



Mirtillo Rosso  
a Christmas Carol



Little Milla liked everything about the valley where she was born. The older she got, the more she came to believe that her dear Valsesia had it all. There was Monte Rosa and the Riva Valdobbia houses, and the green pasture, covered in grass and flowers, as well as its fresh water springs to quench your thirst. And there were majestic patches of sky, where the eagle soared, zooming from one mountain top to another, covering in mere minutes distances which she would have taken weeks to travel on foot. But most importantly, near Riva, in the fields where we now find Rifugio Carestia, there were bushes of red lingonberries that Milla and her dad Michele loved to admire, pick and, above all, eat until their bellies ached.



Unfortunately, Milla couldn't spend much time with her dad.

Like lots of Valsesian artisans, he too went abroad every autumn to look for work over the border.

Valsesia has always been an area full of inlayers, wood and marble sculptors, fresco painters, and decorators, in demand all over the world for generations to express their art. Despite Milla's pride in knowing that her dad was so highly thought of, nothing would take away the great sadness that came over her every time she saw him walking away, with his winter boots on, his walking stick, and his backpack with his tools and a few provisions on his back.

And so it was that, yet again, her father set off.



He walked for weeks, crossing Colle Valdobbia, finding shelter at Rifugio Sottile, leaving Gressoney and all of Italy behind him.

At last, on a beautiful crisp day with turquoise skies, he arrived in Paris.

Awaiting him here was the restoration of the church of Saint Sulpice, whose facade had been crafted many years before that by Michelangelo Gabbio, who was also from Riva like our Michele.

The city enveloped him in its colours and perfumes, but he went straight to work. After all, he had a promise to keep: coming home in time for Christmas.



After a season of very hard work, by the time Michele was able to leave again it was December. He crossed back over to Gressoney but, on the road to Colle Valdobbia, he suddenly found himself caught in a wild snowstorm.

The sky turned grey and nasty, a strange howling noise was in the air and our Michele could hardly tell if it was the wind or the call of the wolves.

Undaunted, slowly but surely, he battled ahead without losing heart: he had walked this road many times before, and he was sure that nothing bad would happen to him.

He found shelter at Rifugio Sottile but, after a long and fruitless wait for the blizzard to end, he resumed his journey, in the simple hope of seeing the chimney pots of Riva Valdobbia appear soon on the horizon.



It was Christmas Eve.

After days of preparing and waiting, Milla could see on her mum Emma's face that she was worried. Her dad had promised to be there for Christmas and he had always been a man of his word. Determined to discover what had happened to him, the little girl put on her boots, scarf, and cap and sneaked outside, walking away in the snowstorm along the path that he too should arrive by. All of a sudden, though, the valley that she knew so well seemed unfamiliar and dangerous.

She called for help but her voice was carried away by the wind, while the snow had already covered up her light footprints. Cold and afraid she was starting to give up hope when, in the distance, she saw a bright little ball approach in the darkness. "Lingonberries!" thought Milla, and she felt a rush of warmth and hope, making her start to walk again.



But that red ball wasn't a lingonberry, but the nose of a reindeer that was carrying Milla's father on its back.

Michele had used the very last of his strength when the reindeer had suddenly appeared from the woods and stopped in the middle of the path.

It then bent down, gently, allowing him to climb slowly onto its back.



With the animal's help, they both managed to find their way again. When they arrived at the house, Milla's mum Emma was waiting for them on the threshold, and she ran to meet them laughing and crying with joy. Reunited at last, the family warmed themselves by a blazing fire and celebrated the best of Christmases together.



Like every Christmas Eve, the reindeer came back to guide the sleigh full of gifts, across the skies all over the world. Its name was Rudolf, Santa Claus' reindeer, who guides the sleigh in bad weather with its bright red nose, but from that day forward, Milla and her parents called it Mirtillo Rosso.



If you want you can colour Mirtillo Rosso.

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