

The Adventure of Willy Worm

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Willy was a worm. He was red—a lovely, living red, just like a red worm should be. He was as long as a finger on your hand—your little finger if you’re big, and your big finger if you’re little. Willy could also stretch himself, and scrunch himself—if he pleased. And he pleased—lots!—that’s how he moved about: stretching and scrunching, stretching and scrunching, until he got to where he was going.

Willy had a house. It was a hole in the ground, underneath a tree, and he’d made the hole house all by himself. He was proud of it. He’d eaten his way through the soft earth just like we’d eat our way through a room full of chocolate cake (if we were shaped like a wiggly worm, and there really was a whole room of delicious, creamy, sweet and crumbly chocolate cake.) Willy Worm loved the earth and how it tasted. It was yummy! His whole body was like a big taste bud, all puckered up and juicy and wanting to munch through mealfuls of delicious earth.

One morning, after Willy ate his way through a layer of topsoil, he decided to have dessert. He squirmed out his front door and began to nibble on the pile of leaves which covered his house. Suddenly the leaves were flicked away. A bird with brown feathers, a red breast and a beady eye stared at him. We’ll call him Robin because that was his name.

Robin cocked his head sideways and eyed Willy wiggling and squirming in the bright sunlight and trying to find his front door.

“Chirp,” said Robin merrily. “Chirp! Chirp!” This meant: “Look! Look! A lovely worm!” and he picked Willy up in his beak and flew into the air.

“Help! Help!” cried Willy, wiggling as hard as he could—but it was no use, Robin held him tight and he couldn’t get free no matter how much he wiggled.

Robin flew into the tree above Willy's house and landed on the edge of his nest. Instantly, his three younglings screeched and cheeped and bobbed up and down. They held their mouths wide open, all of them wanting Willy inside their tummies. What a racket they made! Willy shuddered as he looked into their gaping beaks. Robin dropped Willy into the biggest and loudest mouth of all, a fledgling by the name of Freddie, and flew away.

How Willy fought! He wriggled and he wrestled as if his life depended on it (which it did), and Freddie did his best to swallow him, as if his hungry tummy depended on it (which it did)—and Willy won! He squirmed out of Freddie's beak and fell into the nest. In an instant, before the chicks could grab him, Willy wiggled his way amongst the twigs and branches of the nest. All day he lay there, quivering with fear and listening to the loud squawking of the fledglings whenever Robin, or his wife, Robinetta, brought food—food with names like Billy Bug and Greenish Grasshopper and Pudgy-Wudgy Grub. Willy hoped his best friends, Wiggle and Squiggle, weren't among them.

Finally night came and Robinetta sat in her nest. Freddie and his brother and sister, Archibald and Melissa, settled down and were quiet. Willy waited. He waited as still as a mouse until it was dark and the birds were snoring. Then, slowly, carefully, silently, he worked his way out of the nest and wiggled along the branch. The moon was thin and sharp and there was hardly any light as Willy crept along the branch to the tree trunk. He tried to climb down the trunk, but it was much too steep. He slipped and fell. "Oh help!" whispered Willy as quietly as he could as he bounced from branch to branch and landed with a thump on a pile of leaves.

"Ooof!" said Willy, the wind knocked out of him. In a moment he came to his senses, and wiggled his way deep into that pile of leaves quicker than he'd ever wiggled in his whole life. Luckily, these were the very same leaves that covered his house. He found his front door, rushed inside and breathed a huge sigh of relief.

After that, Willy kept his head low and only came out at night to eat leaves and grass and such things. Eventually he met his lovely and wiggalicious wife, Wendy. They had at least a hundred children, all of them as wiggly as parents want their children to be. There were Wilhelmenas and Wandas and Wendleberries and Wendlenuts and Wendlefruits and, of course, lots of Willy and Wendy Juniors too.

Last I heard of them the whole family was eating their way towards the compost heap in the corner of the garden. Perhaps you'll meet them there and say hello for me.