

Mr. Orwell's *Christmas Tale*

Finn was a fluffy gray squirrel who lived with his family in a cozy hole in the center of a sturdy oak trunk. It was winter, and frost clung to the bare tree branches.

As the sun peeped over the horizon, Finn quickly jumped out of bed. He ran to his mom, gave her a cuddly squirrel hug (which meant he not only hugged her with his little arms, but also with his soft tail), and then sat down to a delicious breakfast. This was a very special day for Finn—it was the first day of his Christmas holidays.



When Finn had finished his breakfast, he was just about to speed through the tree branches when he heard his mother call to him.

"Not so fast, Finn," his mother said. "Haven't you forgotten a few things?"

"Aw, but Mom, it's Christmas holidays."

"That doesn't matter," his mother explained. "Your teeth still need to be brushed, your bed made, and your chores completed."

"Yes, Mom," said Finn. He knew he should obey his mother, but inside he was unhappy about having to do these things when there were Christmas fun and games to be enjoyed.

Finn did his tasks as fast as he could. Then he scurried off to the nearby tree, sprinting and jumping from branch to branch. Finn was on his way to see his good friend Dilly. Dilly was a white bunny who lived in a burrow with her family.



"Dilly," called Finn. "Come out and play with me!"

Out popped a grumpy Dilly. "You'll have to wait a few minutes. I still have some chores to do ... *during* the holidays."

Finn waited outside Dilly's family burrow. When Dilly was finished, the two hurried off to play.

Finn could climb and jump through the branches of the trees, but Dilly could hop so fast that Finn had a hard time keeping up with her.

As the day wore on and the morning turned to afternoon, the two friends found themselves by Mr. Orwell's tree. Mr. Orwell was a wise old owl. He had been around for a long time and always had an interesting story to tell. Mr. Orwell loved the little animals, and was pleased to see Finn and Dilly.



"What are you two up to these days?" Mr. Orwell asked.

"It's the winter holidays, and we are having so much fun!" exclaimed Dilly.

"Except that our mothers still make us do our chores," added Finn.

"Ah, Christmas holidays! That does sound wonderful. I remember when I was young I had trouble doing my chores during holidays, too. But one winter, my brother and I learned the hard way about why it was important to do the things our mother asked us to do. Would you like to hear the story?"

"Oh yes!" chorused Finn and Dilly. They loved Mr. Orwell's stories.

The old owl flew down and perched himself on a nearby rock. Finn and Dilly sat on the ground, eager to hear Mr. Orwell's tale.



"When I was a wee owlet," began Mr. Orwell, "my mother needed to make a trip that would keep her away for a few days.

"My brother Edgar and I were old enough to take care of ourselves. Our mother left instructions of things we needed to do each day while she was away. She told us to make sure we slept during the day, as we needed our strength to hunt at night. She told us to make sure to keep the nest clean."

"Really? You had to do that, even though it was winter holidays?" asked Dilly.

"Yes, it's what our mother asked us to do. But as soon as she was gone, Edgar and I had other plans.

"'Mother's gone,' Edgar said. 'Let's do whatever we want until Mother returns.'"



"We can play all day!" I exclaimed. 'We don't really need to take naps and do our chores.'

"It sounded like a fun plan. So we started the day off by playing hide-and-seek through the trees. We played all day long and had a great time. But by the time night set in we were both very hungry, and we went to find food like our mother had taught us. However, we were both so tired from playing that we weren't quick enough to catch anything.

"We finally went back to our nest to sleep, but it was such a big mess that we couldn't sleep. It was terribly uncomfortable! We tossed and turned all night long, and when morning came, we were very tired. We were also hungry, but since we couldn't hunt during the day, we had to wait till it was night.



"We still didn't clean our nest, but instead went straight out to play. Again we played all day long. That night we were again too tired to hunt, and so we tried to sleep.

"After tossing and turning, and with our stomachs growling, Edgar and I finally realized that if we had obeyed our mother, we wouldn't have been so tired and hungry. Had we done as our mother had asked, our nest would've been tidy and comfortable to sleep in.

"I think we need to clean our nest,' Edgar suggested. 'I can't sleep. There are all these things poking into me.'

"I agree,' I said. 'We should've taken our naps as well, so that we wouldn't be so tired when we tried to hunt.'



"Edgar and I spent some time cleaning the nest, and then fell into a blissful sleep. It felt nice to sleep in a tidy nest. Throughout the day we made sure to rest so that when night came around we weren't too tired to hunt. Later that evening we found something good to eat.

"When Mother returned we told her what had happened, and she was happy that we had learned our lesson. We told her that in the future we would try our best to obey what she asks us to do.

"You see, we learned that while having fun and playing is a good thing, there is also a good reason to clean and do our chores. We learned to appreciate our mother and all that she had taught us. From then on we did our best to be cheerful whenever it came time to do our chores and help around the nest."



Dilly and Finn looked at each other and then at Mr. Orwell. They would do their best to cheerfully help out at home from then on, even if it was their Christmas vacation.

"Thank you for the story, Mr. Orwell," said Finn. "I'm going to remember it every time I have a hard time with my chores."

"You're very welcome," said Mr. Orwell. "Happy Christmas holidays!"

"You too," chorused Dilly and Finn. The two friends returned to their homes, determined to do their best.



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