto's turn to blush, which he did to the roots of his hair. He had intended to hush his sister with the kicks, but evidently he had not struck where he intended. For a time he was too embarrassed to look his father in the face.

"Well, Miezchen, what was the rest of the story which Otto did not allow you to finish? You say he called you a dreadful name, raised his stick at you, and—?"

"Then, then," began Miezi,—she realized, now, that she had told, and must sacrifice the candy rooster in consequence,—"then he didn't kill me, anyway."

The father laughed heartily. "It was good of him not to kill my little girl, but what then?"

"That was all."

"The story has a happy ending," said the father. "The stick remains poised in the air and little Miezchen comes home as the artichoke. Now let us forget everything except that this is my birthday and that we are to do justice to the feast provided."

Otto, however, still felt somewhat disturbed, and after dinner went off to a corner by himself. He seemed to be reading, but instead, he was thinking about what had happened, for he was very sure that his mother would never again let him go with the others to coast by moonlight.

Miezi went to her room to take a last look at the candy rooster with which she must part, now that she had failed to keep her promise. Mrs. Ritter was seated at the window trying to explain to herself the strange actions of her children. She became more and more restless as she thought about it, and finally went in search of Miezi, whom she found at the foot of the bed in a very unhappy state of mind.

"Miezchen, mamma has come to have a talk with you. I want you to tell me when it was that you were frightened by that man."

"The night that we went coasting by moonlight. I know he called me that word papa used at the table to-night."

Mrs. Ritter now went to find her husband. "I should like to tell you something, Otto," she said.

The colonel laid his newspaper aside and looked inquiringly at his wife.

"I have been thinking about the scene at the table to-night, and I have come to the conclusion that the children were frightened by the same man that tried to kill the joiner. I have just found out from Miezi that it happened the evening I gave the children permission to coast by moonlight, and that was the very night the joiner was hurt. It is much more likely that the man called her 'aristocrat' than 'artichoke.' If so, I should say that the man was Andreas's brother. He is the only one in the world who would think of using that word, and I am sure the only one who would hurt Andreas. Don't you think it likely that it was Andreas's brother George?"

"It does seem probable," answered the colonel, thoughtfully; "I will see what can be done about it." He rang for the coachman to bring the carriage, and a few moments later he was on his way to the city.

For several days Colonel Ritter went frequently to confer with the police, but it was not until two weeks later that they succeeded in getting results. One evening, when the Colonel returned to his home, he told the members of his family that the thief had been captured, and that it was, as Mrs. Ritter had surmised, the joiner's own brother George. He had been living in the near-by hotels, confident that no one had seen him in his home town, because he had passed through in the night.

He denied knowing anything about the affair when he was first arrested, but when told that Colonel Ritter had weighty evidence against him, he inferred that he must have been recognized after all. He lost his temper, and said that of course those "aristocrats" would like to make trouble for him. In answer to questions he said that he had just returned from service in the Neapolitan War; and that he had intended to go to his brother to borrow some money, but finding him with the large sum before him, he saw the opportunity to get it all. It had been his intention merely to knock his brother senseless, so that he could make his escape, and he protested that he had never wished to kill him.

Fortunately, most of the money was still in George's possession. It was recovered, and he was put in prison.

This story caused quite a commotion in the little town, especially among the school children.

Several nights after George had been arrested, Otto came home very much excited. Although Joggi had been set free as soon as George had confessed, he was still too frightened to take advantage of his liberty. He thought that he should be killed if he went out. Finally the police authorities turned him out by force, but he ran quickly to a near-by barn where he hid himself in the farthest corner. Here he had remained for three days, and the farmer had threatened to take the pitchfork to him if he did not go away soon.

"That is very sad indeed," said Mrs. Ritter, when Otto had finished telling her about it. "The poor

fellow suffers because his mind is too feeble to understand what is said to him. It is hard that an innocent man should be made so miserable. If you had told me that night about what had happened to Miezi, we should not have caused Joggi so much suffering. You had better try to do something for him, since you might have spared him all this."

"I will give him my red candy rooster," said Miezi, sympathetically.

"A red candy rooster to a grown-up man!" laughed Otto. "You had better keep it, since you are so fond of it."

"They say he has had no food, mother," Otto continued. "I shall be glad to take him some dinner."

Mrs. Ritter gave her consent, so the children packed a basket with good things to eat, and started for the barn to find Joggi. He was there, crouched in the corner as they had supposed.

Otto opened the basket for him to see and said, "Come out here, Joggi, and you shall have all there is in this basket."

Joggi did not move.

"Come, Joggi," continued Otto, "you know the farmer may take the pitchfork to you if you stay here."

At this Joggi screamed and tried to get farther back in his corner.

Miezi was very sorry for the poor man. Going up to him, she whispered in his ear: "My papa will not let them hurt you, so you had better come along with me. I brought you something from Santa Claus. See!" She held out the candy rooster to him as she spoke.

These whispered words restored Joggi's confidence. He looked fearlessly about, took the candy rooster from her hand, and began to laugh in his old way. He allowed Miezi to lead him out, but he would not touch the basket, so they let him follow them home.

Mrs. Ritter was relieved to see Joggi with them. She opened the door for them, and had a good supper placed before the hungry man, saying, "Eat all you want, Joggi, and be happy."

Joggi ate heartily and seemed as pleased as a child over the rooster, which he held constantly. As soon as he had finished eating, he rose to go home, and they noticed that he looked at the rooster and laughed as he went, his great fright apparently forgotten.

For several days Mrs. Ritter did not see the joiner. It seemed a longer time to her, for so much had happened in the meantime; she had not worried about him, however, because she knew that he was well cared for.

The colonel had told Andreas about his brother's confession. "It is like him to do things in that fashion," said the joiner. "I would gladly have given it all to him, but he always takes the wrong way to get what he wants."

One bright sunny morning Mrs. Ritter went tripping down the hill like a schoolgirl. She was going to see Andreas, and she had some plans in mind, the carrying out of which would give her a great deal of pleasure.

When she reached his house and entered as usual, she was surprised to see Wiseli run out of the room in tears, and the joiner sitting in the deepest gloom, as if a great sorrow had befallen him.

"What has happened?" she exclaimed, as she stood still in astonishment.

"Mrs. Ritter," he faltered, "I wish that the child had never come to my house."

"What!" she exclaimed, more amazed than ever. "Wiseli? What can she have done?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't misunderstand me, Mrs. Ritter!" he cried. "It is only because she has been here and has made a little paradise out of my humble home that I am so unhappy. They have sent for her the second time, and she has to go back to Beechgreen. I shall be miserable without her. You don't know how hard it is for me to let her go. She would rather stay with me, too, so we are both unhappy over it. I would give the uncle all I have saved in the last thirty years, if he would only let me keep her."

Mrs. Ritter sighed in relief and said, "I should do nothing of the sort; I know of a much better way."

He looked at her questioningly.

"I should adopt Wiseli, if I were you and wanted her. Then you will be her father and she will be your child and heir. Wouldn't that be a better way, Andreas?"

Andreas grasped Mrs. Ritter's hand as he asked eagerly, "Is such a thing possible?"

"Yes"; said Mrs. Ritter, "I thought that you might want to keep her, so I have been looking the matter up, and Mr. Ritter is at home now, so that, in case you want to settle the legal part of it, he can take you to the city immediately, for you are not yet able to go by yourself. Then you will have nothing to worry about, and you can tell Wiseli after you come back."

It was the first time that she had ever seen the joiner excited. He began to get into his overcoat

as she rose to go.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that we can get the matter settled to-day?"

"Yes, I am sure," she replied, "and I will send the carriage over at once."

A few moments later Wiseli noticed the Ritter carriage drive up to the gate and the coachman come to assist the joiner down the walk. She was surprised to see him get into the carriage, for he had not told her that he was going for a drive. "Perhaps," she thought, "he did not feel like telling me, because this is the last day that I can be with him."

Wiseli had the dinner ready at the usual hour, but the joiner was not there. She did not wish to eat without him, so she waited and waited, but still he did not come. Finally, she fell asleep. She dreamed that she was again at her uncle's home and that she was very unhappy. She was not aware of the beautiful evening glow in the sunset which promised a pleasant to-morrow.

Wiseli started from her slumber when the door opened. It was the joiner, who had just returned, and his face was as radiant as the sunset. He had been in such a different mood in the morning that Wiseli stared in astonishment.

"I have good news, Wiseli," he said, as he hung up his hat and stepped about as lightly as a boy. "It is all settled. You are legally my child, and I am your father. Call me father this very minute, my little girl."

All the color had left Wiseli's cheeks, and she stood uncomprehending and speechless.

"Of course you don't know what I am talking about," he said. "I begin at the wrong end because I am so glad. This is what has happened, Wiseli: the proper authorities have to-day given me the legal right to take care of you. I have been to the city and the matter is arranged, so that we really belong to each other. You shall never go back to your uncle's again, for now you have a home of your own."

His meaning dawned at length upon Wiseli, although it seemed too good to be true. Impulsively she sprang into his arms. "Then I can always call you father," she said. "I know who knew that this was going to happen," she added.

"Who knew it would happen, Wiseli?"

"My mother knew it would."

"Your mother! How, Wiseli?"

"In my dream I saw the path that leads to your house, and she was pointing to it and saying, 'See, Wiseli, that is your path.' So mother must have known it," she added. "Don't you think that she helped to bring it about, father?"

The good man could not answer, for his heart was full and his eyes were dimmed with tears, but he looked at Wiseli so lovingly that she understood.

Suddenly the door was thrown open, and Otto fairly sprang into the room. He threw up his cap and shouted, "Hurrah! We've won, and Wiseli is free."

Miezi came in next, almost breathless, and as she held the door open she cried, "See what is coming for the celebration!"

There was the baker's boy carrying so large a board on his head that he stuck fast in the doorway, and they had to help him to get it into the house.

It was explained that Otto and Miezi, having permission to order as large a cake as they wished for the occasion, had told the baker to make them the largest he could, so he had baked one just the size of his oven.

Trina came with loaded baskets which contained a well-browned roast and tempting vegetables, for Mrs. Ritter knew that the joiner had not been able to eat his dinner, and surmised rightly that Wiseli would not have eaten much by herself. Trina prepared things on the table so that they could all sit down. It was a joyous occasion for every one present. The feast was followed with merriment and song until a late hour.

At last Trina stood ready to return, and the guests rose to go.

"To-night you have brought the feast to us," said the joiner, "but one week from to-night I invite you all to come back to a feast that I wish to provide in honor of my little daughter."

Then they shook hands in the pleasant anticipation of coming together again soon, and in general satisfaction that their little friend had at last a home of her own. Wiseli followed Otto to the door and said: "I thank you a thousand times, Otto, for all that you have done for me. Chappi never hurt me again after you choked him, because he was afraid that I might tell you, so you see how much reason I have to be grateful."

"I am much more indebted to you," said Otto. "I haven't had to do that work in the schoolroom again, and that I disliked much more than punishing Chappi, so we shall have to call it even."

Miezi, who had been the gayest of the party all the evening, waved her hand in answer to the last

farewell, and then the guests were lost to view. Joiner Andreas sat down by the window in his accustomed place, but Wiseli first restored order to dishes and furniture. When she had finished that task, she went to her father and said: "Shouldn't you like to hear the verses that mother taught me? They have been running in my mind all the evening, and I don't intend ever to forget them."

"I shall be very glad to hear them," said the joiner, as he took her on his knee. Then Wiseli, leaning on his shoulder and looking out to the stars, repeated with joyful heart:

"Commit thou all thy ways
And all that grieves thy heart
To Him whose endless days
Shall grace and strength impart.

He gives to wind and wave
The power to be still;
For thee He'll surely save
A place to work His will."

From this time on the little home of the joiner, nestling among the flowers, remained one of the happiest in the world. Wherever Wiseli went, people were so polite to her that she was quite astonished, for they had scarcely noticed her before. Her aunt and uncle Gotti never passed the house without coming in to see her, and they always invited her to make them a visit.

Wiseli was very much relieved to see their friendly manner, for she had had secret fears as to how they would accept the situation. She was glad to live in peace with all the people about her, but she said to herself, "Otto and the rest of the Ritter family were kind to me when I was unhappy and poor, but the others paid no attention to me until my father took me, so I know where to look for my real friends."

PRONOUNCING VOCABULARY OF PROPER NAMES

The vowels are marked as in Webster's dictionary.

In unaccented syllables, long vowels and ä should not be pronounced too strongly; but they should not become indistinct, especially in the names around Lake Garda (both persons and places). In unaccented syllables the vowel [~e] should be very light and rather indistinct; a very common pronunciation, though not the most exact, is to sound this vowel in German names like the *a* in *sofa*.

Aar (är)
Aloise (älōē'z[~e])
Andreas (än drā'äs)
Bergamo (bĕr'gä mō)
Bern (bĕrn)
Chappi (käp'pē)
Como (cō'mō)
Desenzano (dā sĕn dzä'nō)
Engadine (ĕn gä dēn')
Enrico (ĕn rē'cō)
Garda (gär'dä)
Gotti (gŏt'tē)
Hans (häns)
Heimatlos (hī'mät lōs): homeless
Joggi (yŏg'gē)
Kunzli (kunts'lē)
Maloja (mä lō'yä)
Maria (mä rē'ä)
Marie (mä rē')
Menotti (mā nŏt'tē)
Miez (mēts)
Miezchen (mēts'chĕn)
Miezi (mēt'sē)
Peschiera (pĕ skyâ'rä)
Rico (rē'cō)
Ritter (rĭt'ter)
Riva (rē'vä)

Rudi (r[u:]'dē)
St. Gall (saint gäl)
St. Moritz (saint mō'rĭts)
Sils (zĭls)
Sils-Maria (zĭls-mä rē'ä)
Silvio (sēl'vyō)
Stineli (stē'n[~e] lē)
Trevillo (trā vēl'lō)
Trina (trē'nä)
Trudt (tr[u:]t)
Una sera ([u:]'nä sā'rä): one evening
Urschli (ur'shlē)
Wiseli (vē'z[~e] lē)
Wisi (vē'zē)

Transcriber's Note:

Not all letters can be shown as in the original text. The following convention has been used to indicate letters which can not be represented (where x denotes the letter).

[~x] letter with tilde above
[x:] letter with dieresis below

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