



# The Valley

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S. '39

**A** LONG, long time ago when the world was young there was a certain happy village in which men and beasts lived in perfect harmony. The land was fruitful, protected from harsh winds, bitter snows, and the heat of the sun.

But it came to pass that the winds blew fiercely, and the snows swept down from the mountains above. The face of the sun was darkened for days, so that most of the men and beasts left the valley, and those that remained turned on each other in desperation.

Among the beasts who left were two wise squirrels. The future in their valley would never be happy, they knew, for men and beasts were learning to hunt and kill each other. So they packed their pouches with all manner of nuts and seeds and set out to find a way through the surrounding mountains.

After traveling for days they reached a barren, rocky spot where only moss and a few scrubby bushes grew. But the sun shone brightly; the wind blew brisk and clean; and cool, clear water trickled down between the rocks from the melting snows above.

Here the squirrels decided to stay and recreate their valley, a simpler but purer home. With moss and weathered rock they planted their nuts and seeds, watering them constantly. In a protected spot they planted a particular nut. They took turns keeping the place where it lay warmed by the heat of their bodies, for this nut came from a particular tree whose branches spread widely and whose leaves were thick and green. It was their favorite in the valley.

**A**ND so it came to pass that the nuts and seeds of the valley were sown and grew through the seasons. Especially did this particular tree twist and turn to a great height in that rugged spot, until its gnarled limbs spread majestically over the lesser trees and the underbrush around it.

One day there came a man from the valley. His tribe had stayed through the Great Storm. They had forgotten the ways of their ancestors in the lust of killing, but they were very wise in practical things. Their thirst for knowledge was great, for they had an exacting faith called Science. This man was the wisest of his kind. His curiosity had led him to climb the mountain in search of new things. He was very weary. The sight of growing things in this barren spot was good to him, and he wished to rest. But his curiosity was too great. He went among the rocks, plucking moss, tearing twigs, and stuffing them into a bag with other curious things. At the twisted tree he stopped to marvel and to ponder. But his mind was muddled and his body tired. The squirrels watched him from their hidden places. For they had seen the man coming and were suspicious. They remembered the Great Storm. They saw him sit beneath the tree and rub his head; then they saw him grow excited, rise, and stumble down the mountain. He was a wise man, and this thing troubled him sorely. They chuckled and come out to play and to work a little, as was their custom.

The next day a second man came up the mountain. His kind had stayed in the valley and were great hunters. Now they were at peace with the people of the first man, but they still hunted the beasts in sport. They were proud of their strength and delighted in difficult tasks. He too stopped to rest beneath the twisted tree. But the bark was rough, the rocky soil prodded his flesh, and the cool, clear water that trickled past chilled his heated

body. He arose and went down the mountain side, grumbling to himself. Again, the squirrels came out as was their custom, to play and to work a little.

After the second man, came a third on the next day. His kind had left the valley and found a flat country beyond the mountains, where they kept the old ways of the valley. This man had a great desire to see the old valley. So it was that he came and found this barren spot where green things grew. He breathed the brisk, thin air. He bared his chest in the bright sunlight. He quenched his thirst in the cool, clear water, and sat beneath the twisted tree to gaze at the valley below. It puzzled him to be in this place. The winds whispered old tales of the valley, and there were strange rustling sounds among the rocks.

**D**EEPLY stirred, the man began to play on a reed pipe. He caught the sighing wind and the rustling among the rocks and wove them into sweet music. He caught the bright sunlight and broke it into gay tinkling notes. He caught the shadows in the valley and played sad wistful strains. Out from their hidden places came the squirrels, wondering at this man. They began to dance about him and chatter gaily. They brought him berries and nuts; they made a bed of moss beneath the twisted tree for him; they told him all manner of things that had come to pass in this place and in the valley. And the man was glad. For his understanding was clear now. He knew what had happened in the old valley, why there were shadows and sadness below, why there was bright sunlight with green things and a twisted tree on the mountain, why he had come back from the flat country beyond. Here it was the custom to work a little, to play a little, and to live in harmony with all things. With joy in his heart he left the twisted tree and went to tell his people that the old valley still lived on the mountain.

