

The Twelve Months. A New Year's Dream

Harriet Beecher Stowe

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THE mystic hour had come: the parting year
Sighed its adieu, — the midnight bell had tolled
Its last sad requiem.
It was an hour for fancy's wildest range,
And in a magic trance my steps she led
Down to the caverns of the hoary deep.
Fair was the place; no mortal eye before
Had e'er upon its radiant glories gazed; —
No foot of man e'er sullied its pure strands.
Around the cave a light unearthly shone,
By whose clear beam the cavern's vast extent
Throughout its wide expansion stood revealed.
High rose the brilliant walls of crystal clear,
And many a sparkling gem to earth unknown
Flashed its bright radiance there. The glittering roof,
Hung with stalactites wrought in every form
That nature's art could carve, flashed down its light;
And the bright sanded floor, spread far and wide,
Sent back the gleam on the pure sparkling gems
And dazzling spars that glittered in its beam.
From many a coral cleft and crystal rock
The broad sea plants their emerald drapery wreathed.
No sound amid the spacious vaults was heard
Save the soft rippling of the murmuring wave,
Or the last dying tones of Nereid's harp
In some far distant bower.
But soon upon mine ear strange sounds there stole,
Of voices musical, whose choral swell
Mingled with softest tones of lyre and lute
Touched by ethereal fingers. Fairy forms,
Through the far windings of the distant cave,
Came moving on with light and airy tread,
Till, full arrayed before my wondering eye,
Stood the twelve daughters of the rolling year.
Fierce was the brow of her who first advanced,
Rude, boisterous March, firm and erect her form;
Her eye, bright, dark and piercing, and her face
All frowning cold and chill: no lineament
Of the soft spring I traced, though born from her.
Fair April, next, with childish tread advanced,
Of features infantine, form immature,
Her dewy eye suffused with frequent tears,

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Like rain drop on the purple violet's breast;
While yet upon her dimpled cheek there played
Smiles bright as gleaming morn or fading eve:
And oft the full loud laugh of childish glee
Rung joyous from her soul.
Around her bright the rainbow hues were wreathed,
That, as a graceful robe, her form begirt:
She bore a lyre with young spring flowerets twined,
Which oft in childish glee she swept along,
Or waked its murmuring chords to notes of woe.
Spring's darling child was she, who oft would twine
Around her brow fair wreaths of opening flowers;
And hoary winter, too, the maiden loved,
And oft in fatal fondness laid his hand
On her young head, and withered the sweet buds.
One infant hand was in her sister's clasped,
Fair flowery May, with graceful step mature,
And slender, fragile form, and smiling mien;
Her long green mantle swept the golden floor,
Filmy its texture as the gossamer —
'Twas more like rays of softest emerald light
Floating in bending waves around her form
Than aught of mortal woof.
The flowers among her golden curls enwreathed
Seemed fair though pale. The humble violet,
The lily of the vale, the snow-drop pure,
The daisy of the mead with golden eye,
And many an other fragile bud of spring
Blossomed in beauty in her garland wild.
Near her there stood three sisters hand in hand,
Tall and majestic were their rising forms,
And the bright dyes of every summer flower
Were softly blended in their flowing robes.
Full brightly from its long dark lashes beamed
Their sparkling eye, while, on their glowing cheek,
Carnation mantled. Graceful was their mien,
And bright their smile as sunbeams on the wave.
Next stood September fair — a matron form
With spicy gums and fruit and vintage crowned,
While at her feet Pomona's golden horn
Pour'd forth in rich abundance its ripe stores,
The luscious fruit, the golden grain, and all
Kind autumn's gifts with lavish hand bestowed.
And next her sister, mild October, stood.
Pale was her sweet fair face, her features calm
With softest lines of pensive thought were marked;
Sedate and mild the cast of her blue eye;
Serene her smile as moonlight's placid ray.
She wore a robe of thousand varied hues,
Brighter than all the emerald dyes of spring,
Or summer's deeper green and firmer tinge.

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'Twas like the radiance of a summer's eve
When gold and saffron clouds with crimson blent,
Glow in the setting sun's last mellow ray,
And drink in radiance from his sinking orb.
And near her stood November's pensive form.
Her mournful air, her frequent flowing tears,
Her drooping form, her wreath all sear and dead,
Her faded robe presaged decay and death.
Near her three figures firm and tall there stood,
Fair were their faces but still deadly pale;
Bright were their clear blue eyes, tho' cold and chill:
An icy helmet bound their pallid brows;
An icy spear gleamed in each frozen hand;
Around their towering forms thick clouds were wreathed;
A mantle dark, impervious to the view.
But still though oft they frowned with air severe,
Yet sometimes, too, they smiled with cheerful gleam.
'Twas said their frowns could wake the wintry winds,
Call forth tornadoes from their dark retreats,
And send them forth to desolate mankind;
Uproot on rifted rock the ancient oak,
And rock the mountain from its deep laid base;
Could rouse the surging billows of the deep,
Till they in madness foamed, and raged, and boiled,
Such dreadful power was their's, tho' now they stood
Serene and peaceful, leaning on their spears.

Why was this beauteous group assembled here?
Much then I marvelled, till upon my ear
Arose their yearly song to HIM, Most High,
Who wheels the seasons in their mazy course,
While hand in hand their measured round they trode.

Maker of the new-born year,
Great Creator, bending, hear;
Lo! we bow in adoration,
Join the chorus of creation.
Thine the flowery spring's perfume,
Thine the glowing summer's bloom,
Thine the autumn's varied dyes,
Freshening fruits and cloudless skies;
Thine the blush of rising day,
Thine the fervid beam of noon,
Thine the twilight's fading ray,
Thine the midnight's hallowed gloom.
All the glowing orbs above,
Join to sing thy power and love;
While the smooth, revolving spheres,
Chime thy praise through endless years;

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Day to night thy glory sings,
Night to day responsive rings;
All things in the vast creation,
Join in praise and adoration.