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In winter, the high peaks of the Swiss Alps are completely covered with snow. But in spring and summer, the snow disappears from the slopes and valleys. And you can see grass and pretty flowers everywhere.

The small town of Mayenfeld lies in a valley in the east of Switzerland. A tall mountain rises up behind the town.

One morning in June, a tall young woman was walking slowly up the mountain path. The young woman’s name was Detie. In her left hand, Detie carried a bundle of clothes. Her right hand was holding the hand of a little girl. It was a warm, sunny day but the little girl was wearing two woollen dresses, one on top of the other. She also had woollen stockings on her legs and boots on her feet. A long red scarf was tied tightly around her body.

Halfway up the side of the mountain, Detie and the little girl came to a small village. This was Dörfli, the place where Detie had been born. As they went through the village, a woman called out to her.

‘Detie!’ she shouted. ‘Let me walk with you!’

A large woman with a pleasant face came out of a house. This was Barbie, an old friend of Detie’s.

‘Is this your sister’s child?’ asked Barbie.

‘Yes,’ replied Detie. ‘This is my niece, Heidi. She’s five years old. When my sister died a few years ago, I had to take care of Heidi.’

‘But where are you taking her?’ asked Barbie.

‘I’m taking her to Uncle Alp’s house,’ replied Detie. ‘Uncle Alp is Heidi’s grandfather. She’ll have to stay with him now.’
‘Detie!’ said Barbie. ‘You can’t leave the child with Uncle Alp! He doesn’t know how to care for children!’

‘He must take care of Heidi now,’ said Detie. ‘I’m going to live in Germany because I have a new job in Frankfurt. I can’t take care of Heidi any more.’

Barbie looked up towards the top of the mountain. ‘Uncle Alp lives all alone up there,’ she said. ‘He doesn’t like people and people don’t like him. He always looks so unhappy and angry.’

Detie turned round. ‘Where’s Heidi?’ she asked.

Barbie saw the child on the path below them and pointed. ‘Look, she’s down there, with Peter,’ she said.

The little girl was with a young boy. There were several goats beside them.

‘Peter will look after Heidi,’ said Barbie. ‘Now tell me more about Uncle Alp.’

‘When Uncle Alp was young, he was very rich,’ said Detie. ‘He had one of the best farms in the country but he lost a lot of money. Uncle Alp had to sell the farm and leave Dörfli. Twelve years later, he came back with Tobias, his young son. When Tobias grew up, he married my sister, Adelheid. Tobias and Adelheid had a daughter – Heidi. But then Tobias was killed in an accident. Soon after this, Adelheid became ill and she died, too.

‘Heidi came to live with me,’ Detie went on. ‘But I can’t look after her now. So I’m taking her to Uncle Alp.’

The women, the children and the goats had reached a small wooden hut on the mountainside. This house was where Peter lived. He lived there with his mother and grandmother. Peter’s father and grandfather were both dead.

Peter was eleven years old and he worked as a goatherd. He looked after goats. Every morning in summer, he went down to Dörfli and fetched the villagers’ goats. Then he took the animals high up the mountain. He led them to
a pasture where there was fresh new grass. Every evening, Peter took the goats back to the villagers’ homes.

Barbie said goodbye to Detie and went into the hut. She wanted to visit Bridget, Peter’s mother.

Detie climbed further up the mountain. After about fifteen minutes, she stopped to rest. Peter and the goats were on the path above her. Detie looked around. Where was Heidi?

Heidi was far below them. The little girl was very hot and tired in her heavy clothes. She sat down and pulled off her stockings and boots. Then she took off the thick scarf and her two woollen dresses. She put all the clothes carefully in a pile on the ground. Now she was wearing only a thin cotton dress. She felt very happy and free. She ran after Peter and the goats.

Detie waited on the steep path for her niece.

‘What have you done, Heidi?’ she said angrily. ‘Where are your woollen dresses? Where is your scarf, and where are your new boots?’

Heidi pointed down to the pile of clothes that was many metres below them.

‘There they are,’ she said. ‘I don’t need them.’

‘Peter, run and fetch Heidi’s clothes!’ said Detie. She held out a coin towards him. ‘Look,’ she said. ‘I’ll give you this penny.’

Peter ran down the path quickly. He picked up the clothes and ran back to Heidi and Detie. Then he took the money from Detie and put it in his pocket.

‘Now, Peter. Please carry the clothes to Uncle Alp’s hut,’ said Detie, and she began to climb up the path again. Heidi and Peter followed her.

After about an hour, they came to Uncle Alp’s hut. The little house stood on a ledge which was high on the side of the mountain. The old man had a wonderful view from his
home. He could see right down the valley to Dörfli. Three old fir trees, with big branches, grew next to the hut. The ground rose up steeply behind the trees, to the top of the mountain.

Uncle Alp was sitting on a wooden bench outside the hut. He was smoking his pipe and looking at the view.

Heidi ran up to the old man and held out her hand. ‘Hello, Grandfather,’ she said.