



December 26

The Day After Christmas

I'll bet you thought Belinda's story was over on Christmas Day! But she is so excited to have her mom at home again that she has plenty of stories yet to tell. Let's listen!

“Howard,” whispered Belinda, “My mom was gone for a VERY long time! I think I should make sure she’s still here!”

With one arm around her cat, Custard, Belinda jumped out of her warm bed and tip-toed softly down the hall. She stopped and listened for a moment.

No sounds in the kitchen. No bacon was sizzling. No one was singing Christmas carols. No pancakes were cooking. It was very, very quiet.

While Belinda looked all around, Custard wiggled his way out of her arms and stomped back to his warm bed. Belinda giggled as she watched him go. “OK, Custard. I guess it’s pretty early!”

Belinda continued to tip-toe quietly, in case anyone was still sleeping. In a few steps, she was in the living room, smiling at the Christmas tree. *We had the best tree ever! And I even figured out what it was that made it Christmas!*

In the kitchen, Belinda thought about making breakfast for her mom and dad. She wasn’t allowed to use the stove by herself yet, but she could pour juice! “That would be a great surprise,” she whispered to herself as she put out two glasses.

Belinda’s parents always kept the juice where Belinda could reach it. She used two hands to carry the OJ to the table. One paper towel later, two glasses were filled, a teeny tiny spill was cleaned up, and Belinda was ready to carry her surprise upstairs to her parents.

Standing outside their door, she looked down at her two hands. “Ooops,” she said to herself. “Knocking could be a problem!” But Belinda liked solving problems, and she giggled at the thought of “using her head”!

Holding the juice carefully, she used her head with its mop of red curls to tap gently on her parents' door.

Lucky for Belinda, she didn't have to OPEN the door since she didn't have any hands left! Instead, her mom came to the door with a HUGE smile.

"Juice for us?" she asked. "What a treat!"

Belinda handed the glasses to her mother with a smile. Not only was her mother still *here* at 1234 Old River Road, but she was drinking juice that Belinda carried up the steps. That was breakfast in bed, Belinda style!

Belinda's dad reached an arm out and tucked his daughter into the bed. She sighed with happiness. Her family was together, she had made juice for her parents, and her dad couldn't tickle her while he was drinking his OJ!

Belinda's mom climbed back in the bed and snuggled her daughter close. The rumbly sound of the pipes reminded her that the old house was working hard to keep her family warm, even if her silly kitty was too lazy to get out of his bed!

Soon Belinda's tummy reminded her that pipes weren't the only things that rumbled! She was hungry! Her dad must have heard the

tummy rumbles because he chuckled and said, “Must be time for breakfast! I hear tummy rumbles!”

Belinda giggled and jumped out of bed. “I am VERY hungry, Daddy. I think maybe I hear bacon and maybe pancakes and waffles and chocolate chip cookies!”

Her mother laughed as she got out of bed and reached for her warm red robe. “You must have been having some special breakfasts around here while I was away!”

“We did, Mommy. And Daddy let me lick the beaters when we made cookies!”

“What?” her father said. “You are getting me in trouble already? I thought I was being SO nice, letting you lick those beaters!”

Belinda giggled. “It’s ok, Mommy. I only did it once. And I didn’t die or anything so it must have been good batter.”

The family talked about cookies and breakfast and happy memories while Belinda set the table for breakfast.

Soon Grandmother and Gramps joined them at the table, and the sound and smell of breakfast made Belinda’s tummy rumble even louder.

“Mommy,” Belinda said, “what are we going to do now that you’re home? Can I stay home from school every day? You were away a long time. Don’t you think we should be able to play EXTRA days?”

Belinda’s parents continued preparing breakfast, and the smell made Belinda SO hungry! But her father said, “Belinda, you are still asking questions in threes! You and your mom and I are going to have a lot of fun things to talk about and plan now.”

“We were thinking about planning a trip,” Belinda’s mother said. “Not right now, but we will talk about it very soon.”

Belinda was so excited she dropped her fork right on the floor.

CLANG!

“A whole family trip? Where will we go?? Will we go on the train?”

Her father held up his hand, chuckling and counting on his fingers.

“That’s three! I guess some things don’t change.”

“Sam,” Belinda’s mother said, getting a clean fork from the drawer for Belinda.

“After breakfast, let’s get a calendar so we can show Belinda some of the things that are going to happen in the next few months. I know she likes to mark the days on a calendar when she’s waiting for something special. She did such a great job on her Advent Calendar!”

After breakfast, Belinda's dad peeked in a mirror on his way to get a calendar. He just shook his head. "My hair still sticks up," he said. "That's like Belinda's three questions: another thing that doesn't change."

His wife smiled. She didn't mind sticky-up hair if he didn't mind her curly red mop!

Once the table was cleared, a black car arrived to take Grandmother and Gramps to New York. Belinda hugged both of them very hard and said an extra thank you for the beautiful charm bracelet AND the magical sleigh ride!

The whole family walked out to wave to Grandmother and Gramps as they rode off in the big black car.

"I don't know why Grandmother doesn't take the train," Belinda said. "It was much more fun than a car!"

"Well," her mother said, "Grandmother likes to ride in the big black car. That means she doesn't have to worry about a lot of people and luggage and escalators. She can just have an easy ride home. And that's ok!"

"Humph!" said Belinda, clearing space on the table.

“So,” Belinda said, “here is a calendar so we can talk about THINGS THAT ARE GOING TO HAPPEN!”

Her father said, “Belinda, a lot of grown-ups want to welcome your mother home. I started calling them as soon as I knew she would get home in time for Christmas. So the first thing that’s going to happen is that we are going to have a really BIG party on New Year’s Eve so that all of our friends can welcome your mom home. And of course Elizabeth and Andrew can come if their parents agree. In fact, they might want to sleep over. A New Year’s Eve Party means staying up until midnight to celebrate the New Year!”

“Wow,” Belinda said, counting on her fingers. “December is almost over! Grandmother went home to New York and Gramps went with her so he could see the big tree. Will we make invitations for a *Welcome Home Mom* party? Will it be in the barn? We’d better hurry up! There’s only five days left in December!”

“Oh! Wait!” Belinda said, jumping out of her seat! “I remember last year, Daddy! Me and you and Gramps stayed up and watched a big ball come down on television. Then we went outside and banged on pots with wooden spoons! It was WAY fun!”

“That’s right, Belinda!” her father said. “New Year’s Eve is a time for celebrating. We say thank you for all the good things that happened in the year that’s coming to an end, and we celebrate all the good things we hope for in the coming year. Some people have silly horns and funny hats and noisemakers. And some people bang pots like us!”

“I can’t wait for that!” Belinda said. “Mommy missed it last year, but NOT this year! Can I help buy the silly hats? I like them a way lot! Last year I tried to put one on Custard,” she giggled, “but he didn’t like it very much!”

“It sounds like there will be lots of fun things, even though Christmas is over. Especially now that mommy is home!”

While Belinda’s mom and dad found pens and pencils and markers for the calendar, Belinda went to the living room to see the Christmas tree again.

“I wonder what that is?” she said.

There was a bright purple box under the tree. It was WAY in the back. She didn’t see it on Christmas Day, but she saw it now.

Crawling on her belly, she reached for it and pulled it out. It was for her! She couldn’t wait to see what was inside and ripped the crinkly purple paper off.

Inside was a purple notebook. Each page had a DATE at the top, with space for writing about the day down below.

She brought it to the kitchen to show her parents. “Look what I found!” she said, holding the purple notebook in front of her. “Another present!”

Her parents smiled at each other. “I wondered when you would find it,” her mom said. “We thought you might like to have an after-Christmas surprise, so we just left it under the tree!”

“Is it for school? Is it for homework? Is it for our THINGS THAT ARE GOING TO HAPPEN???”

“Yes, maybe, and yes,” her mother chuckled. “You can use it any way you would like, but you did such a good job with your Advent Calendar that your dad and I thought you might like to continue keeping an UN-Advent Calendar with special days and times that you’ll want to remember.”

“And we can start with the Welcome Home Mom Party on New Year’s Eve! I will write it in my purple book right away!”



December 27

Getting Ready

If you know Belinda, you know that she is very good at planning—especially planning parties! And with her new purple book, she'll be able to write lots of notes and draw pictures so that nothing is forgotten. Do you think she's getting started right away??

“Howard,” Belinda whispered. “I think I am going to write things in my new purple book, to get ready for Mommy’s Welcome Home Party. And thank You, Howard, for bringing her back to our house. I missed her a way lot, and I know that Daddy did too. I don’t know if she is home FOREVER or just for a while, but I am going to be happy every day she’s here and make sure I make her smile every day!!”

Reaching under her pillow, Belinda pulled out her new purple book. “Hmmm. Today,” she said, “we will have to make invitations right

away! And we will have to deliver them by hand. I will write that down, so I don't forget. There is not enough time to mail the invitations!"

Snuggling down in her warm bed, Belinda felt her kitty curled across her feet and giggled, It tickled a little, but it was ok!

With her purple book in her lap, she wrote down all the things she was thinking about. They took up a lot of room! "Maybe she would have to write some January things in July," she giggled.

She knew they would need to go to the store and get silly hats and horns and noisemakers. And they would probably need some food — especially COOKIES! (She wrote COOKIES in big letters so that everyone would pay attention and not just get things like bread and milk and cereal. COOKIES are party food!)

"What else would they need," she wondered.

"I know!" she sat up in bed and started writing faster and faster. "We need a list of our friends to invite to the party! That's what we did when we had a Christmas party, and we will need an even BIGGER list this time to celebrate that Mommy is home!"

A knock on the door got Belinda's attention. She jumped out of bed and ran to the door to see who was there. WOW! Mom and Dad at the same time. What a great way to start the day!!

“Look,” she said, pulling their hands toward her bed. “I have been working on the plan for the party. And it’s going to be great!”

Their smiles got bigger and bigger as they saw how much Belinda had done to help plan this special party. What a great day—and it was just getting started!

“You have so much organized already, Belinda,” her mom said. “All of us will have to help with the list. And you and your dad are already great at invitations!”

Belinda smiled, remembering the Christmas party in the barn.

“Maybe today,” Belinda’s dad said, “we should get the invitations printed and delivered. Then tomorrow, we could go to the store to get silly hats and noisemakers. I don’t think your mom should have to cook the food since she is the guest of honor, but we COULD make some cookies because her cookies are the best!”

Belinda’s mom said, “People love to help! We will ask everyone to bring a dish. That will make it really easy to have lots of food for everyone!”

Belinda looked at her mom—and looked at the kitchen cabinets, not sure how bringing a dish would mean lots of food.

Her father caught her glance and chuckled. “When your mom says, ‘bring a dish,’ she means bring a dish that has food on it! Not just an empty dish!”

“OH!” Belinda giggled. “That sounds better. I wondered what we were going to do with a houseful of empty dishes and some cookies!”

NOT The End