

The Winter is Best of All.

When tiny buds are waking
From their long, long sleep,
And from the soft green mosses
Pretty wild flowers peep;
When all the happy birdies
Once again are here,—
Then I think the Springtime
The best time of the year.

But when the Summer, with its days,
So long and bright, is here,
And little brooks seem dancing
With new life and cheer,
And all the woods and meadows
Are filled with blossoms gay,—
Then I wish the Summer
Would always, always stay.

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But now 'tis jolly Winter,
The cold winds shriek and roar;
The trees and fields are sparkling,
For Jack Frost's here once more.
And as I watch the snowflakes
That softly flutter and fall,
I think I like the Winter
The very best of all.

—*Mattie M. Renwick, in Child Garden.*

The Talisman—A "Guess Story."

Papa had little Robbie on his knee and Paul and Frank comfortably snuggled up on each side of him. Then Paul said:

"Now tell us a 'Guess Story,' please, papa."

Papa could tell the most interesting stories about common things, like bees or kites or marbles, but without telling what they were, and the boys would have to guess what they were about.

"Well," began papa, "you know that long ago, in the countries where they had kings, the king would sometimes send some man, whom he knew he could trust, on an important mission. The king would give his own signet-ring to the man, so that the one to whom he was sent would recognize it and would obey the commands of the king's messenger just as if they were the commands of the king himself.

"In some countries people have believed that there were certain magic things called talismans that had some wonderful power to make people obey them, if only they carried the talisman."

Papa stopped the "Guess Story" for a minute, and took a small box, not much over an inch in length from his pocket.

"When I was down town to-day," said papa, "I found a talisman that really has certain wonderful powers. It is inside this little box.

"If I gave it to one of you boys, you might send the talisman on a long journey, in care of some faithful man, and he would go for many miles, guarding the talisman

carefully, and then pass it on to some one else who was bound to obey it, and so it would pass from one to another, for thousands of miles.

"You would not even have to pay the railway fare of the men—the great steam engines would puff, and the wheels would revolve, and the train would travel on, day and night, carrying the talisman on the errand that you entrusted to it.

"When it left the train, there would be other men waiting to receive it and to carry out the commands you sent with it.

"Even away up in Alaska there are men waiting now who would tramp for miles over snow and ice for you, if you sent the talisman to them with your orders."

"Would it ever come back again?" asked Rob.

"Well, no—," said papa. "Oh, yes, there is a way you could have it come back to you."

But none of the boys could guess.

"Is it a penny?" asked Paul.

"No."

"A dime—any money?" asked Frank.

"No."

After the boys had thought and puzzled, papa thought it was time to help them a little, so he said, "Well, if you wanted to send it to some one you knew in—well, in California, and you were not quite sure where he lived, you could send a request that if the messengers failed to find him, they would send it back to you."

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Paul. "You mean that they would send back what the talisman carried, papa?"

"Yes."

"Then, I know," and he whispered in papa's ear.

"Paul has guessed it, and I'll give him the talisman," announced papa. "If the others 'give it up,' he will show it to you."

As Frank and Robbie really couldn't guess, Paul opened the little box carefully and showed them—a postage stamp!—*Selected.*

Two little birdies, one wintry day,

Began to wonder and then to say,

"How about breakfast this wintry day?"

Two little maidens, that wintry day,

Into the garden wended their way,

When the snow was deep that wintry day.

One with a broom swept the snow away,

One scattered crumbs, then went to play,

And birdies had breakfast, that wintry day.

Francis Thompson, the English poet, tells a tale of how a swallow that nested in his garden carried greetings to and fro between England and Italy. Catching the bird in the early autumn he fastened the following message to its wings: "Swallow, little swallow, I wonder where you pass the winter." The next spring the swallow returned, and attached to its foot was the answer to his question, "Florence, at the house of Castellari. Cordial greetings to the friend in the North."