



MARY AND THE TWELVE MONTHS

Once upon a time there was a girl called Mary. She lived in a house by the woods with her stepmother. Although the stepmother gave Mary a roof over her head, food and clothes, she had no love for her. She also had a daughter of her own, Mary's stepsister Helen, whom she loved dearly, and she took such precious care of her as if Helen was a porcelain doll. Mary had to do all the chores around the house, she washed and sewed their clothes, cooked, tidied up and took care of the garden. But nothing was ever good enough for the stepmother. Because Mary was much prettier than her stepsister, the stepmother dreaded the day when suitors would come. She worried they wouldn't care for her beloved Helen and would want Mary instead. She couldn't let that happen! She thought and mused until one day she came up with a plan. One evening in the middle of a cold winter she sent Mary to pick violets.

"But mom, it's freezing out there! Where am I to find violets now?" Mary wondered. Normally, she would go out for anything without hesitation, but she knew it was impossible now.

"How dare you talk back, you good-for-nothing? Go, I don't want to see your face here anymore! And don't you even think about coming back without those flowers!" shouted the stepmother at Mary. She threw a winter coat at her and locked the door behind her.

MARY AND THE TWELVE MONTHS

“Oh dear, what in the world will I do now?” Mary sighed. The snow was up to her knees and she was shivering in the chilling gale. She wandered through the cold forest for a long time and was just beginning to think she would meet her end there, when suddenly she spotted a flickering light in the distance. It was very weak, but she set out towards it.

As she approached, she saw that the light was a campfire and twelve men were seated around it. Three of them were as young as Mary, another three a bit older, another three were even older than that and the last three were so old that their hair was as white as the snow. It was the Twelve Months. Each of them ruled over one month of the year. At first she was frightened, but her longing for warmth was stronger than her fear and so she spoke up:

“Good evening to all of you. Please, let me warm up a little, I’m chilled to the bone.”

“Dear girl, what are you doing climbing a hill at night in this foul weather?” asked an old man sitting on the highest rock with a frozen sceptre in his hand. It was January and at that time, it was he who was wielding the power.

“My stepmother had me go pick violets and told me not to come back without them,” admitted Mary with a sad voice.

“Well then, let us help you. Brother April, come take my place and rule for a moment,” said the mighty January, he rose up and passed the sceptre to his younger brother. The sceptre suddenly turned green with flowers budding on the top. As he struck the ground with it, the snow around him melted and green grass with flowering violets appeared instead.

“Go on, pick them,” said April to Mary encouragingly. For a moment, she stood in awe of the miracle in front of her, but then she began carefully picking the violets. When she collected a nice bunch of them, the snow and ice covered the small green island once again. Mary would have never guessed that she could ever witness such magic.

“Thank you, thank you with all my heart,” she said heartily and quickly made her way back home.

Helen and her stepmother were left in shock when they saw Mary in the door,

MARY AND THE TWELVE MONTHS

holding the flowers.

“Where did you find them?” hissed the stepmother and snatched the beautiful flowers from Mary’s hands.

“Over there at the top of that hill. I found a few of them growing there,” answered Mary. She couldn’t wait to warm up a little in their tiny house.

the very next day Mary could not believe her ears when her sister ordered her to go outside and gather strawberries.

“But dear sister, you know that strawberries don’t grow now. Once they start growing, I’ll be happy to go and pick some for you,” Mary smiled at her.

The stepmother swiftly jumped at Mary and snapped at her: “When my Helen tells you to do something, you better do it straight away! I don’t want to hear another word! Go, I don’t want to see your face until you bring those strawberries!!”

Once again the poor girl found herself outside in the harsh winter. Again she roamed for hours through the woods and pushed her way through heaps of snow. She was hungry and tired, but then she saw the flickering light in the distance she ran towards it, hoping that the Twelve Months could maybe save her this time as well.

“Good evening, wise men. I’m Mary and you saved my life yesterday. May I warm up a bit at your fire again?” she asked and pointed with her numb hand at the flames.

“What do you seek here today?” said January.

“Strawberries, dear January, they sent me for strawberries today,” she answered.

“But strawberries grow in summer, Mary. It’s winter now, the time of Christmas and peace,” said the old man.

“I know, I know. But my stepmother wouldn’t hear of it and she refused to let me back home without them,” she nodded sadly.

“June, my brother, I pass my power onto you, help poor Mary,” said January. Then he stood up and switched seats with June.

Once again, the sceptre struck the ground, the snow melted and a green carpet of grass with red juicy strawberries appeared instead. Mary gathered a full apron of strawberries, thanked the Twelve Months and headed back home.

MARY AND THE TWELVE MONTHS

When she returned, the stepmother and Helen enjoyed the sweet fresh strawberries and Mary, exhausted, went to get some rest.

Only a few days passed when, yet again, the stepmother sent Mary off to the woods. This time she wanted Mary to bring her pears. Even the Lord almighty himself saw that she only wanted to drive Mary away, preferably forever.

“Now? Pears in winter? I beg you, don’t send me into the cold again, please,” Mary knelt before her stepmother and started crying.

“Are you talking back to me again?! You better get up and leave, I don’t want to see your face until you return with my pears!” shouted the stepmother.

Desperate Mary stumbled through valleys and over hills, crying her eyes out, with hands as cold as ice. She thought she was completely lost, that she would never find her way back home, when she finally noticed a familiar light in the distance.

“My dear Twelve Months, please help me once more,” she stepped in front of January and joined her hands as if she were praying. She felt hopeless and didn’t know what to do.

“Oh Mary, what do you need this time?” asked the white-haired January.

“Pears, please,” she said and wiped off the tears from her cheeks.

“Well, come then, brother September.”

September took over the sceptre and struck the ground. A tree started growing from the ground, with yellow pears hanging from its branches

“Collect them quickly Mary,” rushed her September.

But she only managed to collect two small pears before the spell wore off.

“I’m very grateful to you,” smiled Mary thankfully at the Twelve Months and ran back home.

Her stepmother was already waiting for her with a spiteful look on her face.

“What took you so long? Give them to me,” she dragged her inside and took both pears from her.

“Did you only bring two? I bet you ate the rest on the way home, you glutton!!” shouted Helen.

“I’m sure you’re right, darling,” agreed the stepmother.

MARY AND THE TWELVE MONTHS

“I’m going to get more myself, since you’re so useless and greedy,” said Helen, already putting on her coat and leaving into the cold night.

Helen, too, wandered for a long time through the forest and she, too, finally saw the flickering light. She also felt the creeping cold on her fingers when she made her way up to the twelve wise men.

“What brings you here, dear girl?” asked January.

“What do you care, old fool? I’m looking for pears!” barked Helen impudently.

Of course, the Twelve Months didn’t like that tone, so they became angry and unleashed a blizzard so strong that the world had never seen anything like it before. Helen had no chance against such weather and got lost somewhere in the depths of the forest.

Hours passed and Helen still had not returned, so the stepmother decided to go looking for her daughter. The devil himself would not set foot into such a terrible blizzard, but the stepmother decided to go anyway. She had no respect for anyone or anything, not even the power of nature. And what happened to her? Deep inside the dark forest, she got lost as well. Whether she found Helen before they both froze to death will forever remain a mystery.

Poor frightened Mary waited many hours for them to come home, but neither of them ever did.

And so from that moment on, Mary lived happily in her house, sewing and tidying up and tending the geese out in the meadows. One sunny morning, a handsome young lad passed Mary’s house and they immediately caught each other’s eye and fell in love. Ever since, they lived happily together, without any evil people spoiling their lives.