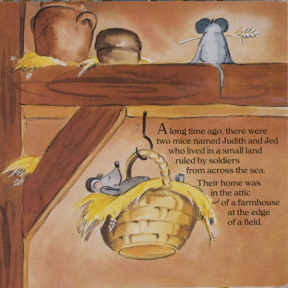


A Story by
Hans Wilhelm

A Christmas Journey



by Hans Wilhelm




A long time ago, there were two mice named Judith and Jed who lived in a small land ruled by soldiers from across the sea.

Their home was in the attic of a farmhouse at the edge of a field.



It was a nice, cozy place and, best of all, it kept them
safe from their enemy, Brutus the cat.

An illustration of two mice, one grey and one brown, sitting on a thick, white snowdrift. They are looking out from a dark opening, possibly a hole in a wall or a doorway, where a green curtain hangs. The background is a light brown color with many white snowflakes falling. In the foreground, there are dark, bare tree branches covered in snow.

One year when winter came, it snowed for days and days and days. The mice ate all of the food they had stored away. Each day, they would sneak out to the barn to look for more food. But they didn't find any.

The snow kept falling and the mice became hungrier and hungrier.

One day Jed said, "We must find something to eat or we will starve."

"But there isn't a morsel to be had," said Judith.

"Then we'll have to leave this home and find food somewhere else," said Jed.

Judith sighed, "It's so cozy here. But you're right. We'll go tonight when Brutus is asleep."







After it became dark, Jed and Judith tiptoed out of the farmhouse. The night was still. The sky was black. The little mice were very cold as they trudged through the deep snow.

"SShh!" said Jed. "I heard a noise. I think someone is following us."

"It's Brutus!" said Judith. Quickly the two mice ducked under a rock. Hidden from sight, they huddled together in the darkness, shivering with cold and fright.





In the morning, Judith sniffed the air. "I smell smoke," she said.

"Let's see where it's coming from," said Jed. "Someone may be cooking something."

They followed the smoke and found three men asleep around a small fire. A donkey stood tied to a tree. A ring of boxes and trunks circled the men.

"Maybe there's some food," whispered Judith.





Careful not to make a sound,
Jed and Judith searched the boxes
and trunks.



They found no food,
but there were great piles of coins
and jewels and sweet smelling
perfumes.

"We could take some of the
coins," Jed said. "Then we could
buy some food."

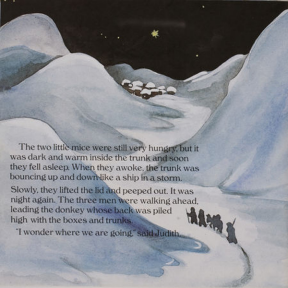
"That would be stealing," said
Judith disapprovingly. "It wouldn't
be right to take what isn't ours."



Suddenly, out of the corner of
his eye, Jed saw a dark shadow
moving across the snow.

"It's Brutus!" he whispered.
"Quick! Let's hide in this trunk!"





The two little mice were still very hungry, but it was dark and warm inside the trunk and soon they fell asleep. When they awoke, the trunk was bouncing up and down like a ship in a storm.

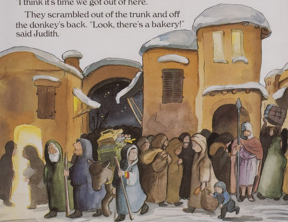
Slowly, they lifted the lid and peeped out. It was night again. The three men were walking ahead, leading the donkey whose back was piled high with the boxes and trunks.

"I wonder where we are going," said Judith.

After a while, the donkey stopped. Jed and Judith lifted the lid again. They were in a small village. The streets were crowded with soldiers and many other people.

As the three men stopped to talk to a fourth man, Jed said, "I think it's time we got out of here."

They scrambled out of the trunk and off the donkey's back. "Look, there's a bakery!" said Judith.







But the bakery was empty. The shelves and barrels were bare.

"Let's try the grocery," said Jed.
There was no food in the grocery either, and
no food in any of the other stores.



"This is strange," said Jed.
"I wonder why all these people
are here." The two mice heard
a familiar growl. "It's Brutus!"
cried Jed.

"Let's get into the center of the
crowd over there," said Judith. "He
won't see us then."





They moved along with the crowd. Suddenly everyone stopped. Jed and Judith scampered to the front of the group. They were in a small room and it was filled with people.

Before them on the floor was a huge pile of gold...and jewels...all the treasures from the trunk that they had been riding in. And there were fine silks and velvets and small handmade gifts and...FOOD!

...Baskets and boxes and jars of cakes and breads and cheeses. But the three men were not looking at the treasures on the floor. All the people were looking at a small manger around which the gifts were arranged. In the manger lay a tiny infant.

"Food at last!" cried Jed.

"No Jed," said Judith as she gazed at the baby in the manger. "These gifts are for the child. Perhaps we should give him a gift too."





She untied her little scarf
and placed it in the manger close to the
baby's cheek. He turned his gaze toward
the two little mice and seemed to smile.

As Jed and Judith smiled back at the little baby
they were filled with feelings of love and peace.

In the glow of the baby's smile they knew
they would be fed. They were safe and secure.

Their journey was over.

They had found home.



