

THE LINNETS AND THE FIR TREE

KEYWORD: Partnership.

This is a story of a little boy called Johnnie, who was always so kind and good to the animals and flowers and plants that the Nature Spirits loved to talk with him.

One day Johnnie was lying under the shade of a big fir tree in a park listening to the wind whispering in the branches and watching them sway to and fro. Presently he heard, oh! such sweet voices talking. Looking up the tree whence the voices came he saw two beautiful creatures. One was taller and bigger than the other. The larger one had a head and shoulders like a human being. Golden rays came out from the shoulders, and they had the shape of wings. She had a pretty face and a very sweet smile. She also had long wavy hair which covered her like a cloak, and she looked for all the world like a beautiful young girl. Johnnie knew she was the Spirit of the fir tree.

The other one was an Air Spirit. She was rather short but also beautiful. Rays of gold and rose color came out all over her body. She held up her wand, which was about as long as her forearm, and waved it at Johnnie. Then she bowed very gracefully to him and went on talking with the Tree Spirit.

As Johnnie listened he heard the Tree Spirit say: "I've done my very best to give loving service since I began to grow here. I have spread my branches away out ever so far so that little boys and girls and grown-ups who come to rest under them may have a nice shade. I have grown my branches so thickly together that many birds have built their nests in them every year and been protected from the wind and rain."

"Oh, yes!" said the Air Spirit, "I know that, for when we sylphs blew the north, south, east, and west winds, the birds were so sheltered that they never fell out of their nests. But, friend, I hear that you are going away. Aren't you happy any more?"

"Oh! I'm happy enough," said the Spirit of the tree, "but I feel that I can be of no more service, so what's the use of living on? I am going to die, but I think that it is coming sooner than I expected. You see, it is such a long time since we had any rain, and the people here keep waiting and waiting for it instead of watering the ground and giving us trees a drink. They have let us get so dry at the roots that we are quite parched, and I for one shall be glad to go home to our Group Spirit and take a rest. Some time I may come back again and do some more work."

"Well," said the Air Spirit, "you just cheer-up. I will see if we can call a meeting of the undines and the sylphs and bring down a shower of rain to relieve you. I will make a special note of your case and of the other trees in this park and put it before the committee, and I feel sure before long you will get a good drink."

"It is too late," sighed the Tree Spirit; "I know that I am going to die; I feel that something terrible is about to happen."

"Nonsense," said the Air Spirit, "you've just got the blues."

While they were discussing all this, there came flying to this particular tree two little linnets. They had just got married, and were on their honeymoon. While all the little birdies that were invited to the wedding were having a good time sporting in the fountain and eating delicious fat worms and grubs that the bride's mother had prepared, the bride and bridegroom slipped quietly away on their honeymoon,

and were now looking for a nice tree in which to build their nest and make a home for their young ones. Seeing our fir tree they alighted on it. They were so busy cooing and loving each other they did not hear the conversation that was going on between the Air Spirit and the Tree Spirit.

The Tree Spirit saw them and felt sorry for them and said: "Little birdies, please do not make your home in my branches, because I am not going to live very long; all your labor will be lost, and your babies won't be big enough to fly when the time comes for me to die."

"Why," said the bridgroom linnnet, "the very idea of such a thing. Your branches are beautiful and green and so close together that it is an ideal place to build a home for our babies. I am perfectly willing and able to pay rent for my wife and future family. How much is it?"

"I don't want any rent. I am only warning you," said the Tree Spirit. "If you do not want to take the advice of one many years older than yourself, I cannot help it; you must use your own judgment, but do not blame me when trouble comes."

"Thank you for your advice," said the bridegroom rather pertly, "but we are perfectly capable of taking care of ourselves." So they set about building their nest right away in the fir tree.

Johnnie heard and saw everything, so he hurried home and told his mother. Mother, who knew that Johnnie saw Nature Spirits and talked to them, said: "Do you think the linnets are doing right to build a nest in the fir tree after being warned of danger by the Tree Spirit?"

"No, Mother, I think they are wrong; they are not using good judgment," said Johnnie.

"Well, dear, let us wait and see what will happen."

So in our next story we will tell you what happened to the fir tree and the linnets.