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Rock Crystal (New York Review Books Classics)

Adalbert Stifter

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Seemingly the simplest of stories—a passing anecdote of village life— Rock Crystal opens up into a tale of almost unendurable suspense. This jewel-like novella by the writer that Thomas Mann praised as "one of the most extraordinary, the most enigmatic, the most secretly daring and the most strangely gripping narrators in world literature" is among the most unusual, moving, and memorable of Christmas stories. Two children—Conrad and his little sister, Sanna—set out from their village high up in the Alps to visit their grandparents in the neighboring valley. It is the day before Christmas but the weather is mild, though of course night falls early in December and the children are warned not to linger. The grandparents welcome the children with presents and pack them off with kisses. Then snow begins to fall, ever more thickly and steadily. Undaunted, the children press on, only to take a wrong turn. The snow rises higher and higher, time passes: it is deep night when the sky clears and Conrad and Sanna discover themselves out on a glacier, terrifying and beautiful, the heart of the void. Adalbert Stifter's rapt and enigmatic tale, beautifully translated by Elizabeth Mayer and Marianne Moore, explores what can be found between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day—or on any night of the year.

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