



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Birds' Christmas

F. E. Mann

"Chickadee-dee-dee-dee! Chickadee-dee-dee-dee! Chicka—" "Cheerup, cheerup, chee-chee! Cheerup, cheerup, chee-chee!" "Ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee!"

"Rap-atap-atap-atap!" went the woodpecker; "Mrs. Chickadee may speak first."

"Friends," began Mrs. Chickadee, "why do you suppose I called you together?"

"Because it's the day before Christmas," twittered Snow Bunting. "And you're going to give a Christmas party," chirped the Robin. "And you want us all to come!" said Downy Woodpecker. "Hurrah! Three cheers for Mrs. Chickadee!"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Chickadee, "and I'll tell you all about it. To-morrow IS Christmas Day, but I don't want to give a party."

"Chee, chee, chee!" cried Robin Rusty-breast; "chee, chee, chee!"

"Just listen to my little plan," said Mrs. Chickadee, "for, indeed, I want you all to help. How many remember Thistle Goldfinch—the happy little fellow who floated over the meadows through the summer and fall?"

"Cheerup, chee-chee, cheerup, chee-chee, I do," sang the Robin; "how he loved to sway on thistletops!"

"Yes," said Downy Woodpecker, "and didn't he sing? All about blue skies, and sunshine and happy days, with his 'Swee-e-et sweet-sweet-sweet-a- twitter- witter- witter- witter-wee-twea!'"

"Ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee," said Snow Bunting. "We've all heard of Thistle Goldfinch, but what can he have to do with your Christmas party? He's away down South now, and wouldn't care if you gave a dozen parties."

"Oh, but he isn't; he's right in these very woods!"

"Why, you don't mean—"

"Indeed I do mean it, every single word. Yesterday I was flitting about among the trees, peeking at a dead branch here, and a bit of moss there, and before I knew it I found myself away over at the other side of the woods! 'Chickadee-dee-dee, chickadee-dee-dee!' I sang, as I turned my bill toward home. Just then I heard the saddest little voice pipe out: 'Dear-ie me! Dear-ie me!' and there on the sunny side of a branch perched a lonesome bit of yellowish down. I went up to

see what it was, and found dear little Thistle Goldfinch! He was very glad to see me, and soon told his short story. Through the summer Papa and Mamma Goldfinch and all the brothers and sisters had a fine time, singing together, fluttering over thistletops, or floating through the balmy air. But when 'little Jack Frost walked through the trees,' Papa Goldfinch said: 'It is high time we went South!' All were ready but Thistle; he wanted to stay through the winter, and begged so hard that Papa Goldfinch soberly said: 'Try it, my son, but do find a warm place to stay in at night.' Then off they flew, and Thistle was alone. For a while he was happy. The sun shone warm through the middle of the day, and there were fields and meadows full of seeds. You all remember how sweetly he sang for us then. But by and by the cold North Wind came whistling through the trees, and chilly Thistle woke up one gray morning to find the air full of whirling snowflakes. He didn't mind the light snows, golden-rod and some high grasses were too tall to be easily covered, and he got seeds from them. But now that the heavy snows have come, the poor little fellow is almost starved, and if he doesn't have a warm place to sleep in these cold nights, he'll surely die!"

Mrs. Chickadee paused a minute. The birds were so still one could hear the pine trees whisper. Then she went on: "I comforted the poor little fellow as best I could, and showed him where to find a few seeds; then I flew home, for it was bedtime. I tucked my head under my wing to keep it warm, and thought, and thought, and thought; and here's my plan:

"We Chickadees have a nice warm home here in the spruce trees, with their thick, heavy boughs to shut out the snow and cold. There is plenty of room, so Thistle could sleep here all winter. We would let him perch on a branch, when we Chickadees would nestle around him until he was as warm as in the lovely summer time. These cones are so full of seeds that we could spare him a good many; and I think that you Robins might let him come over to your pines some day and share your seeds. Downy Woodpecker must keep his eyes open as he hammers the trees, and if he spies a supply of seeds he will let us know at once. Snow Bunting is only a visitor, so I don't expect him to help, but I wanted him to hear my plan with the rest of you. Now you WILL try, won't you, EVERY ONE?"

"Cheerup, cheerup, ter-ra-lee! Indeed we'll try; let's begin right away! Don't wait until to-morrow; who'll go and find Thistle?"

"I will," chirped Robin Rusty-breast, and off he flew to the place which Mrs. Chickadee had told of, at the other side of the wood. There, sure enough, he found Thistle Goldfinch sighing: "Dear-ie me! dear-ie me! The winter is so cold and I'm here all alone!" "Cheerup, chee-chee!" piped the Robin:

"But the snow is so deep," said Thistle, and the Robin replied:

Then he told Thistle all their plans, and wasn't Thistle surprised? Why, he just

couldn't believe a word of it till they reached Mrs. Chickadee's and she said it was all true. They fed him and warmed him, then settled themselves for a good night's rest.

Christmas morning they were chirping gaily, and Thistle was trying to remember the happy song he sang in the summer time, when there came a whirr of wings as Snow Bunting flew down.

"Ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee," said he, "can you fly a little way?"

"Oh, yes," replied Thistle. "I THINK I could fly a LONG way."

"Come on, then," said Snow Bunting. "Every one who wants a Christmas dinner, follow me!" That was every word he would say, so what could they do but follow?

Soon they came to the edge of the wood, and then to a farmhouse. Snow Bunting flew straight up to the piazza, and there stood a dear little girl in a warm hood and cloak, with a pail of bird-seed on her arm, and a dish of bread crumbs in her hand. As they flew down, she said:

"And here are some more birdies who have come for a Christmas dinner. Of course you shall have some, you dear little things!" and she laughed merrily to see them dive for the crumbs.

After they had finished eating, Elsie (that was the little girl's name) said: "Now, little birds, it is going to be a cold winter, you would better come here every day to get your dinner. I'll always be glad to see you."

"Cheerup chee-chee, cheerup chee-chee! thank you, thank you," cried the Robins. "Ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee, ter-ra-lee! thank you, thank you!" twittered Snow Bunting.

"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee-dee, chick-a-dee-dee-dee-dee, chick-a-dee-dee-dee-dee! how kind you are!" sang the Chickadees.

And Thistle Goldfinch? Yes, he remembered his summer song, for he sang as they flew away:

"Swee-e-et-sweet-sweet-sweet-a-twitter-witter-witter-witter—wee-twea!"



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