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A New Year's Party

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It was the first day of the year, and because parties were among the finest things in the world — at least to Ella's way of thinking — her mother decided to throw her one.

"It really does feel like the beginning of something," Ella said happily. "A new day, a new year, new toys, new games — and we're even having supper on new dishes."

The dishes were a gift from Santa: pink and white, a proper little set with six cups and saucers, six small plates, a teapot, a sugar bowl, and a cream jug. They had thin bread and butter, hot chocolate with whipped cream on top, and a cake Ella's mother called a New Year's cake — pink and white, with pink sugar trimmings along the white frosting. In the center stood one pink candle.

"It would be quite impossible to have a candle for every year that's ever been," said Ella's mother, "so let's say the year is just one day old."

After most of the cake had disappeared, the girls played house. Each took a corner of the room for her own, arranged it with dolls and treasures, and began calling on each other in borrowed shawls and old hats. They were quite happily settled in when they heard a soft flutter, flutter against the windowpane — then again.

"A little bird!" said Ella, peering out. "Right on the sill. I think it might be hurt."

They opened the window and Ella lifted the bird gently into her hands. Its feathers were ice-cold. They gave it bread crumbs, fresh water, and a leaf of lettuce from the box of seedlings Ella kept in her room. Little by little, the bird grew warmer, and before long it was hopping about and chirping. It had simply been very hungry. When they set it free, it flew off into the winter afternoon.

"We'll put suet in that tree," said Ella.

"And bread crumbs," said her friends.



"And some crumbs from the New Year's cake, too."

So the bird got its own New Year's feast — and Ella and her friends became, from that day on, among those children who remember to look after the birds through the cold months, setting out bread and suet for the feathered people who need it most.

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