

5. The Twelve Months



ONCE upon a time, in a faraway country, there lived a mother who had two daughters. One was her own child, the other was her stepdaughter. She was very fond of her own daughter, but she hated her stepdaughter. The only reason was that Marouckla, the stepdaughter, was prettier than her own daughter, Holena.

The gentle-hearted Marouckla did not know how beautiful she was, and so she could never make out why her mother was always so cross with her.

Marouckla had to do all the housework, tidying up the cottage, cooking, washing, spinning, weaving and sewing. She liked work and she did it all without a word of complaint while Holena spent the time adorning herself and lazing about. Even then, Holena and her mother scolded and rated and abused Marouckla every day. They envied her so much that one day, they decided to throw her out in the freezing cold to get rid of her.

“Go, Marouckla, and get me some violets from the forest; I want to wear them and to smell them,” said Holena.

“But, my dear sister, it is impossible to find violets in the snow,” said poor Marouckla.

“How dare you argue when I tell you to do something? Off you go at once, and if you don’t bring me violets from the forest I’ll kill you!” said Holena threateningly.

The stepmother caught hold of Marouckla, turned her out of the door, and slammed it to after her.

Marouckla went into the forest weeping bitterly. The snow lay deep, and there wasn’t a human footprint to be seen. Marouckla wandered about for a long time, tortured by hunger and trembling with cold.

At last, she saw a light in the distance. She went towards the glow, which came from the top of a mountain. A big fire was burning there, and round the fire were twelve stones with twelve men sitting on them. Three of them had snow-white beards, three were not so old, and three were still younger. The three youngest were the handsomest of them all. They were not speaking, but all sitting silent. These twelve men were the twelve months. Great January sat highest of all; his hair and beard were as white as snow, and in his hand he held a club.

Marouckla was frightened. She stood still for a time in terror, but, growing bolder, she went up to them and said, “Please, kind sirs, let me warm my hands at your fire.”

Great January nodded, and asked her, “Why have you come here, my dear little girl? What are you looking for?”

“I am looking for violets,” answered Marouckla.

“This is no time to be looking for violets, for everything is covered with



snow,” answered Great January.

“Yes, I know; but my sister Holena and my stepmother said that I must bring them some violets from the forest. If I don’t bring them, they’ll kill me. Tell me, fathers, please tell me where I can find them.”

Great January stood up and went to one of the younger months – it was March – and, giving him the club, he said, “Brother, take the high seat.”

March took the high seat upon the stone and waved the club over the fire. The fire blazed up, the snow began to melt, the trees began to bud, and the ground was at once covered with grass. It was springtime.

The violets began to bloom among their little leaves, and before Marouckla had time to think, so many of them had sprung up that they looked like a blue cloth spread out on the ground.



“Now, pick them quickly, Marouckla!” commanded March.

Marouckla picked them joyfully till she had a big bunch. Then she thanked the months with all her heart and scampered merrily home.

Holena and the stepmother wondered when they saw Marouckla bringing the violets. They opened the door to her, and the scent of violets filled all the cottage.

“Where did you get them?” asked Holena sulkily.

“They are growing under the bushes in a forest on the high mountains.”

Holena snatched all the flowers and did not give even a single one to her sister.

The next day, she called to her sister and said, “Go, Marouckla, and get me some strawberries from the forest.”

“Alas! dear sister, where could I find any strawberries in this hard winter?” said Marouckla.

“How dare you argue! Go at once and get me the strawberries, or I’ll kill you!”

The stepmother caught hold of Marouckla and pushed her out of the door and shut it after her.

Marouckla went to the forest weeping bitterly. The snow was lying deep, and there wasn’t a human

footprint to be seen anywhere. She wandered about for a long time, tortured by hunger and trembling with cold. At last, she saw the light she had seen the other day. Overjoyed, she went towards it. She came to the great fire with the twelve months sitting round it.

“Please, kind sirs, let me warm my hands at the fire.”

Great January nodded, and asked her, “Why have you come again, and what are you looking for here?”

“I am looking for strawberries. My sister Holena and my stepmother bade me bring some strawberries, and if I don’t, they will kill me. Tell me, fathers, tell me, please, where I can find them.”

Great January arose. He went over to the month sitting opposite to him - it was June - and handed the club to him, saying, “Brother, take the high seat.”

June took the high seat upon the stone and swung the club over the fire. The fire shot up, and its heat melted the snow in a moment. The ground was all green, the trees were covered with leaves, the birds began to sing, and the forest was filled with all kinds of flowers. It was summer. The ground under the bushes was covered with white starlets, the starry blossoms were turning into strawberries every minute. They ripened at once, and before Marouckla had time to think, there were so many of them that it looked as though a red carpet had been spread on the ground.

“Pick them at once, Marouckla!” commanded June.



Marouckla picked them joyfully till she had filled her apron full. Then she thanked the months with all her heart and scampered merrily home.

Holena and the stepmother wondered when they saw Marouckla bringing the strawberries. Her apron was full of them.

“Where did you pick them?” asked Holena sulkily.

“There are plenty of them growing in the forest on the high mountains.”

Holena took all the strawberries, and ate them all up with her mother. They didn’t leave even a single one for Marouckla.

On the third day, Holena ordered, “Marouckla, go into the forest and get me some red apples.”

The stepmother caught hold of Marouckla and without giving her a chance to speak, pushed her out of the door and shut it after her.

Marouckla went to the forest again, weeping bitterly. But she didn’t wander about this time. She ran straight to the

top of the mountain where the big fire was burning and the twelve months were sitting round the fire.

“Please, kind sirs, help me.”

Great January nodded, and asked her, “What are you looking for today?”

“I am looking for red apples. If I don’t bring them, my sister and my mother will kill me. Tell me, father, tell me, please, where I could find them.”

Great January rose up. He went over to one of the older months - it was September. He handed the club to him and said, “Brother, take the high seat.”

Month September took the high seat upon the stone and swung the club over the fire. The fire began to burn with a red flame, the snow began to melt. But there was a cold wind that sent the faded leaves down to the ground. It was autumn. Marouckla saw just one apple-tree with red apples hanging high among its branches.

“Shake the tree at once, Marouckla!” commanded September.

Right gladly Marouckla shook the

tree, and first one apple fell down and then another.

“Now, Marouckla, that’s enough. Run home quickly!” shouted the months.

Marouckla obeyed at once. She picked up the apples, thanked the months with all her heart, and ran merrily home.

Holena and the stepmother wondered when they saw Marouckla bringing the two apples.

“Where did you get them?” asked Holena.

“I found them in the forest on the high mountain.”

“And why didn’t you bring more? Or did you eat them on the way home?” said Holena harshly.

“Alas! sister dear, I haven’t even tasted them. I shook the tree twice; two apples fell down, and they wouldn’t let me shake the tree again. They shouted to me to go straight home,” protested Marouckla.

“May you be struck to death by lightning!” said the wicked Holena and began to eat the apple. It tasted so delicious that she told her mother she had never tasted anything so nice in all her life. The stepmother liked it too. When they had finished, they wanted some more.

“Mother, give me my fur coat. Let’s go to the forest ourselves and get the apples. That ragged little wretch

would eat them all up again on her way home. We’ll find the place all right, and I’ll shake them all down, however they shout at me.”

Her mother agreed readily. They wrapped themselves in fur coats and shawls and off they went to the forest.

The snow lay deep, and they wandered about for a long time, but at last they saw the top of the mountain where the big fire was burning and the twelve months were sitting. They stepped up to the fire and stretched out their hands to warm them, without asking permission or speaking one polite word.

“Why have you come here, and what are you looking for?” asked Great January crossly.

“Why do you want to know, you old fool?” replied Holena angrily. “It’s no business of yours,” said her mother.

Great January frowned and swung the club over his head. The sky grew dark in a moment, the fire burned low, the snow began to fall thick and an icy wind began to blow through the forest. Holena and her mother couldn’t see one step in front of them.

They tried to find their way out but the snow fell in huge masses, and soon, they were lost in it.

At home, Marouckla waited and waited and yet Holena and her mother did not come back. When she went

to search for them she found neither her mother and sister nor the twelve months in the forest. At last, she returned home sadly.

So, good Marouckla inherited the cottage and the land around it. She married a kind husband and they both lived happily ever after.

–Traditional

Things to do :

1. Find the meaning of the following words.

* adorning * rated * abused * starlets * delicious

2. Read the words. Write the words that combine to make each of them.

* stepmother * footprint * snowwhite
* springtime * gentle-hearted * anywhere

Now write other meaningful words that begin/end with –

* the first word in each * the second word in each.

3. Answer the following questions.

- (1) Why did Marouckla's stepmother hate her ?
- (2) In what season does the story take place ?
- (3) Does Marouckla get any of the things she brings ?
- (4) Why do Holena and her mother go out in the snow themselves ?
- (5) Why is Great January annoyed with Holena and her mother ?
Does he help them ?

4. Describe the following with the help of the story.

* Springtime * Summer * Winter

5. Group Work

- (1) Form groups of 3. Read aloud the conversations in the story, each group presenting one piece of conversation.
- (2) Form groups of 5. Find at least two fairy tales/folk tales each and share them with other members in your group. Make a collection of 10 different stories in each group.

6. Language Study (See pages 84-88.)

Note the words that are highlighted.

Marouckla ran to the top of the mountain where the big fire was burning.

The highlighted words are all nouns. Find 5 other nouns from the story.

7. Activity

Hold a story-telling competition in which each one narrates a folk-tale or fairy-tale.

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