

Mistress Mary

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Mistress Mary, quite contrary, How does your garden grow? With dingle bells and cockle shells And cowslips, all in a row.

High upon a cliff that overlooked the sea was a little white cottage, in which dwelt a sailor and his wife, with their two strong sons and a little girl. The sons were also sailors, and had made several voyages with their father in a pretty ship called the "Skylark." Their names were Hobart and Robart. The little girl's name was Mary, and she was very happy indeed when her father and her brothers were at home, for they petted her and played games with her and loved her very dearly. But when the "Skylark" went to sea, and her mother and herself were left alone in the little white cottage, the hours were very dull and tedious, and Mary counted the days until the sailors came home again.

One spring, just as the grasses began to grow green upon the cliff and the trees were dressing their stiff, barren branches in robes of delicate foliage, the father and brothers bade good-bye to Mary and her mother, for they were starting upon a voyage to the Black Sea.

"And how long will you be gone, papa?" asked Mary, who was perched upon her father's knee, where she could nestle her soft cheek against his bushy whiskers.

"How long?" he repeated, stroking her curls tenderly as he spoke; "well, well, my darling, it will be a long time indeed! Do you know the cowslips that grow in the pastures, Mary?"

"Oh, yes; I watch for them every spring," she answered.

"And do you know the dingle-bells that grow near the edge of the wood?" he asked again.

"I know them well, papa," replied Mary, "for often I gather their blue blossoms and put them in a vase upon the table."

"And how about the cockle-shells?"

"Them also I know," said Mary eagerly, for she was glad her father should find her so well acquainted with the field flowers; "there is nothing prettier than the big white flowers of the cockle-shells. But tell me, papa, what have the flowers to do with your coming home?"

"Why, just this, sweetheart," returned the sailor gravely; "all the time that it takes the cowslips and dingle-bells and cockle-shells to sprout from the ground, and grow big and strong, and blossom into flower, and, yes--to wither and die away again--all that time shall your brothers and I sail the seas. But when the cold winds begin to blow, and the flowers are gone, then, God willing, we shall come back to you; and by that time you may have grown wiser and bigger, and I am sure you will have grown older. So one more kiss, sweetheart, and then we must go, for our time is up."

The next morning, when Mary and her mother had dried their eyes, which had been wet with grief at the departure of their loved ones, the little girl asked earnestly,

"Mamma, may I make a flower-garden?"

"A flower-garden!" repeated her mother in surprise; "why do you wish a flower-garden, Mary?"

"I want to plant in it the cockle-shells and the cowslips and the dingle-bells," she answered.

And her mother, who had heard what the sailor had said to his little girl, knew at once what Mary meant; so she kissed her daughter and replied,

"Yes, Mary, you may have the flower-garden, if you wish. We will dig a nice little bed just at the side of the house, and you shall plant your flowers and care for them yourself."

"I think I 'd rather have the flowers at the front of the house," said Mary.

"But why?" enquired her mother; "they will be better sheltered at the side."

"I want them in front," persisted Mary, "for the sun shines stronger there."

"Very well," answered her mother, "make your garden at the front, if you will, and I will help you to dig up the ground."

"But I do n't want you to help," said Mary, "for this is to be my own little flower-garden, and I want to do all the work myself."

Now I must tell you that this little girl, although very sweet in many ways, had one serious fault. She was inclined to be a bit contrary, and put her own opinions and ideas before those of her elders. Perhaps Mary meant no wrong in this; she often thought knew better how to do a thing than others did; and in such a case she was not only contrary, but anxious to have her own way.

And so her mother, who did not like her little daughter to be unhappy, often gave way to her in small things, and now she permitted Mary to make her own garden, and plant it as she would.

So Mary made a long, narrow bed at the front of the house, and then she prepared to plant her flowers.

"If you scatter the seeds," said her mother, "the flower-bed will look very pretty."

Now this was what Mary was about to do; but since her mother advised it, she tried to think of another way, for, as I said, she was contrary at times. And in the end she planted the dingle-bells all in one straight row, and the cockle-shells in another straight row the length of the bed, and she finished by planting the cowslips in another long row at the back.

Her mother smiled, but said nothing; and now, as the days passed by, Mary watered and tended her garden with great care; and when the flowers began to sprout she plucked all the weeds that grew among them, and so in the mild spring weather the plants grew finely.

"When they have grown up big and strong," said Mary one morning, as she weeded the bed, "and when they have budded and blossomed and faded away again, then papa and my brothers will come home. And I shall call the cockle-shells papa, for they are the biggest and strongest; and the dingle-bells shall be brother Hobart, and the cowslips brother Robart. And now I feel as if the flowers were really my dear ones, and I must be very careful that they come to no harm!"

She was filled with joy when one morning she ran out to her flower-garden after breakfast and found the dingle-bells and cowslips were actually blossoming, while even the cockle-shells were showing their white buds. They looked rather comical, all standing in stiff, straight rows, one after the other; but Mary did not mind that.

While she was working she heard the tramp of a horse's hoofs, and looking up saw the big bluff Squire riding toward her. The big Squire was very fond of children, and whenever he rode near the little white cottage he stopped to have a word with Mary. He was old and bald-headed, and he had side-whiskers that were very red in color and very short and stubby; but there was ever a merry twinkle in his blue eyes, and Mary well knew him for her friend.

Now, when she looked up and saw him coming toward her flower-garden, she nodded and smiled to him, and the big bluff Squire rode up to her side, and looked down with a smile at her flowers.

Then he said to her in rhyme (for it was a way of speaking the jolly Squire had),

"Mistress Mary, so contrary, How does your garden grow? With dingle-bells and cockle-shells And cowslips all in a row!"

And Mary, being a sharp little girl, and knowing the Squire's queer ways, replied to him likewise in rhyme, saying,

"I thank you, Squire, that you enquire How well the flowers are growing;
The dingle-bells and cockle-shells And cowslips all are blowing!"

The Squire laughed at this reply, and patted her upon her head, and then he continued,

"'T is aptly said. But prithee, maid, Why thus your garden fill When ev'ry field the same flowers yield To pluck them as you will?"

"That is a long story, Squire," said Mary; "but this much I may tell you,

"The cockle-shell is father's flower, The cowslip here is Robart, The dingle-bell, I now must tell, I've named for Brother Hobart

"And when the flowers have lived their lives In sunshine and in rain, And then do fade, why, papa said He 'd sure come home again."

"Oh, that 's the idea, is it?" asked the big bluff Squire, forgetting his poetry. "Well, it 's a pretty thought, my child, and I think because the flowers are strong and hearty that you may know your father and brothers are the same; and I 'm sure I hope they 'll come back from their voyage safe and sound. I shall come and see you again, little one, and watch the garden grow." And then he said "gee-up" to his gray mare, and rode away.

The very next day, to Mary's great surprise and grief; she found the leaves of the dingle-bells curling and beginning to wither.

"Oh, mamma," she called, "come quick! Something is surely the matter with brother Hobart!"

"The dingle-bells are dying," said her mother, after looking carefully at the flowers; "but the reason is that the cold winds from the sea swept right over your garden last night, and dingle-bells are delicate flowers and grow best where they are sheltered by the woods. If you had planted them at the side of the house, as I wished you to, the wind would not have killed them."

Mary did not reply to this, but sat down and began to weep, feeling at the same time that her mother was right and it was her own fault for being so contrary.

While she sat thus the Squire rode up, and called to her

"Fie, Mary, fie! Why do you cry; And blind your eyes to knowing How
dingle-bells and cockle-shells And cowslips all are growing?"

"Oh, Squire!" sobbed Mary, "I am in great trouble "Each dingle-bell I loved so
well Before my eyes is dying, And much I fear my brother dear In
sickness now is lying!"

"Nonsense!" said the Squire; "because you named the flowers after your brother
Hobart is no reason he should be affected by the fading of the dingle-bells. I very
much suspect the real reason they are dying is because the cold sea wind caught
them last night. Dingle-bells are delicate. If you had scattered the cockle-shells
and cowslips all about them, the stronger plants would have protected the
weaker; but you see, my girl, you planted the dingle-bells all in a row, and so the
wind caught them nicely."

Again Mary reproached herself for having been contrary and refusing to listen to
her mother's advice; but the Squire's words comforted her, nevertheless, and
made her feel that brother Hobart and the flowers had really nothing to do with
each other.

The weather now began to change, and the cold sea winds blew each night over
Mary's garden. She did not know this, for she was always lying snugly tucked up
in her bed, and the warm morning sun usually drove away the winds; but her
mother knew it, and feared Mary's garden would suffer.

One day Mary came into the house where her mother was at work and said,
gleefully,

"Papa and my brothers will soon be home now."

"Why do you think so?" asked her mother.

"Because the cockle-shells and cowslips are both fading away and dying, just as
the dingle-bells did, and papa said when they faded and withered he and the
boys would come back to us."

Mary's mother knew that the harsh winds had killed the flowers before their time,
but she did not like to disappoint her darling, so she only said, with a sigh,

"I hope you are right, Mary, for we both shall be glad to welcome our dear ones
home again."

But soon afterward the big bluff Squire came riding up, as was his wont, to where
Mary stood by her garden, and he at once asked,

"Pray tell me, dear, though much I fear The answer sad I know, How
grow the sturdy cockle-shells And cowslips, all in a row?"

And Mary looked up at him with her bright smile and answered,

"Dingle-bells and cockle-shells And cowslips are all dead, And now my
papa's coming home, For so he surely said."

"Ah," said the Squire, looking at her curiously, "I 'm afraid you are getting way
ahead of time. See here, Mary, how would you like a little ride with me on my
nag?"

"I would like it very much, sir," replied Mary.

"Then reach up your hand. Now!--there you are, little one!" and Mary found
herself seated safely in front of the Squire, who clasped her with one strong arm
so that she could not slip off.

"Now, then," he said "we 'll take a little ride down the hill and by the path that
runs beside the wood."

So he gave the rein to his mare and they rode along, chatting merrily together, till
they came to the wood. Then said the Squire,

"Take a look within that nook And tell me what is there."

And Mary exclaimed,

"A dingle-bell, and truth to tell In full bloom, I declare!"

The Squire now clucked to his nag, and as they rode away he said,

"Now come with me and you shall see A field with cowslips bright And not
a garden in the land Can show so fair a sight."

And so it was, for as they rode through the pastures the cowslips bloomed on
every hand, and Mary's eyes grew bigger and bigger as she thought of her poor
garden with its dead flowers.

And then the Squire took her toward the little brook that wandered through the
meadows, flowing over the pebbles with a soft, gurgling sound that was very
nearly as sweet as music; and when they reached it the big Squire said,

"If you will look beside the brook You 'll see, I know quite well, That
hidden in each mossy nook Is many a cockle-shell."

This was indeed true, and as Mary saw them she suddenly dropped her head and began to weep.

"What 's the matter, little one?" asked the Squire in his kind, bluff voice. And Mary answered,

"Although the flowers I much admire, You know papa did say He won't be home again, Squire, Till all have passed away."

"You must be patient, my child," replied her friend; "and surely you would not have been thus disappointed had you not tried to make the field flowers grow where they do not belong. Gardens are all well enough for fancy flowers to grow in, but the posies that God gave to all the world, and made to grow wild in the great garden of Nature, will never thrive in other places. Your father meant you to watch the flowers in the field; and if you will come and visit them each day, you will find the time waiting very short indeed."

Mary dried her eyes and thanked the kindly old Squire, and after that she visited the fields each day and watched the flowers grow.

And it was not so very long, as the Squire said before the blossoms began to wither and fall away; and finally one day Mary looked out over the sea and saw a little speck upon the waters that looked like a sail. And when it came nearer and had grown larger, both she and her mother saw that it was the "Skylark" come home again, and you can imagine how pleased and happy the sight of the pretty little ship made them.

And soon after, when Mary had been hugged by her two sunburned brothers and was clasped in her father's strong arms, she whispered,

"I knew you were coming soon, papa."

"And how did you know, sweetheart?" he asked, giving her an extra kiss.

"Because I watched the flowers; and the dingle-bells and cowslips and cockle-shells are all withered and faded away. And did you not say that, God willing, when this happened you would come back to us?"

"To be sure I did," answered her father, with a happy laugh; "and I must have spoken truly, sweetheart, for God in His goodness was willing, and here I am!"

The Wond'rous Wise Man

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There was a man in our town And he was wond'rous wise; He jumped into a bramble bush And scratched out both his eyes. And when he saw his eyes were out, With all his might and main He jumped into another bush And scratched them in again!

Our town is a quiet little town, and lies nestling in a little valley surrounded by pretty green hills. I do not think you would ever have heard our town mentioned had not the man lived there who was so wise that everyone marvelled at his great knowledge.

He was not always a wise man; he was a wise boy before he grew to manhood, and even when a child he was so remarkable for his wisdom that people shook their heads gravely and said, "when he grows up there will be no need of books, for he will know everything!"

His father thought he had a wond'rous wise look when he was born, and so he named him Solomon, thinking that if indeed he turned out to be wise the name would fit him nicely, whereas, should he be mistaken, and the boy grow up stupid, his name could be easily changed to Simon.

But the father was not mistaken, and the boy's name remained Solomon.

When he was still a child Solomon confounded the schoolmaster by asking, one day,

"Can you tell me, sir, why a cow drinks water from a brook?"

"Well really," replied the abashed schoolmaster, "I have never given the subject serious thought. But I will sleep upon the question, and try to give you an answer to-morrow."

"But the schoolmaster could not sleep; he remained awake all the night trying to think why a cow drinks water from a brook, and in the morning he was no nearer the answer than before. So he was obliged to appear before the wise child and acknowledge that he could not solve the problem.

"I have looked at the subject from every side," said he, "and given it careful thought, and yet I cannot tell why a cow drinks water from a brook."

"Sir," replied the wise child, "it is because the cow is thirsty."

The shock of this answer was so great that the schoolmaster fainted away, and when they had brought him to he made a prophecy that Solomon would grow up to be a wond'rous wise man.

It was the same way with the village doctor. Solomon came to him one day and asked,

"Tell me, sir, why has a man two eyes?"

"Bless me!" exclaimed the doctor, "I must think I a bit before I answer, for I have never yet had my attention called to this subject."

So he thought for a long time, and then he said, "I must really give it up. I cannot tell, for the life of me, why a man has two eyes. Do you know?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy.

"Then," said the doctor, after taking a dose of quinine to brace up his nerves, for he remembered the fate of the schoolmaster, "then please tell me why a man as two eyes.

"A man has two eyes, sir," returned Solomon, solemnly, "because he was born that way."

And the doctor marvelled greatly at so much wisdom in a little child, and made a note of it in his note-book.

Solomon was so full of wisdom that it flowed from his mouth in a perfect stream, and every day he gave new evidence to his friends that he could scarcely hold all the wise thoughts that came to him. For instance, one day he said to his father,

"I perceive our dog has six legs."

"Oh, no!" replied his father, "our dog has only four legs."

"You are surely mistaken, sir," said Solomon, with the gravity that comes from great wisdom, "these are our dog's fore legs, are they not?" pointing to the front legs of the dog.

"Yes," answered his father.

"Well," continued Solomon, "the dog has two other legs, besides, and two and four are six; therefore the dog has six legs."

"But that is very old," exclaimed his father.

"True," replied Solomon, "but this is a young dog."

Then his father bowed his head in shame that his own child should teach him wisdom.

Of course Solomon wore glasses upon his eyes--all wise people wear them,--and his face was ever grave and solemn, while he walked slowly and stiffly so that people might know he was the celebrated wise man, and do him reverence.

And when he had grown to manhood the fame of his wisdom spread all over the world, so that all the other wise men were jealous, and tried in many ways to confound him; but Solomon always came out ahead and maintained his reputation for wisdom.

Finally a very wise man came from Cumberland, to meet Solomon and see which of them was the wisest. He was a very big man, and Solomon was a very little man, and so the people all shook their heads sadly and feared Solomon had met his match, for if the Cumberland man was as full of wisdom as Solomon, he had much the advantage in size.

They formed a circle around the two wise men, and then began the trial to see which was the wisest.

"Tell me," said Solomon, looking straight up into the big man's face with an air of confidence that reassured his friends, "how many sisters has a boy who has one father, one mother, and seven brothers?"

The big wise man got very red in the face, and scowled and coughed and stammered, but he could not tell.

"I do not know," he acknowledged; "nor do you know, either, for there is no rule to go by."

"Oh, yes, I know," replied Solomon; "he has two sisters. I know this is the true answer, because I know the boy and his father and his mother and his brothers and his sisters, so that I cannot be mistaken."

Now all the people applauded at this, for they were sure Solomon had got the best of the man from Cumberland.

But it was now the big man's turn to try Solomon, so he said,

"Fingers five are on my hand; All of them upright do stand. One a dog is, chasing kittens; One a cat is, wearing mittens; One a rat is, eating cheese; One a wolf is, full of fleas; One a fly is, in a cup How many fingers do I hold up?"

"Four," replied Solomon, promptly, "for one of them is a thumb!"

The wise man from Cumberland was so angry at being outwitted that he sprang at Solomon and would no doubt have injured him had not our wise man turned

and run away as fast as he could go. The man from Cumberland at once ran after him, and chased him through the streets and down the lanes and up the side of the hill where the bramble-bushes grow.

Solomon ran very fast, but the man from Cumberland was bigger, and he was just about to grab our wise man by his coat-tails when Solomon gave a great jump, and jumped right into the middle of a big bramble-bush!

The people were all coming up behind, and as the big man did not dare to follow Solomon into the bramble-bush, he turned away and ran home to Cumberland.

All the men and women of our town were horrified when they came up and found their wise man in the middle of the bramble-bush, and held fast by the brambles, which scratched and pricked him on every side.

"Solomon! are you hurt?" they cried.

"I should say I am hurt!" replied Solomon, with a groan; "my eyes are scratched out!"

"How do you know they are?" asked the village doctor.

"I can see they are scratched out!" replied Solomon; and the people all wept with grief at this, and Solomon howled louder than any of them.

Now the fact was that when Solomon jumped into the bramble-bush he was wearing his spectacles, and the brambles pushed the glasses so close against his eyes that he could not open them; and so, as every other part of him was scratched and bleeding, and he could not open his eyes, he made sure they were scratched out.

"How am I to get out of here?" he asked at last.

"You must jump out," replied the doctor, "since you have jumped in."

So Solomon made a great jump, and although the brambles tore him cruelly, he sprang entirely out of the bush and fell plump into another one. This last bush, however, by good luck, was not a bramble-bush, but one of elderberry, and when he jumped into it his spectacles fell off, and to his surprise he opened his eyes and found that he could see again.

"Where are you now?" called out the doctor.

"I 'm in the elderberry bush, and I 've scratched my eyes in again!" answered Solomon.

When the people heard this they marvelled greatly at the wisdom of a man who knew how to scratch his eyes in after they were scratched out; and they lifted Solomon from the bush and carried him home, where they bound up the scratches and nursed him carefully until he was well again.

And after that no one ever questioned the wond'rous wisdom of our wise man, and when he finally died, at a good old age, they built a great monument over his grave, and on one side of it were the words,

"Solomon; the Man who was Wond'rous Wise."

and on the other side was a picture of a bramble-bush.