

Guild Caroline Snowden

**Minnie: or, The Little
Woman: A Fairy Story**



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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	8
CHAPTER III.	10
CHAPTER IV.	12
CHAPTER V.	14
CHAPTER VI.	16
CHAPTER VII.	18
CHAPTER VIII.	20
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

Guild C. S. Caroline Snowden

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HOW THE STORY CAME TO BE WRITTEN

One evening, last summer, a little girl, with laughing eyes that no one could resist, looked up into my face, and said,

"'Touldn't you wite me a story?"

"Yes. What shall it be about?" was the answer.

"O, wite something I could wead myself, – something with pictures, – something like Tom Thumb, you know; and I shouldn't care if it had pink covers, too, and wasn't larger than-this." And she held up the palm of a rosy hand.

In a moment more she came bounding back to whisper, "I shouldn't care if you left off the fingers, only make a *cunning* story, and something I can wead."

Instead of leaving off, I should have to add a great many of Minnie's fingers, to cover the book, which would grow so large, and I couldn't help it, any more than you can when a little bud opens out to a great flower. So, I ask her forgiveness; hoping that she will find, inside of the volume, something "cunning" enough to make her forget the covers.

And now, dear children, if you like my story, you must all thank Minnie C-, to whom it is dedicated, with the heartiest good wishes of

The Author.

CHAPTER I. RODOCANACHI

Somewhere in Massachusetts is a little town as beautiful as a garden. Nay, in summer-time I think this place is prettier than a garden; for it is not laid out in long, stiff beds and paths; but the roads wind about like rivers under its shady trees, and, wherever you see a bed of flowers, a cosy little house is sure to rise up in its midst; and then the hills, – Did you ever read about the giant, who wouldn't give the fairies any peace, but chopped them up for mince-meat, and did all kinds of wicked things, till they resolved to kill him, if they could?

The fairy queen, who was very wise, knew that the giant's strength lay in a great brass helmet which he wore; so she told her people to watch, and, if ever he laid it aside, to steal this, and hide it away.

Now, one summer's day, the giant went hunting, and had such good success that he came home with his arms full of game, tired and warm enough.

I don't remember the giant's name: perhaps it was Ugolino, or Loeschigk, or Rodocanachi. We'll call it Rodocanachi. Down he threw his game, – the deer and squirrels he had killed to eat; and the poor little robins, and blue-birds, and humming-birds, he had only killed for the pleasure of seeing them flutter down from the boughs where they were singing sweetly-down to the ground, with their broken, bloody wings.

Rodocanachi threw his game aside, and then lay down himself to drink from a pretty stream that ran bubbling and sparkling under the shady trees. He was so thirsty, and had such a monstrous swallow, that, before long, the stream stopped flowing, and, wherever the sun fell into its bed, the pebbles began to grow white and dry. He had drunk it almost up, when the giant said to himself, "Bah! what a shallow river, and how the pebbles get into my teeth! I must have a drop of wine to take away the earthy taste."

There, under the shady trees, Rodocanachi drank and smoked, till his head grew hotter than ever, and so confused, that he stretched himself upon the grass; and, while trying to collect his thoughts, fell fast asleep.

Then, how the fairies flew into sight! Down they swung, from all the high oaks and elms, on rope-ladders made of spider-web; and, from under the broad mulleins, up they poured in a swarm; from the other side of the stream they fitted up rafts of pond-lily leaves, and came floating across; for, after the giant turned away, the river had run full again. What had seemed beds of fern-leaves came marching down from the hill-side, or out from the deep shade, – they were fairy armies, with banners all astir; and such a rustling as they made, and such a patter of little feet, and flutter of tiny wings, and singing and shouting of soft, glad voices, you never heard!

Last came the car of the fairy queen, a pearly pond-lily, lined and fringed inside with gold, with a golden seat, and drawn by six bright-blue dragon-flies, that sprinkled a light from their transparent wings, as the car shed fragrance all along its way.

The queen arose and lifted her sceptre; which was tipped with a diamond so bright it shone like a star, and could light a path at midnight through the densest wood. She stretched this wand forth, and the noisy multitude grew so still-so still that you could not hear a sound, except the giant's breathing; – then she spoke:

"The time we have watched and waited for so long, so impatiently, has come; the wicked Rodocanachi is in our power at last. Say, what shall we do with him, my subjects?"

Then swelled forth a breeze of little voices, so confused that you could not tell one from another; and the queen's wand rose again.

"We have not a moment to waste, be still, and hear the advice of my general."

"If I have led your armies bravely, O, great queen-

"Yes, yes," interrupted the queen, "but what shall I do with Rodocanachi? I'll praise you, and receive your compliments afterwards."

"Suffer me, then, to go alone, and, with my spear, this tough acacia-thorn, put out the giant's eyes."

The fairy shook her head, and turned to a statesman, the greatest in all her kingdom:

"What say you?"

"Cut off his hands and feet, and make mince-meat of them, as he made of my cousin's family!"

Again the queen shook her head, and turned to a grave judge, the wisest man in Fairy-land:

"Let us go together, and, while he sleeps, roll this old sinner off from the mountain-top, that his bones may be well broken when he reaches the valley below!"

At this the little people all shouted for joy, and some ran towards Rodocanachi, impatiently, to begin; but the fairy, with her sparkling sceptre, called them back.

Puzzled and sorrowful, great queen as she was, she wrung her little hands and wept. "I cannot bear to do such cruel deeds," she sighed; "and yet how shall I banish this tyrant, and make my people happy? O, I wish any one, who thinks it a pleasant thing to be a queen, could stand in my place to-day!"

CHAPTER II. DANDELION

In the court of the fairy queen was a child, as pretty and gentle as a flower; a little boy, whose work it was to gather dew and honey, and bring it to his mistress in an acorn-cup, or strewn in separate drops over some broad leaf.

Now, this child loved his mistress dearly, and his heart was large and true as if it had beat in a larger bosom; he could not bear to think of torturing even the cruel Rodocanachi, – much less could he bear to see his dear queen grieve.

Little fellow as he was, he tried to make his way toward the fairy's chariot; but the people crowded so, and moved their banners about so restlessly, that more than once he was thrown to the ground, and trodden under their feet.

But Dandelion-that was his name-caught at the tip of one of the fern-leaf banners, which happened to lean toward him; and, when it was lifted into the air, he swung himself, like a spider, from banner to banner, over the heads of the crowd.

Then he climbed up among the pearly, perfumed lily-leaves of the fairy's car, and, all powdered over himself with gold-dust from its splendid lining, knelt at his mistress' feet.

The queen smiled through her tears, – for she was fond of Dandelion, – and asked why he had come at such a time; then said: "Perhaps my pretty one can give me some advice." And all the fairy-people laughed at the thought of a poor little boy being wiser than statesmen and generals.

Dandelion did not care how small they thought him, if he could but help his queen; so he said, bravely:

"O, my great mistress, I was shaking dew out of the cups of white violets that grow by the stream, when this giant lay down near me and fell asleep. Then all the people hurried, and I with them, to your court. I heard you ask what should be done with the wicked Rodocanachi; and, when no one had an answer to give, and my mistress sorrowed, I crept back all alone to the hill-top, where the giant lay, and climbed on his shoulder-

"My brave little Dandelion!" said the queen.

"I had picked up a feather, that a wood-dove had just let fall on the grass; and with this I tickled Rodocanachi's nose-

"Fine work!" growled the general. "Suppose you had wakened him, and we were all slaves again!"

But the queen, waving the general back to his seat with her sceptre, said, "Let the boy go on: I am curious to hear the rest."

"The giant stirred; his head was on uneven ground, and the great brass helmet tipped, tipped, tipped, and at last it rolled away, and left his forehead bare."

"O, Dandelion, you have saved my kingdom!" said the queen; and the people all shouted "Bravo!" and "Hurrah for Dandelion!" as, without waiting longer for leave, they rushed to the hill-top where Rodocanachi lay.

Then came a clanging sound, as if all the mountains were great brass drums, and twenty giants were beating them-it echoed so far and wide.

"Ah, it's the giant's helmet! and now we fairies are safe!" exclaimed the queen. She clapped her hands, and the six blue dragon-flies flew to the hill-top with their chariot in time for Dandelion to see the helmet, still jarring where it had been thrown by the fairy-people, far down among the rocks.

"Now, fly, fly quickly," said the queen, "and tear up sods and bushes, and gather leaves, till you've hidden the helmet so safely that Rodocanachi can never find it again."

Fairies, though little people, are not slow; and when at last the giant, with a snore that sounded like thunder, awoke from his sleep, the helmet, for which he began to look at once, was nowhere to be seen.

And the giant's strength was gone. He could not break the stem of a wild-flower, much less lift the game he had killed that very day. He could hardly totter home; and, when there, could not open his own door.

So Rodocanachi began a search for his helmet: all in vain, in vain. He stepped his great feet into it, and never guessed it was hid underneath the grass, and bushes, and flowers, that looked as if they had always grown where they were.

For a year he wandered up and down the earth, growing thinner and sadder every day. He had nothing to satisfy his monstrous appetite except berries and mushrooms. Sometimes the fairies, in pity of his wretched state, would crack a handful of nuts, or kill a frog or two, for his breakfast; but Rodocanachi fairly starved and worried himself to death.

And the queen was so grateful to dear little Dandelion, that she made him always dress in cloth-of-gold, and gave him a beautiful golden shield.

But this was only to remind the people how he looked when the boy crept up into her chariot that day, all dusted over with gold. When Dandelion died, a plant sprang out of his grave, – and every one said the fairy put it there, – that had blossoms exactly like his golden shield; and, when these withered, there came globes of seed, with starry wings, that could fly about in the air, and swing on the wind, from leaf to leaf, as Dandelion swung on the fern-leaf banners once. We call the flowers Dandelions, to this day.

When, in summer-time, you see these golden shields sprinkled over the meadows, and along the roadsides, you must think of the brave little fairy, who did great things because so willing to do the best that he could.

CHAPTER III. MINNIE'S HOME

We have found, from the history of Dandelion, that no one is too small to be of use. We have found that kind hearts may succeed where wise heads and strong arms fail; but perhaps you will wonder what Rodocanachi has to do with my story.

I'll tell you. Have you forgotten that I began to describe a beautiful little town, with roads that wound about like rivers, and houses set in the midst of garden-beds?

Great hills rose on every side, folding against each other as if they meant to shut out the rest of the world, with its noise, and trouble, and weariness. So the valley looked, from a distance, like a bird's nest lined with moss, and leaves, and long fine grass; and the houses and churches seemed like white eggs scattered among the greenery.

Or, if you stood in the centre, the slopes of the hills were so smooth and round, that the valley was like the inside of a painted bowl: – here were woods and waterfalls like pictures; here meadows of grass and grain; white patches of buckwheat, and the tender green of oat-fields, were striped along with brown potato-beds, and patches of dark-green tasselled maize.

In this gay-painted bowl, in this soft grassy nest, lived a little girl, whose name was Minnie, and whose history I mean to tell.

But what has it all to do with Rodocanachi?

Why, this: people say that the beautiful valley between the hills was nothing less than the inside of the giant's great brass helmet! Rivers had found their way through it now, and forests had rooted themselves on the sods that were spread by fairy hands; yet, deep down underneath, the helmet still was wedged among the rocks. Think what a giant Rodocanachi must have been, when you could thus put a whole town into his hat!

Whether the wonderful place in which she lived had anything to do with Minnie's strange history, I cannot tell. See what you think about it.

The house of Minnie's father was near the centre of the town, and in a street where there were many other houses. These were not joined together in a block, like city dwellings, but each had a garden and summer-house, and a patch of grass in front for the children's play-ground.

Around Minnie's house was a curious fence, made of thin strips of iron, bound at the top with a square board, painted white.

In the next house lived a boy named Frank. He was a bright, good-natured little fellow, just of Minnie's age, with rosy cheeks and curly hair, and as full of fun as he could be.

Minnie herself was very fond of play. Perhaps she played too hard, for she did not look hearty and rosy like Frank, but was slight and quick as a humming-bird, and fluttered about so from one thing to another, that it was more than her mother could do to keep her always in sight.

One minute she'd be seated quietly on the door-step, looking at the pictures in a book; the next she was away, and you only caught sight of her curls going round the corner of the house.

Or, perhaps, after you had looked for Minnie in the garden, she would start up with her laughing eyes from behind your very chair, and the next instant she was fluttering along the top of the fence, standing on one foot, and, with her bright pink dress, looking more like a flower than a little girl.

The iron strips of the fence were so far apart that Minnie could easily peep through, and could even crowd her little hand between the squares, to stroke Franky's curls, or pat his rosy cheeks.

As soon as breakfast was over, every morning, both Minnie and Frank would run to the fence, and talk and play there for hours.

But Minnie was not satisfied with this; she wanted to swing on the boughs of her father's young fruit-trees, and, as I told you, would climb the fence, and skip along the rail upon one foot.

Again and again her mother warned her that she might fall and kill herself, or at least soil and tear her dress, and that it was rude for little girls to be climbing trees and fences.

It was of no use. Even while she was talking, Minnie would clamber into some place so dangerous that her mother would have to run and take her down.

CHAPTER IV. MINNIE AND THE SQUIRREL

One day, when Minnie's mother had been telling her how wicked it was to be so disobedient, and how much trouble she gave every one that loved her, the little girl thought she never would climb another fence, but would begin now, and be good.

So she seated herself on the door-step, and was quiet as many as two minutes.

Then a little brown sparrow came hopping, hopping along the top of the fence, and stopped a short way off, and chirped, as if he were saying, "You can't catch me!"

"Can't I?" said Minnie, and another minute she was dancing along the rail.

The sparrow flew away, and then Minnie, remembering the promise which she had made to her mother, went back to her seat.

She was quiet longer this time, for she began to think how hard it was to be good. Then she remembered how the sparrow had flown away-away off alone up into the bright blue air, and could sing as loud as he chose, and tilt on the highest boughs of the trees, and nobody call him rude.

And the sparrow didn't have to be washed and dressed in the morning, and to eat his breakfast at just such a time, and be careful to take his fork in his right hand, and not to spill his milk.

O, how much better breakfasts the sparrow had! First, a drink of dew from the leaves about his nest; then, a sweet-brier blossom to give him an appetite; and then, wild raspberries and strawberries, as many as he wanted; and, afterwards, wild honey to sweeten his tongue, or smooth gum from the cherry-tree to clear his throat before the morning song!

Then for a merry chase through the woods, instead of going to school. "O, dear! O, dear!" said Minnie, "why wasn't I made a sparrow?"

Just then she heard a chattering in the pine-tree over her head, and a squirrel tripped in sight. Minnie happened to have some nuts in her pocket, so she quietly rolled one along the top of the fence, and squirrel came down for it.

I think wild creatures know which children are their friends, and which their enemies. At all events, this squirrel did not feel afraid of Minnie, but sat there nibbling at the nut she gave him, until he had eaten out all the meat.

Just then her mother came to the door with some ladies, who had been making her a call, and off darted squirrel, quicker than you can think.

"Now, where has he gone?" thought Minnie; "down under the cool grass, I suppose, or far off into the pleasant woods, where he can have all the nuts he wants, and play hide-and-go-seek among the boughs. O, dear! I wish I had been a squirrel! I wonder if I couldn't run along the fence as quickly as he did just now!"

Her mother was talking so busily with her friends that she forgot to watch Minnie, and off the little girl flew, along the rail, skipping and dancing, and twirling upon one foot.

And now comes the wonderful part of my story. Minnie thought she heard somebody scream, and then she looked round, and her mother was gone, and she was seated on the door-step all alone again, and squirrel, on the fence beside her, was eating his nut.

"Come, give us another!" he said, at last, throwing away the shell, and speaking with the queerest little squeaky, grumbling voice.

"Why, who taught you how to talk?" asked Minnie, in surprise.

"O, nobody. Squirrels don't go to school. They couldn't keep us quiet on the benches, you see. It makes us ache to sit still!" and he ran round and round the rail of the fence, to rest himself.

"Pray, don't go away yet," called Minnie; "I want to know if all squirrels talk, or what you did to learn."

Down the squirrel jumped into the grass, pulled the blades apart with his paws, and smelt of this weed and that, till at last he found what seemed to satisfy him, for he broke off a sprig, and went back to his seat on the fence.

"Minnie, how should you like to live with us?" he said. "We have good times, I tell you, out in the woods. We do nothing but chatter, and eat, and fly about, all day long. We haven't any master, and the whole world's our play-ground; the deep earth is our cellar; the sun is our lamp and stove."

"But I should frighten the squirrels, I'm so large!" and Minnie stood on tip-toe, to let him see what a great girl-as indeed she was, beside a squirrel!

"The same weed that made me talk like a little girl, will make you grow small as a squirrel. Do you dare to taste it?" and he tossed the green sprig into Minnie's lap.

"Dare? yes, indeed! who's afraid?" She ate the leaves at a mouthful.

CHAPTER V. A SQUIRREL-BACK RIDE

Minnie had only half believed what the squirrel said, and was surprised and almost frightened when she felt herself growing smaller in every limb. Did you ever drop a kid glove into boiling water? It will keep its former shape, but shrink together so as to be hardly large enough for a doll. Thus Minnie's whole form shrank, until she was no taller than squirrel himself, and not half so stout, and her hands were as tiny as his paws.

"Now we'll have plenty of fun," said squirrel; and they started together for the woods.

But Minnie walked so slowly, with her little feet, that her guide soon lost his patience. He would dart on out of sight, and come back for her, again and again; he would wait to eat nuts, and dig holes in the ground to bury some against winter-time; and still Minnie, for all her hurrying, lagged behind.

At last squirrel said, "This will never do; seat yourself on my back, and I'll carry you faster than any steam-car that ever you saw. Here we go!"

It was a pretty sight—the little rider and her frisky steed, bounding so gracefully over the road. They had not gone far, however, when Minnie called,

"O, squirrel, pray, pray stop!"

"What's the trouble now?"

"You go so fast it takes away my breath, and the underbrush all but scratches my eyes out; and the grass is full of bugs and ugly caterpillars, that stretch their cold claws to catch at me as I go past."

"Is that all?" He darted by a post, along the fence-rails, and up the trunk of a tree, and into the leafy boughs. But now it was the squirrel's turn to complain.

"Don't pull at my ears so hard! Why, my eyes are half out of my head! It is bad enough to carry such a load!"

"But, dear squirrel, I shall tumble off! Here we are, away up in the air, higher than any house, and you skip and leap, and scramble so, it frightens me out of my wits."

"Jump off a minute, then; I know a better way to carry you."

No sooner had Minnie obeyed, than he was out of sight. With one spring, he had leaped to the bough of a taller tree; — and now would he ever come back?

It made her dizzy to look down. It seemed further than ever to the ground, now, she had grown so small. And the insects that crept and flew around her looked so large! A great mosquito came buzzing about with his poisoned bill, and then a hard-backed beetle trolled past, and two or three fat ants. And a bird alighted on the bough, and began to sing.

Minnie drew down a broad leaf to hide her face, for she felt afraid that the bird would think her some kind of bug, and eat her up. Perhaps he meant to do so, for he kept hopping nearer and nearer as he sang.

"O, how I wish I were at home!" thought Minnie. "Perhaps my mother is looking for me now; and Franky has been standing ever so long at the fence, with the half of his cake that he promised to save for me. How could that old squirrel be so wicked as to leave me here alone?"

Still the bird hopped nearer, and eyed her as he sang, and looked as if his mouth were watering for a taste.

"I shall be killed and eaten up by ants and worms if I fall to the ground," thought Minnie; "or, even if I reached it alive, I could never, never find the way home, with these small, slow feet. Let the robin eat me, then."

But now came a rustling amongst the leaves, and a chirping, chattering sound, and, lo! her friend the squirrel frisked into sight. He seemed to be quarrelling with the bird, for she half spread

her wings, and stretched her beak as if she could bite him; and squirrel chattered and chuckled at her, and his bright brown eyes flashed with anger, till the robin flew away.

"A moment later, Minnie, and you would have been changed into a song. That saucy fellow meant to eat you for his luncheon," said squirrel. "Now, don't complain that I went away; if you do, I shall go again. We never allow any grumbling out here in the woods."

"Yet they allow quarrelling, and murder, and mischief of many kinds, I see," thought Minnie; "but as I've come so far, I will not go home without learning how birds and squirrels live."

CHAPTER VI. LIVING IN A TREE

The squirrel now tucked his little friend under his chin, as if she were a nut, and off they went together, fast as any bird could fly.

Minnie soon found there was no use in urging squirrel to go in a straight line, and pick out the smoothest paths: it was not his way. He made her dizzy, often, by running along the under side of the boughs, or twirling round them in his frisky way; and, in passing from tree to tree, whichever branches were farthest apart, they were the ones he chose for a leap.

If he heard with his quick ears any sound that frightened him, down squirrel darted into some hollow trunk, that was full of ants and rotten wood, and wiry snails; but Minnie found he was growing very tired, and was all in a perspiration with carrying such a burden; so she did not complain.

Yet, when, in passing, her curly hair caught on the rough bark, and had many a pull, and her cheeks became bruised with brushing against the leaves, and she shook black ants and beetles out of her dress, Minnie more than once wished herself home again.

At last, with a chuckle of delight, squirrel darted up the trunk of a beautiful elm, and seated Minnie where the great boughs parted into something like an arm-chair; while he went to find his mate.

This, then, was her new home! Tired and hungry as she was, the little girl looked about her with pleasure-it was such a lovely place. On one side were sunny fields; on the other, stretched the silent, shady wood, with its beds of moss, and curtains of vine, and clumps of wild-flowers.

Closer about her, fanning her warm cheeks, were the green leaves of the elm-more thousands of them than she could think of counting, and all so fresh, and creased, and pointed so prettily. "Many a game of hide-and-seek I'll have here!" she thought.

But now squirrel returned with his wife, who shook hands with her little guest very politely, and begged her to feel quite at home. Madam Squirrel was not so handsome as her husband, but was such a kind, motherly person, that you would not notice her looks.

She had brought some dry moss from her nest, and with this made a soft bed for Minnie to rest upon while she prepared dinner. The good soul even wove the twigs together into a leafy bower above her head, and called one of her young ones to stand near and keep the flies away, so that Minnie might have a nap.

The young squirrel, however, was less thoughtful than his mamma. He had so many questions to ask, and so much news to tell, that sleep was out of the question. And Minnie found that the wonderful herb had not only made her grow small as squirrels, but at the same time had taught her to understand their language.

And not this alone; by listening carefully, at first, she could soon make out what all the creatures around her were saying-the bees, and birds; and grasshoppers, and wasps, and mice.

Even the leaves she saw talked to each other all day long; the wind had only to come, and make them a call, and start a subject or two-then there was whispering enough! And the grass underneath whispered back, and perfumed wild-flowers talked with the grass, and the river talked to the flowers, or, when they would not listen, talked to its own still pebbles.

The sun, if he did not speak, smiled such a broad, warm smile, that any one could guess it meant, "I know you, and love you, friends!" And at night the silent moonshine stole into the wood, and kissed the leaves till they smiled with happiness, and kissed the flowers till the air was full of perfumes they breathed back to her, and kissed the brook till all its little wavelets sparkled and laughed together for joy.

Meantime the stars were winking at each other, to think they had caught the cold moon making love!

CHAPTER VII. MASTER SQUIRREL

No sooner had young Master Squirrel taken up his stand by Minnie's couch, than he began to tell how fortunate she was in having such friends.

"Yes," Minnie replied, "I was thinking of them this very minute, and wishing I could send word to my dear mother that I was safe. Poor Franky must be tired of waiting for me by this time; there's no one else to play with him. And then, if you could only see our baby; she's so sweet and cunning!"

"Nonsense!" said Master Squirrel; "she is not half so cunning as you are, now. I was speaking of your new friends, my father and mother."

"Well, what about them?"

"O, we belong to such a fine family, and are so much respected here in the woods, and my father is so rich!"

Minnie laughed. "Who ever heard of a rich squirrel? Where do you keep your money? Are there any banks in the woods?"

"Banks enough, but they bear nothing except grass and violets. We are not so foolish as to put our wealth into pieces of white and yellow stone. My father may not have gold, but he has more nuts and acorns hidden away than any other squirrel in creation. As for the silly birds, they never save anything, and the worms and beetles live from hand to mouth."

"What happens to the frogs and flies?"

"O, they creep into a hole, when winter comes, and freeze, like stupid flowers, till the spring sun is ready to thaw them out again. You see, we squirrels are the only wise and prudent creatures. And to think that, among all squirrels, you should have become acquainted with the richest one—you are very lucky!"

"If all your father's nuts were brought together and measured," said Minnie, "how many bushels would there be?"

"What do I know about bushels? He has at least as many as would make a wagon-load!"

Master Squirrel said this with a great air, but Minnie only laughed. "My father does not pretend to be rich, but he gives away more than a wagon-load of nuts every year; besides keeping all we want for ourselves."

Dear children, as Minnie looked upon the squirrel's nuts, that made him feel so important, just so God's angels look upon *our* treasures. Money, fine horses and carriages, are to them no reason for being proud. They smile at our gains and savings, which seem foolish toys to them. The angels have better wealth.

The squirrel was silent, and so ashamed that Minnie said, to comfort him:

"I should not mind never seeing a nut, if I were as bright and spry as your father; and, whether she were rich or poor, I know any one as kind and generous as your mother would always be respected."

"Poh! it is easy enough to be kind. I've seen one ant help another home with his dinner; I've seen a ground-sparrow, when her neighbor was shot, feed the hungry young ones left in the nest; but that's nothing – that doesn't give one a place in the best society!"

"I don't believe the little orphan-birds waited to ask if their friend belonged to the aristocracy. But, Master Squirrel, what do you call society?"

"I will show you, to-morrow. I heard my mother say that she should give a grand party in honor of your coming. Though it will be like my parents (who are very condescending) to ask some of the common people, you may expect to see along with them all the aristocracy of the woods."

Now the mother-squirrel came with Minnie's dinner; and, sending her talkative son away to give invitations for the party, busied herself with spreading out the tempting meal.

Of course there were nut-meats in plenty; walnuts on one leaf, chestnuts on another, and ground-nuts and grains of wheat on a third. Then there was a bit of honey-comb, and a ripe red strawberry that squirrel had run a mile to pick on the mountain-top; and there were some slices of what Minnie thought must be squirrels' tongues, they were so small and tender; she ate them with a great relish.

Then squirrel brought, in a nut-shell, a drink of fresh water from the brook; and, filling her shell again, dropping in a sweet-brier leaf or two to perfume it, she bathed Minnie's forehead till the tired little traveller went fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII. NIGHT

Upon awaking, Minnie was surprised to find all dark about her. The good old squirrel had tucked the moss of her couch together so nicely that she was warm and comfortable; but, on reaching out a hand, she felt the leaves wet with dew.

Then a wind stirred the branches, and far up in the sky she saw the twinkling stars, and knew that it was night.

Night, and the little girl was alone there out of doors! No mother in the next room listening to see if her children breathed sweetly, and all was well; no sister Allie to nestle close beside her, now; but the great lonely sky above her, and the creaking elm-bough for her cradle.

And how high this cradle lifted her into the air! She hardly knew which was farthest off, the ground or the sky. It was all so strange that Minnie thought she must be dreaming. She stretched her hands out in the starlight; they were small as squirrels' paws, – ten times smaller than even baby Allie's dimpled hands, – small as those of her smallest doll. Who ever heard of such hands for a little girl?

Yes, she felt sure it was a dream; but, turning to sleep, she was aroused by a loud snoring. Could a man be hidden up here among the boughs? And suppose he should catch her alive, and shut her up in a cage, to be advertised, and talked about, and pointed at with canes and parasols in Barnum's museum?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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