



# The Grass Seeker

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Level 4

Every year, when the snow starts to melt, 67-year-old Gaddi shepherd Room Singh packs a few of his essentials.

Food to last him for three to four months,  
40 kgs of salt for his animals,  
pots and pans,  
a worn-out radio,  
medicines,  
a torch and solar lantern,  
and an old rifle to scare bears away.

Rounding up his flock of about 300 goats and sheep, he bids farewell to his wife Hitmani Devi, his family and his village Shiah in the Garsa valley of Himachal Pradesh—and sets off.







Grass. Juicy blades of grass high up on the hill slopes, fed by meltwater streams and clean mountain air that his flock loves to graze on. That is what Room Singh goes looking for, when summer reaches the valley.



For hundreds of years, nomadic Gaddis have responded to the changing seasons, heading up in summer and turning back from the high grasslands before the freezing winter. For the last 40 years, Room Singh has followed in their footsteps, wrapped in his woollen chola (knee-length coat) and tapping his trusty stick.





Finding pastures isn't always easy. Some years ago, when he reached his final camping ground at Donspaan, it snowed for two days without stopping. His animals went without food because the grass was buried deep. He couldn't bear to eat, either. "If they go hungry, I do too," he says.

He begins his long uphill trek from a village called Kalga. After crossing Kheerganga, Room Singh enters a wild and unspoiled landscape, where settlements have musical-sounding names. Tundabhuji, Thakur Kuan, Patra Ghat, Pandu Pul, and finally Donspaan.



*Map not to scale.*





The 60-kilometre journey takes him along the raging Parvati. The bridge across is broken, and there's only one trail ahead. He crosses icy torrents and melting snow bridges; he climbs across steep rock faces and navigates chilly waterfalls. The tinkling of the flock's bells keeps him company in the silence.

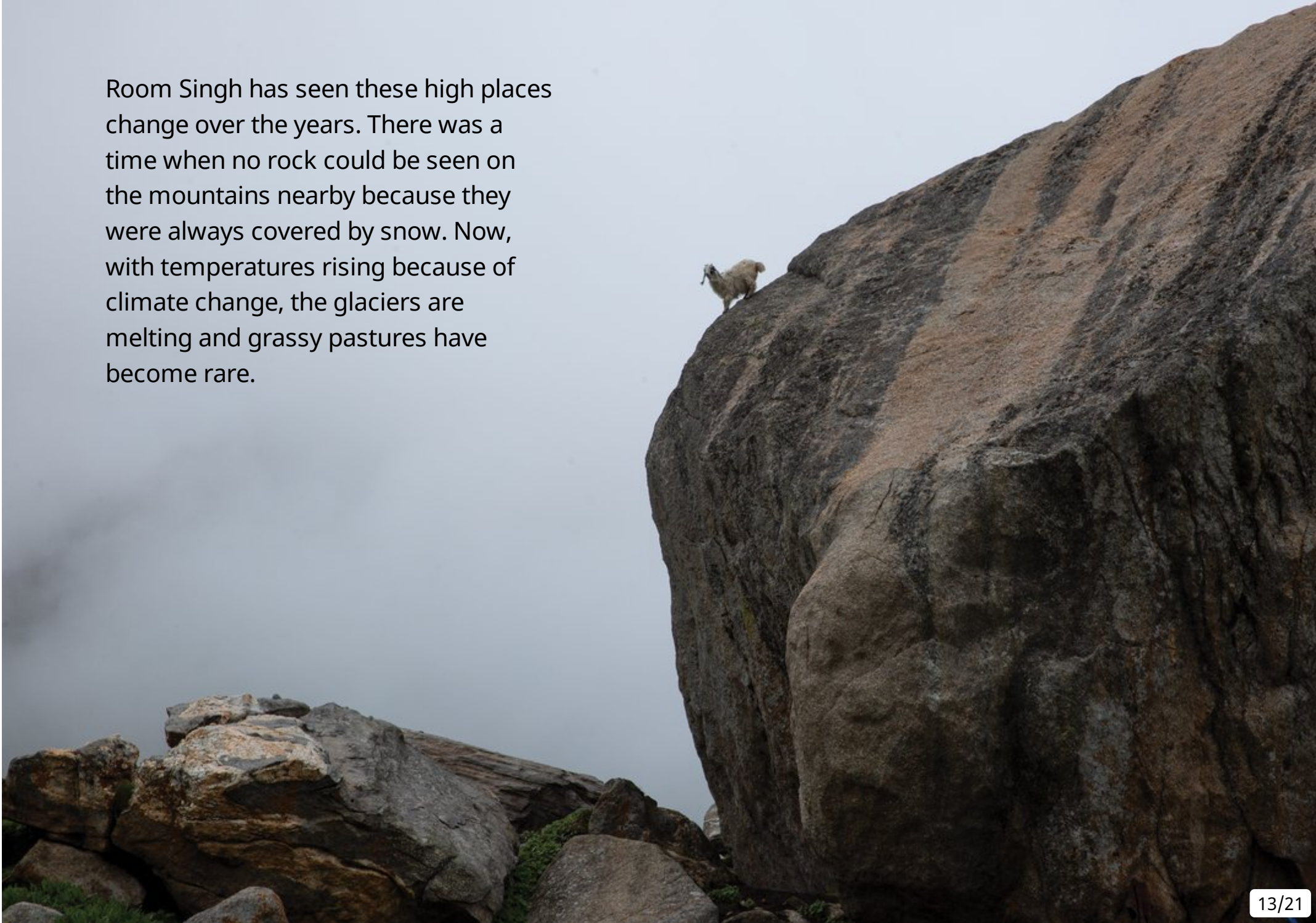






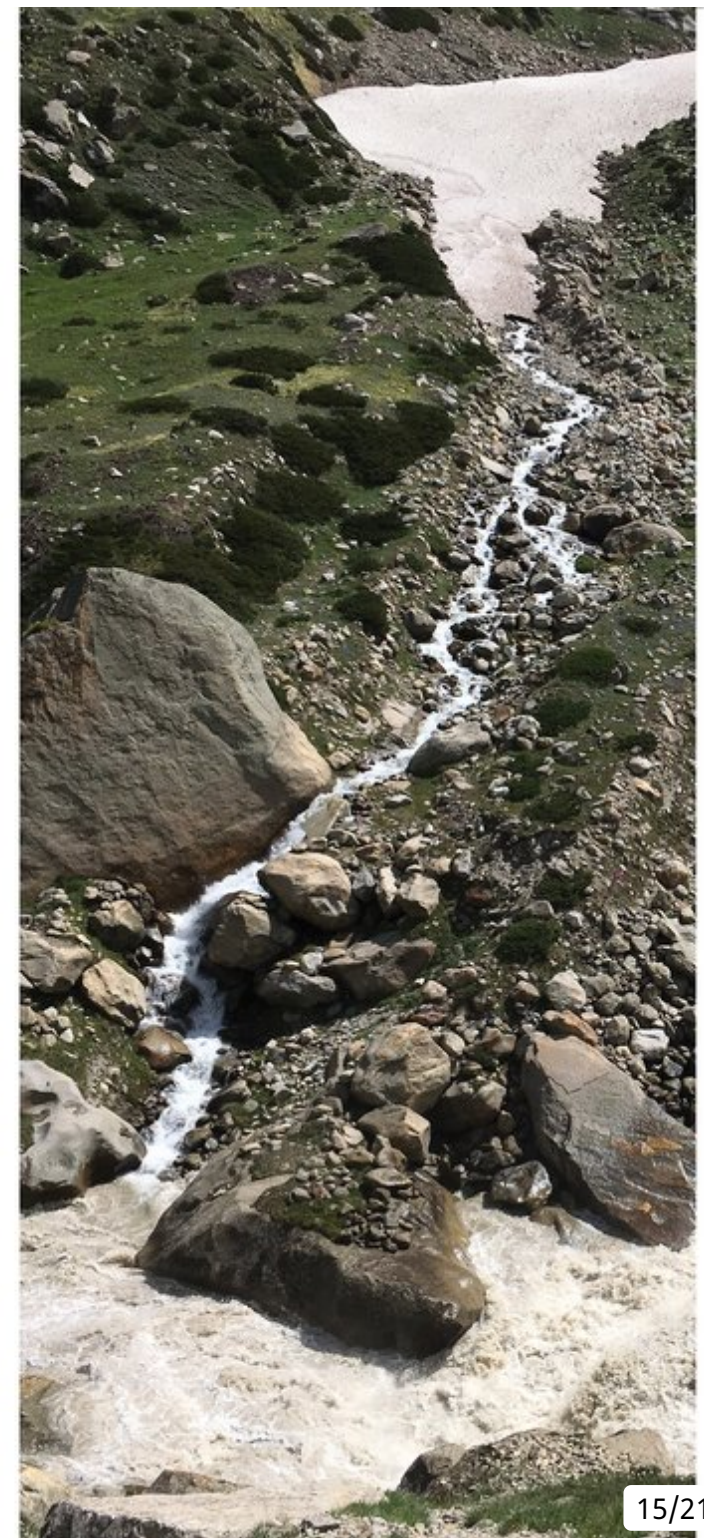
Here, 13,000 feet up in the Pin Parvati valley, Room Singh likes to walk in the wide open spaces, collecting firewood and letting his flock graze at its own pace. There is no rush to get anywhere. The air is pure. The water is clear and sweet. Wildflowers are in bloom and herbs grow waiting to be picked.

Room Singh has seen these high places change over the years. There was a time when no rock could be seen on the mountains nearby because they were always covered by snow. Now, with temperatures rising because of climate change, the glaciers are melting and grassy pastures have become rare.





He worries that if it stops snowing, the rivers will run dry and the world will come to an end.







To the Gaddi, each stone, each spring, each slope is precious. Room Singh loves the mountains like he does his family, and never feels lonely. The shepherd sleeps under the open sky, his flock gathered around him. He wastes little and barely pollutes, taking only what he needs from nature and leaving no trace of his stay.



Room Singh knows that the days of his past are drawing to a close. Finding pastures is getting harder, and his animals aren't as healthy as before. With their wool no longer being what it used to be, selling the Gardu blankets and shawls isn't easy.







A Gaddi shepherd migrates to grasslands that are high up, unfit for agriculture. Over the years, the climb has become more difficult, with old routes closing down and trees being planted on pastoral grounds.

The nomadic way of life of these generations of pastoral wanderers is fast disappearing. Now, the young men in his village see the city as their future. One of his sons is a driver, and his eldest grandchild studies at a local college. But Room Singh continues to walk to the place he feels most at home.



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(English)

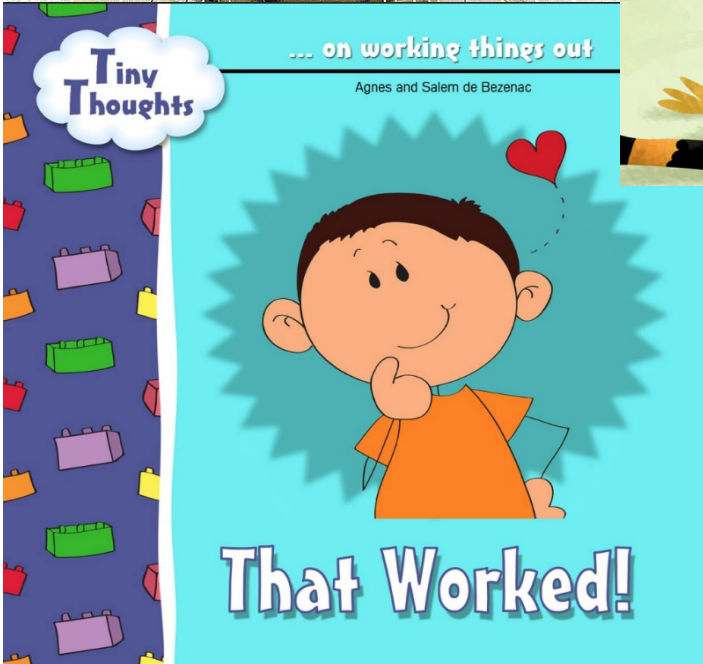
As the weather turns warm, Room Singh takes his flock of goats and sheep and scales the Himalayas for fresh grass. With global warming a reality, this photo book traces the journey that a Gaddi shepherd has been making for the last 40 years.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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