

The door was flung open as the lad was speaking, and the object of his fear stood framed in the doorway, glaring down upon them.

"What do you want, and whose children are you?" he asked, when the little girl ventured to lift her blue eyes to his strange wizened face, with his long hoary hair and piercing eyes which seemed to see into her innermost soul. But she met his gaze unflinchingly, and said,—

"I am Hannchen, Nanna Andersen's little granddaughter, who lives in the valley, and he," pointing to the boy, "is my brother Paul. We have come up here to buy a horse for our dear little Guido, who is sick. He wants a Christmas-tree badly, and we have nothing to put on it. Will you please sell us a horse, *Min Herre* [sir]?" she asked in a pleading little voice, as Bertel did not speak. "I've brought money—see." And she opened her hand and showed him four *skillings*, which is about twopence in our money.

"What sort of a horse do you suppose *that* will buy, eh?" And Bertel's voice, although it was gruffness itself, was not unkind.

"We cannot tell," Hannchen answered, drooping her small head, covered with a red knitted cap, from which peeped her flaxen hair. "It is all we've got. Our father and our mother are with God, and we have nobody to give us money now but *Bestemoder* [grandmother], and she is very poor, and could only give us four *skillings*. *Bestemoder* has promised us some pretty candles if we can get a toy to put on it for dear little Guido."

"I have dug up a tree out of the snow," said Paul, venturing to speak for the first time.

"And it is such a nice little tree," put in Hannchen.

"Is it really, my child?" said old Bertel, smiling; and the brown mummy-like face took a more life-like tint, which made Paul think he wasn't so very dreadful after all. "I think I can sell you a horse to put on that tree. Come in."

Paul and Hannchen followed the old man into the hut, and their blue eyes grew large and round at the wonderful things they beheld there. Its interior was quite as quaint as its exterior, and the sloping roof was crossed and re-crossed with carved beams. But it was not the hut nor the carved work that struck the children; it was the multitude of toys that filled every available space,

and even hung from those curious beams and crowded the shelves on the wooden walls.

"It is the fairies' toyshop!" gasped Hannchen at length, much to the amusement of old Bertel. "Ah, if only Guido were here to see it!" And her soft, round cheeks burned with excitement.

The old man chuckled to himself as he went from shelf to shelf selecting a toy here and a toy there, fishing out a doll from a box and a boat from another, and unhitching some more things, delightful to children, from the dark beams. All these toys, including a horse with a thick mane and a long tail, he crammed into Paul and Hannchen's arms, and told them they were to share them with little sick Guido. He would not take their money, and said they could lay it out in milk and cream for the *julegrød* or Christmas porridge, a dish which every Norwegian child likes to taste on the eve of the birth of the Christ-Child.

With many thanks and adieux the happy children departed, and old Bertel stood on the doorstep and watched them descending the mountain, feeling almost as happy as they.

It was a mild day for that time of the year, and although it was cold, and snow lay thick on the ground and on the branches of the dusky pines, it was bright, and the winter sun was peeping over the mountain range, and making the frozen waterfalls and fjords shine like jewels; and the old man, when Paul and Hannchen had disappeared behind the pines, gazed about him and drank in the scene.

In a valley which separated the Pine Mountain from another clothed with beech and oak stood a cottage. It was small and mean, and through its cracks the winter wind often pushed its icy fingers.

It was Christmas Eve, and much colder and wilder than the previous day; and notwithstanding that the wind was boisterous, the blind of the little house was drawn up, so that the people who lived in it might see the Christmas stars.

It was not very late in the afternoon, but the stars were already out, and looking in at a tiny boy lying in a cot bed before a log fire. His face was very thin, and white as a snowflake; his eyes were the colour of mountain barebells, and his hair lay like a cloud of shimmering gold on his broad white brow. It was Paul and Hannchen's sick brother