

Part I:

Going Up to the Alm-Uncle



In the cozy little town of Maienfeld, there's a pretty, green path that leads up to the tall mountains. This path goes through woods and meadows until it gets steep and the air fills with the sweet scent of herbs.

One sunny morning in June, a tall, strong young woman guided a little girl up this mountain path. The little girl, only about five years old, had rosy cheeks that peeked through her tanned skin. She was wearing several layers of clothes and a big red shawl, despite the summer heat. Her heavy boots made the going difficult.

They had been climbing for an hour when they reached a small village halfway up the mountain. This was where the young woman, whose name was Deta, grew up. Many people greeted her as they passed by. Deta answered back as they continued walking. But she didn't stop until a voice from a nearby cottage called out, asking her to wait. This was her friend Barbara who wanted to join them on their way up the mountain.





A young woman and a little girl on the mountain



While they waited for Barbara to come out, the little girl let go of Deta's hand and sat down on the ground.

"Are you tired, Heidi?" Deta asked the little girl.

"No, but hot," Heidi replied.

"We'll get to the top of the mountain in about an hour if you keep taking big steps," Deta encouraged her.

Finally, Barbara, a friendly-looking woman, came out of the house to join them. Heidi followed along behind as the two women started chatting.

"Where are you taking the child, Deta?" Barbara asked. "Is she the child your sister left behind?"

"Yes," Deta replied, "I'm taking her to live with Alm-Uncle on the mountain. I need her to stay with him."

"You can't be serious about taking her there, Deta! You must be out of your mind to consider it. The old man won't welcome you. He probably won't even listen to you," said Barbara.

"Why not? He's her grandfather, and it's time he helped take care of her. I've looked after her up to now, but I've just been offered a great job. I can't miss this chance, and I can't take her with me," Deta explained.

"But Alm-Uncle is so...different from everyone else. How will he manage with such a young child? Heidi won't be happy with him, I'm sure of it. But tell me about your new job," Barbara said, changing the subject.

"I'm going to a beautiful house in Frankfurt," Deta told her. "Last summer, I managed a family's house while they were away on vacation. You know, ever since my mother



passed away, I've had to travel far for work. This family liked me and asked me to come with them to Frankfurt this time. I agreed."

"I'm glad it's not me going to live with the old man," Barbara said nervously.

"Well," Deta said firmly, "he has to do his part for Heidi now."

Barbara had moved to the village after getting married. She had heard different stories about the old man known as "Alm-Uncle" who lived alone on the mountain. She wanted to know the truth. She didn't understand why everyone called him "Uncle" even though they weren't related to him. Since her friend Deta had grown up in the village, Barbara thought she might know something more. She caught Deta's arm and asked her, "Can you tell me the real story about him? People just gossip, but nobody knows much about him. He doesn't talk to anyone, and he hardly ever comes to church. People avoid him because he looks and acts so scary. He's spooky with his big, gray eyebrows and long beard. Not to mention that twisted walking stick he uses. Why has everyone turned against him?"

Deta explained that she didn't know the whole story of his life. He was much older than her after all. But she did agree to share what she knew if Barbara could keep a secret. Barbara promised she would not talk about it with anyone.

Deta looked around to make sure Heidi wouldn't overhear them. That's when she noticed the girl was gone. The two women had been too busy chatting to notice that the



little girl had stopped following them. The path leading down to the village was empty.

"Where has she gotten to now?" Deta cried, frustrated. "Do you see her?"

Barbara pointed off in the distance. "Look, she's climbing up the mountainside with the goat herder, Peter, and his goats. Peter's usually not here this late. It's good timing though. He can keep an eye on her while we finish talking."

"It'll be easy for Peter to watch her," Deta responded. "She's very smart for a five-year-old and never misses anything. That will help her when she's living with her grandfather. He's got nothing left but a little cottage and two goats."

"Did he have more before?" asked Barbara.

"Yes," Deta replied. She explained that, many years ago, Uncle had inherited a big farm. But he lost it all because he spent too much money and made bad choices. His actions broke his parents' hearts, and they stayed very sad until they died. He disappeared for many years after that. When he returned, he had a teenage son, Tobias. Tobias learned carpentry and was very responsible, unlike his father. "There are many stories and rumors about Uncle," Deta explained. "Which might be why he left his small village to come here and live. We always called him 'Uncle,' and soon everyone in the village was calling him that as well. After he moved to a small farm in the mountains called the Alm, it became 'Alm-Uncle.'"

Barbara, eager to know more, asked, "What happened to Tobias?"



*Deta and Barbara walk and chat*

“Hold on, I can’t tell you everything at once!” exclaimed Deta. “Tobias trained as a carpenter in a place called Mels. After becoming a master carpenter, he returned home. He married my sister Adelheid, and they started their life here in the village.”

Tobias and Adelheid were very happy together. But sadly, Tobias died in an accident while building a house. Adelheid was so sad that she became ill. Not long after, she also passed away. People say God was punishing the old man with the death of his son Tobias and Adelheid. After that, Uncle stopped speaking with anyone and went to live alone in the mountains.

“When Adelheid died,” Deta said, “my mother and I took her little baby, Heidi, to live with us. But now, as I said, I’ve been offered a job in Frankfurt. And things have been difficult since my mother died. But I can’t take Heidi with me to Frankfurt.”

Deta’s friend Barbara thought it was a terrible idea to leave Heidi with her strange grandfather. But Deta felt she had no choice. She felt she had already done a lot for Heidi.

As Deta and Barbara walked and chatted, they reached a small, old mountain hut halfway up the mountain. Even though it was sheltered by the mountainside, the wind rattled its rotting doors and windows. If it had been out in the open, the strong winds might have blown it away during the storm season. Deta said goodbye to Barbara near this hut, and Barbara continued her journey up the mountain.

The little hut was home to an eleven-year-old boy, Pe-

ter the goat herder. Every day, Peter would collect the goats from his village and lead them up the mountain to graze. In the evening, he would run back down the mountain with the goats. When Peter whistled, the goats' owners, mostly children like him, would come to pick them up. That was Peter's only chance to be around other children because he spent most of his day alone with the goats.

Peter lived with his mother and his blind grandmother in a small hut in the village. His father, also a goat herder, had died many years before. Peter spent little time at home. He would always quickly eat his breakfast of bread and milk before rushing out in the early morning. He did the same with dinner before going to bed. He always left home early and returned late so he could spend more time with his goat friends.

Deta waited about ten minutes to see if Peter and Heidi were coming up behind with the goats. She couldn't spot them, so she decided to climb higher for a better look.

Meanwhile, the children were slowly making their way up the zigzagging path. Peter knew all the best spots for the goats to eat. Heidi was following Peter, struggling in her heavy clothes and feeling very hot. She was using all her strength just to keep climbing. She was jealous of how easily Peter moved in his light clothes and bare feet. She even envied the goats, who hopped over bushes and stones effortlessly.

Suddenly, Heidi sat down and quickly took off her shoes and socks. She removed her heavy shawl and two dresses.



She now wore only a light undershirt and was much more comfortable. Deta hadn't wanted to carry too much, so Heidi had been wearing her fancy Sunday clothes over her everyday clothes. Heidi placed her clothes in a neat pile and went to join Peter and the goats. She now felt as nimble as the goats themselves.

When Peter noticed Heidi in her simple attire, a huge grin spread across his face. He didn't say anything, but Heidi felt great and started chatting with Peter. She asked him lots of questions about the goats, like how many he had and what he did with them.

Eventually, Peter and Heidi got to the top of the hill where the hut was. Deta saw them and was shocked. "Heidi, what have you done? Where are your clothes and shoes?" she asked.

Heidi just pointed down the hill where her clothes lay in a pile. "I didn't need them," she said simply.

"Who do you think will go down there to fetch those things?" Deta cried. "It's a half-hour walk! Please, Peter, run down and get them. Don't just stand and stare at me as if you were glued to the spot."

"I'm late already," replied Peter. He stood without moving, his hands in his pockets. He was afraid of Heidi's angry aunt.

"I'll give you this if you go down," said Deta. She held a five-penny coin under his nose.

That made Peter jump. He hurried down the straightest path and returned again in a short time. Deta praised him





Heidi quickly takes off her shoes and socks



and rewarded him with the little coin. Peter didn't often get such a treasure. He laughed and dropped the money deep into his pocket.

"I have more for you if you can carry our pack up to Uncle's hut," said Deta. They still had a steep climb ahead of them. The boy eagerly picked up the pack and followed Deta. Heidi bounced along happily by his side with the goats.

After almost an hour, they reached Heidi's grandfather's hut. It stood at the top of a windy patch of rocky ground. The sun shone down on it. From there you could see the whole valley. Three old fir trees rose up from behind the hut. Behind the line of trees stood a sheer rock face. Beyond that lay green, rolling hills running along bare, steep cliffs.

Uncle had made himself a bench by the side of the hut. Here he sat overlooking the valley. He held his pipe between his teeth and had both hands resting on his knees. He quietly watched the children and Deta climbing up with the goats. Heidi reached the top first. She approached the old man and called out, "Good evening, Grandfather!"

The old man looked up at the sound of her voice, his face softening into a smile. He seemed pleased to have visitors.

Meanwhile, Peter caught up, panting a little from the climb. Deta followed close behind, catching her breath too. Peter handed the bundle to Deta. He was trying not to show how tired he was from the climb.

Heidi began bouncing around, looking at everything. The goats wandered about, nibbling on the grass. It was a beauti-



ful sunny day. The view of the valley below was breathtaking.

Heidi was thrilled to be at her grandfather's hut, high up in the mountains. It was an adventure for her, and she was eager to explore every corner. And the old man felt joy in Heidi's excitement.

"Hello, Grandfather!" Heidi repeated cheerfully, holding out her hand.

"What does that mean?" asked the old man with a gruff voice. He took Heidi's hand and held it, looking at her carefully. Heidi looked right back at him. She was very curious about his long, grey beard and bushy eyebrows that joined in the middle.

"Good day, Uncle," Deta greeted him. "This is Tobias's and Adelheid's child, Heidi. You might not remember her. She was just a baby when you last saw her."

"Why are you bringing her here?" the old man asked. He then quickly told Peter, "Go and bring my goats. You're late!" Peter ran off immediately, happy to leave after the stern look from Uncle.

"I've taken care of Heidi for the last four years," Deta then explained, "Now it's your turn to look after her."

The idea seemed to upset the old man. "What am I supposed to do when she starts missing you and crying?" he grumbled. "Small children always miss their families, and I won't know what to do."

"You'll figure it out," Deta replied sharply. "When Heidi was left to me, I had to learn on my own how to take care of her. No one helped me. I already had my mother to care for,



Grandfather on his bench by the side of his hut



and I had a lot to do. Now, I need to earn some money. If you really can't take care of Heidi, then you decide what to do with her. If anything bad happens to her, it's your responsibility."

Deta said more than she planned because she was feeling guilty. The old man stared at her so intensely after she spoke that she stumbled backward a few steps.

He stretched out his arm and yelled, "Go away! Don't come back here anytime soon!" Deta didn't need to be told again. She quickly said goodbye to Heidi and the old man. Then she hurried back down the mountain.

As Deta reached the village, people called out to her. "Where is the child? Where did you leave her, Deta?" And with each question, Deta grew a bit more upset. "I left her up with the Alm-Uncle!" she blurted as she hurried along.

The villagers kept questioning her. "How could you do that? The poor little girl!" Hearing this over and over, Deta felt bad. She remembered her mother's last wish was for her to take care of Heidi. But Deta told herself that she could help Heidi more if she earned some money.

Deta was happy to leave the village behind and the people judging her. She looked forward to her new job, moving faster to get away from all the accusing voices.



With the Grandfather

After Deta left, Grandfather sat back down on the bench. He resumed smoking his pipe while peering down at the ground. Heidi started looking around. She peeked into the goat shed but couldn't see anything inside. Then, she noticed the three old fir trees behind the hut. The wind was making a loud noise as it blew through the trees. Their tops swayed back and forth. Heidi stopped to listen to the sound.

When the wind calmed down a bit, she walked back to her grandfather. He was sitting just as she had left him. Standing in front of him with her arms behind her back, she stared at him. Looking up, Grandfather saw Heidi standing there without moving. "What do you want to do now?" he asked her.

"I want to see what's inside the hut," Heidi responded.

"Come on then," said Grandfather. He stood up and went into the cottage. "Bring your things along," he told her.

"I don't want them anymore," Heidi said.

Grandfather looked at her closely. He could see in her

