

Hans Christian Andersen

# Rudy and Babette: or, The Capture of the Eagle's Nest



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**Capture of the Eagle's Nest**

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Rudy and Babette; Or, The Capture of the Eagle's Nest:*

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# **Andersen H. C. Hans Christian Rudy and Babette; Or, The Capture of the Eagle's Nest**

## **CHAPTER I LITTLE RUDY**

**LET** us now go to Switzerland, and see its wonderful mountains, whose steep, rocky sides are covered with trees. We will climb up to the fields of snow, and then make our way down to the grassy valleys, with their countless streams and rivulets, impetuously rushing to lose themselves in the sea. The sunshine is hot in the narrow valley; the snow becomes firm and solid, and in the course of time it either descends as an avalanche, or creeps along as a glacier. There are two of these glaciers in the valleys below the Schreckhorn and the Wetterhorn, near the long village of Grindelwald. They are a remarkable sight, and therefore many travelers from all countries come in the summer to visit them: they come over the high mountains covered with snow, they traverse the deep valleys; and to do this they must climb, hour after hour, leaving the valley far beneath them, till

they see it as if they were in an air-balloon. The clouds hang above them like thick mists over the mountains, and the sun's rays make their way through the openings between the clouds to where the brown houses lie spread, lighting up some chance spot with a vivid green. Below, the stream foams and blusters, but above it murmurs and ripples, and looks like a band of silver hanging down the side of the rock.

On either side of the path up the mountain lie wooden houses. Each house has its little plot of potatoes; and this they all require, for there are many children, and they all have good appetites. The children come out to meet every stranger, whether walking or riding, and ask him to buy their carved wooden châteaux, made like the houses they live in. Be it fine or be it wet, the children try to sell their carvings.

About twenty years since you might have seen one little boy standing apart from the others, but evidently very desirous to dispose of his wares. He looked grave and sad, and held his little tray tightly with both hands as if he was afraid of losing it. This serious look and his small size caused him to be much noticed by travelers, who often called him and purchased many of his toys, though he did not know why he was so favored. His grandfather lived two miles off among the mountains, where he did his carving. He had a cabinet full of the things he had made. There were nut-crackers, knives and forks, boxes carved with leaves and chamois, and many toys for children; but little Rudy cared for nothing so much as for an old gun, hanging from a

rafter in the ceiling, for his grandfather had told him it should be his own when he was big enough to know how to use it.

Though the boy was little, he was set in charge of the goats; and Rudy could climb as high as any of his flock, and was fond of climbing tall trees after birds' nests. He was brave and high-spirited, but he never smiled except when he watched the foaming cataract, or heard the thundering roar of an avalanche. He never joined in the children's games, and only met them when his grandfather sent him to sell his carvings; and this employment Rudy did not much like. He would rather wander alone amongst the mountains, or sit by his grandfather while he told him stories of former ages, or of the people who lived at Meiningen, from whence he had come. He told him they had not always lived there, but had come from a distant northern country called Sweden. Rudy took great pride in this knowledge; but he also learnt much from his four-footed friends. He had a large dog, named Ajola, who had been his father's; and he had also a tom-cat who was his particular friend, for it was from him he had learnt how to climb.

"Come with me on the roof," the cat said to him; for when children have not learnt to talk, they can understand the speech of birds and animals quite as well as that of their father and mother; but that is only while they are very little, and their grandfather's stick seems as good as a live horse, with head, legs, and tail. Some children lose this later than others, and we call them backward. People say such funny things!

"Come with me, little Rudy, on the roof," was one of the

first things the cat had said which Rudy had understood: "it is all imagination about falling; you don't fall if you are not afraid. Come; put one of your paws so, and the other so! Feel for yourself with your fore-paws! Use your eyes and be active; and if there's a crevice, just spring and take firm hold, as I do!"

Rudy did as he was told, and you might often have seen him sitting beside the cat on the top of the roof; afterwards they climbed together to the tops of the trees, and Rudy even found his way to the rocky ledges which were quite out of the cat's reach.

"Higher! higher!" said the trees and the bushes; "see how we can climb. We stretch upwards, and take firm hold of the highest and narrowest ledges of the rocks."

So Rudy found his way to the very top of the mountain, and often got up there before sunrise; for he enjoyed the pure invigorating air, fresh from the hands of the Creator, which men say combines the delicate perfume of the mountain herbs with the sweet scent of the wild thyme and the mint found in the valley. The grosser part of it is taken up by the clouds, and as they are carried by the winds, the lofty trees catch the fragrance and make the air pure and fresh. And so Rudy loved the morning air.

The happy sunbeams kissed his cheek, and Giddiness, who was always near, was afraid to touch him; the swallows, who had built seven little nests under his grandfather's eaves, circled about him and his goats, singing: "We and you! and you and we!" They reminded him of his home, his grandfather, and of the fowls; but although the fowls lived with them in the same house, Rudy had

never made friends with them.

Although he was such a little boy, he had already traveled a considerable distance. His birthplace was in the canton of Vallais, whence he had been brought over the mountains to where he now lived. He had even made his way on foot to the Staubbach, which descends through the air gleaming like silver below the snow-clad mountain called the Jungfrau. He had also been to the great glacier at Grindelwald; but that was a sad story. His mother lost her life at that spot; and Rudy's grandfather said that it was there he had lost his happy spirits. Before he was a twelvemonth old his mother used to say that he laughed more than he cried, but since he had been rescued from the crevasse in the ice, a different spirit seemed to have possession of him. His grandfather would not talk of it, but every one in that district knew the story.

Rudy's father had been a postilion. The large dog, which was now lying in the grandfather's room, was his constant companion when traveling over the Simplon on his way to the Lake of Geneva. Some of his relations lived in the valley of the Rhone, in the canton of Vallais. His uncle was a successful chamois-hunter and an experienced guide. When Rudy was only a twelvemonth old his father died, and his mother now wished to return to her own relations in the Bernese Oberland. Her father lived not many miles from Grindelwald; he was able to maintain himself by wood-carving. So she started on her journey in the month of June, with her child in her arms, and in the company of two chamois-hunters, over the Gemmi towards Grindelwald. They

had accomplished the greater part of their journey, had passed the highest ridge and reached the snow-field, and were now come in sight of the valley where her home was, with its well-remembered wooden houses, but still had to cross one great glacier. It was covered with recent snow, which hid a crevasse which was much deeper than the height of a man, although it did not extend to where the water rushed below the glacier. The mother, while carrying her baby, slipped, fell into the cleft, and disappeared from sight. She did not utter a sound, but they could hear the child crying. It was more than an hour before they could fetch ropes and poles from the nearest house, and recover what seemed to be two corpses from the cleft in the ice. They tried every possible means, and succeeded in restoring the child, but not his mother, to life; so the old man had his daughter's son brought into his home, a little orphan, the boy who used to laugh more than he cried; but he seemed to be entirely changed, and this change was made down in the crevasse, in the cold world of ice, where, as the Swiss peasants think, lost souls are imprisoned until Doomsday.

The immense glacier looks like the waves of the sea frozen into ice, the great greenish blocks heaped together, while the cold stream of melted ice rushes below towards the valley, and huge caverns and immense crevasses stretch far away beneath it. It is like a palace of glass, and is the abode of the Ice-Maiden, the Queen of the Glaciers. She, the fatal, the overwhelming one, is in part a spirit of the air, though she also rules over the

river; therefore she can rise to the topmost peak of the snow mountain, where the adventurous climbers have to cut every step in the ice before they can place their feet; she can float on the smallest branch down the torrent, and leap from block to block with her white hair and her pale blue robe flying about her, and resembling the water in the beautiful Swiss lakes.

"I have the power to crush and to seize!" she cries. "They have robbed me of a lovely boy whom I have kissed, but have not killed. He now lives among men: he keeps his goats amid the hills, he ever climbs higher and higher away from his fellows, but not away from me. He belongs to me, and I will again have him!"

So she charged Giddiness to seize him for her, for the Ice-Maiden dared not venture among the woods in the hot summer time; and Giddiness and his brethren – for there are many of them – mounted up to the Ice-Maiden, and she selected the strongest of them for her purpose. They sit on the edge of the staircase, and on the rails at the top of the tower; they scamper like squirrels on the ridge of the rock, they leap from the rails and the footpath, and tread the air like a swimmer treading water, to tempt their victims after them and dash them into the abyss. Both Giddiness and the Ice-Maiden seize a man as an octopus seizes all within its reach. And now Giddiness had been charged to seize little Rudy.

"I seize him!" said Giddiness; "I cannot. The miserable cat has taught him all her tricks. The boy possesses a power which keeps me from him; I cannot seize him even when he hangs by

a branch above the precipice. I should be delighted to tickle his feet, or pitch him headlong through the air; but I cannot!"

"We will succeed between us," said the Ice-Maiden. "Thou or I! I! I!"

"No, no!" an unseen voice replied, sounding like distant church bells; the joyful singing of good spirits – the Daughters of the Sun. These float above the mountain every evening; they expand their rosy wings which glow more and more like fire as the sun nears to setting over the snowy peaks. People call it the "Alpine glow." And after sunset they withdraw into the snow and rest there until sunrise, when they again show themselves. They love flowers, and butterflies and human beings; and they were particularly fond of Rudy.

"You shall never catch him – you shall never have him," said they.

"I have captured bigger and stronger boys than he," said the Ice-Maiden.

The Daughters of the Sun now sang a song of a traveler whose cloak was carried away by the storm: "The storm took the cloak but not the man. You can grasp at him, but not hold him, ye strong ones. He is stronger, he is more spiritual than we are! He will ascend above the sun, our mother! He has the power to bind the winds and the waves, and make them serve him and do his bidding. If you unloose the weight that holds him down, you will set him free to rise yet higher."

Thus ran the chorus which sounded like distant church bells.

Each morning the sunbeams shone through the little window of the grandfather's house and lighted on the silent boy. The Daughters of the Sun kissed him, and tried to thaw the cold kisses which the Queen of the Glaciers had given him, while he was in the arms of his dead mother, in the deep crevasse, whence he had been so wonderfully rescued.

## CHAPTER II

# GOING TO THE NEW HOME

**RUDY** was now a boy of eight. His uncle, who lived in the Rhone valley at the other side of the mountains, wished him to come to him, and learn how to make his way in the world; his grandfather approved of this, and let him go.

Rudy therefore said good-by. He had to take leave of others beside his grandfather; and the first of these was his old dog, Ajola.

"When your father was postilion, I was his post-dog," said Ajola. "We traveled backwards and forwards together; and I know some dogs at the other side of the mountains and some of the people. I was never a chatterer, but now that we are not likely to have many more chances of talking, I want to tell you a few things, I will tell you something I have had in my head and thought over for a long time. I can't make it out, and you won't make it out; but that doesn't matter. At least I can see that things are not fairly divided in this world, whether for dogs or for men. Only a few are privileged to sit in a lady's lap and have milk to drink. I've never been used to it myself, but I've seen a little lap-dog riding in the coach, and occupying the place of a passenger. The lady to whom it belonged, or who belonged to it, took a bottle of milk with her for the dog to drink; and she

offered him sweets, but he sniffed at them and refused them, so she ate them herself. I had to run in the mud beside the coach, and was very hungry, thinking all the time that this couldn't be right; but they say that there are a great many things that aren't right. Would you like to sit in a lady's lap and ride in a carriage? I wish you could. But you can't arrange that for yourself. I never could, bark and howl as I might!"

This is what Ajola said; and Rudy put his arms round him, and kissed his cold, wet nose. Then he took up the cat, but puss tried to get away, and said, —

"You're too strong! and I don't want to scratch you. Climb over the mountains, as I taught you. Don't fancy you can fall, and then you will always keep firm hold." As he said this, the cat ran away; for he did not wish Rudy to see that he was crying.

The fowls strutted about the room. One of them had lost its tail feathers. A tourist, who imagined he was a sportsman, had shot its tail off, as he thought it was a wild bird.

"Rudy is going away over the mountains," said one of the fowls.

The other one replied, "He's in too great a hurry; I don't want to say good-by." And then they both made off.

He then said good-by to the goats; they bleated "Med! med! may!" and that made him feel sad.

Two neighboring guides, who wanted to cross the mountains to beyond the Gemmi took Rudy with them, going on foot. It was a fatiguing walk for such a little boy; but he was strong, and

never feared anything.

The swallows flew part of the way with them. "We and you! and you and we!" they sang. Their route lay across the roaring Lütschine, which flows in many little streams from the Grindel glacier, and some fallen trees served for a bridge. When they gained the forest at the other side, they began to mount the slope where the glacier had quitted the mountain, and then they had to climb over or make their way round the blocks of ice on the glacier. Rudy sometimes was obliged to crawl instead of walking; but his eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he planted his feet so firmly that you would think he wanted to leave the mark of his spiked shoes behind him at every step. The dark earth which the mountain torrent had scattered over the glacier made it look almost black, but still you could catch sight of the bluish-green ice. They had to skirt the countless little pools which lay amongst the huge blocks of ice; and sometimes they passed by a great stone that had rested at the edge of a cleft, and then the stone would be upset, and crash down into the crevasse, and the echoes would reverberate from all the deep clefts in the glacier.

So they went on climbing. The mighty glacier seemed like a great river frozen into ice, hemmed in by the steep rocks. Rudy remembered what he had been told, of how he and his mother had been pulled up out of one of those, deep, cold crevasses; but he soon thought no more of it, and it seemed no more than many other stories which he had been told. Occasionally, when the men thought the path too rough for the boy, they offered him a hand;

but he was not easily tired, and stood on the ice as securely as a chamois. Now they got on rock, and clambered over the rough stones; then they would have to walk through the pine-trees, or over pasture-lands, whilst the landscape was constantly changing. Around them were the great snow mountains – the Jungfrau, the Mönch and the Eiger. Every child knew their names, and, of course, Rudy knew them. Rudy had never before been up so high; he had never walked over the wide snow-fields: like the ocean with its waves immovable, the wind now and again blowing off some of the snow as if it were the foam of the sea. The glaciers meet here as if they were joining hands; each forms one of the palaces of the Ice-Maiden, whose power and aim is to capture and overwhelm. The sunshine was hot, the snow was brilliantly white, and seemed to sparkle as if covered with diamonds. Countless insects, most of them butterflies or bees, were lying dead on the snow; they had gone up too high, or been carried by the wind, and had been frozen to death. A threatening cloud hung over the Wetterhorn, looking like a bundle of black wool; it hung down, heavy with its own weight, ready to burst with the resistless force of a whirlwind. The recollection of this whole journey – the encamping for the night, at such a height, the walk in the dark, the deep clefts in the rock, worn away by the force of water during countless years – all this was fixed in Rudy's memory.

An empty stone hut beyond the *mer de glace* gave them shelter for the night. Here they found pine branches for fuel, and they

quickly made a fire and arranged the bed as comfortably as they could. They then seated themselves about the fire, lighted their pipes, and drank the hot drink which they had prepared. They gave Rudy some of their supper, and then began to tell tales and legends of the spirits of the Alps; of the mighty serpents that lay coiled in the lakes; of the spirits who were reported to have carried men in their sleep to the marvelous floating city, Venice; of the mysterious shepherd, who tended his black sheep on the mountain pastures, and how no one had seen him, although many had heard the tones of his bell and the bleating of his flock. Rudy listened to all this, though he was not frightened, as he did not know what fear was; and as he was listening he thought he heard the weird bleating; it grew more and more distinct till the men heard it too, and left off talking to listen, and told Rudy to keep awake.

This was the Föhn, the blast, the terrible tempest, which sweeps down from the mountains upon the valleys, rending the trees as if they were reeds, and sweeping away the houses by a flood as easily as one moves chessmen.

After a time they said to Rudy that it was all over, and he might go to sleep; and he was so tired with his long tramp that he obeyed at once.

When day broke, they pushed forward. The sun now shone for Rudy on new mountains, new glaciers, and snow-fields. They were now in the canton of Vallais, and had crossed the range which could be seen from Grindelwald, but were yet far from his

new home. Other ravines, other pastures, woods, and mountain-paths now came into sight, other houses, and other people; but they were strange and deformed-looking beings, with pale faces, and huge wens hanging from their necks. They were *crétins*, feebly moving about, and looking listlessly at Rudy and his companions – the women were particularly repulsive to look at. Should he find such people in his new home?

## CHAPTER III

### UNCLE

**RUDY** had now come to his uncle's house, and found to his relief that the people were like those he had been used to. There was only one *crétin*, a poor silly boy – one of those who rove from one house to another in the canton of Vallais, staying a month or two in each house, and the unfortunate Saperli was there when Rudy came.

Uncle was a great hunter, and also knew the cooper's trade. His wife was a lively little person, and almost looked like a bird; her eyes were like those of an eagle, and her long neck was quite downy.

Rudy found everything new to him – dress, habits and customs, and language, though he would soon get used to that. They seemed more comfortably off than in his grandfather's house. The rooms were large, and the walls were decorated with chamois' horns and polished guns, and there was a picture of the Virgin over the door; fresh Alpine roses and a burning lamp stood before it.

Uncle was, as I have said, one of the most successful chamois-hunters in the neighborhood, and also one of the best guides. Rudy soon became the pet of the household. They had one pet already, an old hound, blind and deaf; he was no longer able to

go out hunting, but they took care of him in return for his former services. Rudy patted the dog, and wished to make friends; but he did not care to make friends with strangers, though Rudy was not long a stranger there.

"We live very well here in the canton of Vallais," said uncle, "we have chamois, who are not so easily killed as the steinbock, but we get on better than in the old days. It is all very well to praise former times, but we are better off now. An opening has been made, and the air blows through our secluded vale. We always get something better when the old thing is done with," said he; for uncle had much to say, and would tell tales of his childhood, and of the days when his father was vigorous, when Vallais was, as he said, a closed bag, full of sick folk and unfortunate *crétins*; "but the French soldiers came, and they were the right sort of doctors, for they killed both the disease and the persons who had it. The French knew all about fighting; they struck their blows in many ways, and their maidens could strike too!" and here uncle nodded at his wife, who was a Frenchwoman. "The French struck at our stones in fine style! They struck the Simplon road through the rocks; they struck the road, so that I may say to a child of three years old, 'Go to Italy, keep right on the highway!' and the child will find himself in Italy if he only keeps right on the road!" and then uncle sang a French song, "Hurrah for Napoleon Buonaparte!"

Rudy now heard for the first time of France, and of Lyons, a great town on the river Rhone, where his uncle had been.

In a few years Rudy was to become an active chamois-hunter. His uncle said he was capable of it; he therefore taught him to handle a gun and to shoot. In the hunting season he took him to the mountains, and made him drink the warm blood from the chamois, which keeps a hunter from giddiness. He taught him to know the seasons when avalanches would roll down the mountain sides, at midday or in the afternoon, according to whether the sun had been strong on the places. He taught him to watch how the chamois sprang, and notice how his feet fell that he might stand firm; and that where he could obtain no foothold he must catch hold with his elbows, grasp with his muscles, and hold with his thighs and knees – that he might even hold with his neck if necessary. The chamois were very wary, – they would send one to look out; but the hunter must be still more wary, – put them off the scent. He had known them so stupid that if he hung his coat and hat on an alpenstock, the chamois took the coat for a man. Uncle played his trick one day when he and Rudy were out hunting.

The mountain paths were narrow; they were often a mere cornice or ledge projecting over a giddy precipice. The snow was half melted, and the rock crumbled beneath the feet; so the uncle laid himself down at full length and crept along. Each stone, as it broke off, fell, striking and rolling from ledge to ledge till it was out of sight. Rudy stood about a hundred paces from his uncle on a projecting rock, and from this point he saw a great bearded vulture swooping over his uncle, whom it seemed to be about to

strike over the precipice with its wings, to make him its prey. Uncle had his eye on the chamois, which he could see with its kid on the other side of the ravine; Rudy kept his eye on the bird, knew what it would do, and had his hands on his gun ready to fire; the chamois suddenly sprang up, uncle fired, the animal fell dead, the kid made off as if it was used to dangers. At the sound of the gun the bird flew away, and uncle knew nothing of his danger until told of it by Rudy.

As they were going home in the best of humors, uncle whistling one of his songs, they suddenly heard a strange noise not far off; they looked round them, and saw that the snow on the side of the mountain was all in motion. It waved up and down, broke into pieces, and came down with a roar like thunder. It was an avalanche, not over Rudy and uncle, but near, too near, to them.

"Hold fast, Rudy!" he shouted; "fast, with all your power!"

And Rudy clung to the stem of a tree; uncle climbed above him up to the branches and held fast, while the avalanche rolled past at a distance of a few yards; but the rush of air broke the trees and bushes all around like reeds, and cast the fragments down, and left Rudy pressed to the earth. The tree-stem to which he had held was broken, and the top flung to a distance; there, among the broken branches, lay uncle, his head crushed; his hand was still warm, but you would not know his face. Rudy stood pale and trembling; it was the first shock in his life, the first time he had felt horror.

It was late when he brought the tidings of death to what was now a sorrowful home. The wife was speechless and tearless until they brought the body home, then her grief broke forth. The unfortunate *crétin* hid himself in his bed, nor did they see him all the next day; but in the evening he came to Rudy.

"Write a letter for me! Saperli cannot write! Saperli can go with the letter to the post!"

"A letter from thee?" exclaimed Rudy. "And to whom?"

"To the Lord Christ!"

"What do you mean?"

And the half-idiot, as they called the *crétin*, cast a pathetic glance at Rudy, folded his hands, and said solemnly and slowly:

"Jesus Christ! Saperli wishes to send a letter to ask Him that Saperli may lie dead, and not the man in this house."

And Rudy took him by the hand. "That letter would not go there! that letter would not bring him back."

But it was impossible for Rudy to make him understand.

"Now thou art the support of the house," said the widow, and Rudy became so.

## CHAPTER IV

### BABETTE

**WHO** is the best shot in the canton of Vallais? Even the chamois knew. "Take care of Rudy's shooting!" they said. "Who is the handsomest huntsman?" "Rudy is!" said the maidens, but they did not say, "Take care of Rudy's shooting!" nor did their serious mothers say so either; he nodded to them as lightly as he did to a young girl; for he was brave and joyous, his cheeks were brown, his teeth sound and white, and his eyes coal-black and sparkling; he was a handsome fellow, and not more than twenty. The ice-cold water did not hurt him in swimming; he swam like a fish, could climb better than any other man, could hold fast like a snail to the walls of rock, for his muscles and sinews were good; and you saw when he leapt that he had taken lessons from the cat and from the chamois. Rudy was the surest guide to depend on, and might have made his fortune in that way; his uncle had also taught him coopering, but he gave little thought to that, for his pleasure and delight was in shooting the chamois; and in this way he earned money. Rudy was a good match, as they say, if he did not look above his own position. And he was a dancer among dancers, so that the maidens dreamt of him, and some of them even thought of him when waking.

"He gave me a kiss at the dance!" said Annette, the

schoolmaster's daughter, to her dearest friend; but she ought not to have said that even to her dearest friend. Such a secret is not easy to keep: it is like sand in a bag full of holes, it will run out; and they all soon knew that Rudy had given her a kiss at the dance, though he had not kissed the one that he wanted to kiss.

"Just watch him!" said an old huntsman; "he has kissed Annette; he has begun with A and he will kiss all through the alphabet."

A kiss at the dance was all that the gossips could say against Rudy so far; but although he had kissed Annette, she was not the flower of his heart.

Down at Bex, among the great walnut-trees, close to a little rapid mountain stream, there lived a rich miller; his dwelling-house was a big building of three floors, with small turrets, roofed with shingle and ornamented with metal plates which shone in the rays of the sun or the moon; the biggest turret had for a weather-cock a glittering arrow which had transfixed an apple, in memory of Tell's marksmanship. The mill appeared fine and prosperous, and one could both sketch and describe it, but one could not sketch or describe the miller's daughter; at least, Rudy says one could not, and yet he had her image in his heart. Her eyes had so beamed upon him that they had quite kindled a flame; this had come quite suddenly, as other fires come, and the strangest thing was, that the miller's daughter, the charming Babette, had no thought of it, as she and Rudy had never spoken to each other.

The miller was rich, and his riches made Babette hard to

approach; "But nothing is so high," said Rudy to himself, "that a man can't get up to it; a man must climb, and he need not fall, nor lose faith in himself." This lesson he had learnt at home.

It happened one day that Rudy had business at Bex, and it was quite a journey, for the railway did not then go there. From the Rhone glacier, at the foot of the Simplon, between many and various mountain-heights, stretches the broad valley of the Rhone, whose flood often overflows its banks, overwhelming everything. Between the towns of Sion and St. Maurice the valley bends in the shape of an elbow, and below St. Maurice it is so narrow that it hardly allows room for more than the river itself and a narrow road. An old tower stands here on the mountain side, as a sentry to mark the boundary of the canton of Vallais, opposite the stone bridge by the toll-house; and here begins the canton Vaud, not far from the town of Bex. As you advance you notice the increase of fertility, you seem to have come into a garden of chestnuts and walnut-trees; here and there are cypresses and pomegranates in flower; there is a southern warmth, as if you had come into Italy.

Rudy arrived at Bex, finished his business, and looked about him; but never a lad from the mill, not to mention Babette, could he see. This was not what he wished.

It was now towards evening; the air was full of the scent of the wild thyme and of the flowers of the limes; a shining veil seemed to hang over the wooded mountains, with a stillness, not of sleep, nor of death, but rather as if nature were holding its breath,

in order to have its likeness photographed on the blue vault of heaven. Here and there between the trees, and across the green fields stood poles, to support the telegraph wires already carried through that tranquil valley; by one of these leaned an object, so still that it might have been mistaken for a tree-stump, but it was Rudy, who was as still and quiet as everything about him; he was not asleep, and he certainly was not dead. But thoughts were rushing through his brain, thoughts mighty and overwhelming, which were to mold his future.

His eyes were directed to one point amidst the leaves, one light in the miller's parlor where Babette lived. So still was Rudy standing, that you might believe he was taking aim at a chamois, for the chamois will sometimes stand for an instant as if a part of the rock, and then suddenly, startled by the rolling of a stone, will spring away; and so it was with Rudy – a sudden thought startled him.

"Never give up!" he cried. "Call at the mill! Good evening to the miller, good day to Babette. A man doesn't fall when he doesn't think about it; Babette must see me at some time if I am ever to be her husband."

Rudy laughed, for he was of good cheer, and he went to the mill; he knew well enough what he wished for – he wished for Babette.

The river, with its yellowish water, rushed along, and the willows and limes overhung its banks; Rudy went up the path, and as it says in the old children's song:

"to the miller's house,  
But found no one at home  
Except little Puss!"

The parlor cat stood on the steps, put up his back, and said "Miou!" but Rudy had no thought for that speech; he knocked at the door; no one heard, no one opened it. "Miou!" said the cat. If Rudy had been little, he would have understood animals' language, and known that the cat said: "There's no one at home!" So he went over to the mill to ask, and there he got the information. The master had gone on a journey, as far as the town of Interlaken "*inter lacūs*, between the lakes," as the schoolmaster, Annette's father, had explained it in a lesson. The miller was far away, and Babette with him; there was a grand shooting competition – it began to-morrow, and went on for eight days. Switzers from all the German cantons would be there.

Unlucky Rudy, you might say, this was not a fortunate time to come to Bex; so he turned and marched above St. Maurice and Sion to his own valley and his own mountains; but he was not disheartened. The sun rose next morning, but his spirits were already high, for they had never set.

"Babette is at Interlaken, many days' journey from hence," he said to himself. "It is a long way there if one goes by the high road, but it is not so far if you strike across the mountains, as I have often done in chamois-hunting. There is my old home, where I lived when little with my grandfather; and the shooting-

match is at Interlaken! I will be the best of them; and I will be with Babette, when I have made acquaintance with her."

With his light knapsack, containing his Sunday suit and his gun and game-bag, Rudy went up the mountain by the short way, which was, however, pretty long; but the shooting-match only began that day and was to last over a week, and all that time, he was told, the miller and Babette would spend with their relations at Interlaken. So Rudy crossed the Gemmi, meaning to come down near Grindelwald.

Healthy and joyful, he stepped along, up in the fresh, the light, the invigorating mountain air. The valley sank deeper, the horizon opened wider; here was a snow-peak, and there another, and soon he could see the whole shining range of the Alps. Rudy knew every snow-mountain, and he made straight for the Schreckhorn, which raised its white-sprinkled, stony fingers high into the blue air.

At length he crossed the highest ridge. The pastures stretched down towards his own valley; the air was light, and he felt merry; mountain and valley smiled with abundance of flowers and verdure; his heart was full of thoughts of youth: one should never become old, one need never die; to live, to conquer, to be happy! free as a bird – and he felt like a bird. And the swallows flew by him, and sang, as they used to do in his childhood: "We and you, and you and we!" All was soaring and rejoicing.

Below lay the velvety green meadow, sprinkled with brown châteaux, and the Lütschine humming and rushing. He saw the

glacier, with its bottle-green edges covered with earth-soiled snow; he saw the deep fissures, and the upper and the lower glacier. The sound of the church bells came to him, as if they were ringing to welcome him home; his heart beat more strongly, and swelled so that Babette was forgotten for a moment, so large was his heart and so full of memories!

He again went along the way where he had stood as a little urchin with the other children, and sold the carved châlets. He saw among the pines his grandfather's house, but strangers now lived in it. Children came along the path to sell things, and one of them offered him an Alpine rose; Rudy took it as a good omen, and he thought of Babette. He soon crossed the bridge where the two Lütschine unite; the trees here grew thicker, and the walnuts gave a refreshing shade. He now saw the flag waving, the white cross on a red background, the flag of the Switzers and the Danes; and now he had reached Interlaken.

This, Rudy thought, was certainly a splendid town. It was a Swiss town in Sunday dress; not like other places, crowded with heavy stone houses, ponderous, strange, and stately. No! here it seemed as if the châlets had come down from the mountains into the green valley, close by the clear, rapid stream, and had arranged themselves in a row, a little in and out, to make a street. And the prettiest of all the streets – yes, that it certainly was! – had sprung up since Rudy was here, when he was little. It seemed to have been built of all the charming châlets which his grandfather had carved and stored in the cabinet at home,

and they had grown up here by some power like the old, oldest chestnut-trees. Each house was a hotel, with carved woodwork on the windows and doors, and a projecting roof, and was elegantly built; and in front of the house was a flower-garden, between it and the broad, macadamized road; all the houses stood on one side of the road, so as not to hide the fresh green meadows, where the cows wandered about with bells like those in the high Alpine pastures. It seemed to be in the midst of lofty mountains, which had drawn apart in one direction to allow the snow-clad peak of the Jungfrau to be seen, most lovely of all the Swiss mountains.

There were a great many well-dressed visitors from foreign countries as well as many Switzers from the different cantons. Each competitor had his number in a garland on his hat. Singing and playing on all kinds of instruments were to be heard everywhere, mingled with cries and shouts. Mottoes were put up on the houses and bridges, flags and pennons floated in the breeze; the crack of the rifles was frequently heard, and Rudy thought this the sweetest sound of all; indeed, in the excitement of the moment he quite forgot Babette, although he had come on purpose to meet her.

The marksmen now went in the direction of the target. Rudy went with them, and was the best shot of them all – he hit the bull's-eye every time.

"Who is that young stranger who shoots so well?" the onlookers asked each other. "He talks French as they do in canton Vallais. But he also speaks German very well," others replied.

"They say he was brought up near Grindelwald," one of the competitors remarked.

There was life in the fellow, his eyes shone, his arm was steady, and for that reason he never failed in hitting the mark. Courage comes with success, but Rudy had a store of natural courage. Admiring friends soon gathered around him, and complimented him on his success; he altogether forgot Babette. Then some one laid his hand on his shoulder, and spoke to him in French.

"You belong to the canton of Vallais?"

Rudy turned, and saw a burly individual with a rosy, good-humored face. It was the wealthy miller from Bex; his stout form almost concealed the pretty, slim Babette, but she looked at Rudy with her sparkling, dark eyes. The miller was glad that a rifleman from his own canton should prove the best shot, and should have won universal applause. Rudy was certainly in luck, for although he had forgotten his principal object in coming, she had now come forward to him.

When neighbors meet one another at a distance from home they generally get to talking, and make each other's acquaintance. Because Rudy was a good shot he had become a leader at the rifle competition, just as much as the miller was at Bex, because of his wealth and his good business; so they clasped each other by the hand for the first time; Babette also offered her hand to Rudy who squeezed it, and looked at her so earnestly that she quite blushed.

The miller spoke of their long journey, and how many large

towns they had come through; and it certainly seemed to have been a very long journey, as they had traveled by the steamboat, and also by rail and by post-chaise.

"I came the nearest way," said Rudy. "I walked over the mountains; no road is too high for a man to come over it."

"And break your neck," said the miller. "You look just the man to break his neck one day, you look so headstrong."

"A man doesn't fall if he doesn't think about it," replied Rudy.

The miller's relatives in Interlaken, with whom he and Babette were staying, asked Rudy to visit them, as he was from the same canton. This was a chance for Rudy; fortune favored him, as she always does favor those who endeavor to succeed by their own energy, and remember that "Providence gives us nuts, but we have to crack them for ourselves."

Rudy was welcomed by the miller's relatives as if he had belonged to the family, and they drank to the health of the best shot, and Babette clinked her glass with the others, and Rudy thanked them for the toast.

In the evening they went for a stroll on the road by the big hotels beneath the old walnut-trees, and there was such a throng, and the people pushed so that Rudy was able to offer his arm to Babette. He said he was glad to have met the people from Vaud. The cantons of Vaud and Vallais were very good neighbors. He seemed so thoroughly pleased that Babette could not resist the inclination to press his hand. They walked together just like old acquaintances, and she was very amusing. Rudy

was delighted with her naive remarks on the peculiarities in the dress and behavior of the foreign ladies; and yet she did not wish to make fun of them, for she knew that many of them were amiable and worthy people – indeed, her own godmother was an English lady. She had been living in Bex eighteen years ago, when Babette was christened, and she had given her the valuable brooch she was now wearing. Her godmother had twice written to her, and Babette was now hoping to see her and her daughters in Interlaken.

"They were two old maids, almost thirty!" said Babette; but you must remember that she was only eighteen.

Her little tongue was never still for an instant, and all that Babette had to say was intensely interesting to Rudy; and he told her all about himself – that he had frequently been to Bex, and knew the mill well, and that he had often seen her, though he did not suppose she had ever noticed him; and how he had called at the mill, hoping to see her, and found that her father and she were away from home, a long way from home, indeed, but not so far that he could not get over the barrier which divided them.

He told her a great deal more than this. He told her that he was very fond of her, and that he had come here on purpose to see her, and not for the rifle competition.

Babette was very quiet when he told her this; she thought he set too high a value on her.

While they continued rambling, the sun set behind the mighty wall of rock; the Jungfrau stood out in all its beauty and

magnificence, with the green of the tree-clad slopes on either side of it. All stood still to admire the gorgeous spectacle, and both Rudy and Babette were happy in watching it.

"There is no place more lovely than this!" said Babette.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Rudy, and then he looked at Babette.

"I must go home to-morrow," he said, after a short silence.

"You must come to see us at Bex," Babette whispered to him; "my father will be pleased."

# **CHAPTER V**

## **THE RETURN HOME**

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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