



HE MADE OUT THE FIGURE OF A MAN.

## In the Depths of the Snow.

(By Walter T. Stratton, in 'Home Words.')

Every one in the village of Imhof said it would lie between Ulrich Lauener and Peter Werden; and by 'it' everybody meant the prize of five hundred francs offered for the finest piece of carving made in the valley before Christmas. The donor was an Englishman, wintering in Grindelwald, and the award was to be decided by him at Meiringen on Christmas Day.

A stranger might have said that Imhof slept cuddled under the snow, but within its wooden chalets there was wakefulness enough to set tools chipping and tongues wagging.

Only Ulrich Lauener was silent. Every other competitor talked of the wonderful work of art he was perfecting, and invited his friends to come and criticise the unfinished carving. But nobody knew what Lauener was doing in his lonely chalet that stood high above the nestling village—not even Marie. Yet the girl was consumed with curiosity, and her gentle wiles were calculated to unearth the deepest secret.

'Don't you find it dreadfully cold, working all alone?' she ventured timidly one Sunday morning.

'Ah, so!' laughed Ulrich. 'But the faggots burn well—and carve well, too. I have a fine store—enough to last till Christmas.'

'Is it something very big you are making? I am sure father would help you get it down on his sledge, if it is. Peter Werden has nearly finished his table. Ah, you should see it, Ulrich—all flowers and chamois.'

'I shall see it on Christmas Day,' returned Ulrich, with a smile flitting across his face. 'And shall I not be the only one who has not seen it—except the English Herr?'

'You might have shown it to me, your beautiful carving,' urged Marie, coaxingly. 'Just one peep, and nobody else need be the wiser.'

But Ulrich was obdurate, though more than once he was tempted to soften towards the girl. 'She will be twice as pleased when she sees it labelled with the first prize,' he thought. 'Where will the fun be if she knows beforehand that I have done something quite new? Why, all the valley would be talking about it in a day. No—better wait till the Englishman can see and judge for himself.'

So the work went on silently, and with no one to admire, in Lauener's chalet. His model of the spears and needles of the Engelhorner as they appeared in the summer, with here and there a thread of snow clinging to their precipitous rocks, grew daily

nearer completion. Even the tiny valley and its countless streams seemed to be bathed in sunlight. But the last finishing touches were terribly hard to give. Marie had suddenly become cold to him, and the fact robbed him of his inspiration. Sometimes he felt inclined to let the wood that

had yielded so well to his tools burn among the faggots which crackled on the stone hearth.

But, despite depression, the work prospered, until, a week before Christmas, Ulrich laid aside his tools. He did not regard the carving from near and far, as though anxious to discover any flaw that might be rectified. But, with his back to his bench, he sat staring into the heart of the red embers, and the blue coils of smoke fashioned themselves at the bidding of his thoughts.

First, he pictured himself with Marie, and the firelight seemed to dance, and the blackened beams of the chalet to look less gloomy. A smile crept shyly across his face as he fancied he saw Marie setting the white tablecloth on the little square table which had not been used to such adornment. Five hundred francs would go a very long way towards making the dream a reality. For some minutes he enjoyed his thoughts as though they were the first meal Marie had prepared for him.

Then the warm blaze began to die down.



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