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The Squirrels' Christmas

Martha B. Thom

Mr. Squirrel was stroking his whiskers again.

Mrs. Squirrel stood in the middle of their tidy home with both hands thrust deep into her apron pockets — which, as anyone who knew her could tell you, was a very bad sign indeed. It meant that something was going to be done, and done quickly.



"My dear," she said, "do you realize that we have absolutely nothing in the cupboard?"

Mr. Squirrel gave a thoughtful flirt of his tail. He knew the facts as well as his wife. Hadn't he been the one to invite the Chatter-Reds in? Hadn't he felt sorry for them because they looked so cold and hungry? He knew perfectly well that all fall, when the nuts were thickest, the Chatter-Reds had frolicked and played instead of storing up their winter supply. He had warned them a hundred times. They had been rather saucy about it.

And yet — yesterday, the day before Christmas — they had turned up at the door, all five of them, looking so forlorn that he simply couldn't bear it. They said very little. Their noses quivered expectantly. The youngest, little Charlie Chatter-Red, began to whimper. They couldn't stop him. And at last he said it right out loud, with the tears rolling down his small cheeks like marbles spilling from a boy's pocket: "I'm so hungry! I haven't had a thing to eat for two days!"

Then he buried his head in his mother's lap and howled.

Mr. and Mrs. Squirrel had gone into a corner to talk it over. When you yourself have just one nut left the day before Christmas, it takes a long time to decide to give it away. And one reason they had only one nut left was that for several weeks they had already been helping these same Chatter-Reds. But Mrs. Squirrel was kind, in spite of her sharp tongue, and she said she supposed it was their plain duty to help — unto seventy times seven, as the saying goes. So the last nut — a fine fat one it was, too — was brought out. Mr. Chatter-Red nearly bowed himself in two with gratitude, and all the little Chatter-Reds danced about

like tops. They whirled up so much dust in Mrs. Squirrel's living room that everyone began to sneeze. At last they went home.



And Mr. and Mrs. Squirrel stood and looked at each other. They said nothing at all.

And here it was Christmas morning, with nothing in the cupboard.

"At least we can be thankful we have no children," said Mr. Squirrel. "They won't have to go hungry on Christmas day."

Mrs. Squirrel had nothing but a snort in answer to this.

Mr. Squirrel crossed the room and stood looking out the window. The landscape was not very cheerful — gray sky, bare trees, and a cold wind that made one shiver just to hear it. A Merry Christmas indeed.

Mrs. Squirrel still had her paws in her apron pockets. She seemed to be thinking very hard. The harder she thought, the more she cocked her head to one side. She was in real danger of bending it so far it would snap right off — and then the idea came. Back snapped her head! Out came her hands from her apron pockets! Over to Mr. Squirrel she marched and nudged him with her elbow.

"My dear," she said, "I have thought of something!"

"What is it?" demanded Mr. Squirrel, whirling around.

"Put on your best coat, polish up your shoes, take your silver-headed cane, and we'll go for a walk on Christmas morning!"

"But, Sabrina" — that was Mrs. Squirrel's name — "I really can't see what taking a walk has to do with getting anything to eat."

"You get on your coat and shoes first," answered Mrs. Squirrel, "and I'll tell you."

She whisked about like a girl. You would not have believed she could be so spry. While she was tying her bonnet under her chin, she told him her plan.

"Sandy" — that was Mr. Squirrel's name — "the children living in the big house across the road always have a stocking full of good things on Christmas morning. I have seen them come out and scatter crumbs to the birds, and tie bits of suet on the tree branches. Perhaps if we went walking past, they would throw us some nuts. We don't care to beg — but it is only fair that those who have so much and are so kind-hearted should spare us a little on Christmas morning."

Mr. Squirrel thought this an excellent plan, and he gave his shoes such an extra

polishing that they nearly put his eyes out.



It all happened just as they had hoped. When they approached the big house across the road, the children were already outdoors scattering crumbs and grain. One boy was climbing a tree with a bit of suet tied to a string. There was a great deal of shouting and laughing, and to tell the truth the squirrels were a little timid — but when one is hungry, it does not pay to be afraid.

As soon as the children caught sight of them, they shouted louder than ever.

"Oh, oh!" they cried. "See Mr. and Mrs. Squirrel! How fine they look! Let's give them some nuts!"



And if you will believe me, those generous boys and girls poured out such bags of nuts and goodies that Mr. and Mrs. Squirrel were busy the rest of the morning carrying them home.

And they invited the Chatter-Reds to come along and fill up *their* larder too.

So everyone had a Merry Christmas — and Mrs. Squirrel did not have to put both hands in her apron pockets for months and months.

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