Molesworth Mrs.

Mary: A Nursery Story for Very Little Children

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Содержание

Mrs.Molesworth
Mary

Chapter One.
A Birthday Morning

One morning Mary awoke very early. It was in the month of May, and the mornings were light, and sometimes the sun shone in through the windows very brightly. Mary liked these mornings. The sunshine made everything in the room look so pretty; even the nursery furniture, which was no longer very new or fresh, seemed quite shiny and sparkling, as if fairy fingers had been rubbing it up in the night.

"I wonder what day it is," thought Mary. It was difficult for her to remember the days, for she was not yet four years old. She was only going to be four soon. Mamma had told her her birthday would come in May, and that this year it would be on a Thursday. And every day, ever since Mary knew that May had come, she wondered if it was Thursday. But it was rather puzzling. Two Thursdays had come without it being her birthday.

"P'raps mamma has made a mistook," thought Mary. "P'raps my birfday isn't going to be in May this time."

For if it changed about from one day to another – last year

it was Wednesday, and next year it would be – oh, it was too difficult to remember that – mightn't it change out of May too? Mary didn't think months were quite so difficult to remember as days, for different things came in months. In April there were showers, and in May flowers. Nurse had told her that, and when the months with the long names came it would be winter.

"I hope it isn't a mistook," thought Mary. "I'd like it best to be in May. 'MAY' is such a nice short little word, and only one letter more makes it 'Mary.' No, I think it can't be a mistook." Mary could read very well, and she could spell little words. She had learnt to read when she was so little that she could not remember it. She thought knitting and cross-stitch work were much harder than reading. But she had to learn them, because mamma said too much reading was not good for such a little girl, and would make her head ache, and mamma bought her pretty coloured wools and nice short knitting needles, and Mary had made a carpet for the drawing-room of her doll-house. But though it looked very pretty Mary still liked reading best. She had also worked a kettle-holder for grandmamma: that is to say she had worked the stitches all round the picture of a kettle, which was already on the canvas when mamma bought it. Mamma called it "grounding it," and while she was working it, Mary often wondered what "grounding" it meant, for a kettle-holder was not meant to lie on the ground. She might have asked mamma to explain, but somehow she did not. She was not a very asking child. Big people did not always understand, not even mamma *quite* always, and

it made Mary feel very strange when they did not understand; it almost made her cry. Though even that she did not mind as much as when they told her she would know when she got big. She did not want to wait to know things till when she got big. It made her feel all hot to think what a lot of knowing there would be to do then, it seemed like a very big hill standing straight up in front of her which she would never get to the top of. She thought she would rather go up it in what she called "a roundy-round way." Papa had shown her that way once when it took her breath away to climb up one of the "mountings" – Mary always called hills "mountings" – in grandmamma's garden, and Mary had never forgotten it. She thought the hill of knowing would be much nicer to go up that way, and that she might begin it now – just a little bit at a time. She thought this all quite plain inside her own mind, but she could not have told it to anybody. Very often it is not till children *are* quite big that they can tell their own thoughts, looking back upon them. And Mary did not know that she *was* going up the hill of knowing already, a little bit at a time, just as she fancied she would like to go.

Mary felt glad when she had settled it in her mind that it could not be a mistake about her birthday coming on a Thursday, and she lay quite still, watching the sunshine. It had got on to her bed by now, and it made all sorts of nice things on the counterpane. Mary's bed was rather a big one for such a little girl, for the cot she used to have was now her brother Artie's; Artie slept now in Leigh's room, and there was only a corner there for quite a small

bed. Leigh was the big brother of Artie and Mary. He was eight years old.

Yes, the sunshine made the counterpane very pretty. It was quite white, and as Mary's home was in the country, white things did not get a grey dull look as they do in London. There were patterns all over the counterpane, and if Mary bumped up her knees she could make fancies to suit the patterns – like garden paths leading to beautiful castles, or robber caves – the boys told her stories of robber caves which were very interesting, though rather frightening. And this morning the light shone on a pattern she had never noticed so much before. It was a round ring, just in the middle, and flowers and leaves seemed growing inside it.

"It's a fairy ring," thought Mary; "I wonder if the fairies p'raps come and dance on it when I'm asleep." For she had seen fairy rings on the grass in the fields sometimes when she and her brothers were out walking, and nurse had told her about them. Mary had often wished she could get up in the night and go down to the fields to see the fairies, but she knew she could not. She would never be able to open the big door. Besides, it would be naughty to go out without mamma's and nurse's leave. And it would be very cold – even if the moon were shining it would be cold. For Mary had stood in the moonlight once or twice and she knew it did not warm like the sun.

"I suppose they don't burn such big fires in the moon," she thought.

The fancy about the fairy ring on the counterpane was very

nice, for she could think about it and "pertend" she saw the fairies dancing without getting out of her warm nest at the top of the bed at all. She thought she would tell Artie about it and perhaps he would help to make some nice stories of fairy rings. Artie was not always very "listening" to Mary's fancies. He did really like them, but he was afraid of Leigh laughing at him. When Leigh was away, and Artie and Mary were alone together, it was very nice. But very often Leigh wanted Artie to play big things with him, and then Mary had to amuse herself alone. Leigh was not an unkind big brother; he would carry Mary if she was tired, and would have read stories to her, if she had not liked best to read them to herself. But he had quite boy ways, and thought little girls were not much more good than the pretty china figures in his mother's cabinets in the drawing-room.

So Mary was often alone. But she did not mind. She had lots of friends of different kinds. Now and then nurse would say to her, "It would be nice, Miss Mary, if you had a little sister, wouldn't it?"

But Mary shook her head. She did not think so.

"No, zank you," she would say, "I doesn't want a little sister."

The waking so early and the thinking about the sun and the moon and fairy rings and how soon it would be her birthday, began to make Mary rather tired at last. And after a while she fell asleep again without knowing it.

When she woke up for the second time the sun was still shining, though not so brightly as before. And she heard voices

talking in the next room, that was the day-nursery. There was a door open between it and the night-nursery where Mary slept.

"Thursday, 18th May," said one of the voices. "May's a nice month for a baby, and all the summer before it. 'Thursday's child has far to go.' Perhaps little Missie will marry a hofficer and travel to the Injies. Who can say?"

Then there was a little laugh.

"That's Old Sarah," said Mary to herself. Sarah was the housemaid – the upper housemaid, and though she was not *very* old, the children called her so because her niece, who was also called Sarah, was the nursery-maid. "Little Sarah," they sometimes called her. Her father was the gardener, and he and her mother lived in a cottage which the children thought the prettiest house in the world. And sometimes they were allowed, for a very great treat, to go there to tea.

It was Little Sarah who was talking to Old Sarah just now. Mary heard her voice, but as she spoke rather low she could not quite tell what the nursery-maid said. She only heard the last words – it was something about "nurse will tell her."

This put it into Mary's mind that, though it was quite morning now, she had not seen nurse, and yet she must be up and dressed.

"Nurse," she called out in her little clear voice. "Nurse, where are you?"

The two Sarahs popped their heads in at the door.

"Are you awake, Miss Mary?" asked Little Sarah.

"In course I'm awake. You heard me calling," said Mary.

She thought Little Sarah was very stupid sometimes.

"I'm calling nurse," Mary went on, "I don't want you, Little Sarah. You can go and dress Master Artie."

If Little Sarah was rather stupid, she was also very good-natured. She glanced at Mary with a smile, but with rather an odd look on her face too.

"What does you want? What is you looking at me for?" said Mary.

"Oh, nothing," said Sarah. "I was only thinking whatever would you do without nurse if – if nurse was busy and couldn't be so much with you, Miss Mary."

"Nurse wouldn't never be busy like that," said Mary.

"Oh, well, never mind. I'll dress Master Artie and I dare say nurse – " began Sarah, but she stopped short. Nurse just then came into the room.

"Here's Miss Mary worretting for you," said the girl.

Nurse hurried up to the little girl's bed.

"Have you been awake long, my dear?" she said. "I'm so sorry."

"Nurse," whispered Mary, pulling nurse's head close down so that she could whisper to her, "I heard Old Sarah and Little Sarah talking, and Old Sarah sayed 'Thursday' and 'May.' Is it my birfday comed, nurse? Mamma sayed it was coming in May, and it would be Thursday."

"My dearie," said nurse, "you've guessed right. It is your birthday – the 18th of May."

Mary felt pleased, but also a little disappointed. She had been waiting for her birthday and thinking about it for such a long time that now she could scarcely believe it had come. For it seemed just like other days. No, not quite like other days, not as nice. For nurse had got up so early and Old Sarah and Little Sarah had been talking in the nursery – she did not like anybody to talk like that in the nursery.

"Dress me quick, please, nurse," she said, "and then I'll go to mamma's room, and then p'raps my birfday will begin. I don't think it can have beginned yet. I thought – " and then she stopped and her lips quivered a little.

"What, my dearie?" said nurse.

She was a very kind, understanding nurse always, but this morning she spoke even more kindly than other mornings to Mary.

"I don't know," said Mary. "I think I thought mamma would come to kiss me in bed like a fairy, and – and – I thought there'd be stockings or somefin' like that – like Kissimas, you know."

Nurse had lifted Mary out of her bath by this time, and was rubbing her with a nice large "soft-roughey" towel – "soft-roughey" was one of Mary and Artie's words – it meant the opposite of "prick-roughey." They did not like "prick-roughey" things. She wrapped Mary all round in the big towel for a minute; it was nice and warm, for it had been hanging in front of the fire; then she gave Mary a little hug.

"You mustn't be unhappy, dear Miss Mary," she said.

“Mamma meant to come, I’m sure, but she’s fast asleep – and when she wakes I’m afraid she’ll have a headache. So I’m afraid your birthday won’t be quite like what you planned. But I’m sure there’ll be some pretty presents for you – quite sure.”

But Mary looked up with her lips quivering still more, and the tears beginning to come too.

“It isn’t presents I want,” she said. “Not presents like that way. I – I want mamma. Mammas shouldn’t have headaches. It takes away all the birfday-ness.”

Then she turned her head round and pressed it in to nurse’s shoulder and burst into tears.

Chapter Two.
Guessing

Poor nurse was very sorry. But she knew it would not do to be *too* sorry for Mary, for then she would go on crying. And once Mary got into a long cry it sometimes went on to be a very long one indeed. So nurse spoke to her quite brightly.

"My dearie," she said, "you mustn't cry on your birthday morning. It's quite a mistake. Look up, dear. See, the sun's coming out so beautiful again, and we'll have Master Leigh and Master Artie calling for their breakfast. And you'll have to be quick, for your papa gave me a message to say you were to go down to see him in the dining-room."

Mary gave a little wriggle, though she still kept her face hidden. But as nurse went on talking she slowly turned round so that her dressing could go on.

"I've something to say to you before you go down," nurse went on. "There's something that's come just in time for your birthday. I'll give you each two guesses – you and Master Leigh and Master Artie, while you're eating your breakfast."

Mary looked up.

"Where's my hankercher?" she said, and when nurse gave it to her she wiped her eyes.

That was a good sign.

"Let me have my guesses now, nursey," she said coaxingly.

But nurse kept to what she had said.

"No, dear, guesses are much nicer when there's two or three together. Besides, we must be very quick. See, there's your nice frock all ready."

And Mary saw, where nurse pointed to, one of her Sunday afternoon frocks lying on a chair. It was a blue one – blue with tiny white stripes, and Mary was very fond of it. It had a very pretty wide sash, just the same colour, and there were little bows on her shoes the same colour too. Her face got quite smiley when she saw all these things. She was not a vain little girl and she did not care about fine clothes, but it gave her a nice feeling that, after all, her birthday was going to be something different to other days.

Soon she was dressed; her hair, which was not very long but soft and shaggy and of a pretty brown colour, combed out so that no tuggy bits were left; her hands as clean as a little girl's hands could be; a nice white pinafore on the top of the pretty blue frock, so that Mary felt that, as nurse said, she was quite fit to go to see the Queen, if the Queen had asked her.

And when she went into the day-nursery things seemed to get still nicer. There were no bowls of bread and milk, but a regular "treat" breakfast set out. Tea-cups for herself and the boys, and dear little twists of bacon, and toast – toast in a toast-rack – and some honeycomb in a glass dish.

"Oh," said Mary, "it *is* my birfday. I'm quite sure now there's

no mistook."

And in a minute Leigh and Artie came running in. I do not know, by the by, that Leigh came *running*, most likely he was walking, for he was rather a solemn sort of boy, but Artie made up for it. He scarcely ever walked. He was always hopping or jumping or turning head over heels, he could *almost* do wheels, like a London street boy. And this morning he came in with an extra lot of jumps because it was Mary's birthday.

"You thought we'd forgotten, Leigh and me, now didn't you?" he said. "But we hadn't a bit. It was Leigh said you liked the bacon twisted up and it was me reminded about the honey. Wasn't it now, nurse? And we've got a present for you after breakfast. It's downstairs with papa's and mamma's. We'll give you them all of us together, Mary."

But the mention of mamma brought a cloud again to Mary's face.

"Nursey says mamma's dot a headache, and we can't see her. Not Mary on her birfday."

At this Leigh looked up.

"Is that true?" he said. "Is mamma ill?"

"She's asleep, Master Leigh, and she may sleep a good while. I dare say you'll all see her when she wakes."

"Her shouldn't be 'nill on my birfday," began Mary again.

"Rubbish, Mary," said Leigh. "I dare say she'll be all right. And you should be sorry for mamma if she's ill; it isn't her fault."

"I am sorry," said Mary dolefully; "that's why I can't help

crying."

"Come now, Miss Mary," began nurse. "You're forgetting what we fixed. No crying on a birthday, my dear. And you're forgetting about the guesses. I'm going to give you two guesses each, Master Leigh and Master Artie and Miss Mary, about what's come just in time for her birthday. Now don't speak for a minute, but think it well over while you go on with your breakfast."

There was a silence then; all the children looked very grave, though their thinking did not prevent their enjoying their nice breakfast.

"Now, Master Leigh," said nurse, "you guess first."

"A pony," said Leigh. "A new pony instead of Dapple Grey who's getting too old to trot." Nurse shook her head.

"No, it's not a new pony. Besides, I don't think Miss Mary would care as much for a new pony as you boys would."

"No," Mary agreed. "I don't want no pony but Dapple Grey. Nother ponies trot too fast." Leigh thought again. This time he tried to make his guess some quite "girl" thing.

"A doll – a big doll for Mary," he said.

Nurse smiled. No, it was not that – at least – "A wax doll, do you mean, Master Leigh?"

"Yes, a wax doll. But I don't *think* it could be a doll, for that could have been got already for a birthday present, and this is quite an *extra* present, isn't it?" said Leigh.

"Yes, *quite* extra," said nurse. "But now it's Master Artie's

turn."

Artie's ideas were very jumbled. He did not keep the inside of his head in nearly such good order as Leigh kept his. First he guessed "a fine day for Mary's birthday," as if any "guessing" could be needed for a thing which was already there before their eyes. Then he guessed a *very* big cake for tea, which was not a very clever guess, as a nice big cake on a birthday was an "of course." So now it came to Mary's own guesses. She looked up eagerly.

"For us all to be doo – " Then with a great effort, for Mary was growing a big girl and wanted to speak quite rightly, "to be g-ood all day. Kite g-ood."

"That would be very nice," said nurse, "and I hope it will come true, but that's more wishing than guessing, Miss Mary. It's something that's come, not going to come, that I want you to guess about."

Mary's face grew very grave. Then it smiled again.

"I know," she said, "mamma's headache to g-go away, now, jimmedjetly, and then we'll go and see her."

"I hope it will," said nurse. "But that wasn't the guess."

She saw that Mary was too little quite to understand.

"See if I can't help you," she said. "What would you like best of anything? Don't you think a doll that could learn to speak and love you and play with you would be a nice birthday present?"

Artie and Mary looked puzzled. They had to think about it. But Leigh was quicker.

"Why, nurse," he said, "a doll like that would be a *living*– oh nurse, I do believe – " but just as he was going to say more there came a tap at the door, and Robert, the footman, came in.

"If you please, Mrs Barley," he began. "Barley" was nurse's own name, and, of course, the other servants were all very respectful, and always called her "Mrs Barley."

"Master wants the young gentlemen and Miss Mary now at once, if so be as they've finished their breakfast."

"I think you should say 'Miss Mary and the young gentlemen,' Robert," said Leigh.

"Specially as it's Mary's birthday," said Artie.

"Oh rubbish," said Leigh; "birthday or no birthday, it's proper."

"I beg the young lady's pardon," said Robert, who was a very well brought up footman. "I'm sure I meant no offence," and he looked towards Mary, but just then he could not see anything of her. For while her brothers were correcting Robert, Mary had been employing herself in getting down from her chair, which took a good while, as it was high and she was very short. Nothing but a sort of fluff of blue skirts and sash and white muslin pinafore and shaggy hair, with here and there a shoe or a little pink hand sticking out, was to be seen. Robert sprang forwards, meaning to be extra polite and set Miss Mary right side uppermost again, but in some mysterious way she managed to get on her feet by herself.

"No, zank you, Robert," she said with dignity, as she stood

there with a rather red face, smoothing down her pinafore. "I can get down alone."

"Miss Mary, my dear," said nurse. "I'm always telling you to ask me to lift you down. The chair will topple over some day and you'll be hurting yourself badly."

"But, nurse, I'm *four*, now," said Mary. "Four is big."

"Of course it is," said Leigh. "Never mind, nurse. The best plan will be for me to hold her chair while she gets down. Are you ready, Artie? Mary and I are."

Artie had managed to "honey" his face and hands, and nurse thought Mary too would not be the worse for a slight sponging.

"Papa likes a sweet kiss, but not a honey one," she said.

But at last they were all ready and on their way down to the dining-room, where they came upon Robert again, ready to throw open the door with great dignity, as he had hurried down the back stairs on purpose to be there before them.

Papa was just finishing *his* breakfast. He looked up with a bright smile.

"Well, young people," he said. "Well, my pet," this was to Mary. "So this is your birthday, my little queen – eh?"

He lifted her on to his knee and kissed her.

Mary loved when papa called her his little queen.

"I have to be off immediately," he said, "but first I have to give you your birthday presents from dear mamma and me."

"And ours, papa, Leigh's and mine. They're all together – mamma put them all together," said Artie.

"All right. They are over there on the side-table. You fetch them," said papa.

"Are you going to a meeting, father?" asked Leigh.

"Yes, my boy, to lots of meetings. I shan't be back till late to-night."

"What are meetings?" Mary was just going to ask, but the sight of Artie and the parcels put it out of her head. There was a beautiful doll's perambulator from papa and mamma, and "a church book," bound in red, and with "Mary" outside, in lovely gold letters; and from Leigh and Artie, a doll's tea-service – cups and saucers and teapot and everything – in white china with little pink flowers, and dear little teaspoons of shining silver, or at least quite as pretty as silver. And then there was the birthday cake – covered with white sugar and with "Mary" in pink letters. There was no fear of Mary forgetting her name this birthday, was there?

How her eyes sparkled, and how quick her breath came with pleasure, and how rosy her cheeks grew!

"Oh papa," she said, "oh Leigh, oh Artie!" and for a minute or two that was all she could say.

"Are you pleased, my pet?" said papa.

"Oh, I *never*, never did have such sp'endid presents," said Mary.

"Dear little Mary," said Artie, kissing her. "I am so glad you like them."

Then another thought struck Mary, as she stood touching gently one of her treasures after the other, as if she did not know

which she loved the most.

"Papa, dear," she said, "can't I see dear mamma? I would like to zank dear mamma."

"And so you shall, my pet," said her father. And he picked her up as he spoke and seated her on his shoulder. Mary was very fond of riding on papa's shoulder. "Come along, boys," he said, "you may come with me, if you won't be noisy, to see mamma and something else – Mary's best birthday present of all."

"Anoder birfday present," said Mary, so surprised that she felt quite breathless. "*Anoder*, papa?"

"Yes, old woman – you couldn't guess what, if you tried for a week of Sundays," said papa.

Papa did say such funny things sometimes! Mary would have begun wondering what a week of Sundays could be like, if her thoughts had not been so busy with the idea of another birthday present, that she could not take in anything else.

What *could* it be?

"There's been nothing but guessing to-day," said Artie. "Nurse *was* making us guess so at breakfast, about something that's comed for Mary's birthday. Could it be this other present, papa? I'm tired of guessing."

"Well, don't guess any more," said papa. "I'm going to show you."

Chapter Three.
A Wonderful Birthday Present

There was a room next to Mary's mother's room which was not often used. Mary was rather surprised when her father carried her straight to this room instead of to her mother's. And when he lifted her down from his shoulder she was still more surprised to see that there was a nice little fire burning in the grate, and that the room looked quite cheerful and almost like another nursery, with a rocking-chair in front of the fire, and the blinds drawn up to let the pretty summer morning brightness in.

There was something in the corner of the room which Mary would have stared at a great deal if she had seen it. But just now she did not look that way, for she was surprised for the third time by seeing that a door stood open in the corner near the window, where she had never known before that there was a door.

"Where does that go to, papa?" she said, and she was running forward to look when her father stopped her.

"It goes into mamma's room, my pet," he said, "but I don't want you to go in there yet. Perhaps mamma's asleep."

"It's all dark," said Mary; she had been peeping in. She felt rather strange, and a very tiny, weeny bit frightened. Everything seemed "funny" this birthday morning. She almost felt as if she was dreaming.

"Why is mamma's room all dark?" she said again. "Is her asleep?"

"I'm not sure, dear. Wait here a minute and I'll see," and her father went into the next room, closing the door a little after him.

Mary and her brothers stood looking at each other. What was going to happen?

"It's to be a surprise, I s'pose," said Artie.

"It's the guesses, *I* say," said Leigh.

"It's a birfday present for me. Papa said so," said Mary.

"We're speaking like the three bears," said Artie laughing. "Let's go on doing it. It's rather fun. You say something, Leigh – say 'somebody's been in my bed' – that'll do quite well. Say it very growlily."

"Somebody's been in my bed," said Leigh, as growlily as he could. Leigh was a very good-natured boy, you see.

"Now, it's my turn," said Artie, and he tried to make his voice into a kind of gruff squeak that he thought would do for the mamma bear's talking. "Somebody's been in *my* bed," he said. "Come along, Mary, it's you now."

Mary was laughing by this time.

"Somebody," she began in a queer little peepy tone, "somebody's – " but suddenly a voice from the other side of the door made them all jump.

"My dear three bears," it said – it was papa, of course, "be so good as to shut your eyes *tight* till I tell you to open them, and then Mary can finish." They did shut their eyes – they heard papa

come into the room and cross over to the corner which they had not looked at. Then there was a little rustling – then he called out:

"All right. Open your eyes. Now, Mary, Tiny Bear, fire away. Somebody's lying – "

"In my bed," said Mary, as she opened her eyes, thinking to herself how *very* funny papa was.

But when her eyes were quite open she did stare. For there he was beckoning to her from the corner where he was standing beside a dear little bed, all white lace or muslin – Mary called all sorts of stuff like that "lace" – and pink ribbons.

"Oh," said Mary, running across the room, "that's *my* bed. Mamma showed it me one day. It were my bed when I was a little girl."

"Of course, it's your bed," said her father. "I told you to be Tiny Bear and say, 'somebody's lying in my bed.' Somebody *is* lying in your bed. Look and see."

Mary raised herself up on her tiptoes and peeped in. On the soft white pillow a little head was resting – a little head with dark fluffy curls all over it – Mary could not see all the curls, for there was a flannel shawl drawn round the little head, but she could see the face and the curls above the forehead. "It," this wonderful new doll, seemed to be asleep – its eyes were shut, and its mouth was a tiny bit open, and it was breathing very softly. It had a dear little button of a nose, and it was rather pink all over. It looked very cosy and peaceful, and there seemed a sweet sort of lavendery scent all about the bed and the pretty new flannel

blankets and the embroidered coverlet. That *was* pretty – white cashmere worked with tiny rosebuds. Mary remembered seeing her mamma working at it, and it was lined with pale pink silk. But just then, though Mary saw all these things and noticed them, yet, in another way, she did not see them. For all her real seeing and noticing went to the living thing in this dear little nest, the little, soft, sleeping, breathing face, that she gazed at as if she could never leave off. And behind her, gazing too, though Mary had the best place, of course, as it was her birthday and she was a girl – behind her stood her brothers. For a few seconds, which seemed longer to the children, there was perfect silence in the room. It was a strange wonderful silence. Mary never forgot it.

Her breath came fast, her heart seemed to beat in a different way, her little face, which was generally rather pale, grew flushed. And then at last she turned to her father who was waiting quietly. He did not want to interrupt them. "Like as if we were saying our prayers, wasn't it?" Artie said afterwards. But when Mary turned she felt that he had been watching them all the time, and there was a *very* nice smile on his face.

"Papa," she said. She seemed as if she could not get out another word, "papa – is it?"

"Yes, darling," he replied, "it is. It's a baby sister. Isn't that the nicest present you ever had?"

Then there came back to Mary what she had often said about "not wanting a baby sister," and she could scarcely believe she had ever felt like that. She was sorry to remember she had said

it, only she knew she had not understood about it.

"I never thought her would be so pretty," she said. "I never thought her would be so sweet. Oh papa, her is a *lubly* birfday present! When her wakes up, mayn't I kiss her?"

"Of course you may, and hold her in your arms if you are very careful," said her father, looking very pleased. He had been very anxious for Mary to love the baby a great deal, for sometimes "next-to-the-baby" children are rather jealous and cross at being no longer the pet and the youngest. It was a very good thing he and her mamma agreed that the baby had come as a birthday present to Mary.

The idea of holding her in her own arms was so delightful that again for a moment or two Mary felt as if she could not speak.

"And what do you two fellows think of your new sister?" said papa, turning to the boys. Leigh leant over the cradle and peered in very earnestly.

"She's something like," he said slowly, "something like those very tiny little ducklings," and seeing a smile on his father's face he went on to explain, though he grew rather red, "I don't know what makes me think that. She looks so soft and cosy, I suppose. You know the little ducklings, papa? They're like balls of fluffy down."

"I don't think she's a bit like them," said Artie, who in his turn had been having a good examination of the baby. "I think she's more like a very little monkey. Do you remember that tiny monkey with a pink face, that sat on the organ in the street at

grandmamma's one day, Leigh? It *was* like her."

He spoke quite gravely. He had admired the monkey very much. He did not at all mean that the new baby was not pretty, and his father's smile grew rather comical.

"See how she scroozles up her face," he went on; "she's *just* like the monkey now. It was a very nice monkey, you know, papa."

But Mary was not pleased. She had never seen a monkey, but there was a picture of one for the letter "M" in what she called her "animal book," and she did not think it pretty at all.

"No," she said, "no, Artie, her's not a' inch like a monkey. Her's *booful*, just booful, and monkeys isn't."

Then suddenly she gave a little cry.

"Oh papa, dear, do look," she called out, "her's openin' her eyes. I never 'amembered her could open her eyes," and Mary nearly danced with delight.

Yes indeed, Miss Baby was opening her eyes and more than her eyes – her little round mouth opened too, and she began to cry – quite loud!

Mary had heard babies cry before now, of course, but somehow everything about *this* baby was too wonderful. She did not seem at all like the babies Mary saw sometimes when she was out walking; she was like herself and not anything else.

Mary's face grew red again when she heard the baby cry.

"Oh papa, dear," she said. "Has her hurt herself?"

"No, no, she's all right," said papa. But all the same he did not

take baby out of her cot – papas are very fond of their babies of course, but I do not think they like them *quite* so much when they cry – instead of that, he turned towards the door leading into the next room.

"Nurse," he said in a low voice, but nurse heard him.

"Yes, sir," said a voice, in reply, and then came another surprise for Mary. The person who came quickly into the room was not "nurse" at all, but somebody quite different, though she had a nice face and was very neatly dressed. Who could she be? The world did seem *very* upside down this birthday morning to Mary!

"Nurse," she repeated to her father, with a very puzzled look.

"Yes, dear," said the stranger, "I'm come to be baby's nurse. You see she needs so much taking care of just now while she's still so very little – your nurse wouldn't have time to do it all."

"No," said Mary, "I think it's a good plan," and she gave a little sigh of satisfaction. She loved the baby dearly already and she would have been quite ready to give her anything – any of her toys or pretty things, if they would have pleased her – but still she did feel it would have been rather hard for *her* nurse to be so busy all day that she could not take care of Artie and her as usual.

The strange nurse smiled. Mary was what people call an "old-fashioned" child, and one of her funny expressions was saying anything that she liked was "a good plan." She stood staring with all her eyes as the nurse cleverly lifted baby out of the cot and laid her on her knee in a comfortable way, so that she left off

crying. But her eyes were still open, and Mary came close to look at them.

"Is her going to stay awake now?" she said. "Perhaps she will, for a little while," said the nurse. "But such very tiny babies like to sleep a great deal."

Mary stood quite still. She felt as if she could stay there all day just looking at the baby – every moment she found out some new wonder about her.

"Her's got ears," she said at last.

"Of course she has," said the strange nurse. "You wouldn't like her to be deaf?"

"Baby," said Mary, but baby took no notice.

"Her *it* deaf," she went on, looking very disappointed. "Her doesn't look at me when I call her."

"No, my dear," said the nurse. "She hasn't learnt yet to understand. It will take a good while. You will have to be very patient. Little babies have a great, great deal to learn when they first come into this world. Just think what a great many things you have learnt yourself since you were a baby, Miss Mary."

Mary looked at her. She had never thought of this.

"I wasn't never so little, was I?" she said.

"Yes, quite as little. And you couldn't speak, or stand, or walk, or do anything except what this little baby does."

This was very strange to think of. Mary thought about it for a moment or two without speaking. Then she was just going to ask some more questions, when she heard her father's voice.

"Mary," he said, "mamma is awake and you may come in and get a birthday kiss. Leigh and Artie are waiting for you to have the first kiss as you're the queen of the day."

"I'd like there to be two queens," said Mary, as she trotted across to her father. "'Cos of baby coming on my birfday. When will her have a birfday of hers own?" she went on, stopping short on her way when this thought came into her head.

Her father laughed as he picked her up.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait a whole year for that," he said. "Next year, if all's well, your birthday and baby's will come together."

"Oh, that will be nice," said Mary, but then for a minute or two she forgot all about baby, as her father lifted her on to her mother's bed to get the birthday kiss waiting for her.

"My pet," said her mother, "are you pleased with your presents, and are you having a happy day?" Mary put up her little hand and stroked her mother's forehead, on which some little curls of pretty brown were falling.

"Mamma dear," she said, "your hair isn't very tidy. Shall I call Larkin to brush it smoove?" and she began to scramble off the bed to go to fetch the maid.

"What a little fidget you are," said her mother. "Never mind about my hair. I want you to tell me what you think of your little sister."

"I think her *sweet*," said Mary. "And her curls is somefin like yours, mamma. But Leigh says hers like little ducks, and Artie

says hers like a pink monkey."

Mamma began to laugh at this, quite loud. But just then the nurse put her head in at the door.

"Baby's opening her eyes so wide, Miss Mary," she said. "Do come and look at her, and you, Master Leigh and Master Artie too. You shall come and see your mamma again in the afternoon."

So they all three went back into the other room to have another look at baby.

"I say, children," called their father after them. "We've got to fix what baby's to be called. It'll take a lot of thinking about, so you must set your wits to work, and tell me to-morrow what name you like best."

Chapter Four.
Babies

There was plenty to think of all that day. Mary's little head had never been so full, and before bedtime came she began to feel quite sleepy.

It had been a very happy day, even though everything seemed rather strange. Their father would have liked to stay with them, but he was obliged to go away. Nurse – I mean Artie's and Mary's own nurse – was *very* good to them, and so were cook and all the other servants. The birthday dinner was just what Mary liked – roast chicken and bread-sauce and little squirly rolls of bacon, and a sponge-cake pudding with strawberry jam. And there was a very nice tea, too; the only pity was that baby could not have any of the good things, because, as nurse explained, she had no teeth.

"She'll have some by next birthday, won't she?" asked Leigh.

"I hope so, poor dear," said nurse, "though she'll scarcely be able to eat roast chicken by then."

"Why do you say 'poor dear'?" asked Leigh.

"Because their teeth coming often hurts babies a good deal," said nurse.

"It would be much better if they were all ready," said Leigh. "I don't see why they shouldn't be. Baby's got hands and eyes and everything else – why shouldn't she have teeth?"

"I'm sure I can't say, Master Leigh," nurse answered. "There's many things we can't explain."

Mary opened her mouth wide and began tugging at her own little white teeth.

"Them doesn't hurt me," she said.

"Ah but they did, Miss Mary," said nurse. "Many a night you couldn't sleep for crying with the pain of them, but you can't remember it."

"It's very funny," said Mary.

"What's funny?" asked Leigh.

"About 'amembering," answered Mary, and a puzzled look came into her face. "Can you 'amember when you was a tiny baby, nurse?"

"No, my dear, nobody can," said nurse. "But don't worry yourself about understanding things of that kind."

"There's somefin in my head now that I can't 'amember," said Mary, "somefin papa said. It's that that's teasing me, nurse. I don't like to not 'amember what papa said."

"You must ask him to-morrow, dearie," nurse answered. "You'll give yourself a headache if you go on trying too hard to remember."

"Isn't it *funny* how things go out of our minds like that?" said Leigh. "I'll tell you what I think it is. I think our minds are like cupboards or chests of drawers, and some of the things get poked very far back so that we can't get at them when we want them. You see the newest things are at the front, that's how we can

remember things that have just happened and not things long ago."

"No," said Artie, "'tisn't quite like that, Leigh. For I can remember what we had for dinner on my birthday, and that was very long ago, before last winter, much better than what we had for dinner one day last week."

"I can tell you how that is," said nurse, "what you had for dinner on your birthday made a mark on your mind because it was your birthday. Everything makes marks on our minds, I suppose, but some go deeper than others. That's how it's always seemed to me about remembering and forgetting. And if there's any name I want to remember very much I say it out loud to myself two or three times, and that seems to press it into my mind. Dear, dear, how well I remember doing that way at school when I was a little girl. There was the kings and queens, do what I would, I couldn't remember how their names came, till I got that way of saying two or three together, like 'William and Mary, Anne, George the First,' over and over."

The children listened with great interest to nurse's recollections, the boys especially, that is to say; the talk was rather too difficult for Mary to understand. But her face looked very grave; she seemed to be listening to what nurse said, and yet thinking of something behind it. All at once her eyes grew bright and a smile broke out like a ray of sunshine.

"I 'amember," she said joyfully. "Nursie said her couldn't 'amember names. It was names papa said. He said us was to fink

of a name for baby."

"Oh, is that what you've been fussing about?" said Leigh. "I could have told you that long ago. *I've* fixed what I want her to be called. I've thought of a *very* pretty name."

Mary looked rather sorry.

"I can't fink of any names," she said; "I can only fink of 'Mary.' Can't her be called 'Mary,' 'cos it's my birfday?"

Leigh and Artie both began to laugh.

"What a silly girl you are," said Leigh; "how could you have two people in one family with the same name? Whenever we called 'Mary,' you'd never know if it was you or the baby we meant."

"You could say 'baby Mary,'" said Mary, who did not like to be called a silly girl.

"And when she was big," said Leigh, "how would she like to be called 'baby'?"

Mary had not thought of this, still she would not give in.

"Peoples has the same names," she said. "Papa's name's 'Leigh,' and your name's 'Leigh,' – there now – " and as another idea struck her, "and us *all* is called Bertum. Papa's Mr Bertum and mamma's Mrs Bertum and – and – "

"And you're 'Miss Bertum,'" said Leigh, laughing. "But that's because Bertram is our *family* name, you see, Mary. We've each got a first name too. It doesn't much matter papa and me being the same, except that sometimes I think mamma's calling me when she means papa, but it would never do if Artie and I had

the same name. Fancy, if we were both called 'Artie,' we'd never know which you meant."

"No," said Mary, laughing too, "it would be a very bad plan. I never thought of that. But I *can't* think of a pitty name for dear little baby."

"There's lots," said Artie, who had been sitting very silent – to tell the truth, he had forgotten all about choosing a name, but he did not want to say so. So he had been thinking of all the names he could, so that he might seem quite as ready as Leigh. "There's Cowslip and Buttercup and Firefly and – "

"Nonsense," said Leigh, "considering you're six years old, Artie, you're sillier than Mary. Those are cows' names, and – "

"They're not – not all of them," said Artie, "Firefly's a pony's name. It's little Ella Curry's pony's name, and I think it's very pretty."

"For a pony perhaps," said nurse, "but then you see, Master Artie, your little sister isn't a pony."

"I wish she was," said Leigh, and when nurse looked up astonished he looked rather ashamed. "Of course I don't mean that it isn't nice for her to be a little girl," he went on, "but I do so wish we had a pony."

"You may just be patient for a while, Master Leigh," said nurse; "you know your papa's promised you a pony when you're ten years old, and by that time baby will be nearly two."

"That won't matter," said Leigh, "even Mary won't be able to ride my pony. It's to be a real sensible one, not a stupid donkey

sort of pony, with panniers or a basket on its back."

"No," said Artie, "it's to be a galoppy-trot one! Won't we make him go, Leigh."

"I shall," said Leigh; "you won't have much to say to it. You'll be too little too."

Artie's face fell. Mary, who was sitting beside him, slipped her little hand into his.

"Nebber mind, Artie," she said. "We'll ask papa to give us anoder pony. A very gentle one for you and me and baby."

"A perambulator will be more in baby's way," said nurse. "Miss Mary's old one is quite worn out and they do make such pretty ones nowadays. I hope your mamma will get her a very nice one."

"And may we push it sometimes?" said Artie, brightening up again, "that would be nice."

Leigh gave a little laugh.

"What a baby you are, Artie," he was beginning, but nurse, who saw that he was in one of his teasing humours, looked up quickly.

"It's such a fine evening," she said, "and it's scarcely five o'clock. How would you like to go out a little walk? We didn't go very far to-day. We might go as far as the Lavender Cottages, I've something to take there from your mamma."

The boys looked very pleased.

"Oh yes, nurse," they said, "do let's go out."

"And mayn't we stop and see the puppies at the smithy on the

way?" Leigh went on.

"I'm f'ightened of those little barky dogs," said Mary; "I don't want to go out, nurse, I'm sleepy."

"It'll do you good, my dear, to have a little walk before you go to bed; you'll sleep all the better for it and wake all the fresher in the morning," and a few minutes afterwards, when the little party were walking down the drive, Mary looked quite bright again.

It was a very lovely evening. The way to the Lavender Cottages lay across the fields, and, as every one knows, there is nothing prettier than a long stretch of grass land with the tender spring green lighted up by late afternoon sunshine.

Mary trotted along contentedly, thinking to herself.

"My birfday's going to bed soon," she thought, "and to-morrow morning it'll be gone – gone away for a long, long time," and she gave a little sigh. "But somefins won't be gone away, all my birfday presents will stay, and baby sister will stay, and when my birfday comes back again it will be hers too. Dear little baby sister! I wish her had comed out a walk wif us, the sun is so pitty."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.