

one cheek. But the little girl no sooner held out her finger to him, saying, "Now, little Brownie," than he hopped on it and began to sing so sweetly that Will afterwards told his mother that he thought the angels must have taught him. He sang a beautiful story, too, all about the secrets of the forest, what made the flowers so sweet, the water so clear and the moss so soft and green. Then he sang that the snow was a warm, soft blanket tucked over the little flowers in the winter to keep them from the cold, cruel winds. Just as he got so far in his story, the clock began to strike, and he stopped. Will heard it this time and counted aloud—"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve."

The little maiden jumped up and ran to the table crying, "Now we can have something to eat and drink."

Will gave part of his bread to the rabbit and squirrel, then crumbled the rest up for the birds. He handed his mug to the little maiden, who pressed it to her rosy lips and drank the milk to the last drop.

She gave back the mug to Will, laughing merrily and saying: "Your visitors have had enough, but there is nothing for you, little boy."

"O yes, there is," answered Will; "I have my chestnuts." And immediately began to eat them. How good they did taste! Will wished he had ten times as many. He was not sorry, however, that he had given away the rest of his dinner.

The little maiden was sitting again on the stool, but the squirrel and rabbit were playing quietly about the room. The birds were still busy over their crumbs. When Will had eaten his last chestnut, his golden-haired guest called out to him.

"I think you are asleep; put your head in my lap, and I will sing you to sleep."

Will did as he was bidden, and began to sing that same soft and slow lullaby. Will only dreamed that he was singing.

Just as the sun was dropping behind the tall pine-trees, Will's mother came home with a heavy basket on her arm. When she entered the hut, she found a bright fire burning, but Will with his head on his stool fast asleep. His mother bent down and kissed him. The little boy put his arms around her neck and cried, "Sing some more." Then he sat up, rubbed his eyes and looked around the room. "They are all gone, mother," he said, "the pretty little girl, the birds, the squirrel and rabbit."

"You have been dreaming, my little man," said his mother. "Come, help me put the tea, sugar and meal away. Then I shall bake you a little cake for your supper."

Will did as his mother bade him, and afterwards, while she was mixing and baking his cake, he told her of his wonderful morning. She smiled and said he must have dreamt it all, but Will shook his curly head, declaring he knew it was true that he had given away his bread and milk because he was so hungry.

His mother laughed aloud then, and said, "It is nothing unusual for you to be hungry, Will; but be patient now, dear, and you will soon have a nice little cake to eat besides a large bowl full of porridge and milk."

Will was sorry that his mother thought he had only dreamt the wonderful things he told her, for he felt sure that it had all really happened, and for many days kept telling her the stories the birds sang.

At last it was Christmas Eve. Will thought he would try Santa Claus again, so he hung up a stocking by the fire-place for the old fellow to fill. The next morning Will awakened his mother very early crying out:

"O mother, mother, hear the little birds singing 'Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas!'"

"Why, yes," answered the widow, sitting up in bed, "I certainly do hear singing."