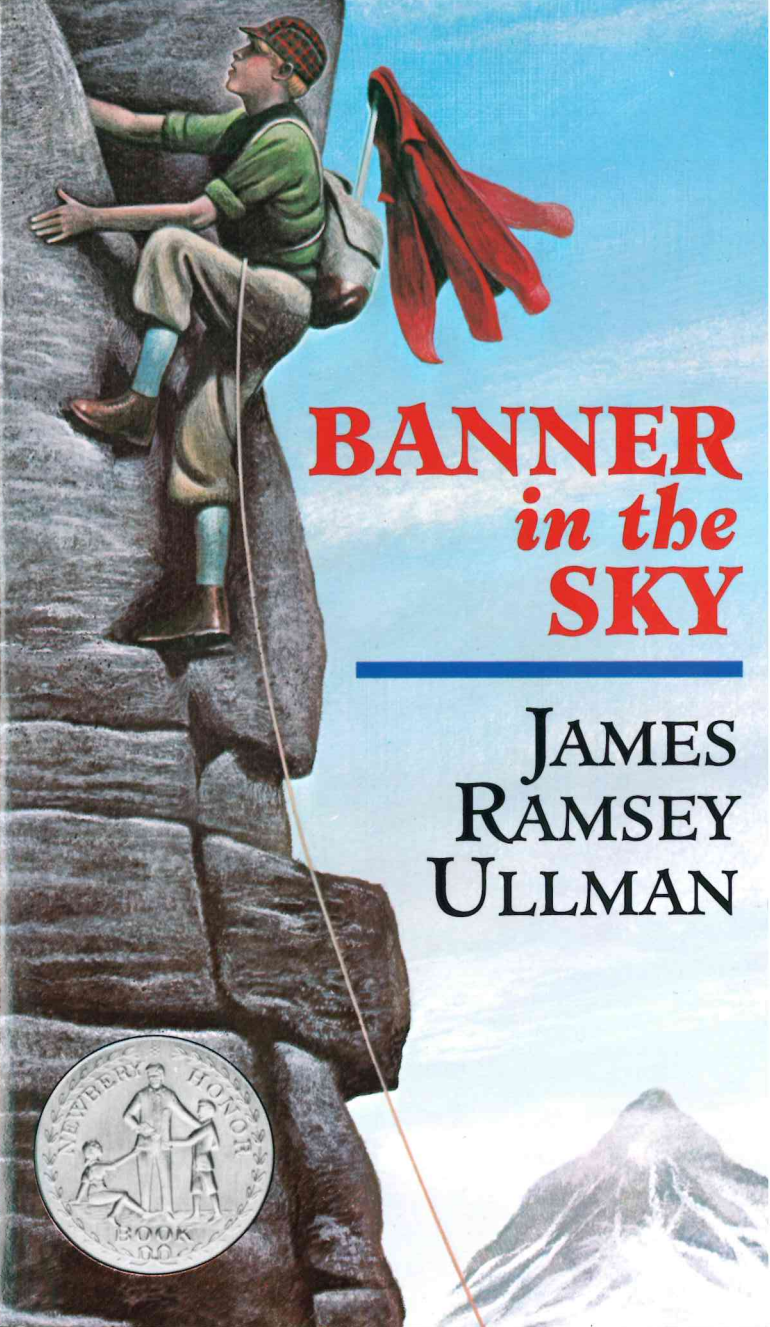
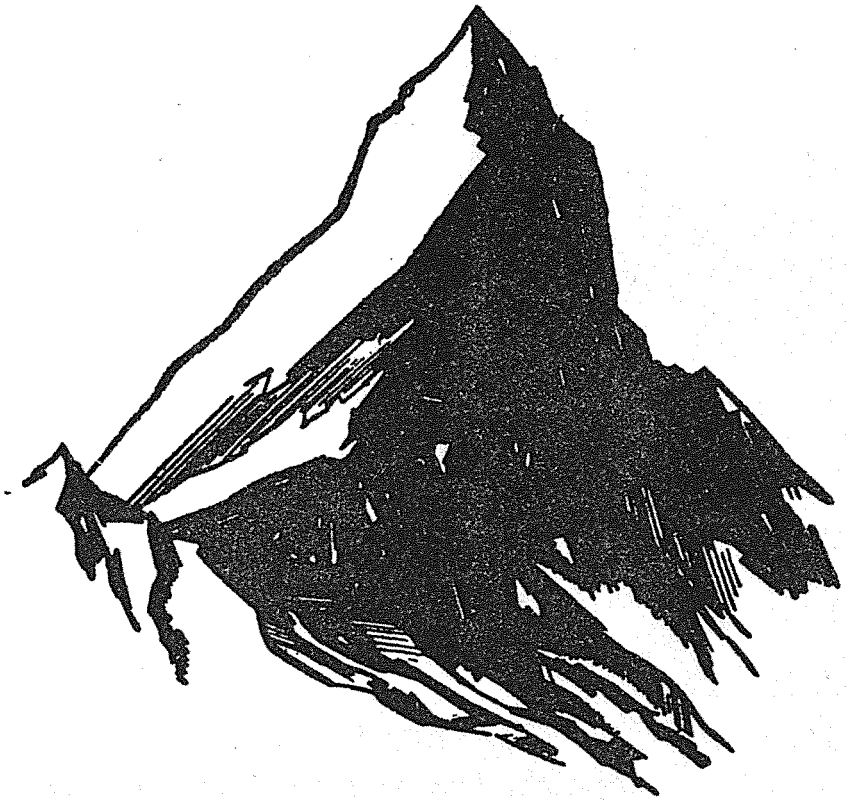


BANNER *in the* SKY

JAMES RAMSEY ULLMAN



Banner in the Sky

JAMES RAMSEY ULLMAN

HarperTrophy®
A Division of HarperCollins*Publishers*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Ramsey Ullman was born in New York City in 1907. HIGH CONQUEST, the first of his nine books for J.B. Lippincott, appeared in 1941, and was followed by THE WHITE TOWER, RIVER OF THE SUN, WINDOM'S WAY, and BANNER IN THE SKY, which was a 1955 Newbery Honor Book. All of these titles also became major motion pictures. Mr. Ullman's vivid stories of mountaineering not only came from his imagination but were sparked by personal experience, too. A newspaper reporter, writer, world traveler, and mountaineer, Mr. Ullman was also a member of the first American expedition to Mount Everest. He died in 1971 at the age of 63.

For information address HarperCollins Children's Books, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 54-7296
ISBN 0-397-30264-9
ISBN 0-06-447048-2 (pbk.)

Published in hardcover by HarperCollins Publishers.
Harper Trophy® is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

First Harper Trophy edition, 1988.
09 10 11 12 13 OPM 40 39 38

For
JIM—BILL—DAVID
and also
(why not?)
SUSAN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Ramsey Ullman was born in New York City in 1907. HIGH CONQUEST, the first of his nine books for J.B. Lippincott, appeared in 1941, and was followed by THE WHITE TOWER, RIVER OF THE SUN, WINDOM'S WAY, and BANNER IN THE SKY, which was a 1955 Newbery Honor Book. All of these titles also became major motion pictures. Mr. Ullman's vivid stories of mountaineering not only came from his imagination but were sparked by personal experience, too. A newspaper reporter, writer, world traveler, and mountaineer, Mr. Ullman was also a member of the first American expedition to Mount Everest. He died in 1971 at the age of 63.

THE CHAPTERS

1.	A Boy and a Mountain	11
2.	A Boy and a Man	25
3.	Two Hundred Dirty Dishes	39
4.	Trial—	52
5.	—And Error	60
6.	Master and Pupil	73
7.	A Prisoner Escapes	89
8.	White Fury	99
9.	The Challenge	115
10.	Three to Make Ready—	126
11.	Alone	139
12.	A Boy and a Ghost	153
13.	—Four to Go	164
14.	First of All Men	184
15.	The Needle's Eye	200
16.	Darkness and Dawn	222
17.	The Day	238
18.	The Heights	257
19.	The Conqueror	276

CHAPTER ONE

A BOY AND A MOUNTAIN

In the heart of the Swiss Alps, on the high frontier between earth and sky, stands one of the great mountains of the world. To men generally it is known as the Citadel, but the people of the valley beneath it seldom call it by that name. They call it the Rudisberg—Rudi's Mountain. And that is because, in the long-gone year of 1865, there lived in that valley a boy called Rudi Matt. . . .

Most of the boys of the village were tall, broad and strongly built. Rudi was small and slim. But to make up for it, he was quick. In all his sixteen years he had probably never been quicker than on a certain summer morning when he slipped out the kitchen door of the Beau Site Hotel and into the alley beyond. When Teo Zurbriggen, the cook, turned from his stove to get a jar from the spice shelf, Rudi had been at his usual place, washing the breakfast dishes. But when, five seconds later, Old Teo turned back, his young helper was gone.

The cook muttered under his breath. But, almost at the

same time, he smiled. He smiled because he knew what the boy was up to, and in his old heart he was glad.

Outside, Rudi did not follow the alley to the main street. He went in the other direction, came to a second alley, and ran quickly through the back part of the town. He made a wide detour around his mother's house; another around the house of his uncle, Franz Lerner. Fortunately he met no one who knew him—or at least who knew he was supposed to be working in the kitchen of the Beau Site.

Soon he came to the edge of the town and a roaring brook. Across the brook lay a footbridge; but, instead of using it, he worked his way upstream around a bend and then crossed over, leaping agilely from boulder to boulder. From the far side he looked back. Apparently no one had seen him. Scrambling up the bank, he plunged through a clump of bushes, skirted a barnyard and picked up a path through the meadows. Here, for the first time, he stopped running. There was no living thing to be seen except a herd of grazing cows. The only sound was the tinkling of their bells.

The meadows rolled gently, tilting upward, and their green slope was sprayed with wildflowers. The path crossed a fence, over a rickety stile, then bent and rejoined the brook; and now the cowbells faded and there was again the sound of rushing water. Rudi walked on. Three or four times he passed people going in the opposite direction, but they were only *Ausländer*—tourists—and nothing to worry about. Whatever guides were climbing that day

were already high in the mountains. And any others who might have known and questioned him were back in the town or on their farms.

Rudi smiled at the passersby. *"Grüss Gott,"* he said—"God's Greetings"—in the ancient salutation of the Alps. *"Grüss Gott,"* they said in reply.

He was no longer hurrying. He walked with the slow, rhythmic pace of the mountain people, and, though the path was now steepening sharply, he felt no strain. His legs, his lungs, all of his slight wiry body, were doing what they did best; what they had been born to do. His feet, through the soles of his shoes, moulded themselves to each hump and crevice of the path. Arms and shoulders swung in easy balance. His breathing was steady, his heartbeat strong and even.

"A typical mountain boy," one would have said, seeing him at a distance. But then, coming closer, one would have seen that he was not typical at all. Partly, this was because of his slimness, his lightness of muscle and bone; but even more it was in his small, almost delicate features and his fair, pink-and-white complexion. Rudi Matt hated his complexion. In summer he exposed his face for hours to the burning sun, in winter he scrubbed it violently with snow, trying to make it brown and tough and weather-stained, as a mountain man's should be. But no stain appeared. No whisker sprouted. "Angel-face," the other boys called him. Or, rather, *had* called him, until they learned that his fists, though small, were useful. Most of the men of Kurtal had black hair. Rudi's was blond. Most

of them had dark eyes. Rudi's were light—though exactly what color no one was quite sure. His mother called them hazel, but she saw them only when he was at home or around the village. When he left the village, when he climbed above it, they seemed to change, as the light changed. Looking up at the great peaks above the valley, they seemed to hold within themselves the gray of mountain rock, the blue of mountain sky.

Rudi Matt climbed on. Now that he was no longer afraid of being stopped, his heart was filled with peace and joy. Just why he had run off on this particular day he could not have said. He had had to—that was all. He had looked from the window of the hotel kitchen and seen the peaks that rimmed the valley rising vast and shining in the morning sun; and he could no more have stopped himself than he could have stopped breathing. A few minutes before, he had been a prisoner. Now he was free. He no longer looked backward—only up—as slowly the great mountain world unfolded before him.

The path bore away from the brook, zigzagged up the highest of the meadows and entered a forest. And here Rudi stopped. Beside the path, at the forest's edge, was a shrine. It was a tiny thing, no more than a rough wooden box nailed to one of the trees, and inside was a cross and a chipped image of the Virgin. Carved in the wood near the Virgin's feet was the name JOSEF MATT, and beneath it the dates, 1821–1850.

Rudi had never known his father. It had been fifteen years since he had died. But every time in his life that the

boy had come to this place he had stopped and prayed. He prayed now, kneeling in the soft moss before the shrine. Then he arose, crossed himself and climbed on through the forest.

A few minutes later he made a second stop. Leaving the path, he made his way between the trees to a large blue spruce and reached for the stout stick that was concealed in its branches. This was his *Alpenstock,* the climber's staff he had made for himself, as a substitute for an ice-ax, which he did not own; and he kept it hidden here because he was afraid that if he took it home his mother or uncle might find it. It was a strong staff, almost five feet long, with a sharp point on one end and a crook on the other. And if it was nothing like the real *Alpenstock*s and axes that Kronig, the smith, made at his forge in the village, at least it was better than nothing. As he hefted it now in his hand, feeling its familiar weight and balance, it was no longer merely a stick, but a part of himself.

He climbed on. For a while, still thinking of his father, he walked slowly and somberly, with his eyes on the ground. But this did not last long, for he was young and the sun was shining and he was doing what he most loved to do in all the world. He tilted his stick before him like a lance. He picked up stones and threw them at the trees. He threw back his head and yodeled and the high wild YOOOO—LEEEE—OOOOO—LAAAY—EEEEE rode the still air like a soaring bird.

The path twisted upward. Always upward. The forest was close around him; then a little less close; then not

close at all. The great firs and spruces fell away, and he came out onto a slope of dwarf pine and scraggly, moss-hugging shrubs. Sitting on a boulder, he ate a bite of lunch. He had no knapsack, any more than he had an ice-ax, but he had managed to stuff a piece of bread and another of cheese into a pocket before bolting from the hotel kitchen, and, plain and crumbled though they were, they tasted better than any food he had ever eaten in the hotel or in his home.

His eyes moved down across the treetops to the valley. There was the white thread of the brook dividing it; on either side the meadows and farms; in the valley's center the town of Kurtal. He could see the main street, the square, the church, the Beau Site Hotel, where he worked, and the two other hotels beyond it. All three buildings were new; even Rudi could remember when they had not been there at all. Ten or twelve years before, Kurtal had been no more than a tiny farming village, lost in a deep Swiss valley. But while Rudi had grown, it had grown too. It had become what the *Ausländer* called a "resort." Each year, during the summer months, there were more and more visitors—people from the cities, people from England, France, Germany, and even from faraway America—coming up in the coaches from the lowlands. In the last few summers there had been so many of them that there was even talk of building a railway.

It was the mountains that brought them, of course: the tall white glorious mountains of the Alps. In the old days the people of the outside world had not been interested in

the Alps; they had left them to those who had been born and lived there. But in Rudi's own lifetime all that had changed. The *Ausländer* had come: first in trickles, then in droves. They had moved up into the villages, into the high valleys, onto the glaciers, onto the peaks themselves. The sport, the craft, the adventure of mountaineering had been born. In every village, men whose ancestors through all history had been farmers and herdsmen were now farmers and herdsmen no longer, but Alpine guides. And the profession of guide was the proudest in the land. To be a member of the Company of Guides of Kurtal was the highest honor that a man could attain.

Men had not only come to the mountains. They had conquered them. A generation before, only a handful of peaks in the Alps had been climbed to the top, but now, in 1865, there were scarcely any that had *not* been. One by one, year after year, they had been attacked, besieged and taken. Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, the Dom, the Weisshorn, the Schreckhorn, the Eiger, the Dent Blanche, the Lyskamm—all these and a hundred more, the whole great white host of the most famous mountains of Europe—had felt the boot nails of their conquerors in their summit snows.

All of them . . . except *one.*

Rudi Matt was no longer looking down into the valley. He was looking up and beyond it, and now slowly his eyes moved across the wide circle of the ranges. They moved over the meadows and forests, the glaciers and snowfields, the gorges and precipices, the ridges and peaks. They

rested on the snow-dome of Monte Rosa, the spire of the Wunderhorn (his father had first climbed it), the Rotalp (his uncle Franz), the soaring crest of the Weisshorn. Now at last he had turned completely; he was looking in the direction in which he had been climbing. And still his eyes moved on—and up—and up. The other mountains fell away. There was a gap, a deep gorge, a glacier. The earth seemed almost to be gathering itself together. It leaped upward.

And there it was. . . .

The Citadel!

It stood up like a monument: great, terrible—and alone. The other mountains were as nothing beside it. It rose in cliff upon cliff, ridge upon ridge, tower upon tower, until the sharp, curving wedge of its summit seemed to pierce the very heart of the sky. It was a pyramid built up out of a thousand parts—out of granite and limestone and snow and ice, out of glaciers, precipices, crags, ledges, spires, cornices—but so perfect was its vast shape, so harmonious the blending of its elements, that it appeared a single, an organic, almost a living thing. Rudi Matt had been born in its shadow. He had seen it every day of his life. He had stared up at it from the village, from the forests, from the glaciers on every side, until its every detail was fixed indelibly in his mind. But familiarity had not bred indifference. The years had not paled its magic. Instead, that magic had grown stronger, deeper. And on this day, as on every day in his life when he had looked

up at it, Rudi Matt felt again the catch in his breath and the wild surging of his heart.

There it stood. The Citadel. The last unconquered summit of the Alps.

"It cannot be climbed," said the people of the valleys. In the past fifteen years no one had even tried to climb it. "It will never be climbed," they said.

No?

Now he was moving on again. He came to a stream, stopped and drank. A furry marmot watched him from a nearby boulder, whistled shrilly and disappeared. High above, a giant hawk whirled slowly through the still, blue air.

Beyond the stream was a fork in the path. The right-hand branch, plain and well trodden, led off toward the Dornelberg and the Wunderhorn, two of the most popular peaks for climbing in the district. But it was not this branch that Rudi followed. Bearing left, he moved on along a barely visible trail that climbed upward toward the base of the Citadel. He was above tree line now. Even the dwarf pine and shrubs were gone—all grass and moss were gone—and the earth was a bare sweep of gravel and tumbled boulders. Among the boulders the going was tricky, for he had no proper nailed mountainboots; but his feet were nimble, his balance true, and, making deft use of his self-made staff, he climbed quickly and easily. When, after an hour, he turned and looked back, the rocky point where

he had stopped to eat seemed almost as far below him as the village.

The world into which he had now come was one of stillness and desolation. There was the gray of rock, the white of snow, the blue of sky—and that was all there was. The only movement, anywhere, was that of his own body; the only sound the scraping of his own feet against the boulders. Yet Rudi was not conscious of loneliness. He was too used to being alone for that. Every one of the perhaps fifty times during the past two years that he had climbed up to the Citadel's glaciers, he had been alone, and he was now as familiar with this world, and as at home in it, as in the valley below. Pausing now and then, he stared at the mountain that towered gray and monstrous above him. Most of the people in the town believed it was the home of demons, who would destroy anyone who ventured onto its forbidden slopes. . . . Well, maybe. . . . But he, Rudi, was not yet within a mile of the mountain itself. And if any demons did, indeed, come down into the foothills, they would do so, he was certain, only under cover of night.

He looked up, and the sun was bright and golden in the zenith. The thin finger of cold, that for an instant had touched him, dwindled and was gone.

The slope steepened. The boulders grew larger. He had come to the terminal moraine of the Citadel's glacier—the great mass of tumbled, broken rock which all ice-sheets push and grind before them in their slow descent. Ten more minutes brought him to the top of the moraine, and

now the glacier spread before him. Or, more accurately, two glaciers; for he had come out at a point, facing the Kurtal ridge of the Citadel, where its northern and eastern ice-streams met and joined. The one on the north, which was broader, rose to the pass between the Citadel and the Dornelberg and was known as the Dornel Glacier. The eastern one, called the Blue Glacier, was the steeper and climbed like a giant stairway to the saddle—or col—near the base of the Citadel's southeastern ridge. Beyond this col, invisible from where he stood, still another glacier dropped away on the south side of the mountain, toward the valley and village of Broli.

Rudi had ascended both glaciers. He had been to Broli. No less than five times, indeed, he had completely circled the base of the Citadel, climbing up one glacier and down another, traversing the cols and lower ridges, threading his way through the deep, trackless gorges beneath the mountain's western face. He had stared upward until his neck ached and his eyes swam. He had studied every ridge and cliff and ice-wall and ledge and chimney that could be seen from below. He knew more about the approaches to the Citadel than any guide in Kurtal. And yet he still did not know enough. Still he kept coming up to the glaciers to stare again, to study, to measure. To do this, he had played truant from school—even from church. Now he was running out on his job. Always it meant tears and pleas from his mother, often harsh words from his Uncle Franz. But he did not care. He kept coming back. Nothing in heaven or earth could have held him from coming back.

This time he went up the Blue Glacier. He had not particularly planned to, and just why he picked the Blue, rather than the Dornel, he could not have said. Later, thinking back to that day, he racked his memory for some sign, some motive or portent, that had been the reason for his choice. But he could never find one. He simply crossed the junction of the two ice-streams, bore left, and climbed on toward the south . . . and his destiny.

Like all glaciers, the Blue was cut through by crevasses: deep splits and chasms caused by the pressures of the slow-moving ice. When hidden by snow these could be a great hazard to climbers; but on this midsummer day no snow had fallen in some time, the crevasses were plain to view, and there was no danger if one kept his eyes open and paid attention. Rudi zigzagged his way carefully upward. On the ice, of course, his smooth-soled shoes were even worse than on the boulders, but by skillful balancing and use of his stick he kept himself from slipping.

As he climbed, a black dot came into view on the high col ahead. This was an old hut, built many years before by the first explorers of the mountain, but now abandoned and all but forgotten by the people of the valleys. Rudi had twice spent nights there during his circuits of the Citadel, and he knew it well. But it was not there, specifically, that he was going now. He was not going anywhere, specifically, but only climbing, watching, studying. Every few paces now, he would stop and stare upward, motionless.

The east face of the Citadel rose above him like a battlement. Cliff upon cliff, it soared up from the glacier, its rock

bulging and bristling, its walls veined with long streaks of ice. Far overhead, he could see a band of snow, which marked the mountain's first setback. Beyond it, the sloping walls disappeared for a space, only to bulge out again higher up—incredibly higher up—in a great gray thrust against the empty sky. So vast was it, so steep, so mighty, that it seemed more than a mere mass of rock and ice. More than a mere mountain. It seemed a new world rising up out of the old world that was its mother; a world with a life and a meaning of its own; beautiful and menacing, beckoning and unknown.

But it was not of beauty or terror that Rudi Matt was thinking as he gazed up at it now from the Blue Glacier. It was of a deep cleft, wide enough for a man's body, that slanted up the rock wall before him—and ended. Of a series of ledges, broad enough for a man's feet, that rose one above another toward the high belt of snow—and petered out. His eyes searched up and down, to the right and the left. He climbed on, stopped, and studied the next section of the face. Then he climbed on again.

He moved through absolute silence. Later in the day, when sun and melting snow had done their work, great rock-and-ice masses would break loose from the heights above and come roaring down the mountainside. But it was still too early for this. The Citadel rose up like a tower of iron. There was no movement anywhere. No stirring. No sound.

And then there was a sound. . . .

Rudi stood motionless. It was not the sound of the

mountain, of falling rock and ice. It was a voice. He waited; he looked around him; every sense was straining. But he saw nothing. Nothing moved. It was his imagination, he thought: a trick of his mind, or of the stillness. Or was it—and now the cold finger of fear touched him again—was it the voice of a mountain demon?

He stood without breathing. And the sound came again. It seemed at the same time to come from nearby and far away. He waited. Once more it came. And then suddenly he knew where it came from. It was from beneath the ice. From a crevasse in the glacier.

He approached the nearest crevasse and called out. But there was no answer. He went on to a second. No answer. Again he waited and listened. Again the voice came, faintly. Straight ahead was a third chasm in the ice, and, advancing cautiously, he peered over the edge.

CHAPTER TWO

A BOY AND A MAN

The crevasse was about six feet wide at the top and narrowed gradually as it went down. But how deep it was Rudi could not tell. After a few feet the blue walls of ice curved away at a sharp slant, and what was below the curve was hidden from sight.

"Hello!" Rudi called.

"Hello—" A voice answered from the depths.

"How far down are you?"

"I'm not sure. About twenty feet, I'd guess."

"On the bottom?"

"No. I can't even see the bottom. I was lucky and hit a ledge."

The voice spoke in German, but with a strange accent. Whoever was down there, Rudi knew, it was not one of the men of the valley.

"Are you hurt?" he called.

"Nothing broken—no," said the voice. "Just shaken up some. And cold."

"How long have you been there?"

"About three hours."

Rudi looked up and down the crevasse. He was thinking desperately of what he could do.

"Do you have a rope?" asked the voice.

"No."

"How many of you are there?"

"Only me."

There was a silence. When the voice spoke again, it was still quiet and under strict control. "Then you'll have to get help," it said.

Rudi didn't answer. To get down to Kurtal would take at least two hours, and for a party to climb back up would take three. By that time it would be night, and the man would have been in the crevasse for eight hours. He would be frozen to death.

"No," said Rudi, "it would take too long."

"What else is there to do?"

Rudi's eyes moved over the ice-walls: almost vertical, smooth as glass. "Have you an ax?" he asked.

"No. I lost it when I fell. It dropped to the bottom."

"Have you tried to climb?"

"Yes. But I can't get a hold."

There was another silence. Rudi's lips tightened, and when he spoke again his voice was strained. "I'll think of something," he cried. "I'll think of *something!*"

"Don't lose your head," the voice said. "The only way is to go down for help."

"But you'll—"

"Maybe. And maybe not. That's a chance we'll have to take."

The voice was as quiet as ever. And, hearing it, Rudi was suddenly ashamed. Here was he, safe on the glacier's surface, showing fear and despair, while the one below, facing almost certain death, remained calm and controlled. Whoever it was down there, it was a real man. A brave man.

Rudi drew in a long, slow breath. With his climbing-staff he felt down along the smooth surface of the ice walls.

"Are you still there?" said the voice.

"Yes," he said.

"You had better go."

"Wait—"

Lying flat on the glacier, he leaned over the rim of the crevasse and lowered the staff as far as it would go. Its end came almost to the curve in the walls.

"Can you see it?" he asked.

"See what?" said the man.

Obviously he couldn't. Standing up, Rudi removed his jacket and tied it by one sleeve to the curved end of the staff. Then, holding the other end, he again lay prone and lowered his staff and jacket.

"Can you see it now?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man.

"How far above you is it?"

"About ten feet."

Again the staff came up. Rudi took off his shirt and tied one of its sleeves to the dangling sleeve of the jacket. This time, as he lay down, the ice bit, cold and rough, into his bare chest; but he scarcely noticed it. With his arms ex-

tended, all the shirt and half the jacket were out of sight beneath the curve in the crevasse.

"How near you now?" he called.

"Not far," said the voice.

"Can you reach it?"

"I'm trying."

There was the sound of scraping boot-nails; of labored breathing. But no pull on the shirtsleeve down below.

"I can't make it," said the voice. It was fainter than before.

"Wait," said Rudi.

For the third time he raised the staff. He took off his trousers. He tied a trouser-leg to the loose sleeve of the shirt. Then he pulled, one by one, at all the knots he had made: between staff and jacket, jacket and shirt, shirt and trousers. He pulled until the blood pounded in his head and the knots were as tight as his strength could make them. This done, he stepped back from the crevasse to the point where his toes had rested when he lay flat. With feet and hands he kicked and scraped the ice until he had made two holes. Then, lying down as before, he dug his toes deep into them. He was naked now, except for his shoes, stockings and underpants. The cold rose from the ice into his blood and bones. He lowered the staff and knotted clothes like a sort of crazy fishing line.

The trousers, the shirt and half of the jacket passed out of sight. He was leaning over as far as he could.

"Can you reach it now?" he called.

"Yes," the voice answered.

"All right. Come on."

"You won't be able to hold me. I'll pull you in."

"No you won't."

He braced himself. The pull came. His toes went taut in their ice-holds and his hands tightened on the staff until the knuckles showed white. Again he could hear a scraping sound below, and he knew that the man was clawing his boots against the ice-wall, trying both to lever himself up and to take as much weight as possible off the improvised lifeline. But the wall obviously offered little help. Almost all his weight was on the lifeline. Suddenly there was a jerk, as one of the knots in the clothing slipped, and the staff was almost wrenched from Rudi's hands. But the knot held. And his hands held. He tried to call down, "All right?" but he had no breath for words. From below, the only sound was the scraping of boots on ice.

How long it went on Rudi could never have said. Perhaps only for a minute or so. But it seemed like hours. And then at last—at last—it happened. A hand came into view around the curve of the crevasse wall: a hand gripping the twisted fabric of his jacket, and then a second hand rising slowly above it. A head appeared. A pair of shoulders. A face was raised for an instant and then lowered. Again one hand moved slowly up past the other.

But Rudi no longer saw it, for now his eyes were shut tight with the strain. His teeth were clamped, the cords of his neck bulged, the muscles of his arm felt as if he were being drawn one by one from the bones that held them.

He began to lose his toeholds. He was being dragged forward. Desperately, frantically, he dug in with his feet, pressed his whole body down, as if he could make it part of the glacier. Though all but naked on the ice, he was pouring with sweat. Somehow he stopped the slipping. Somehow he held on. But now suddenly the strain was even worse, for the man had reached the lower end of the staff. The slight "give" of the stretched clothing was gone, and in its place was rigid deadweight on a length of wood. The climber was close now. But heavy. Indescribably heavy. Rudi's hands ached and burned, as if it were a rod of hot lead that they clung to. It was not a mere man he was holding, but a giant; or a block of granite. The pull was unendurable. The pain unendurable. He could hold on no longer. His hands were opening. It was all over.

And then it was over. The weight was gone. There was a scraping sound close beneath him; a hand on the rim of ice; a figure pulling itself up onto the lip of the crevasse. The man was beside Rudi, turning to him, staring at him.

"Why—you're just a boy!" he said in astonishment.

Rudi was too numb to move or speak. Taking the staff from him, the man pulled up the line of clothes, untied the knots and shook them out.

"Come on now. Quickly!" he said.

Pulling the boy to his feet, he helped him dress. Then he rubbed and pummeled him until at last Rudi felt the warmth of returning circulation.

"Better?" the man asked, smiling.

Rudi nodded. And finally he was able to speak again. "And you, sir," he said, "you are all right?"

The man nodded. He was warming himself now: flapping his arms and kicking his feet together. "A few minutes of sun and I'll be as good as new."

Nearby, a black boulder lay embedded in the glacial ice, and, going over to it, they sat down. The sunlight poured over them like a warm bath. Rudi slowly flexed his aching fingers and saw that the man was doing the same. And then the man had raised his eyes and was looking at him.

"It's a miracle how you did it," he said. "A boy of your size. All alone."

"It was nothing," Rudi murmured.

"Nothing?"

"I—I only—"

"Only saved my life," said the man.

For the first time, now, Rudi was really seeing him. He was a man of perhaps thirty, very tall and thin, and his face, too, was thin, with a big hawklike nose and a strong jutting chin. His weather-browned cheeks were clean-shaven, his hair black, his eyes deep-set and gray. And when he spoke, his voice was still almost as quiet as when it had been muffled by the ice-walls of the crevasse. He is—what?—Rudi thought. Not Swiss, he knew. Not French or German. English, perhaps? Yes, English. . . . And then suddenly a deep excitement filled him, for he knew who the man was.

"You are Captain Winter?" he murmured.

"That's right."

"And I—I have saved—I mean—"

Rudi stopped in confusion, and the Englishman grinned. "You've saved," he said, smiling, "one of the worst imbeciles that ever walked on a glacier. An imbecile who was so busy looking up at a mountain that he couldn't even see what was at his feet."

Rudi was wordless—almost stunned. He looked at the man, and then away in embarrassment, and he could scarcely believe what had happened. The name of Captain John Winter was known through the length and breadth of the Alps. He was the foremost mountaineer of his day, and during the past ten years had made more first ascents of great peaks than any other man alive. Rudi had heard that he had come to Kurtal a few days before. He had hoped that at least he would see him in the hotel or walking by in the street. But actually to meet him—and in this way! To pull him from a crevasse—save him. . . . It was incredible!

Captain Winter was watching him. "And you, son," he asked. "What is your name?"

Somehow the boy got his voice back. "Rudi," he said. "Rudi Matt."

"Matt?" Now it was the man's turn to be impressed. "Not of the family of the great Josef Matt?"

"He was my father," Rudi said.

Captain Winter studied him with his gray eyes. Then he smiled again. "I should have known," he said. "A boy who could do what you've done—"

"Did you know my father, sir?"

"No, unfortunately I didn't. He was before my day. But ever since I was a boy I have heard of him. In twenty years no one has come to the Alps and not heard of the great guide, Josef Matt."

Rudi's heart swelled. He looked away. His eyes fixed on the vast mountain that rose before them, and then he saw that Captain Winter was watching it too.

Unconsciously the Englishman spoke his thoughts. "Your father was—" He caught himself and stopped.

"Yes," said Rudi softly, "he was killed on the Citadel."

There was a silence. Captain Winter reached into a pocket and brought out an unbroken bar of chocolate. "Lucky I fell on the other side," he grinned.

He broke the bar in two and handed half to Rudi.

"Oh no, sir, thank you. I couldn't."

"When I meet a boy your age who can't eat chocolate," said Winter, "I'll be glad to stay in a crevasse for good."

Rudi took it, and they sat munching. The sun was warm on their thawing bodies. Far above, it struck the cliffs and snow-fields of the Citadel, so brightly that they had to squint against the glare.

Then there was Winter's quiet voice again. "What do you think, Rudi?"

"Think, sir?"

"Can it be climbed?"

"Climbed? The Citadel?"

"Your father thought so. Alone among all the guides of Switzerland, he thought so." There was another pause. "And I think so too," said Captain Winter.

The boy was peering again at the shining heights. And suddenly his heart was pounding so hard that he was sure the Englishman must be able to hear it. "Is—is that why you have come here, sir?" he asked. "To try to climb the Citadel?"

"Well, now—" Winter smiled. "It's not so simple, you know. For one thing, there's not a guide in the valley who would go with me."

"I have an uncle, sir. He is—"

"Yes, I know your uncle. Franz Lerner. He is the best in Kurtal, and I've spoken to him. But he would not go. Anything but that, he said. Any other peak, any route, any venture. But not *that,* he said. Not the Citadel."

"He remembers my father—"

"Yes, he remembers your father. They all remember him. And while they love and respect his memory, they all think he was crazy." Winter chuckled softly. "Now they think *I'm* crazy," he added. "And maybe they're right too," he said.

"What will you do, sir?" asked Rudi. "Not try it alone?"

"No, that crazy I'm not." Winter slowly stroked his long jaw. "I'm not certain what I'll do," he went on. "Perhaps I'll go over to the next valley. To Broli. I've been told there is a guide there—a man called Saxo. Do you know him?"

"Yes—Emil Saxo. I have never met him, but I have heard of him. They say he is a very great guide."

"Well, I thought perhaps I'd go and talk with him.

After a while. But first I must reconnoitre some more. Make my plans. Pick the route. If there *is* a route."

"Yes, there is! Of course there is!"

Rudi had not thought the words. They simply burst out from him. And now again he was embarrassed as the man looked at him curiously.

"So?" said Captain Winter. "That is interesting, Rudi. Tell me why you think so."

"I have studied the Citadel many times, sir."

"Why?"

"Because—because—" He stopped. He couldn't say it.

"Because you want to climb it yourself?"

"I am not yet a grown man, sir. I know I cannot expect—"

"I wasn't a grown man either," said the Captain, "when I first saw the Citadel. I was younger than you—only twelve—and my parents had brought me here for a summer holiday. But I can still remember how I felt when I looked up at it, and the promise I made myself that some day I was going to climb it." He paused. His eyes moved slowly upward. "Youth is the time for dreams, boy," he murmured. "The trick is, when you get older, not to forget them."

Rudi listened, spellbound. He had never heard anyone speak like that. He had not known a grown man could think and feel like that.

Then Winter asked:

"This east face, Rudi—what do you think of it?"

"Think of it, sir?"

"Could it be climbed?"

Rudi shook his head. "No, it is no good. The long chimney there—you see. It looks all right; it could be done. And to the left, the ledges"—he pointed—"they could be done too. But higher up, no. They stop. The chimney stops, and there is only smooth rock."

"What about the northeast ridge?"

"That is not good either."

"It's not so steep."

"No, it is not so steep," said Rudi. "But the rocks are bad. They slope out, with few places for holds."

"And the north face?"

Rudi talked on. About the north face, the west ridge, the southwest ridge. He talked quietly and thoughtfully, but with deep inner excitement, for this was the first time in his life that he had been able to speak to anyone of these things which he had thought and studied for so long. . . . And then suddenly he stopped, for he realized what he was doing. He, Rudi Matt, a boy of sixteen who worked in the kitchen of the Beau Site Hotel, was presuming to give his opinions to one of the greatest climbers in the world.

But Captain Winter had been listening intently. Sometimes he nodded. "Go on," he said now, as Rudi paused.

"But I am only—"

"Go on."

And Rudi went on. . . .

"That doesn't leave much," said the captain a little later.

"No sir," said the boy.

"Only the southeast ridge."

"Yes sir."

"That was the way your father tried, wasn't it?"

"Yes sir."

"And you believe it's the only way?"

"Yes sir."

Captain Winter rubbed his jaw for a moment before speaking again. Then—"That also is very interesting to me, Rudi," he said quietly, "because it is what I believe too."

Later, they threaded their way down the Blue Glacier. For a while they moved in silence. Then Captain Winter asked:

"What do you do, Rudi?"

"Do, sir?"

"Are you an apprentice guide? A porter?"

Rudi swallowed. "No sir."

"What then?"

He could hardly say it. "A—a dishwasher."

"A dishwasher?"

"In the Beau Site Hotel. It is my mother, sir. Since my father died, you see, she is afraid—she does not want—" Rudi swallowed again. "I am to go into the hotel business," he murmured.

"Oh."

Again they moved on without speaking. It was now late afternoon, and behind them the stillness was broken by a

great roaring, as sun-loosened rock and ice broke off from the heights of the Citadel.

When they reached the path Rudi spoke again, hesitantly. "Will you please do me a favor, sir," he asked.

"Of course," said Winter.

"Before we come to the town we will separate. And you will please not tell anyone that I have been up here today?"

The Englishman looked at him in astonishment. "Not tell anyone? You save my life, boy, and you want me to keep it a secret?"

"It was nothing, sir. Truly. And if you say that I have been in the mountains, my mother and uncle will hear, and I will be in trouble." Rudi's voice took on a note of urgency. "You will not do it, sir? You will promise—please?"

Winter put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry," he said. "I won't get you in trouble." Then he smiled and added: "Master Rudi Matt—dishwasher."

They walked down the path. The sun sank. Behind them, the mountain roared.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO HUNDRED DIRTY DISHES

In the kitchen of the Beau Site Hotel old Teo Zurbriggen went about his work. He had long since finished up the breakfast dishes that Rudi had left half-washed, but meanwhile lunch had come and gone and a hundred new ones stood waiting for the suds. And for these Teo had no time, because he was busy cooking dinner.

Gretchen, the waitress, moved back and forth from the dining room. "The boy is a good-for-nothing," she snorted. "Running out and leaving his work."

"He did not run out," said Teo. "I have told you: his mother, Frau Matt, is sick and needs him. And besides," he added, "there are enough clean dishes for dinner."

Gretchen went back to the dining room, and Teo looked out the window. "The sun is low," he thought, "and he should be back soon. Even if he went all the way to the glaciers, he should be back soon."

Old Teo, they called him. He was not really so old; not more than perhaps fifty-five. But his brown skin was wrinkled, his hair almost white, his eyes pale and watery behind craggy brows. And also, he was a cripple. Fifteen

years before, in the prime of his life, he had been one of the foremost guides of Kurtal—and the only one willing to accompany Josef Matt and his employer, Sir Edward Stephenson, on their famous attempt on the Citadel. Unlike the other two, he had been brought down alive, but so badly injured from a thirty-foot fall that his career as a mountain man was over. Even now, he walked with a deep limp. His left arm was half paralyzed and his shoulder hunched up against his neck. He had tried farming, until his wife died and he grew too lonely. Then he had worked at odd jobs around the town. And when the Beau Site was built he became its cook.

He was a good cook—but not a happy one. If it had not made it too dark for his work, he would have put blinds on the kitchen windows to shut out the sight of the soaring mountains.

There were footsteps in the alley outside. "Ah, there's the runaway," thought old Teo. But it wasn't. It was Rudi's uncle, Franz Lerner.

He was a big man—not tall, but broad and stoutly built—and his shoulders filled the doorway as he entered. His face, too, was broad, strong and square-cut, with weathered skin, a short fringe of beard and dark, slow-moving eyes. Indeed, everything about him was slow: his gait, his gestures, his speech. Slow and deliberate. Slow and powerful. He was dressed in rough guide's clothing and held a pipe between his teeth.

"Grüss Gott," he said to Teo.

"Grüss Gott," said the cook.

Franz looked around. "Where is the boy?"

"He is out. I—I sent him to the market."

"His mother wants him to do an errand before he comes home. She asked me to tell him."

"I will tell him when he comes back."

At that moment Gretchen the waitress reappeared. "Good evening," she said to Franz. "It is too bad your sister, the Widow Matt, is ill."

"Ill?"

"Why yes. Is she not? Old Teo said the boy had gone to—"

She looked questioningly at the cook. Franz looked at the cook. Then his eyes moved to the stacks of dirty dishes.

"So," he said. "It is *that* again."

Teo said nothing.

Franz took a step forward. "Is it not?" he demanded. "He has sneaked off again to the mountains."

Teo cleared his throat. "There were not many dishes," he murmured. "And besides, the day was so fine—"

"It is not a question of how many dishes. Or of the weather. It is that here is where he works. Where he belongs. Not wandering around in the mountains."

"I am not sure you are right," said Teo.

"What do you mean by that?"

Teo shrugged his twisted shoulders. "You cannot put out a fire by wishing it out. You cannot bottle the wind."

The two men stood facing each other. Gretchen went back into the dining room.

"If you cannot control him," said Franz, "I shall have to speak to Herr Hempel, the proprietor. Perhaps he should work in another part of the hotel."

"And perhaps he should not work in the hotel at all," said Teo.

"He *must* work in the hotel. It is his mother's wish. He is to be trained for the business."

"He is not a child anymore. He cannot be made to do what he does not want to."

"And what he *does* want to—"

"—is to be a guide, of course. If not a full guide yet, at least a porter—an apprentice."

Franz shook his head. "He is not strong enough to be a guide. He is too small. And also too irresponsible." He pointed at the dirty dishes. "Look how he leaves things. How he shirks his work. What would he do in the mountains, where there are real problems and responsibilities?"

"At least he should have the chance to learn." Old Teo came closer and his voice grew lower. "You are a guide, Franz," he said. "When I was young, I too was a guide, and we know how such things are. He cannot stand to see the other boys going out as porters and helpers, learning to be guides, while he works in a kitchen like a girl or an old man. He is Josef Matt's son, and the mountains are in his blood."

"And what do you think is in my sister's blood?" Franz demanded. "A widow at twenty-three, with her husband killed on the Citadel. A widow left with a single child. Do you expect her to let him do as his father did? To die as

his father died?" He brought a big hand down heavily on the table. "No. There have been enough guides in the family. And enough sorrow for one woman. This boy will learn a trade, a profession. Soon now he will go for training to a big hotel in Zurich. When he comes back he will be a clerk, then a manager; one day he may even be a proprietor. Something the family can be proud of."

Teo studied him with his pale old eyes. "It is for your sister that you speak now, Franz," he said quietly. "Not for yourself."

"What I speak is sense. And what I speak is what will be." Franz turned abruptly to the door. "I will go now and tell her about this thing."

He went out. Teo stood for a while at the window, watching the mountains and the setting sun. Then he went back to his oven. . . . "Whatever they do, it will be no use," he thought. "They will see. They will find out. You cannot bottle the wind. . . ."

Frau Matt's house was small and neat. And so was Frau Matt. As a young girl, when she married Josef Matt, she had been one of the beauties of Kurtal, and though the years of her widowhood had faded her, she was still, in her late thirties, an attractive, almost a pretty woman. She had not grown fat, as did so many of the village women as they neared middle age. She had the same fine features and light complexion as her son. She was known for the sweetness of her smile. But there was no smile on her face this summer evening, as she sat listening to her brother Franz.

"No," she said sadly, "Old Teo does not seem able to control Rudi at all."

"He does not even *want* to control him," said Franz.

"When this summer is over it will be all right, I think. Now, at sixteen, he is wild and willful. But in the fall he will go to Zurich for his training. He will be away from the mountains. And when he comes back he will have interest and pride in his work."

Her brother nodded without speaking.

"You know what I want for him," she said. "How I have hoped and planned for him. You do not think I am wrong, Franz?"

"I think you must do as your heart tells you, Ilse."

"My heart—yes. But it is not just that. It is not of myself that I want to think, but of Rudi. So that he may have a good life. So that he may grow up and marry and have children, and not destroy it all by—"

She broke off. When she spoke again it was with a great effort to be calm and reasonable.

"If he were a different sort of boy—bigger and stronger—perhaps I would feel differently. But he is so small, so delicate."

"Yes," Franz agreed, "he is not built for the mountains."

"And he is so quick and bright. His manners are good. In the hotel business he can make a great success. If only he will stop wanting to be what he is not."

"It is when he thinks of his father that he wants to be a guide."

"Yes, of course—when he thinks of his father. . . . And then when *I* think of him. Of my own Josef. Of how young he was, how gay and proud. How he used to laugh when I worried about him—"

Frau Matt closed her eyes, and there was a silence in the room. Then the door opened and Rudi came in.

"Good evening, Mother," he said. "Good evening, Uncle."

The two looked at him without answering.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"Only that we were wondering," said Franz grimly, "if you were coming home at all tonight."

"It was very busy at the hotel today. There were many dirty dishes."

"Yes, I know. I saw them."

"You—you—" Rudi swallowed. "You mean you were there? It must have been while I was out on an errand."

"No doubt. And it must have been a very hard errand, considering what it did to your feet."

Rudi looked down at his shoes, scuffed by rocks and coated with the dust of the trail.

"Did—did old Teo say—"

"Your crony Teo told one lie after another. First to the waitress. Then to me. And now you are taking up where he left off."

Rudi was silent. His uncle stood up. "I am getting sick of these lies, boy," he said. "Good and sick of all this nonsense!"

Still Rudi said nothing.

"Well, what do you have to say for yourself?"

"I am sorry, Uncle."

"Sorry? Is that all? Sorry until the next time, when you do the same thing again."

"You promised me, Rudi," said Frau Matt gently.

The boy couldn't look at her. "Yes, Mother," he murmured.

"Why didn't you keep your promise?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"It—it is hard to explain. I did not mean to go—truly. I did not think of going at all. But when I stand there at the kitchen window, when I see the sun and the mountains—"

"I do not want to scold," his mother told him. "In all other things you are a good boy. Only in this do you disobey me and lie to me." She paused, studying her son's face. "I want you to be happy," she went on. "I want only to do what is right and good for you. In the hotel, and with Herr Hempel so interested in you, you will have such a fine future—the best of any boy in Kurtal. Can't you see how much better it is than the other? Than only climbing around on rocks and ice?"

"I have been a guide for twenty years," his uncle put in, "and look what it has got me. I do not have enough education even to speak to the fine visitors who now come here to Kurtal. I have not yet saved enough money to buy a dozen cows.

"Look what it has done for Teo Zurbriggen. He is crip-

pled. He is poor. Soon you will have a fine career. You will be a businessman, a gentleman. But he must work all his life in a kitchen."

There was a silence, and Rudi stared at the floor. "I will go now to the hotel," he murmured, "and finish the dishes."

But as he turned to leave there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," said his uncle.

And Captain Winter appeared.

"Ah—Franz," he said. "They told me at your house that I could find you here."

"It is an honor, my Captain. Sit down, please. This is my sister, Frau Matt."

Winter bowed respectfully. "The honor is mine, madam," he said, "to meet the widow of the great Josef Matt."

"And this is her son, Rudi," Franz said, as an afterthought.

The Englishman turned and looked at the boy, but he remembered his promise, and no sign of recognition showed on his face. "Hello, son," he said pleasantly. Then he turned back to Franz. "I just wanted to ask," he said, "if you're available for a climb tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? Yes, my Captain." Franz hesitated. "That is, if you do not mean—"

Winter smiled. "No, I don't mean the Citadel. I was thinking of the Wunderhorn. I know you've been on it often, and they say it's a good climb."

"Yes, it is good," Franz agreed.

"And that it gives a clear view of the Citadel."

"Yes, that is good too."

"Excellent. Suppose we leave tomorrow about noon. We can spend the night at the Blausee Hut and go on up the next morning. We'll need food and blankets, of course. It will probably be best to have a porter." He turned, as if struck by a sudden thought. "How about the youngster here?" he suggested, indicating Rudi. "He should do fine as a helper."

"No," said Franz. "No, my Captain. The boy is not available; he works elsewhere. But I will find a good man who—"

Rudi's voice cut suddenly across his uncle's. "Please!" The word was as if wrenched from his flesh. "Please! Just this once let me come, and I will show you what I can do!"

Franz shook his head. "It is not possible. Only now we have just talked of these things, and your mother does not—"

"But this is different, Uncle—with Captain Winter." Rudi's voice, his eyes, his whole body was pleading. "Captain Winter knows I can do it. He will tell you. Up on the glacier today he saw what I can do."

"On the glacier?" The guide's eyes moved to Winter. "You mean that he was with *you,* my Captain?"

"Oh, then they know—?" Winter glanced at Rudi.

"All we know," said Franz, "is that he went up into the mountains today. Leaving his work and defying his mother."

"But he told you nothing of what happened?"

"Happened?" Frau Matt repeated.

"No," said Franz, "he told us nothing."

"In that case," said Captain Winter quietly, "it will be my pleasure to tell you. Today, on the Blue Glacier, this boy saved my life."

"Saved—your—life?" breathed Frau Matt.

Franz stared at him. "What are you saying, my Captain?"

Winter told the story, and they listened in silence. Rudi listened too, feeling the blood slowly seeping into his cheeks and forehead, until it seemed to him that his whole face was on fire. Now and then he raised his eyes, but dropped them again almost instantly. And at last the Captain came to the end of the story.

Then he said: "What your son did, Frau Matt, was a very skillful and a very brave thing. There is no question but that I would be dead right now if he had not done it. I think his father, if he were alive today, would be proud of him."

Now the pounding in Rudi's head was so strong that he thought at any moment it might split right open. Through it, dimly, he was aware that his mother and uncle were no longer looking at Captain Winter, but at him. Indeed, Franz was staring, almost as if he had never seen him before.

"When did you learn these things?" the guide asked.

"I—I didn't." The boy's voice was no more than a whisper. "I just did what seemed best."

"And you held the Captain while he climbed up? All alone? With your own strength?"

"Yes, Uncle."

Winter crossed the room and put a hand on Rudi's shoulder. "Rudi told me," he said, "that he should not have been up in the mountains. But, as you see, it was very lucky for me that he was, and I beg you not to be angry with him. A boy who has done what he did deserves a reward, and I shall see that he gets it. But there's a reward you can give him that would be better than anything else." He paused and smiled at Frau Matt. "Let him come with us tomorrow on the Wunderhorn."

Franz started to speak, stopped, and looked at his sister. And now Captain Winter went over to her. "I think I know how you feel, Frau Matt," he said gently. "But, I promise you, there would be no danger. Your brother and I will be right there with him. And the Wunderhorn is not a difficult mountain."

Frau Matt looked at her hands. Then at last she looked up. . . . *"Please—please* . . ." Rudi murmured.

"What you have just told us—" his mother said to Winter. "What my boy has done—I am proud of him, of course. But—" she hesitated, "but there are things, my captain, that perhaps you do not understand. Rudi is not a mountain boy, you see. He is not to be a guide, but a hotel man. For years we have planned his career, and now he is serving his apprenticeship in the kitchen at the Beau Site." Casting about for straws, she found one and

clutched it. "Every day he works there. The cook needs him. He cannot be spared."

Rudi leapt forward and knelt by his mother's chair. "Yes—yes, I can—truly, Mother." The words tumbled over one another. "Old Teo will let me go—I know he will—he has said so. And besides there is Toni Hassler—he spoke to me last week—he would work as my substitute—"

He had seized her hands and was looking pleadingly into her face. Frau Matt looked back at him for a moment, and then past him, at the two men who stood watching. "I know that Captain Winter is a great climber," she said at last. "If he asks this for you—if he feels it is all right—"

Winter nodded reassuringly.

"And if your uncle—"

"It is up to you, Ilse," said Franz.

Frau Matt was beaten. "Then—then," she said "—this time—this once—"

But when she tried to go on, she couldn't, because Rudi was covering her face with kisses.

When he reached the hotel kitchen there were two hundred dirty dishes waiting for him beside the tub. But for all he cared there could have been two thousand.

During the whole evening he broke only three.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRIAL—

While he slept, he dreamt *the dream.* The setting was the same as always: a thin ridge of rock, a dome of snow, and, beyond the dome, the blue and gleaming emptiness of the sky. But whereas, before, he had invariably been alone, there were now others with him: Captain Winter and his Uncle Franz, a few paces back, and behind them a small shadowy figure—perhaps his mother?—who seemed to be calling him.

All the rest, though, was exactly as in the other dreams. He, Rudi, stepped up from the rock onto the snow. He stood on the very crest of the snow, and all the mountain, all Switzerland, all the world, was beneath him. For a moment he knelt. Then, rising, he unstrapped a pole he had been carrying on his back, took a red flannel shirt from his knapsack, and tied the shirt to the pole by its sleeves. He set the pole into the snow—the magical, shining snow upon which no man had ever stood before; and now a wind was blowing, and the shirt flapped like a flame on the white summit of the Citadel. . . .

Later he awoke, and it was dawn. But the dream was still with him. Getting up, he went to the chest where he kept his few clothes and from the very bottom, where it

lay carefully folded, took out—the red shirt. It was old and tattered and moth-eaten, and on the inside of the neck, in barely decipherable letters, was written the name *Josef Matt.* But the dye in the flannel must have been the best, for, in all the years Rudi had had it, its deep crimson had not faded. Spreading the shirt on his bed, Rudi examined it to see if the moths had been recently at work. They had. A new cluster of holes gaped from one of the armpits, and he must remember to patch them up soon, if the sleeve were not to fall off altogether. For a while he stood looking down at it. Once more, quickly, lightly, he bent and touched it. Then, refolding it, he put it back in the chest.

At the hotel there were of course the breakfast dishes to clean, but he did them in an hour. Excitedly he told Teo of what had happened, and, as he had been sure, the old cook was not only willing, but delighted, that he should go. The dishes done, he went out and found Toni Hassler and told him to report for work at noon.

When he returned, Old Teo pointed at a table. "There is a note for you," he said.

"A note?"

In all his life Rudi had never received a written message. He stared, unbelieving, at the folded sheet of paper, but when he picked it up he saw that, sure enough, it bore his own name. Opening it, he read:

If you will go to Alex Burgner's shop, you will find ordered for you some things that may be useful. They are only a small token of the admiration and gratitude of your friend and fellow-climber, John Winter.

A shout rose into his throat and stuck there. Teo was watching him, and he thrust the note into the old man's hand. Then, remembering that he couldn't read, he snatched it back and read it aloud; and, even now, he could scarcely control his voice.

The cook's pale eyes twinkled. "Well—" he said. "Well, things are getting interesting." And when Rudi still stood motionless: "So, what are you waiting for?"

"You mean I may go now?" Rudi hesitated. "But there is still the silver to be polished. And Toni Hassler is not coming until twelve."

"Good. That means I will have two hours of peace." Old Teo waved a hand at him. "Go on—off with you! *Lausbube!* And if you do not climb like your father's son you need not bother to come back!"

By the time he had finished Rudi was in the alley. Two minutes later he was in the shop of Alex Burgner. On a shelf, waiting for him, were a gleaming ice-ax and a knapsack, and Herr Burgner brought him a pair of boots to try on for size.

"But these—these are the finest—"

"Yes, the finest," said Herr Burgner. "That is what the Captain ordered."

For an hour he tramped the streets, breaking in the boots. Then he went home—and at the last minute remembered to take them off before walking on his mother's polished floors. He went to his room, changed his clothes, and came out again. And this time his mother

was there. She stared at the things he was carrying, and he explained how he had come by them.

"Such fine gifts!" she exclaimed. "So generous!" And then, as an afterthought. "But what a waste, too, since you will be using them only once."

Rudi started to speak, but thought better of it.

"Ah well," said Frau Matt, "your Uncle Franz can use a new ax and pack, and the shoes we can perhaps sell to a guide with small feet."

Sitting on the stoop, he again put on the boots. He adjusted the straps of the pack. He hefted the ax. At a quarter of twelve his uncle appeared, in his rough climbing clothes, and once more Rudi explained about his new equipment. Franz eyed the articles with grudging admiration. "Why is it that for twenty years I have been climbing on glaciers," he muttered, "and for me there has never been a rich Englishman waiting in a crevasse?"

As they started off, Frau Matt appeared in the doorway. "Franz—" she said.

They turned, and she looked up at her brother. "You will watch out for him?" she murmured.

"There is no need to worry, Ilse," he told her. "The Wunderhorn, it is nothing."

She looked at Rudi. "And you—you, my boy—you will do always as your uncle says—"

"Yes, Mother."

To his relief, she did not cry or cling to him. She did not even kiss him. She simply looked at him for another

moment and then went quickly back into the house, while Rudi stared after her in surprise. What he did not know was that on another day, fifteen summers past, she had stood at that same door with his father, crying and kissing and clinging to him, as he set out to climb the Citadel. And that was a thing she could never do again, as long as she lived.

Captain Winter was waiting for them on the porch of the hotel. Fumblingly Rudi tried to express his gratitude, but the Englishman merely waved a hand, and they set about sorting their gear. Soon everything was in its proper place: food, utensils, blankets, extra clothing, and a hundred feet of stout hempen rope. Then they shouldered their packs.

"All right, son?" asked Winter, smiling.

"Yes, sir."

"Pack not too heavy?"

"Oh no, sir."

The hotel fronted on the main square of the town, and as they walked across it Rudi's head was high and his step was proud. He knew almost everyone they passed, of course, and many greeted him and then turned and stared. Around the central fountain, where the guides gathered when they were not working, there was a rustle of interest and a row of brown bearded faces raised from conversations and card games. "So you have a helper at last, Franz," called one of the Tauglich brothers. "It is good to see at last another Matt going to the mountains," said

Andreas Krickel. A little farther on, a particularly wonderful thing happened: Klaus Wesselhoft came sauntering down the street. Klaus was eighteen and an apprentice guide. He was big and strong and loudmouthed, and he made a favorite sport of taunting Rudi by calling him "Plate-scraper" and "Angel-face." He didn't taunt him now, though. Instead, he walked past as if he had not seen him. But Rudi knew that he *had* seen him—seen the ax and the pack and the boots and the two men striding beside him—and suddenly his heart was singing and he wanted to shout in his joy.

Then the town was behind them. They crossed the brook and wound up through the meadows. They went in single file—Captain Winter first, his uncle second, himself third—and their pace was slow, but strong and steady. Soon they came to the forest's edge and the wayside shrine. Winter bared his head as he passed. Franz crossed himself. More than any time before, Rudi wanted to kneel and pray, but with the two men there ahead of him he could not bring himself to do it and, instead, merely crossed himself, too, and said his prayer under his breath.

Soon after, they passed the blue spruce in which his staff was hidden, but there was no need for him to stop there today. As they climbed on, his fingers lovingly stroked the smooth haft of his ice-ax.

In two hours they had come up out of the forest onto the gray boulder-slopes above. So far, so good, Rudi thought. The one thing he had been worried about were his boots, for new boots were supposed to hurt. But these

felt as if he had been born wearing them. Near tree line they stopped briefly for a bite of food and a drink of cold mountain water. Then, moving on, they came to the fork in the path which Rudi had passed the day before. This time, however, their route did not bear to the left, toward the Citadel, but right, in the direction of the Wunderhorn. They trudged up steep mounds of gravel, crossed a moraine and a small glacier, wound through a maze of tumbled rocks on the far side. And here Rudi had his first difficulties.

For it had grown warmer. Much warmer. In the forest they had been protected from the sun, but now it beat down on them, unobstructed, and soon Rudi's body was bathed in sweat. His pack seemed to grow heavier. Now and then he stumbled. With every step he was learning that it was one thing to roam the mountains, free and unencumbered, and quite another to be a porter carrying a thirty-pound load. But he would have bitten his tongue off before he complained; crawled on hands and knees before falling behind. He sweated. He strained. He kept going. And after another hour they came out onto a level stretch near the base of the Wunderhorn, and there before them was the small mountain lake called the Blausee and, on its far side, the overnight hut.

By the standards of a later time it was perhaps not much of a place. In years to come many Alpine cabins would be almost like small hotels, complete with cots or bunks, piped-in water, a cook and helpers, finally even telephones; and the Blausee Hut in 1865 had, to be sure, none

of these. But it was nevertheless the pride of Kurtal. Built only a few seasons before, to accommodate the new crowds of tourists and climbers, it was strong and snug and had space for the night for as many as thirty people. There was a great hearth and firewood, brought up on muleback, for cooking. There was a plank table, benches and oil lamps, and in the loft above, reached by a ladder, piles of fresh straw on which to spread one's blankets. Once inside, the surrounding peaks and glaciers seemed as remote as the town itself, four thousand feet below.

The hut, that evening, was almost full, with guides and their employers. Some had merely come up for the walk and view and would go down in the morning. Some would set out for one or another of the nearby peaks. All the guides, of course, were known to Franz and Rudi, and again, as in the town square, there were glances and comments that made the boy's heart swell with satisfaction. Soon all trace of his tiredness was gone. The fire crackled cheerfully, and when dusk came the oil lamps gleamed. He and Franz and Captain Winter had their supper of meat and cheese, fruit and chocolate, and his uncle made no objection when he drank with them from their jug of wine. Later, he squatted by the fire, while the others, at the table, smoked their pipes, talked and occasionally threw a word to him over their shoulders.

A warm glow filled his body. He was where he belonged. He was a man among men.

CHAPTER FIVE

—AND ERROR

It was still dark when Franz woke him. As in all mountain climbing, they were to make an early start, so that they could already be high on the peak by the best hours of the morning and back down to safety before the afternoon thaw.

Some of the others in the loft were also stirring. Some were still asleep. They ate a quick breakfast, and then put on their outer clothing, laced up their boots and went out. The cold cut at them like a blade, and it was hard for Rudi to believe that they were in the selfsame place in which, twelve hours before, he had been panting and sweating. Skirting the little lake, they began the ascent of a ridge that rose from its farther end, and it was good to be moving and to feel the blood slowly coming to life in the body. Apparently they would be the only climbers on the Wunderhorn that day, for there was no one ahead of them and no one behind.

It was still night, with no moon, but the stars gave enough light for them to find the way, and Franz did not bother to light his lantern. Nor did they need the rope yet, for the angle of ascent, though steady, was gentle. Franz went first, Captain Winter second, with Rudi—as befitted

a porter—again last. And this morning he had no trouble at all in keeping up with them. For an hour their pace continued unbroken, while the stars paled and dawn showed in the east. The only sound between earth and sky was the clinking of axes against the rock.

Then they left the ridge and worked obliquely upward across a slope of frozen snow. But this, too, was not steep, and only once or twice was it necessary for Franz to pause and chop out footholds with his ax. In another half-hour they reached a second ridge: the main southern buttress of the Wunderhorn. Here the real climbing would begin, and they stopped and roped up.

"All right, boy?" asked Winter, smiling.

"All right, sir," Rudi grinned back.

Up they went then. And up. They followed the ridge for a while, worked out onto a face, returned to the ridge. They followed a deep cleft, then a series of ledges, then what seemed like a great curving stairway of granite slabs. The going was steep now. The mountain walls rose almost vertically. But Rudi felt no dizziness, and everywhere he was able to find good holds for hands and feet. Now and then, at a particularly tricky stretch, Franz and Captain Winter stopped up above and stood braced with the rope while he came after them; but not once did he need to put his weight on it, nor would he have slipped without it.

For a long time the air had been gray with dawn-light. And now suddenly it was golden, as the sun came up over the eastern ranges. The glaciers and snowfields below seemed almost to leap up at them in a dazzling glare. The

mica in the rock around them glittered like diamonds. Quickly the day grew warmer, and soon they paused to strip off their sweaters and stow them in their packs. Then up they went again. And up. And up.

Franz and Captain Winter alternated in the lead; and this, Rudi knew, was the greatest compliment a guide could pay to his employer, for no professional would dream of allowing an amateur to go first, unless he was certain that that amateur was as capable as himself. Watching from below, the boy noted the differences between them. His uncle climbed as he did everything else: slowly, carefully, deliberately. His big body inched over a bulge or around a cornice as if it were a moving part of the mountain itself. The Englishman, on the other hand, was all quickness, lightness and grace. He took no chances; all his movements were measured and sure. But he accomplished them with a dash and brilliance that made Rudi think of a fencer or jousting warrior, rather than of a man struggling with inanimate rock. Now that he was in his natural element on a mountainside, it was easy to see why John Winter was ranked as one of the finest climbers in the world.

The two men led. Rudi followed. And he followed easily. Not once did he need the rope; not once did he delay them by slipping or fumbling; and now a great exhilaration filled him, as he realized that what they could do, he could do too. Indeed, there were times when he could have gone faster. There were times when, peering up, he was certain that he could see better routes and holds and

stances than the ones they were using. But this, of course, he kept to himself. It was enough to know that where they could go, he could go. Where *anyone* could go, he, Rudi Matt, could go too.

They were climbing on the south side of the Wunderhorn. When they turned they could see the valley and the town far below, and, all around, a high host of peaks. But one peak was missing. *The* peak was missing. For an hour they climbed, and then another, but the great tower of the Citadel remained hidden behind the shoulder of the Wunderhorn. Then at last they reached the shoulder. They came out onto an almost level stretch beneath the mountain's summit cone, followed it around to a point above the west face . . . *and there it was.* Finding a sunny ledge, they took off their packs, unroped and sat down to rest. Franz brought out cheese, sausage and a jug of tea. While they ate and drank they stared silently at the Citadel.

As on every other time that he had ever looked at it, something that was half thrill and half shiver passed through Rudi's body. High though they were—at perhaps 11,000 feet on the Wunderhorn—the Citadel appeared still to soar as far above them as it had from the valley. A monster of rock and ice, it seemed to blot out half the sky, rising in great sweeps and thrusts and jagged edges to the remote white crest that was its mighty summit. The other mountains, roundabout it, looked like foothills. It towered above them like a giant among pygmies. Preeminent. The King.

For a long time no one spoke. Captain Winter ate his lunch almost without noticing it, his eyes squinting out across the gulf of blue space. And now Rudi knew why the Englishman had wanted to see the Citadel from high up on the Wunderhorn, for much that was hidden from below was now plain and clear before them in the brilliant sunlight. Not only the lower slopes were visible, but the upper as well: the whole intricate maze of ridges and precipices, clefts and gullies, towers and battlements that formed the vast eastern side of the mountain. Plainest of all, in sharp profile against the sky, was the great twisting spine of the southeast ridge, and along it Rudi's eyes now moved slowly upward. Perhaps a third of the way from the bottom they stopped and fixed on the dark out-thrust of rock known as the Fortress, which marked the highest point reached by his father and Sir Edward Stephenson, fifteen years before. Since then, no one had climbed even that far. And no one had ever climbed higher.

Captain Winter was studying the ridge too. Occasionally he moved a finger slowly through the air, as if tracing an imaginary route. Suddenly he spoke to Franz. "On your brother-in-law's attempt," he asked "—did he get to the top of the Fortress?"

"No," said Franz. "Only to the base."

"But he believed there was a way over it?"

"Over, or around it—yes."

"What do you believe?"

"I have no belief. I know nothing about the Citadel."

Winter's eyes met the guide's. "Wouldn't you *like* to know?" he asked.

"No, my Captain, I would not." Franz looked away. "It is an evil mountain, that. A killer mountain. It has been left alone now for fifteen years, and it is best that it be left alone forever."

The Englishman relapsed into silence. Again his eyes squinted and his finger traced slow patterns in the air. Several times Rudi was on the point of speaking—of giving his opinion, of pointing out this or that. But each time he stopped himself, because he did not want to seem forward. And because he was afraid of what his uncle would say. Presently Winter took a pad and pencil from his pack and began drawing detailed sketches of the Citadel. He worked on them for a long time and with great concentration. Franz, leaning back against a rock, seemed to be dozing. After a while Rudi grew restless and began exploring the shoulder of the Wunderhorn.

It had been decided that they would not go on to the summit. Winter had had what he wanted—an unobstructed high-up view of the southeast ridge of the Citadel—and he was not interested in laboring up to the top of a peak that had been climbed many times before. It was therefore not up but down that Rudi looked, as he moved across the high shoulder: along the route they had come up and now would soon be descending. Unless—an idea struck him—unless there was a better route. And suddenly he was convinced that there must be. While the

others still rested, he would spy out a better, more direct way down from the shoulder, and that would be his contribution to the day's climbing.

Edging along the rim of rocks, he peered down, searching. A few yards along, there was a possible starting-off place, but investigation quickly showed that it led nowhere. Beyond it, however, was a second break in the rim that really promised a route. It began with a deep cleft, or chimney, and down this Rudi lowered himself with ease. At the bottom was a broad ledge and beyond it, to the left, a narrower, sloping ledge, leading diagonally downward to a jutting platform. What was directly beyond the platform he could not see; but about ten yards farther on the whole side of the mountain angled out in a fine craggy ridge that would obviously be easy going the whole way down. Rudi grinned with satisfaction. The mountainside below the ledge and platform was steep—almost vertical; there was nothing but thin air for three thousand feet to the glacier below. But mere steepness did not bother a real climber, so long as there were sound holds for hands and feet. He would cross over to the platform, see if there was a way from its far side to the ridge, and, if so, hurry back and tell the others of his discovery.

He moved from the broad ledge to the narrow one. The granite wall above it was smooth, with no support for the hands, but he did not need any, for the two- or three-inch width of the ledge was enough for stance and balance. He took a careful step—a second step—a third. One more would bring him to the jutting platform. But before he

could take it there was a soft tremor beneath his feet. One moment, his footing was a seemingly solid band of mountain granite; in the next, it was a crumbling mass of loose fragments. With a violent leap he thrust himself clear, lunged forward and landed on the platform, and in the same instant, behind him, the whole ledge on which he had been standing disintegrated and plunged in spinning fragments into space below.

For perhaps a minute he stood motionless. Leaning in against the rock, he struggled to control the rasp of his breathing and the pounding of his heart. Then, when he had half succeeded, he turned and took stock of his position. First he looked ahead, toward the ridge, and saw—nothing. The mountain wall beyond his platform was marble-smooth, without foot- or handholds of any kind, and no climber in the world could have crossed it. Then he looked back along the way he had come, and this was little better. Where the narrow ledge had been were now only a few crumbled edges of broken rock. He looked up—at a vertical cliff-face. He looked down—into space.

How long a time passed before he moved again he did not know. And then it was only a matter of inches, to the edge of the platform. Very slowly and cautiously he extended one foot until it rested on the crumbled rock where the ledge had been. He put part of his weight on it—a little more—and the foot slipped. A moment later he tried again. And slipped again. Suddenly something happened to him that had never happened before in his life. He was dizzy. The glacier far below him began to spin like a great

white wheel. Sky and mountain spun, and a reeling, sickening darkness closed in on his body and brain. Back on the platform, he clung to the rock with all his strength, until at last the darkness lightened, the spinning slowed. He looked around again. His face was drawn, his lips white. "I must call for help," he thought. But he couldn't call. He had no breath left. And he was too ashamed.

Then, in the next instant, he saw that there was no need to call. Captain Winter and his uncle were climbing down the cleft from the shoulder and in a moment were on the broad ledge beneath it, looking across at him.

They did not have to ask questions. Their experienced eyes told them what had happened. "Stay where you are. Don't move," said Winter. And though he spoke quietly, his voice, in the still air, was as clear as if he had been at Rudi's side.

Even while he spoke, Franz was uncoiling his rope; and now, for the next ten minutes, he and Winter took turns in trying to throw one end across to the boy. But it was no good. The curve of the mountainside was such that, each time, the rope missed the platform by a few feet, and on the fifth or sixth try Rudi all but lost his balance in reaching out for it.

"All right," said Winter finally, "I'm coming over to you."

But Franz shook his head. "No," he said. "It is I who will go."

"I am lighter," the Englishman protested. "It will be safer for me."

"He is my nephew, sir—not yours. And my responsibility."

Franz laid down his ice-ax and unslung his pack. Then he tied one end of the rope around his waist and handed the other to Winter.

"Wait—I will try again, Uncle," Rudi called. "I am lighter than either of you."

But Franz paid no attention. Advancing to the rim of the ledge, he studied the stretch ahead with grim face and narrowed eyes. "You will please hold me as best you can," he said to Winter. Then he started across.

Winter realized there was no use in further argument. He searched for a projection of rock around which he could secure the rope, found none, and coiled it, instead, around his own body. It was at best, however, a poor support. If Franz had been directly below him it would have been all right; a slip could have been caught before it gained momentum. But the guide was not below. He was off to the side. And if he lost his hold his body would swing back unchecked, like a pendulum, and almost surely pull Winter off the ledge.

Still there was no other way. The Englishman braced himself. The guide moved forward. He put a foot on the crumbled rock, tested it, put his weight on it. The fragments shifted a little, but held, and cautiously he brought his other foot forward. His fingers groped over the smooth wall above him, searching for the tiniest bump or crevice that would give him a hold. His progress was so slow that he scarcely seemed to be moving at all; yet presently he

had taken a second step, and a third. Only two more were now needed to bring him to the platform, but the first would be to the spot where Rudi had tried to stand and slipped.

Franz's boot nails scraped softly on the broken rock. There was no other sound. On either side of him Rudi and Winter stood as motionless as if they were part of the mountain, and for a long moment Franz was motionless too. Then he moved again. One foot moved. It inched slowly along the loose gravel, probed it, dug into it; and the other foot came after. For an instant Franz teetered above empty space, supported only by a half-inch of toe on the crumbling mountainside. Then he leaned forward—lunged—and was standing beside Rudi on the solid platform.

"By God," said Winter quietly from across the void. "That was climbing!"

But Franz was wasting no time on words. Pulling in the rope that trailed behind him, he made a loop near its middle and tied Rudi into it. "All right. Go on," he said.

The boy started across. Twice he slipped on the loose rock, but, with the rope held taut on either side of him, he did not fall, and in less than a minute he was beside Winter on the broad ledge. Then Franz, now alone on the platform, untied the rope from his own waist and secured it around a knob of rock. Winter pulled in his end; again the rope was drawn taut; and, using it as a sort of handrail, Franz came quickly and easily across.

"So," he said. "That is done."

There was of course no way of pulling in the length of rope that was tied to the knob. Cutting it loose with his knife, Franz fastened himself to the new, shortened end and picked up his ax and pack. Once—only once—he glanced at Rudi, but his dark bearded face was expressionless.

They descended almost in silence. Occasionally Winter made a comment or suggestion about the route, but Franz merely grunted his replies; and to Rudi he did not speak at all. The boy was now tied onto the middle of the rope, with the Englishman ahead of him and his uncle behind. The latter scarcely let him climb at all, but simply lowered him down the mountain, as he would have done with a novice tourist. The guides of Kurtal had a contemptuous phrase for it—"Like a bundle of firewood."

Later, on the easy ridge above the hut, Winter walked beside him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, son," he said gently.

Rudi couldn't answer.

"All of us make mistakes. Look at me, yesterday—walking straight into a crevasse."

The hand was warm, the words were kind; but Rudi scarcely felt or heard them. All he could hear was the slow, measured rhythm of his uncle's tread. All he could feel was the cold grimness in his uncle's face. Clearer than words, that face told him its message: that this, his first

trial as a mountain porter, would also be his last. A wave of hopelessness engulfed him. And of bitter shame. For his, he well knew, had been the worst of all sins that a mountaineer can commit. He had made others risk their lives to save his.