

Abigail  
and the  
Giant

Robert Keeter

# **Abigail and the Giant**

by  
**Robert Keeter**

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*To my granddaughter,  
Abigail Catherine Zbinden,  
for your fourth birthday.*

*May you meet many giants.*

**A**bigail loved to feel the cool breeze on her face. The sun was warm on this early spring day and the puffs of cool air felt good. She had been hiking with her grandparents, Omi and Opi, up the mountain across the valley from the village where her grandparents lived. All morning they had followed the trail that wound through the trees and across the meadows. The gray skies of winter had given way to the sun late yesterday afternoon and everyone had been excited about the prospect of hiking in clear weather. It had been a long time since they had seen the sun it seemed and everyone was anxious to be outside.



Abigail hoped they would stop soon and rest, and maybe have something to eat. It seemed like a long time since she'd had breakfast. Omi and Opi had been anxious to get started on their hike so they didn't linger over breakfast the way they usually did. Abigail thought about the thick slice of bread covered in butter and raspberry jam Omi had set before her. She wished she had another now but

knew Omi hadn't brought any. She had brought other things, though, because Abigail saw her pack them in her knapsack. She had seen nuts and cheese and even some chocolate bars disappear into the knapsack and hoped they would soon have some. Right now, though, she had to concentrate on keeping up. Opi and Omi were good hikers and though they made allowances for her short legs it was still all she could do to keep from getting left behind.

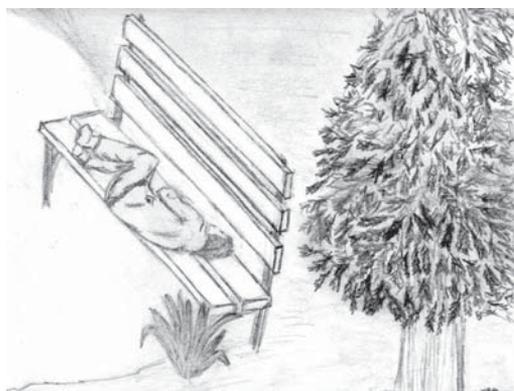
The trail was damp from the morning dew. The snow had melted except on the mountaintops. The air was clear and cold and the mountains on the other side of the valley looked almost close enough to touch. Although the path that crisscrossed the face of the mountain hadn't been used much since the snow melted it was an old, well-worn trail and they had no problem following it. Soon they would reach the high meadow where they would picnic. At least Abigail hoped it would be soon. Omi and Opi didn't show any signs of stopping.

Finally, though, the trail emerged from the wood into bright sunshine and Opi announced that they had arrived at the meadow that was their destination. From Opi and Omi's house across the valley, across the Thunersee, Abigail had been able to see this meadow, or at least approximately where it was. It lay between the sleeping giants, twin mountain peaks that, if one used a little imagination especially at dusk, looked like the profiles of two giants sleeping on their backs. If you stared at them long enough, the

grim faces of the sleeping giants would almost seem to move. Often parents would tell their children who misbehaved and didn't go to bed when they should that the giants woke up and roamed the mountains after dark, sometimes even coming down into the valley looking for children who should be in bed but didn't mind their parents and were up running around.

"It's time for lunch," Omi announced. Omi set her knapsack down on a bench beside the trail on the edge of the meadow and began unpacking their picnic. Abigail plopped down on the bench next to Omi's knapsack. Her legs were tired and it felt good to dangle them off the edge of the bench. Omi handed her a cup of water and began to slice the Biernebrot she had brought. Then she opened a plastic container full of almonds, raisins and chocolate pieces. That was Abigail's favorite. Opi's, too, and they both dug out handfuls.

It wasn't long after Abigail had eaten that she began to feel drowsy. The hike, the warm sunshine, the nice food; all made her want to lay her head down. She stretched out on the bench between Omi and Opi and soon was fast asleep. When she woke up Omi



and Opi were on the other side of the meadow looking at flowers. The sky, which had been clear all day now had a few clouds and there was a breeze blowing down the mountain. Abigail decided she would follow the trail a little farther.

The trail skirted the meadow and disappeared into the woods on the other side. Soon Abigail was in the quiet gloom of the forest. There was no sound. Not even a bird chirping. It was kind of exciting to be walking in the woods by herself. She knew Omi and Opi were just down the trail in the meadow so she wasn't afraid. Still it was exciting to be hiking alone. She had never done that before.

Omi was surprised to see the bench empty. Abigail had been stretched out asleep on it just a minute ago, it seemed. Quickly she scanned the meadow but Abigail wasn't to be seen.

"Abigail," she called. There was no reply.

"Where is Abigail?" Opi demanded as he walked up to Omi.

"Abigail," Omi called again. The meadow was silent except for the echo of her call.

"*ABIGAILLL*," Opi bellowed. He glanced at the sky. The weather was changing. Clear mornings can turn to rain or

snow by afternoon this time of year. It was time to get off the mountain.

*"ABIGAILLL,"* they cried, almost in unison.

The trail disappeared around a rocky ledge. Abigail began to wonder if she should go back. Probably she should, she thought. Omi and Opi might be looking for her. A cloud covered the sun and the trail that had been bright and cheerful was now covered with shadows as it disappeared around some sinister-looking rocks. Abigail wanted to see what was around the bend but knew she should turn back. The sun came out again and lit up the trail.

"I'll go just a little farther," Abigail said to herself as she followed the trail around the rocks.



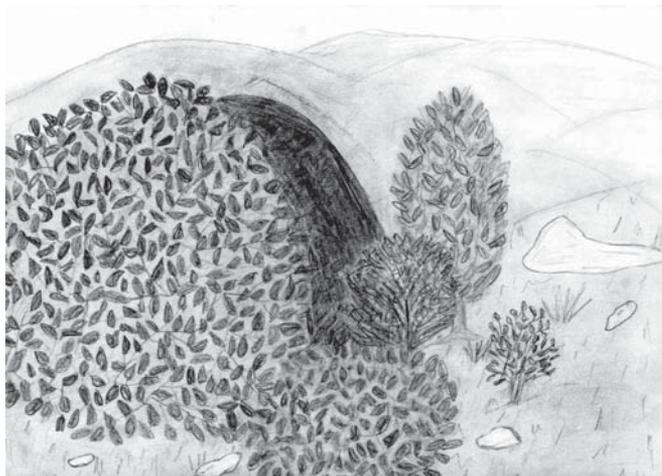
Storms come quickly to the mountain valleys. The mountains hide their approach until they burst over the peaks and

roar down the valleys. But sometimes in early spring the storms don't roar. They arrive quietly, a slight change in the wind the only warning. The sun grows dimmer as the air grows misty. The mountaintops quickly disappear in a white shroud that quietly descends the mountainside wrapping it in silence.

Abigail wanted to go back now. She wanted to find Omi and Opi. In fact, she wanted to go home. The mountain didn't seem such a nice place anymore. The sun was gone and it was cold. She could barely see her feet through the mist. She wasn't sure which way to go on the trail, provided she could even see the trail. Maybe if she waited a little bit the air would clear and the sun would come back out. Maybe Omi and Opi would find her. They might be a little cross with her but Omi would still pick her up and give her a hug and Opi would probably carry her at least part way home. She was tired now and the cold, why had it gotten so cold?

Abigail stood for a while on the trail trying to decide what to do. Then she began to walk. She hoped she was going in the right direction. The trail was hard to see and eventually it didn't seem to Abigail as though there was a trail at all. She seemed to be just climbing up and down the mountainside trying to find her way. She wanted to stop and rest. If only she could find a place where it wasn't so cold. And it was beginning to get dark.

Abigail almost passed the opening in the rocks without seeing it. It was tall and narrow and opened at an angle to the mountainside so that it was invisible when viewed directly. There were bushes which hid its opening so one could easily pass by without noticing. Abigail scrambled through the bushes to the opening.



“Maybe if I rest some here,” she said to herself. “Maybe someone will come along the trail looking for me.”

She decided to sit down close to the mouth of the opening. She couldn’t tell how far the cave went back but she wanted to stay close to the trail so when someone came looking for her she would see or at least hear them. Besides, the cave was dark and she didn’t like it much.

Omi and Opi were hoarse from shouting. They had gone from concerned to panicked as the weather closed in around them and they could no longer see but a few

meters ahead. As darkness began to approach, Omi made her way down the mountain while Opi continued to search for Abigail. The light jackets they packed in their knapsacks didn't keep them warm as the temperature dropped and they still had Abigail's jacket.

It was dark now. Abigail had managed to stay awake but now she couldn't see the trail. She could only listen, but all was still. She was cold and miserable. How nice it would be, she thought, to be home and just sitting down to dinner. She thought about Omi's hot chocolate. She served it so hot you had to wait forever it seemed for it to cool enough to taste. Some hot chocolate and some bread and butter would be nice. It would be nice to be in her warm bed, too. Maybe Opi would read her a story, as he often did.

Abigail wasn't sure where the sound came from. She peered into the darkness where she thought the trail would be and held her breath. Was someone coming? Maybe she had just imagined hearing something. No, there it was again but it wasn't coming from the trail. It was coming from behind her, deeper in the cave. Abigail shivered. What could it be? She began to think about the stories she had been told about the giants that lurk on the mountain. They would catch little children who weren't home in bed where they were supposed to be, so the story went. Abigail shivered again. She would like very much to be home in bed where she was supposed to be.

Whatever it was, it was getting closer. Abigail shrank down against the cold rock and tried to make herself as small as possible. Her heart was hammering in her chest and she was sure it could be heard thumping a dozen meters away. It was pitch black inside the cave but Abigail thought she could see a faint glimmer from deep in the cave. It was so dim she couldn't be sure. There was the sound again, only closer this time. Something was definitely coming.

It was a little stuffy deep in the cave and the giant decided to go get a breath of fresh air while his porridge simmered in the pot. He had only gotten up from his nap a little bit ago and was still stiff. He stretched his arms and worked his neck as he shuffled slowly towards the mouth of the cave. Before even reaching the entrance he could smell the snow in the air. He'd hoped to get some work done in the forest tonight. The weather had kept him cooped up in the cave a lot lately. He stopped at the cave entrance and sniffed the air.

"What's this," he said aloud. There was something in the air, a strange smell among all the usual forest odors and the snow. It smelled like a human, a little like those silly hikers that come banging along the trail when the weather is nice. That was one good thing about foul weather. It kept the smelly, noisy hikers off the mountain. But here was one, at night, in a storm, and close by. Foul weather and hikers, the giant's night was not getting off to a very good start.

Abigail could barely see the giant's silhouette in the mouth of the cave because it was so dark outside, but she could feel his presence and she was so scared she stopped breathing. He was only a meter or two away. When he spoke in his deep, gravelly voice her heart, which had been beating madly, almost froze. As the giant stood there sniffing and looking around the seconds seemed like hours. Suddenly Abigail involuntarily gasped for breath. The startled giant jumped and banged his head on the roof of the cave.



He roared in pain and anger. Abigail stood up but could move no further. She was numb from fright and stood rooted to the cave floor staring at the huge, black form thrashing around in the darkness. The giant rubbed the bump on his head and peered into the cave darkness trying to see what had made the sound. He reached in his

pocket, pulled out a match and struck it on the cave wall. In the glow from the match he saw a very pale little girl staring back at him, eyes wide with fright.

“Good lord,” the giant said. This would not do. Can’t have people in my cave. Can’t have people even knowing my cave is here. They get so hysterical when they see him. Once he’d been looking for mushrooms in the forest when he came face to face with two of those silly hikers. They were comical tripping over each other as they scrambled down the mountain but the results weren’t very funny. For weeks the mountain was covered with people looking and poking and trampling. The giant had had to stay in his cave like a prisoner and the forest animals scattered to other mountains. It was a long time before things got back to normal.

Abigail stood frozen in her tracks. She was terrified but couldn’t move. She felt like she was having a bad dream and wanted to wake up.

“I better scare her off,” the giant thought to himself.

He drew himself up, roared and shook his great arms in the air. Abigail still couldn’t move. She just stood there looking up at him.



When the little girl just stood there looking at him after the giant had done his best to frighten her off he didn't know what to do. Out of frustration he stamped his foot but she just stood there looking at him. The giant blew the match out and slipped back into the depths of the cave.

"Maybe she will go away if I leave her alone," he thought to himself.

He returned to his warm, comfortable room deep in the cave and sat down at his table. A candle in the middle of table gave off its cheerful glow but it didn't improve the giant's spirits. This was serious business. A person in his cave could mean other people later, big people, hysterical people waving sticks in the air and shouting. He might have to find another cave and he really liked this one. Maybe the child would run away. No doubt she was lost and probably couldn't find her way back. Besides, who was going to believe a child who said she saw a giant in a cave, a child that had been lost in the dark and could be expected to imagine all sorts of things.

After turning this over in his mind, the giant felt a little better. He was sure she would be gone by now but he was curious. Finally he took the candle off the table and made his way back toward the mouth of the cave.

Abigail hadn't moved. She wasn't as frightened as she had been when the giant first appeared but she didn't know what to do. She didn't know where to go. When the

giant roared and waved his arms about, Abigail thought he was going to devour her. When he stamped his foot, though, he reminded her of Omi scolding Opi over some minor offense. Maybe the giant wasn't going to eat her after all.

Outside the cave the snow continued to fall. The woods were silent as the flakes piled up on the tree limbs and blanketed the path. The giant stared down at Abigail in the glow of the candle.

"Why is she still here," he asked himself. "Why hasn't she run away? They always run away."

Abigail shivered. She was too cold and tired now to be very frightened. All she could think about was laying her head down. Slowly she curled herself in a ball on the floor of the cave and sleep closed in over her.

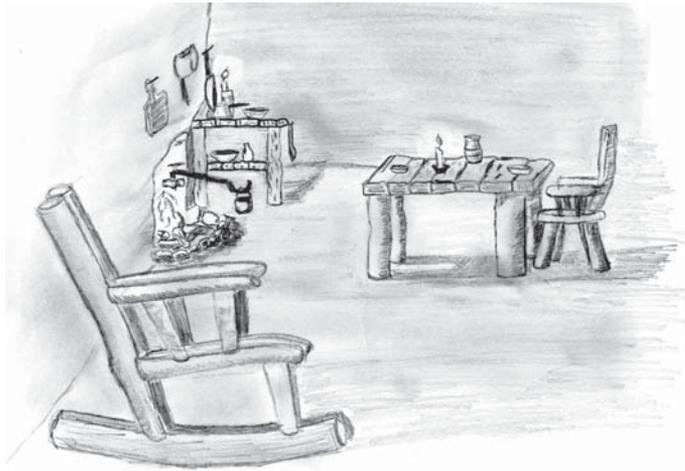
When she woke up she didn't know where she was. She was in a warm, though rather hard bed underneath a rough blanket. Slowly she began to remember the hike, the cold, the cave and finally, the giant. After a few minutes of thinking things over, Abigail peeked out from underneath the cover. She could barely make out the walls of the room in the dim and flickering light. The walls were rock and she realized she was still in the cave. In the center of the room was a table with a candle on it. The table was made of rough-hewn timber and was very big. There were large, heavy chairs around the table and in

one of the chairs, with his hands folded across his belly and his chin resting on his chest, the giant sat dozing.

Abigail lay in the bed thinking over her situation. She was warm and comfortable in the bed and still a little drowsy. It was pleasant to lie there and not think too much. What should she do? Should she try to escape while the giant was asleep? Was it morning yet? Was it still snowing outside? If she left the cave, would she be able to find her way back to the village?

Abigail was awakened by the sounds of pots and pans banging against each other. She had fallen asleep again and now the giant was awake. He was rummaging around the other side of the cave and humming to himself. The cave was filled with the wonderful smell of something baking. Abigail sat up in bed and saw that the table was set for two people. Her stomach took over and dispelled all caution. She was ready for something to eat.

Abigail slipped from beneath the covers and stretched out her feet for the floor. Where were her boots? The giant still had his back to her as she crawled up into one of the large chairs at the table. There were two large metal plates on the table. Next to each plate was a rough cloth napkin neatly folded and on each napkin was a large fork and knife. In the center of the table were several small metal pots along with a candle casting a cheery light over the simple table setting.



As Abigail was considering the contents of the little pots on the table the giant turned from the fire with a pot hanging from a thick, wooden stick through its bail. The giant hardly seemed to notice Abigail as he gently placed the pot on the table. He stepped to the cabinet next to the fireplace, poured milk into a metal cup and set in front of Abigail. Then he poured coffee from the pot next to the fire in another cup and sat down at the table. The steam rose when he lifted the lid off the pot and the pleasant baking aroma grew even stronger. The giant reached his fork into the pot, brought out a big, fluffy biscuit and laid it on Abigail's plate. Then he got another for himself. Next he took his knife and carved out a huge chunk of butter from one of the little pots in the middle of the table and put that on Abigail's plate. After he got butter for himself he held another of the little pots over Abigail's plate and poured honey over her butter, then his own. Abigail watched this all as if she were watching some religious ceremony.

The delicious sights and smells before her and the hunger gnawing at her belly left her mesmerized. She didn't move.

Finally she looked up at the giant who was regarding her thoughtfully. Slowly he picked up his knife and fork and Abigail watched as he carefully cut his biscuit in half, mashed the butter and honey into a pulp and scooped a generous portion onto one of the biscuit halves. As he lifted the morsel to his mouth he kept looking at Abigail who was watching him closely. He closed his eyes and smiled as he began to chew. That broke Abigail's spell and she quickly grabbed the biscuit with both hands and bit off a piece. The biscuit was quite large and still pretty hot so she dropped it back on her plate almost as quickly as she had picked it up. The giant leaned over and cut the biscuit in half and then cut the two halves into halves again. He motioned to Abigail with his knife to pick up her knife and mash up her butter and honey. Abigail picked up the large knife. Everything was much larger than she was used to and the eating utensils were no exception. She did her best to stir the butter and honey together as the giant had done. Then she picked up one of the pieces of biscuit and coated it with the mixture.

As hungry as she was, Abigail could only manage to eat half of the biscuit. She could eat two or three of Omi's biscuits but the giant's biscuits were much larger than Omi's. They were just as good, though. Now she was full

and warm. Things had definitely improved but Abigail began to wonder what would happen next.

The giant wondered, too. He was glad the little girl didn't seem afraid of him but how was he going to get her back to where she belonged and just where did she belong? Most likely from the village in the valley but he couldn't just stroll into town and make inquiries. This was something he was going to have to think about and his rocking chair next to the fire was the best place to think. He got up and began to clear the breakfast dishes.

Abigail watched the giant clear the table and pile the dishes in a big wooden sink. Then he sat down in the big rocking chair by the fire and began to slowly rock. The shadows flickered across his face as the flames leaped and danced in the fireplace. Abigail wondered if she should ask to go home. Maybe she should just go. It seemed as though the giant had forgotten she was there. She could just slip out and try to find her way down the mountain. Then she realized her boots were next to the fire. She wouldn't be able to get them without the giant seeing her.

As the giant gently rocked and stared into the fire, Abigail looked about the room. It wasn't large but was roomy enough. In the middle sat the table where they had eaten their breakfast. The fireplace was set into one wall and various pots hung from metal hooks around it. There was a large metal arm jutting from one side of the fireplace to hang pots over the fire. Next to the fire was a large

wooden counter with a jumble of wooden and metal containers, knives, wooden forks, spoons and bowls. On the other side of the fireplace was the large rocking chair the giant was sitting in. On the opposite side of the room was the bed Abigail had slept in and no doubt belonged to the giant. There were no decorations, no pictures on the walls, which were just the rock walls of the cave.

“What is your name?” the giant asked. His voice startled her. She had forgotten about him as she studied the room.

“Abigail,” she replied after gathering her courage.

“Where do you come from?”

“Aeschi,” she said.

The giant knew of that village. He had heard the birds speak of it. It was across the lake that covered much of the valley. That was not good. To get there he would have to leave the forest and that was dangerous.

“How did you get here?”

“I was hiking with Omi and Opi and got lost.”

“Who are Omi and Opi?” asked the giant.

“My grandmother and grandfather. They live in the village. I was staying with them and we went hiking up the mountain. We stopped for lunch and I took a nap. When

I woke up I walked up the trail and then it got cold. I couldn't see which way to go. I got so cold I came into the cave to try to get warm and I fell asleep. Then I woke up and you came out of the cave. I was afraid of you at first but when you stamped your foot you looked like Omi and I wasn't afraid of you anymore."

Words came gushing out of Abigail. Finally she stopped and realized she had been talking a lot while the giant just sat looking at her. "Do you know how to get home?" he asked.

No, Abigail didn't know how to get home. Down the mountain, of course, and if she could find the trail she might be able to follow it, but she wasn't sure. She never paid much attention to directions when she went hiking with Omi and Opi. They always knew the way.

The giant stroked his beard, then scratched his head. This was a problem and he was going to be forced to deal with it. He didn't like problems. They ruined his calm routine so he avoided them as much as possible and living quietly in the woods he could avoid most problems, but not this one.

No doubt this Omi and Opi would be out looking for their granddaughter and they would probably have alerted the authorities that the child was missing. That would mean people clamoring all over the mountain, the giant thought. He could probably leave her where someone would find

her. Problem was, she would tell what happened and then they would come looking for him. The cave entrance was well hidden so somebody passing by wouldn't notice it but if the little girl told what to look for they would certainly discover the opening.

"Abigail, do you like to play games?" asked the giant.

Yes, Abigail liked to play games.

"Would you like to play hide and seek in the forest?"

Abigail thought that sounded like great fun. The giant got up and began putting on his great boots. He motioned for Abigail to put hers on. Then he took his big coat down from a peg on the wall and put it on. Abigail's boots were warm and dry from sitting next to the fire and she wished she had her jacket. It was probably cold outside. The giant must have thought about that, too, because he took one of his heavy shirts from a large wooden chest and handed it to Abigail. It was big enough for two or three Abigails but she put it on and did her best to gather the shirt about her. Then they set out for the cave entrance.

Soft light filtered through the clouds, danced on the snow and gave the cave entrance a soft, opaque look. There was a hush on the forest as though it were holding its breath. None of the forest creatures stirred to break the stillness. The giant paused just inside the shadows of the cave and listened. Abigail listened, too. After a bit the

giant moved cautiously to the cave mouth and looked out. He could see nothing moving and all was quiet. Finally the giant walked out of the cave into the forest and motioned Abigail to follow.

The snow wasn't deep but Abigail found it easier to walk in the giant's tracks though she had difficulty stretching from one track to the next. Her short legs couldn't match the giant's long stride. Abigail couldn't even see the trail buried beneath the snow but she knew they had crossed it rather than follow it. For all his great size, the giant moved easily through the forest and soon they had left the cave some ways behind. They worked their way down the mountain, not seeming to follow a path, yet there must have been one because they had little trouble moving through the trees and bushes.

Omi and Opi had indeed alerted the authorities and volunteers had been scouring the mountainside since before first light that morning, Omi and Opi with them. Their hearts ached at the thought of their little granddaughter alone on the cold mountain in the dark. Their faces were drawn and haggard with fatigue and worry. Would they get their little Abigail back safe and sound?

Abigail had been following the giant through the forest for some time. It was late afternoon and the sun had begun to peak through the clouds. Here and there shafts of sunlight spotlighted the forest floor. Soon, though, the sun would

slip behind the mountaintops on the other side of the valley and darkness would settle in.

In a small clearing in the forest the giant stopped and sat down on a log. He motioned for Abigail to sit next to him. They sat quietly listening to the forest quiet.

Finally, the giant spoke. "Soon you will be back with your people," he said.

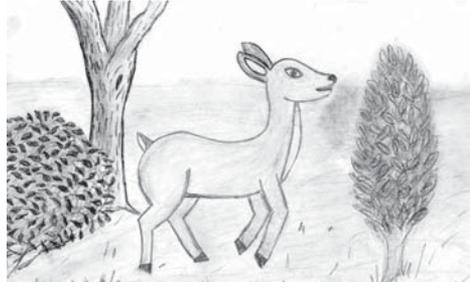
Abigail was glad to hear that. By now she was not in the least afraid of the giant and she had enjoyed hiking through the forest with him. It seemed like he was one of the forest creatures and being with him was like being with a friend in their comfortable home. But she knew Omi and Opi were worried about her and she didn't want them to worry.

She wondered what she would tell them. Would they believe her when she told them about the giant? If they did, would they tell other people and would people come looking for the giant. Maybe they would want to thank him for taking care of her. She thought of the other forest creatures. If you saw them at all, you only caught glimpses of them. They were so shy.

"Do you see the doe?" the giant asked.

Abigail followed the giant's gaze past the clearing into the twilight of the trees. At first she didn't see it. Finally,

though, the outline of it took shape. The doe stood perfectly still, looking at them, and Abigail had to keep focusing on it to keep it from melting back into the woods.



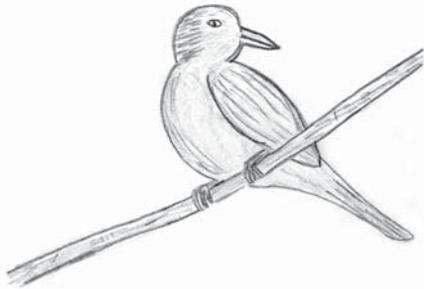
“Follow the doe. It isn’t much farther now. You will soon be back with people and they will take you home. Follow the doe.”

The giant stood up and gently nudged Abigail in the direction of the deer. She took a few steps and looked back at the giant. He gave his great head a slight nod and a smile creased his solemn face. Abigail turned and walked to the edge of the clearing. She looked back again where the giant had been but he was gone. She caught a glimpse of his back as he disappeared through the trees.

Abigail turned back toward the doe. It hadn’t moved but when she began to walk toward it the doe turned and walked slowly through the trees, always keeping just within sight. Abigail followed the doe down the mountain through the trees.

After a little while, a bird began to follow along with them through the trees. It would fly from branch to branch in the trees ahead of Abigail chirping cheerily at her as she approached the branch it was on, then flitting off to the

next tree. Abigail had been watching the cheerful little bird, delighting in its company when she realized she could no



longer see the doe. She stopped and looked all around but it was gone. The little bird was still there, though, on a low branch on a tree a little way ahead so Abigail walked in its direc-

tion and kept walking toward it as it flew from tree to tree, always in the same general direction, down the mountain.

It was so faint at first Abigail wasn't sure she heard it. Then she heard it again and was sure this time. Someone was shouting her name. The little bird had been leading her in the direction the sound came from. As the two walked on the bird's cheerful singing was punctuated more and more often by the sound of someone shouting Abigail's name.

Finally the shouting was very close. The little bird began to move up through the branches until Abigail could no longer see it, but she could still hear its cheerful chirping. Ever since Abigail had woken in the giant's great bed she hadn't really been afraid. All afternoon she had walked through the forest, first with the giant, then following the doe and finally with the cheerful little bird and she had felt safe just as she did when she was with Omi and Opi. She wanted to get back to them, though. She knew they would

be worried. So she called out to the man and the woman calling her name a little way through the trees.

Years had gone by. There had been many hikes with Omi and Opi as Abigail grew up. For some time now it had been she who had had to slow her pace so they could keep up. She had never mentioned the giant, or the doe or the little bird but she thought of them often and hoped to see them whenever she hiked in the forest, as she often did. Sometimes she thought she did see them, just a glimpse, but she couldn't be sure. The light can play tricks on you in the forest.

One night as she tucked her in, Abigail's little girl asked, "Mommy, is it true there are giants in the mountains that get little kids?"

"Giants?" Abigail asked. "Where did you hear about giants?"

"Some kids I was playing with said there are giants that live in the mountains. They say they come out after dark and catch little kids that are supposed to be in bed. They said they catch little kids and eat them. Do you think that's true, Mommy? Do you think there are giants that catch and eat little kids?"

"No, dear. I think those children are just trying to scare you. Close your eyes now and go to sleep."

Abigail sat for a while next to the bed. Through the window she could see the mountains in the twilight. She could see the dark outline of the mountains that, with a little imagination, looked like sleeping giants. She looked down at her sleeping daughter and thought of that night on the mountain long ago and her old friend the giant.



# The End

# Sleeping Giants



# Abigail Catherine Zbinden



# Opi and Omi



# Hiking on the Mountain

