

DUST UNDER THE RUG

Told by

MAUD LINDSAY

Edited & notated, with questions,

by

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There was once a mother who had two little daughters; and as her husband was dead and she was very poor, she worked diligently¹ 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.

Discuss: Why does the mother work to provide for her girls? Why do the girls work to keep the home in order?

One of the girls could not walk, and so 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

¹ *diligently*: trying to do a work well, with care

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.

Discuss: Why do the girls watch the trees?

In the spring there were 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.

Discuss: Why are the girls “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.

Discuss: Do you think there is a cause for the mother getting sick?

Minnie and her little sister sat by the fireside 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 someplace where she might find the work she wanted.

Discuss: Why does she choose the narrow path and not another way?

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 bedclothes 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 irl. “This will never do!” And as soon as she had warmed her hands, she set to work to make the room tidy.

Discuss: Why does she clean the room, instead of letting it remain dirty?

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 rule², 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 kind and so 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—“

² *carpenter's rule*: a measuring tool two feet long.

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 mortal³ maiden, will you stay
All through our fairy’s holiday?
And if you faithful prove, and good,
We will reward you as we should.”

Discuss: Why might the dwarves say they will pay her what they “should”, rather than saying a specific amount?

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 rooms 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.

³ *mortal*: a body that does not live forever

And every day Minnie worked faithfully until the last day of the fairy housekeeper's holiday.

Discuss: What motivates Minnie most to do a faithful job working?

That morning, as Minnie looked out of the window to watch the dwarfs go to their work, she saw on one of the windowpanes 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.

Discuss: How do you think the picture was similar to or different from the forest trees that Minnie watched with her sister?

Discuss: Do you think Minnie could have stopped looking at the picture? Did she have a choice?

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.

Discuss: What does the underlined part above mean?

“I believe,” said Minnie, aloud, “that I will not sweep under the rug today. 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.

Discuss: Do you think the time saved not sweeping under the rug made it worth skipping it?

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 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.”

Discuss: This is the third time the word “bright” is used to describe a clean home. Why is that word used?

“Dust under the rug! Dust under the rug!” said the little voice in Minnie’s heart.

Discuss: Why does the dust make Minnie feel guilty? Why does she feel it was wrong to leave it?

“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 rug 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 goat 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 everyone.”

Discuss: What about leaving the hidden dust would have been unfaithful and untrue?

Discuss: How does everyone share in the joy of sweeping under the rug? Who is “everyone”?

Minnie thanked the dwarfs for their kindness to her, and early next morning she hastened

home with her golden treasure, which bought many things for the dear mother and little sister.

She never saw the little dwarfs again. But she never forgot them, and she always swept under the rug.

Discuss: What was the real treasure that she gained at the end of the story?

Discuss: Why does she want to sweep under rugs?

Discuss: What are some other small duties that she might always do faithfully from now on?