

# TWELVE MONTHS MAKE A YEAR



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## JANUARY

It was a Saturday morning in January and there was no school. Lydia was near the kitchen stove drawing pictures of horses and giving them to Mark to keep him amused, but Jean couldn't sit still. She was in and out of the kitchen, and in and out of the parlor, and up and down the stairs every five minutes.

"Do shut the door," said Cousin Mary at last. "We must keep the house warm. Your father is used to California sunshine."

Jean closed the kitchen door and ran over to the window, where she stood looking out, chewing a stray piece of her brown hair. The snow was swirling past, so thick that the houses across the street were shadowy and she couldn't see the great trees in the graveyard behind them. The snowplow, painted yellow, slowly went by, pushing snow out of its way. Two cars followed close behind it. Their tops were white with snow, as though they were wearing white mufflers. Tom Sullivan, who was in Lydia's grade at school, was trying to follow along what had been the sidewalk, but he sank into the snow up to his middle with every step.

No one else was in sight.

“Oh, dear!” sighed Jean, tapping on the pane. “Father will *never* come, and we haven’t seen him for a year and three months!”

Lydia looked at the kitchen clock.

“I do think the clock’s slow. Cousin Mary,” she complained, “I’ve drawn nine horses in ten minutes, according to that clock. You know I *couldn’t* draw as fast as that!”

“Time goes slowly when you’re waiting,” Cousin Mary said.

She was mixing bread, wearing her apron over her Sunday dress. Now that the children’s father was coming back to the Boston office, she *would* have a big household. Last year, when their mother died, she had suggested that the children should come to her while their father was away on business. When she knew that he was coming back, she didn’t want them to go.

“I hope you will come and stay here,” she wrote him. “The house is large enough and you will like Hingham. It’s only eighteen miles from Boston. I’m used to the children, and they’re used to me. I should miss them terribly.”

Mark climbed up on a chair and brought down the Blue Fairy from the china-closet shelf. She was a candle, with blue wings and robes, and a wick on the top of her blue curls. “The Blue Fairy” was written under her feet, and she had come from Boston. Lydia was thinking too hard about Father to notice what he was up to, but Jean always noticed everything.

She turned from the stormy scene outside and her glance swept the kitchen.

“Mark!” she cried, swooping down upon him. “Put that Fairy back where it belongs this minute!”

Mark held on grimly, and a wing bent under his plump, firm hand.

“Cousin Mary!” Jean appealed. “Do make Mark put back the Blue Fairy. You know we’re keeping her to burn when Father comes home.”

“He’s coming,” Mark said.

But there was no sound of the train down the street; no puffing and panting of the black engine, slowing down at the little station. There was only the sound of the wind and the soft snow, blown fan-shape under the door.

Cousin Mary glanced at the clock.

“He isn’t due for another ten minutes and I’m afraid the train may be very late. Put it back, Ducky.”

It was Lydia who coaxed Mark at last to put the Fairy back on the shelf.

“The train *might* be on time,” Jean said. “We’d better get into our coats.”

“You and Lydia can go,” said Cousin Mary, stirring and stirring the pleasant yellow batter. “Mark and I will wait here.”

Mark roared like a little sunny-haired lion.

“Me too! Me too!”

He jumped to his feet, scattering pictures of horses all

about him, and ran to the clothes closet for his snow suit. For once he pulled it on without help, and even began to put on his own overshoes.

“Do you think he could get there?” Cousin Mary asked Jean doubtfully. “I’ve never seen such a wind.”

“It’s only a block away and there are so few cars out! The street’s cleared. He’ll be all right,” said Jean, who was always the general. She tied a scarf about Mark’s neck. “Where are your mittens?” she asked. “Oh, goodness, there’s only one! You silly boy! You’ll have to keep one hand in your pocket.”

“‘What, lost your mittens, you naughty kittens? Then you shall have no pie,’” Lydia quoted. “Never mind, Mark, I’ve lost one, too. Good-by, Cousin Mary. When you hear the train go by, you’ll know we’ll be back with Father in two shakes of a lamb’s tail. A snowy lamb’s tail,” she added.

It was lucky for the children that the street *had* been cleared and that there was little or no traffic. Climbing over the drifts by the side of the road was like climbing a castle wall. Once on top, they slid down to the pavement in a flurry of snow. The storm was coming from the northeast and raged at their backs. If they turned for a moment, the wind took the breath out of their mouths and the snow almost blinded them. Jean gave Mark one of her mittens and she and Lydia dragged him between them, with their outer hands in their pockets. Mark wanted to put his feet together and be pulled like a sled,

but his sisters told him that a storm was not the proper time for such games.

Once only did they have to get out of the way of a slowly passing car, and once they stopped to watch the horse plow clearing the sidewalk. The two big brown horses were steaming like kettles on a stove and every time they breathed, the vapor from their nostrils froze in clouds. They bent their heads down on their chests and their manes were matted with ice and they walked forward, throwing themselves against the weight of the plow. The snow parted on each side of the steel plowshare and rolled back like heavy white water. It was beautiful to watch, but after a minute the silent horses, the silent man, and the plow were lost to sight again behind the falling snow.

In front of the station and around the shops on the other side of the track the snow gang was already at work, loading trucks with the snow from the sides of the streets. The children were too cold to stand watching. They were glad to go into the station and stand by the stove, from time to time peering out through the frosted windows.

“See, Mark,” said Lydia. “That’s a palm tree and that’s a banana tree. All made out of frost.”

Jean picked up a small twig from the floor and scratched in a very good sketch of a monkey among the leaves of the white banana tree.

“And that’s you, Mark,” she said. “You’re a little monkey.”



Mark pulled off a mitten and put his thumb on the frost between the monkey's paws, which melted in a bright round spot.

"Apple," he said.

Jean looked at him with approval.

"You're getting very clever," she said. "If I had a penny I'd give it to you."

But Mark was busy making apples everywhere.

The train came sooner than anyone expected it would. It was only half an hour late. At the first toot down the track beyond the drugstore the children were out on the platform, though Lydia covered her ears as it roared down upon them.

Father was the very first person to swing down the steps after the conductor, and somehow he managed to get all three of them into his arms at once. But then he was a big man, with a good wide spread of arms—which is nice when there are three children running to be hugged all together. He needed to be big, too, to carry his suitcases back through the blizzard, with three children trying to help and scrambling about underfoot like three happy puppies.

Father seemed to like it, though the wind blew against him, pushing now at this side, now at that, throwing snow into his eyes and sending his hat flying. However, the storm had cleared a sort of path to Cousin Mary's kitchen door; for the gusts blew so hard around the corner of the



house that they blew the snow away, right down to the brown grass in one place, and piled it into a drift ten feet high just beyond.

Cousin Mary had heard the train and she was there to throw open the kitchen door and welcome them all in. The kitchen was filled with the good smell of cocoa and toast. They all sat about the table with its red and white oilcloth cover and drank and ate and talked before they took off their coats and leggings. They were too excited to take time for such things—just at first.

That afternoon the blizzard snowed itself out. First the wind began to drop, and the snow fell softly as down. Then it thinned, and the flakes grew larger and at last stopped. It was beautiful outside. The sky was black above a world of white and silver. Some leftover icicles gleamed like fringes of glass from the eaves.

“This is something to like,” said Father. “If you were born in the East, snow is in your blood.”

It was Father who suggested that they should make a snowhouse in the great rounded drift by the kitchen door. He took the snow shovel and dug into it and the children carried away the loose snow. At first Mark wanted to climb the peak and slide down; but after a real cave began to be formed, he lost interest in everything else and kept crawling into it, headfirst, whenever his father stopped digging for a moment.

As the snowhouse took form, the sky began to clear. One moment it was gray-black, then it was soft gray with

blue behind it, and suddenly it was pure bright blue above the snow-covered roofs and snow-decorated trees of the town. People in brightly colored coats, grownups and children, began going by, some on skis and some dragging sleds. More cars passed; a dog barked; a blue jay flew past with a loud joyous cry.

The snowhouse was finished and squared off inside, with smooth walls and a hard flat floor. There was room for Father and all three of the children, squeezing a little. Cousin Mary donated an old rag rug and some cushions, but was satisfied to admire it from the outside.

“I hate snow in my hair,” she explained. “Where’s Mark gone to?”

Mark appeared, once more carrying the Blue Fairy, and was once more met by the protests of his sisters.

“You’re a silly boy,” they told him. “Put her back, there’s a dear.”

But this time Mark would not give up his treasure. He crawled into the snowhouse with it and began trying to stick it into a wall.

“Hold on,” said Father. “I’ll make a shelf,” and with his shovel he scooped out a neat square place with a pointed top for the Blue Fairy.

“Light,” commanded Mark.

“Not until—” Jean began by habit, but Lydia laughed.

“Father *is* here,” she said, laying her cheek for a moment against his hand. “Let’s light it, and we’ll call it the Blue Fairy’s Palace.”

“I’ll make you some more cocoa and we’ll bring out the doll’s table from your room and you can have a feast,” suggested Cousin Mary.

But cocoa wasn’t right. Not exactly.

“I know,” said Jean. “Let’s go down to the drug store and get ice cream cones.”

“But it’s too *cold!*” protested Cousin Mary.

“Then they won’t melt,” said Jean.

“Don’t you see, Cousin Mary, ice cream is *right* to eat in an ice palace?” Lydia chimed in, and Father nodded.

“Cold, but right,” he agreed. “We’ll be back in five minutes with a cone for you. You must find a scarf to keep the snow out of your hair, and we’ll all have a feast together in the palace.”

Darkness comes very early in January, and by the time the family got back the blue sky was paling and the evening star was shining yellow in the west. Father lighted the Blue Fairy on her shelf, and her light shone all through the palace. The snow was a soft gold in the candlelight and a larkspur blue in the shadows and the Fairy herself was beautiful, blue and smiling, and no one noticed that one wing was a little twisted.

Cousin Mary, protesting still, crawled in beside Father, and the children filled all the rest of the snowhouse. Five ice cream cones were raised together, five pairs of eyes smiled at one another, and the feasting began in the Palace of the Blue Fairy. Mark, who had lost his usual nap, fell asleep between Father’s knees before he had finished his

ice cream. Later, as Father carried him into the house, he woke up enough to stare about him. The sky now was filled with stars and the lights were beginning to turn the windows of the houses yellow, and the candle still burned in the Blue Fairy's Palace.

"Ice cream and Father," he muttered, and his head fell back again on Father's shoulder.

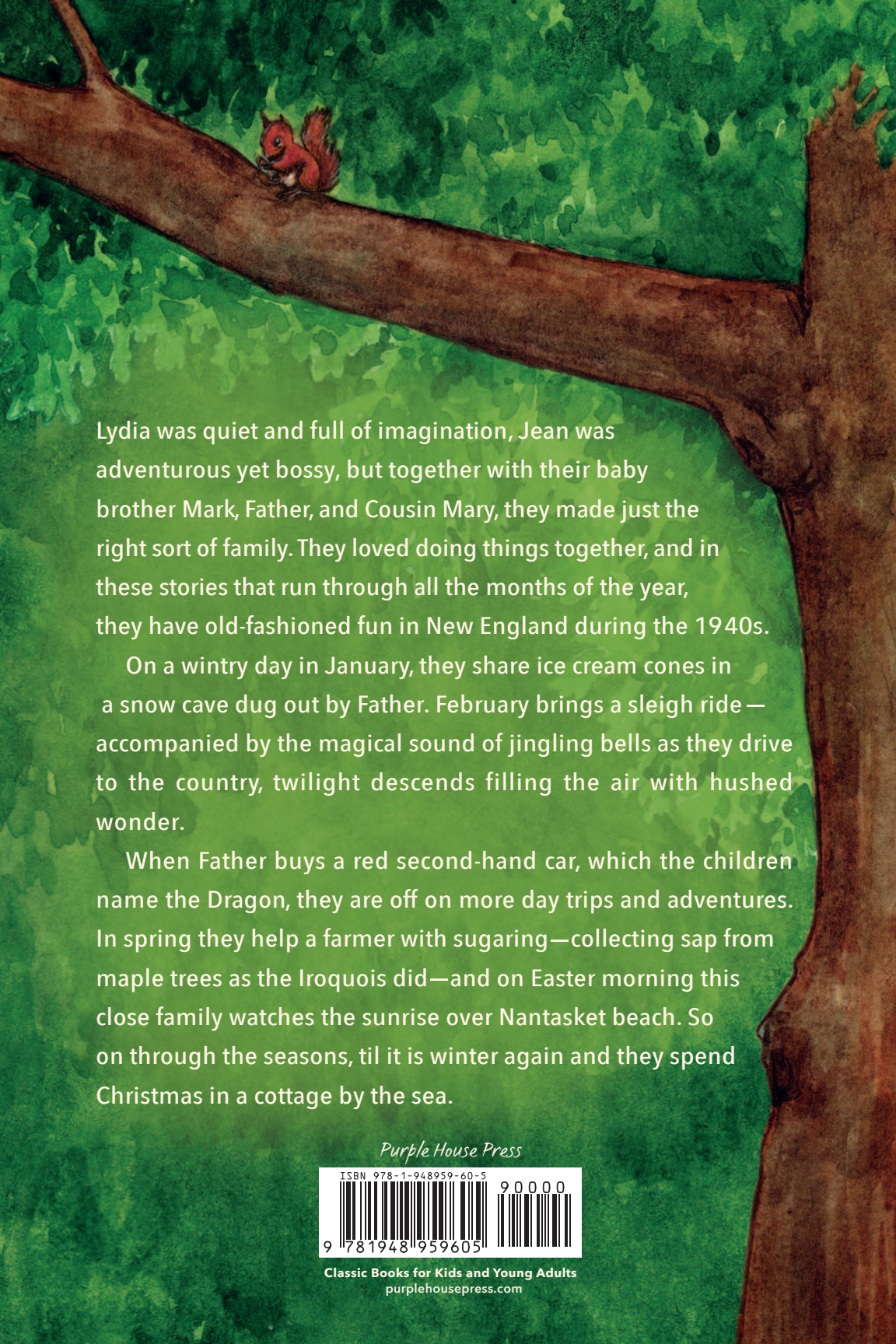
"He should have said 'Father and ice cream,'" Jean murmured to Lydia. "It wasn't polite."

But Father felt satisfied—satisfied with everything—as he walked up the steps with a little girl holding each elbow to help him carry Mark, because, as Lydia said, "He weighs twice as much when he's asleep."



A snowstorm may come quietly  
Like cats who walk across a floor.  
It hangs its curtain in the air  
And piles its weight against the door;  
It fills old nests with whiter down  
Than any swan has ever known,  
And then as silent as it came  
You find the pale snowbird has flown.

But snow can come quite differently,  
With windy uproar and commotion,  
With shaken trees and banging blinds,  
As rude and boisterous as the ocean.  
Such storms will wrestle with strong boys  
And set the girls' skirts wildly blowing,  
Until it throws its cap in air  
And shouts, "Well, good-by now! I'm going!"

A red squirrel is perched on a thick, brown tree branch that extends from the top left towards the right. The background is a vibrant, textured green, suggesting dense foliage. The squirrel is facing left, looking towards the viewer.

Lydia was quiet and full of imagination, Jean was adventurous yet bossy, but together with their baby brother Mark, Father, and Cousin Mary, they made just the right sort of family. They loved doing things together, and in these stories that run through all the months of the year, they have old-fashioned fun in New England during the 1940s.

On a wintry day in January, they share ice cream cones in a snow cave dug out by Father. February brings a sleigh ride — accompanied by the magical sound of jingling bells as they drive to the country, twilight descends filling the air with hushed wonder.

When Father buys a red second-hand car, which the children name the Dragon, they are off on more day trips and adventures. In spring they help a farmer with sugaring—collecting sap from maple trees as the Iroquois did—and on Easter morning this close family watches the sunrise over Nantasket beach. So on through the seasons, til it is winter again and they spend Christmas in a cottage by the sea.

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