

Ana sat on the edge of the bed, and sympathizing with her brother, she asked him whether his head ached.

Gheorghitza had no time to answer; he shook his head and went on playing.

"Sandu, can you stay with him? You see, I must go up again. Gheorghitza dear, be good and play nicely."

Then she kissed him and went slowly away as though she were loth to go.

And with her went Sandu's heart and the joy which filled his soul when he saw her standing by her brother and kissing him so tenderly.

Mistress Veta was beside herself with pleasure that evening. She did not even ask when or why her mother had gone so suddenly. She told Sandu that he was not to dare to tell her what the old lady had said, but to go and get wood to make a fire to warm the supper. And once again she went over in her mind all that Mr. and Mrs. Naraschievici had said. She felt very flattered, and said she did not remember when she had spent such a pleasant day.

There was a heavy frost and the Timish was frozen. The tanners were obliged to have openings made in the ice to enable the rinsing of the skins to take place.

Sandu, shod in big working boots, made his way through the thick mist and came down to the Timish to rinse a set of skins. Behind him came the apprentice with a barrow containing the block of wood with its stand, the rinser and two hatchets for breaking the ice. They made the opening in the ice and Sandu remained alone. He fixed one end of the block on to a stake and arranged the stand firmly under the other, opened out two skins, placed them one over the other, on the block, and began to work.

Sandu was hardened and accustomed to the cold, but however fast he worked his breath froze and his hands grew stiff. Seldom at first, but then more and more frequently did he stamp his feet. He put the rinser on the block, breathed into the palms of his hands, and swinging his arms he beat under his left arm with his right hand, and then under the right arm with his left hand, to make his blood circulate, the while his eyes watered with the cold.

Round him was a frosty calm; the gurgling of the water as he turned the skins made him realize all the more the severity of the winter. He worked away at his task, but slowly, and with little result. It was getting towards noon, and he had rinsed five skins when he heard a crunching of the snow on the bank, and raised his head.

The rinser dropped from his hand. On the bank was Ana with a jug in her hand, wishing him "Good luck."

Sandu did not know how to answer her.

"Come, see what I have brought you, a drop of warm wine, for Mother is out, and you must be cold."

Sandu came up the bank; he could hardly hold the jug.

"Thank you," he said with his mouth, but his heart spoke from his eyes.

Ana looked down.

"Drink quickly," she said, so softly she could scarcely be heard, "for I must not stay long."

Sandu drank the wine.