

wild things of the wood had eaten her, or that she had been caught in a trap, and she would not come back any more to the snug nest in the hollow of the old beech-tree!

Now, what had become of Mrs. Dormouse? Well, that morning, after she had bidden her mate good-bye, the little dormouse looked around the nest, then said to herself: "How untidy it is! There are the shells of that acorn Dor had for breakfast, scattered all over the place! And that morsel of bean,—I am afraid it was I who left that lying about. I really must make things more tidy! And what better chance could I have to do a little spring cleaning than today, when I have the place to myself!"

First, however, Mrs. Dormouse went to the store-room to see if there was enough left of their winter supply to last until the spring things came in. Yes, there was plenty, she thought, if they were very careful. Next, she went back to the nest, and set to work.

It did not take this smart little housewife very long to make it look as fresh and neat as a new pin. Then, feeling rather tired after her busy morning, and meaning to take a short nap before Dor came home, she curled herself into a soft ball, and was soon fast asleep.

She had not been many minutes asleep when she was awakened suddenly by what seemed, to the sleepy little mouse, a terrible hub-bub outside, and she uncurled herself to listen.

"There are sure to be dormice about this beech-tree," said a voice that, to timid Mrs. Dormouse, sounded very loud and very alarming.

"Yes; and here is a nest right enough!" said another voice, just as rough and loud as the former. At the same instant the curious grass curtain which hid the door of the Dormouse dwelling was dragged aside, a hand rudely forced its way into the tiny opening, a loud voice cried in glee, "I have got one!" and behold, our poor little dormouse was a prisoner, at the mercy of two thoughtless schoolboys!

Soon after this Mrs. Dormouse found herself shut into a horrid wooden cage. There were bars on every side; there was a rough box in which lay a few

stale beans and dried peas, and a wheel that went round and round in the most tiresome way as often as she put a paw upon it. There was a wisp of hay in one corner of the cage; and this was the only bed she had to lie on, instead of the soft nest from which she had been taken, in the hollow of the big beech-tree!

For a good while the two boys came nearly every day to the old tool-shed in the garden, where they had placed the cage on a bench, to visit their little captive, and to bring her food and water. They used to stand and laugh at her attempts to get off the cruel wheel, which kept going round and round all the faster the more she tried to get away from it, until at length she just tumbled down to the floor of the cage, too weary to lift her tiny paws any more.

Thus the time went on till autumn. Then one day the boys came to the tool-house as usual, and stood talking beside the cage.

"We shall not need to bother about it any more until spring," said one.

"No, indeed!" replied the other. "See how stupid it is! It is going to take a fine long snooze!"

Mrs. Dormouse was really very sleepy, and felt too dull to understand what was meant. Sure enough she did fall asleep very soon after, and did not wake up properly for a long time.

Meanwhile poor Dor was very lonely without his little comrade. Indeed, he was rather glad when the long summer days were gone, and autumn came round. The red and bronze and yellow leaves fell off the trees, the delicate fern fronds grew dry and brown; there was hardly a flower to be found in all the wood except here and there the meek, golden-eyed daisy! Then Dor crept into his nest, where he curled himself up, with his long tail round him like a little fur boa, and went to sleep. His sleep was so sound that if it rained, or hailed, or snowed outside, Dor did not hear or heed!

The winter passed slowly by, until at length the birds began to sing once more, and the sun peeped now and again through the bare branches of the big beech-tree. Here and there, in shel-