

Leslie Madeline

Minnie's Pet Lamb



Madeline Leslie
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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	4
CHAPTER II.	10
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	16

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CHAPTER I.

NANNIE AND THE PONY

In another book, about Minnie's pet pony, I have already given you some account of Nannie, her pet lamb.

This had all the peculiarities of the South Down, to which breed of sheep it belonged. It had full, bright, black eyes, a small head, and a brownish-gray face and legs. Its back was straight and wide, and covered with fine, short wool, which protected it from the cold.

When Mr. Lee first brought the lamb home, it cried, or bleated, continually. It was placed in a pen close by the stall where Star, the Shetland pony, was kept, and, the next day after it came, managed to get over the light railing which separated them, and creep up close to the animal.

I don't know what Star thought of the little creature; but I suppose he was pleased to have a companion, for when the hostler went to feed him, he found them on very social terms. After this, the lamb's affection for Star grew so strong that it soon forgot all about its mother and its old friends, and gave its whole

heart to the new one. The pony returned the love, and was as kind to his little companion as he could possibly be. He never seemed better pleased than when the lamb was standing quietly by his side, eating the hay or turnips with which it was fed, or when, its hunger being appeased, it lay down close under his nose, and chewed its cud by the hour together.

At such times, the pony was careful not to step on it, or injure it in any way, but expressed his delight in its society by little short neighs, which were sometimes answered by a responsive note.

In a few days they understood each other perfectly, and were as well acquainted, and as fond of each other, as if they had lived together all their lives.

Mr. Lee, who was visiting Minnie's pets with his little daughter, said, one morning, it would never do for the lamb to stand in the stall, so closely confined from the out-door air; and he directed John to turn it out into the barn yard for a few hours every day.

The man did so; but the poor lamb bleated at this separation from its friend, until the groom happened to think such a change would do Star good too.

As soon as the lamb saw the horse coming through the barn door, it stopped crying, and ran toward him just as it would if he had been its mother.

Star put down his head to his favorite, when the lamb frisked and gambolled about him, occasionally nibbling at his nose, when he would start back, and, thinking this fine fun, would begin to

dance again. O, what a pleasant time they did have!

Every morning, Minnie went with her bowl of milk for Nannie, into which, as the lamb grew older, she crumbled some pieces of bread. It was a pretty sight to see the little creature peeping shyly, with its bright eyes, from behind its friend, and then coming a few steps toward her, when she called, in her low, sweet voice, —

“Nannie! Nannie! come and get your breakfast!”

Then she held the bowl down where the lamb could reach to put its mouth in, and laughed to see how much the pretty pet liked the milk.

One morning the lamb had been eating so many turnips that it was not very hungry; and when Minnie called, it did not obey. In vain the little girl called out, in her softest tones, “Nannie, Nannie! come, pretty Nannie, and drink your milk.”

At last, the child went into the stable to see what was the matter with her pet, and there her father and mother presently found her, stooping down on the hay by the side of Star, with the lamb’s head in her lap.

“Minnie! Minnie! come out, quick! The horse will kick you,” exclaimed her mother, greatly alarmed; but Mr. Lee only laughed, as he said, —

“No, indeed; Star loves his young mistress too much for that. Let the child be; she is doing well enough.”

“But she will soil her clothes, and get her shoes covered with dirt,” urged the lady, still looking anxious.

“O, mamma!” cried Minnie, “I’m in a real clean place on this straw, and Nannie likes to lick my hand. How funny Star is looking round to see what I am doing to his friend.”

A few hours later, when Mrs. Lee sat with her sewing in the back parlor, the little girl ran into the room, and taking a cricket, pulled it toward her mother, saying, —

“I want you to tell me all you know about sheep and lambs. Can they do such wonderful things, as dogs, and horses, and cats can?”

The lady laughed. “I am afraid,” she began, “that you would not be satisfied with what little I can tell you; for I confess that I know very little about them. You had better wait till your father comes home, for he has been studying a good many books on that subject, and has learned about the different kinds, with a view to buying a flock.

“Or you can ask Anne; for she was brought up in a shepherd’s family, and can tell you all about the way they bring up little lambs when their mothers will not own them.”

“Not own them,’ mamma! What can you mean? I thought mothers always owned their little children.”

“Sometimes a ewe, as they call the mother, has two or three lambs at a time; and perhaps she thinks she could not nurse them all, and so she chooses one or two that she will take care of, and when the other comes near her, she butts it softly with her head. The lamb knows then that she will not take care of it; and the little forsaken creature begins to cry, Anne says, ‘for all the world

just like a little baby.”

“And what do the people do for it?” inquired Minnie, tears filling her eyes.

“Why, they take it away from the flock, and ‘bring it up by hand,’ as they call it; that is, they feed it with milk, and it learns to love the one who takes care of it, and follows her about wherever she goes, just like a little dog. Anne will tell you all about it.”

“She is busy now. I heard her tell cook she wanted to give your chamber a thorough cleaning to-day. Can’t you remember something more?”

“You know that gentleman, Mr. Sullivan, who comes here sometimes with your father. He is what is called a practical shepherd; that is, he knows all about the habits of sheep, from having been brought up with them. He understands the different breeds, and knows which are the best for wool; and which, for mutton; and what kinds of food are best for them. I have heard your father say that he had gained a great deal of information from Mr. Sullivan, which he could not get from books. I think he will visit us again before long; and I advise you to save all your difficult questions for him to answer.”

“If father buys a flock, will he keep them on his farm?” asked the child.

“O, no, dear! Sheep like to roam over the hills, and browse on the bushes and moss. They can find a very good living where a cow would suffer from hunger.”

At this moment, Anne appeared at the door, to ask her

mistress a question, and Minnie took the opportunity to tell her that she wanted to hear about raising little lambs.

“I’ll be pleased enough to tell you, miss,” answered the woman, smiling. “I’ve had a dale to do with sheep, and lambs, too, in my younger days, and many’s the little cosset I’ve brought up by hand, when the poor cratur would otherwise have died.”

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE LAMBS

Anne was standing on some high steps, putting up clean curtains in her mistress's room; and Minnie stood watching her, and wondering how soon she would be done, so she could tell about the lambs. At last she said, —

“Anne, if I stand up in a chair, I could hold the nails and give them to you.”

“That's true for you, miss,” answered the girl; “and it's a much better way than kapeing them in my mouth.”

“And you can talk better,” urged Minnie, with a roguish look.

Anne laughed outright. “Ah, it's the story ye're after, I see; and sure ye're welcome to all I can tell you.

“You know my mother was English, and my father Irish. I was born in the great city o' Dublin; but after my father died, which was long enough before I could tell my right hand from my left, I went with my mother to her home in England. Of coorse, I knew nothing of that except by hearsay, which is no evidence at all; but well I can remember, when I was old enough, I was sent out on my grandfather's farm, to mind the sheep; I had a dog, Rover, to go with me, and a little crook, because I was a shepherdess, you know; and I used to carry dinner enough in my pail for Rover too, for he had to work hard, poor fellow!

“I liked it very well at first, for the lambs looked so pretty, skipping around the dams; and the air was so fresh and bright; but I was a very little girl; so I soon grew tired, and left all the care of the sheep to Rover. He flew from one end of the field to the other, chasing them away from the hill where they used to wander and get lost.

“When I saw the lambs drinking their mother’s milk, I thought it must be very nice; and so I lay down on the grass, and drank some too; and I liked it so well that I used to drink every day, until grandfather found it out, and forbid me, because the lambs would not have enough.

“By and by I grew up to be a big girl, and then, what with tending the sick sheep, and bringing up the cossets, I had plenty to do. Grandfather had five hundred ewes. He was a rich man, and every body thought well of him. When the lambs began to come, there were some of the ewes that would not own them.”

“I know about that, Anne,” said Minnie; “mamma told me.”

“Well, when there are two, this is often the case; or sometimes the shepherd finds the mother has not milk enough for two, even if she would like them. Did your mamma tell you that some kinds of sheep are much better nurses than others?”

“No, I think she did not know that. She says she don’t know much about sheep.”

“Very likely, as she was not brought up with them. There is a kind called Merinos, which are very bad nurses. Grandfather wouldn’t have them on that account, though they have very fine

wool, which sells for a good price. Out of a hundred lambs, they wouldn't bring up more than half.

"They are poor, tender little things, any way. Well, I mind the time when there was a great storm, and grandfather had to be up all night, housing the poor cratur's; for the lambs were coming fast. A little past midnight, mother called me, and there we sat till morning, before a blazing fire, warming up one and another, as he brought them in. I sat down on a cricket, and took two or three in my lap at once, and hugged them up to my bosom. When they began to twitch, and we found they must die, we put them on the great hearth rug, and took more. Sometimes they'd just lie down and go to sleep, and when we had time to look at them, they'd be stiff and cold; and then again they would cry out like a baby. It used to make my heart ache to hear them."

Anne had now finished her work, and came down from the steps.

"I don't think I should like to be a shepherdess," said Minnie, sighing.

"O, yes, you'd like it mightily. Such a time as that only comes once in a great many years. And then, when it's warm summer weather, and the lambs frisk and frolic about their mothers in the field, and you just sit down and play on the accordeon, while the dog keeps the flock in order, – O, there's no work so pleasant or so healthy as that!"

When Mr. Lee returned from the city, Minnie was ready with her questions about sheep.

“I want to know all I can about them,” she exclaimed.

“There are few stories that can be told about sheep,” he answered, cheerfully; “for it must be confessed that they are far inferior to the horse, dog, and many other animals, in intelligence and sagacity. The sheep has few marked traits, except its meekness, and its natural affection for its young. Still, when I remember that the lamb was selected before all other animals for sacrifice, and as a type of Him who is called ‘the Lamb of God,’ and who is to take away the sins of the world, I feel a deep interest in its welfare.

“The sheep, too, is one of the most useful animals, its fleece or wool being used as a covering to man, and its flesh for food. It was only yesterday I read the well-established fact that, from one pound of sheep’s wool a thread was spun so fine that it reached to the almost incredible distance of ninety-five miles, while one of ordinary fineness reached twenty-six miles. This covering grows so thick in winter that it enables them to bear cold which would be fatal to other animals. They appear to know, too, when a storm is approaching, and take refuge under a sheltering hill or some projecting cliff.

“One very curious thing is, that they can live under the snow for a long time. Mr. Sullivan, who is a shepherd, you know, told me a circumstance which occurred in his own experience.

“There was every appearance of a storm, and he, with his men, drove the sheep early into the fold. In the morning, on counting them, he found there were seven valuable ewes missing. It had

snowed all night, and was still snowing, when he started out in search of them. But nowhere could they be found. The storm continued four days, and the snow had reached a depth very uncommon; but day after day the search was renewed. At last, however, it was given up; when one day a woodcutter, in going over a stone wall which lay almost entirely concealed, fell through the snow, and found himself in the midst of the lost sheep. Their breath had rendered the crust, which was firm enough to bear his weight in other places, so thin here that it would not sustain him. They seemed lively and well, having found enough dead grass under the snow to sustain life.

“There is an instance very similar to this in one of my books, which I will find and read to you.”

“In the winter of 1800, a sheep was buried in the snow near Kendal, and remained there thirty-three days and nights, without the possibility of moving, and yet survived.

“In the same winter, a sheep near Caldbeck, in Cumberland, was buried thirty-eight days; when found, it had eaten the wool completely off both its shoulders, and was reduced to a skeleton; but with great care it recovered.”

“Mr. James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, gives a most interesting account of eight hundred ewes that were buried in the snow. Some of them he and his fellow-servants succeeded in getting out the first day; but the second there were but few of them to be seen, except the horns of some stragglers. The men went about, boring with long poles, but with little success, until

their dog found out their difficulty, and flying to a spot, began to scrape away the snow. From this time, by his keen scent, he marked faster than they could get them out, and by his skill saved two hundred, though some were buried in a mountain of snow fifty feet deep. They were all alive, and most of them recovered their strength.”

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