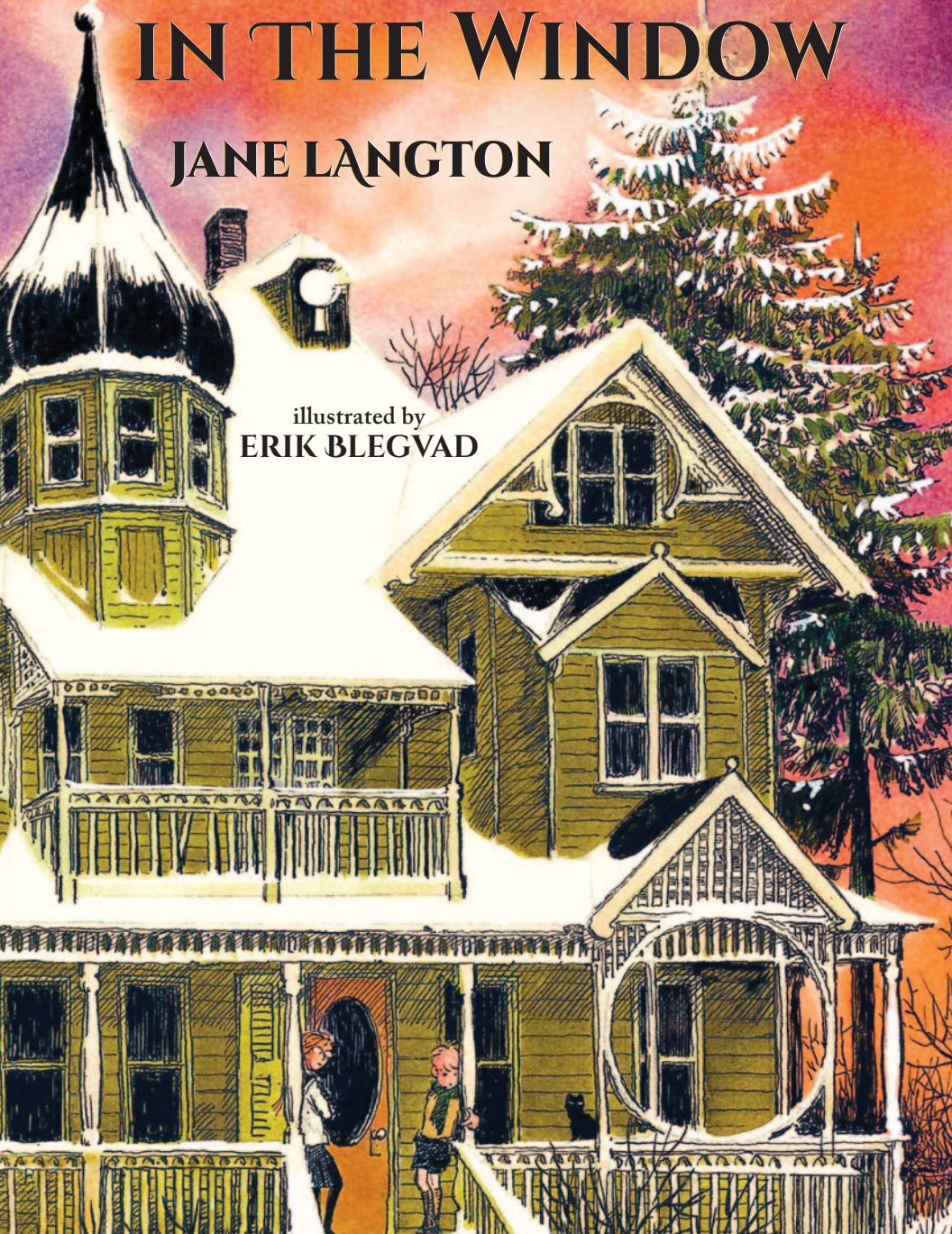


THE DIAMOND IN THE WINDOW

JANE LANGTON

illustrated by
ERIK BLEGVAD



THE HALL FAMILY CHRONICLES



THE DIAMOND IN THE WINDOW



illustrated by
ERIK BLEGVAD

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First Edition

For Christopher and David

*On him the light of star and moon
Shall fall with purer radiance down . . .
Him Nature giveth for defense
His formidable innocence;
The mounting sap, the shells, the sea,
All spheres, all stones, his helpers be . . .*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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**THE DIAMOND
IN THE WINDOW**



EDWARD MISBEHAVES

Edward Hall sat under the front porch of the big house on Walden Street in Concord, Massachusetts, and thought about his two ambitions in life. The first was to be the President of the United States. That was not very likely, but it was at least possible. The second was unlikely and impossible altogether, because he had been born into the wrong family. Why, oh, why wasn't his name "Robert Robinson" instead of "Edward Hall"?

Eddy took out of his pocket a collection of bottle caps, matchboxes and pennies and arranged them on the ground in a decorative pattern. If only fathers and mothers would be more careful when they chose names for their children! If only they would pick names that sounded well in Backwards English! "Edward Hall," for example, was all right in ordinary English, but it was terrible the other way around—"Drawde Llah" didn't sound like anything. But "Robert Robinson"—there was a name! If you turned it backwards and softened the "s," it was transformed into a name as strange and fantastic as that of an ambassador from some foreign land—"Trebor Nosnibor"! Edward put his two ambitions in life together and whispered under his breath, "Introducing the President of the United States, Mr. Trebor Nosnibor!" How glorious! Edward sighed.

His older sister squeezed through the broken place in the lattice and squatted down beside him. Eleanor was taller and thinner than Edward, and she wore glasses because her eyes were weak. Her hair was red, like his, and it hung in a long pigtail down the middle of her back. Eleanor was very fond of a boy in her class named Benjamin Parks. She switched her long pigtail over her shoulder and stared earnestly through the broken slats. "Someone's coming," she said, "and you know who it is? It's Mr. Preek! What do you suppose he wants with Aunt Lily?"

Mr. Preek was the president of the bank and a selectman. With him was his secretary, Miss Prawn. These two

sterling citizens of Concord had decided to take matters into their own hands. In their opinion this affair of the Halls had been allowed to slide along (in the most slipshod way) for far too many years. It was high time some responsible persons did something about it. They meant to, and here they were.

Their faces were grim. Mr. Preek wore a large grim vest. Miss Prawn was swathed about in a grim black cape, although it was a nice warm day in June. She poked her foot at a stove-in place in the porch floor and pursed up her lips.

Aunt Lily came to the door. Her face went white when she saw who her visitors were. "Come in," she said.

The visitors stayed exactly ten minutes. When they came out, Eleanor and Edward were still under the porch, listening through the hole in the floor.

"As soon as I possibly can," said Aunt Lily.

"Seven hundred and twelve dollars is a great deal of money in back taxes. Miss Hall," said Miss Prawn.

"This property would bring a great deal more if you sold it for the price of the land," said Mr. Preek.

"But our house is on it," said Aunt Lily.

"Tear it down and live somewhere else," said Mr. Preek. "Good day. Miss Hall."

Edward and Eleanor listened. They could hear the thump-thump of Mr. Preek's feet, going down the steps, and the crack-crack of Miss Prawn's. Aunt Lily shut the door so quietly it made no noise at all.

Mr. Preek stopped at the gate and looked back. Miss Prawn looked back, too, and shook her head. They were talking about the house. Eleanor and Edward, hidden under the porch, listened with all their ears.

“A monstrosity, of course,” Mr. Preek was saying. “Those dreadful towers, those turrets.”

“And on such holy ground,” said Miss Prawn, “the sacred soil of Concord, cradle of American liberty.”

“Where the Minutemen fought the first battle of the American Revolution,” said Mr. Preek, “on the nineteenth of April in 1775 at the Old North Bridge!”

“As the crow flies,” said Miss Prawn, flapping her black cloak and looking like a crow herself, “hardly a mile from this spot!”

“And do you realize, Miss Prawn,” said Mr. Preek, “that this ghastly object is within full view of the home of Ralph Waldo Emerson?” He gazed sadly across the field at the stream of tourists going and coming from Emerson’s square white house. “What must they think?” he said.

“And of course,” said Miss Prawn, “it’s scarcely a quarter of a mile from Orchard House, home of Louisa May Alcott, don’t forget that!”

“How could I?” said Mr. Preek. “How could I forget the author of *Little Women*?”

“And let me remind you, too, Mr. Preek, that this house stands on the very street that leads to Walden Pond, Henry Thoreau’s Walden Pond. Did I ever tell

you?” said Miss Prawn. “My own dear grandfather put Henry Thoreau in jail!”

“No!” said Mr. Preek. “You never told me! What a glorious heritage!” His brow darkened and he shook his fist at the Hall’s big house. “This blot, this stain must come down!”

“Those Halls haven’t a leg to stand on, legally,” said Miss Prawn.

Mr. Preek looked smug. “No, indeed,” he said. “Within the year we’ll have it for unpaid taxes, and then—”

(Eleanor and Edward, listening under the porch, stiffened. “Then *what?*” whispered Eddy fiercely.)

Mr. Preek was smiling nastily. He made a gesture like someone striking a match. He held out the hand with the invisible match in the direction of the house. Miss Prawn clapped her hands. “Out in the street they’ll be, the four of them!” said Mr. Preek.

This was too much for Edward. He shot through the broken lattice and planted himself in front of Mr. Preek and Miss Prawn. “SUMATOPOPIH!” cried Edward. (Mr. Preek was quite stout.)

“No, no!” shouted Eleanor, still under the porch on hands and knees.

Miss Prawn and Mr. Preek recoiled from small dirty Eddy and then brushed past him. “Stark raving mad, the lot of them!” said Miss Prawn loudly. “*Everybody* knows it.”

“KCITSMOORB!” shouted Edward. (Miss Prawn was

rather thin.) Miss Prawn and Mr. Preek looked a little frightened. They scuttled on down the street without looking back.

Eleanor was giggling hysterically. "Oh, Eddy," she said, "you shouldn't have."