



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Minnie and the Dwarfs

Maud Lindsay

There was once a mother, who had two little daughters; and, as her husband was dead and she was very poor, she worked diligently all the time that they might be well fed and clothed. She was a skilled worker, and found work to do away from home, but her two little girls were so good and so helpful that they kept her house as neat and as bright as a new pin.

One of the little girls was lame, and could not run about the house; so she sat still in her chair and sewed, while Minnie, the sister, washed the dishes, swept the floor, and made the home beautiful.

Their home was on the edge of a great forest; and after their tasks were finished the little girls would sit at the window and watch the tall trees as they bent in the wind, until it would seem as though the trees were real persons, nodding and bending and bowing to each other.

In the Spring there were the birds, in the Summer the wild flowers, in Autumn the bright leaves, and in Winter the great drifts of white snow; so that the whole year was a round of delight to the two happy children. But one day the dear mother came home sick; and then they were very sad. It was Winter, and there were many things to buy. Minnie and her little sister sat by the fire and talked it over, and at last Minnie said:—

"Dear sister, I must go out to find work, before the food gives out." So she kissed her mother, and, wrapping herself up, started from home. There was a narrow path leading through the forest, and she determined to follow it until she reached some place where she might find the work she wanted.

As she hurried on, the shadows grew deeper. The night was coming fast when she saw before her a very small house, which was a welcome sight. She made haste to reach it, and to knock at the door.

Nobody came in answer to her knock. When she had tried again and again, she thought that nobody lived there; and she opened the door and walked in, thinking that she would stay all night.

As soon as she stepped into the house, she started back in surprise; for there before her she saw twelve little beds with the bed-clothes all tumbled, twelve

little dirty plates on a very dusty table, and the floor of the room so dusty that I am sure you could have drawn a picture on it.

"Dear me!" said the little girl, "this will never do!" And as soon as she had warmed her hands, she set to work to make the room tidy.

She washed the plates, she made up the beds, she swept the floor, she straightened the great rug in front of the fireplace, and set the twelve little chairs in a half circle around the fire; and, just as she finished, the door opened and in walked twelve of the queerest little people she had ever seen. They were just about as tall as a carpenter's rule, and all wore yellow clothes; and when Minnie saw this, she knew that they must be the dwarfs who kept the gold in the heart of the mountain.

"Well!" said the dwarfs all together, for they always spoke together and in rhyme,

"Now isn't this a sweet surprise?
We really can't believe our eyes!"

Then they spied Minnie, and cried in great astonishment:—

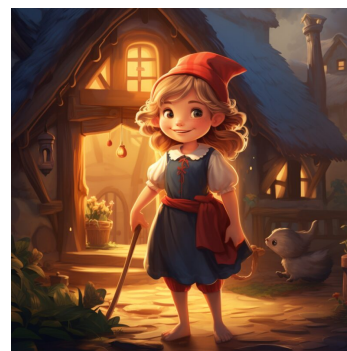
"Who can this be, so fair and mild?
Our helper is a stranger child."

Now when Minnie saw the dwarfs, she came to meet them. "If you please," she said, "I'm little Minnie Grey; and I'm looking for work because my dear mother is sick. I came in here when the night drew near, and—" here all the dwarfs laughed, and called out merrily:—

"You found our room a sorry sight,
But you have made it clean and bright."

They were such dear funny little dwarfs! After they had thanked Minnie for her trouble, they took white bread and honey from the closet and asked her to sup with them.

While they sat at supper, they told her that their fairy housekeeper had taken a holiday, and their house was not well kept, because she was away.



They sighed when they said this; and after supper, when Minnie washed the dishes and set them carefully away, they looked at her often and talked among themselves. When the last plate was in its place they called Minnie to them and said:—

"Dear mortal maiden will you stay

All through our fairy's holiday?
And if you faithful prove, and good,
We will reward you as we should."

Now Minnie was much pleased, for she liked the kind dwarfs, and wanted to help them, so she thanked them, and went to bed to dream happy dreams.

Next morning she was awake with the chickens, and cooked a nice breakfast; and after the dwarfs left, she cleaned up the room and mended the dwarfs' clothes. In the evening when the dwarfs came home, they found a bright fire and a warm supper waiting for them; and every day Minnie worked faithfully until the last day of the fairy housekeeper's holiday.

That morning, as Minnie looked out of the window to watch the dwarfs go to their work, she saw on one of the window panes the most beautiful picture she had ever seen.

A picture of fairy palaces with towers of silver and frosted pinnacles, so wonderful and beautiful that as she looked at it she forgot that there was work to be done, until the cuckoo clock on the mantel struck twelve.

Then she ran in haste to make up the beds, and wash the dishes; but because she was in a hurry she could not work quickly, and when she took the broom to sweep the floor it was almost time for the dwarfs to come home.

"I believe," said Minnie aloud, "that I will not sweep under the rug to-day. After all, it is nothing for dust to be where it can't be seen!" So she hurried to her supper and left the rug unturned.

Before long the dwarfs came home. As the rooms looked just as usual, nothing was said; and Minnie thought no more of the dust until she went to bed and the stars peeped through the window.

Then she thought of it, for it seemed to her that she could hear the stars saying:—

"There is the little girl who is so faithful and good"; and Minnie turned her face to the wall, for a little voice, right in her own heart, said:—

"Dust under the rug! Dust under the rug!"

"There is the little girl," cried the stars, "who keeps home as bright as star-shine."

"Dust under the rug! Dust under the rug!" said the little voice in Minnie's heart.



"We see her! We see her!" called all the stars joyfully.

"Dust under the rug! Dust under the rug!" said the little voice in Minnie's heart, and she could bear it no longer. So she sprang out of bed, and, taking her broom in her hand, she swept the dust away; and lo! under the dust lay twelve shining gold pieces, as round and as bright as the moon.

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Minnie, in great surprise; and all the little dwarfs came running to see what was the matter.

Minnie told them all about it; and when she had ended her story, the dwarfs gathered lovingly around her and said:—

"Dear child, the gold is all for you,
For faithful you have proved and true;
But had you left the rug unturned,
A groat was all you would have earned.
Our love goes with the gold we give,
And oh! forget not while you live,
That in the smallest duty done
Lies wealth of joy for every one."

Minnie thanked the dwarfs for their kindness to her; and early next morning she hastened home with her golden treasure, which bought many good things for the dear mother and little sister.

She never saw the dwarfs again; but she never forgot their lesson, to do her work faithfully; and she always swept under the rug.

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