



The Twelve Days of Christmas

Ilse Plume

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On the first day of Christmas
My true love gave to me
A partridge in a pear tree.

So begins one of the best-loved songs of the yuletide season. Its verses celebrate the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany, when the three Magi presented the baby Jesus with gold, frankincense, and myrrh - the very first Christmas gifts.

Drawing inspiration from centuries-old illuminated manuscripts, Caldecott honor-medalist Ilse Plume here creates an Italian Renaissance setting for the lyrics of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Twice a resident of Florence, her soul "forever touched by the rays of Tuscan sunlight," she has pored over numerous books of hours, bestiaries, and miniatures in search of imagery that might "convey the atmosphere, both tangible and intangible, of a particular time and place": a Florentine garden of the late fifteenth century. Plume's exquisite images, created in gouache and colored pencil, are rich in royal purple and gold, glowing vermilion and verdant green. In each, a beautiful, shy, young noblewoman with magnificent yellow tresses graciously receives a gift from her handsome Romeo: a brown partridge in a fruit-laden tree, two turtledoves in a golden cage ... and, finally, twelve lords a-leaping, in the form of twelve ornamental figures for the lady's Christmas tree.

Plume writes in an artist's note that "I hope that the reader, in turning the pages of my book, will feel the sense of tranquility that he or she would have felt wandering through a Renaissance garden." Many readers will feel exactly that as they lose themselves in this quietly brilliant gem of bookmaking, a gift book that celebrates the joys of gift-giving.

Includes sheet music and lyrics for the home musician.

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