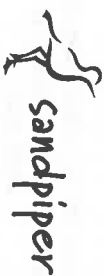


P. L. TRAVERS

*Mary Poppins*  
COMES BACK

ILLUSTRATED BY  
Mary Shepard



Houghton Mifflin Harcourt  
Boston New York



*"They saw before them their own pictured faces"*

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Text set in Old Style 7  
Display type hand-lettered by Georgia Deaver

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:  
Travers, P. L., 1899-1996.  
Mary Poppins comes back/P. L. Travers; illustrated by Mary Shepard.

p. cm.  
Summary: Mary Poppins comes back on the end of a kite string, stays with the Banks family for a while, and then disappears on a merry-go-round horse.

[1. Fantasy.] I. Shepard, Mary, 1909- ill. II. Title.  
PZ7.T689Mas 1997  
[Fic]—dc21 97-223090

ISBN 978-0-15-205816-6  
ISBN 978-0-15-201719-4 (pb)

Manufactured in the United States of America

DOC 30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22  
4500478144

TO PIP, THIS KEEPSAKE

# I

## THE KITE

IT WAS one of those mornings when everything looks very neat and bright and shiny, as though the world had been tidied up overnight.

In Cherry-Tree Lane the houses blinked as their blinds went up, and the thin shadows of the cherry-trees fell in dark stripes across the sunlight. But there was no sound anywhere, except for the tingling of the Ice Cream Man's bell as he wheeled his cart up and down.

"STOP ME AND BUY ONE"

said the placard in front of the cart. And presently a Sweep came round the corner of the Lane and held up his black sweepy hand.

The Ice Cream Man went tingling up to him.

"Penny one," said the Sweep. And he stood leaning on his bundle of brushes as he licked out the Ice Cream with the tip of his tongue. When it was all gone he gently wrapped the cone in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

"Don't you eat cones?" said the Ice Cream Man, very surprised.

"No. I collect them!" said the Sweep. And he picked up his brushes and went in through Admiral Boom's front gate because there was no Tradesman's Entrance.

The Ice Cream Man wheeled his cart up the Lane again and tingled, and the stripes of shadow and sunlight fell on him as he went.

"Never knew it so quiet before!" he murmured, gazing from right to left, and looking out for customers.

At that very moment a loud voice sounded from Number Seventeen. The Ice Cream Man cycled hurriedly up to the gate, hoping for an order.

"I won't stand it! I simply will not stand any more!" shouted Mr. Banks, striding angrily from the front door to the foot of the stairs and back again.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Banks anxiously, hurrying out of the dining-room. "And what is that you are kicking up and down the hall?"

Mr. Banks lunged out with his foot and something black flew half-way up the stairs.

"My hat!" he said between his teeth. "My Best Bowler Hat!"

He ran up the stairs and kicked it down again. It spun for a moment on the tiles and fell at Mrs. Banks' feet.

"Is anything wrong with it?" said Mrs. Banks, nervously. But to herself she wondered whether there was not something wrong with Mr. Banks.

"Look and see!" he roared at her.

Trembling, Mrs. Banks stooped and picked up the hat. It was covered with large, shiny, sticky patches and she noticed it had a peculiar smell.

She sniffed at the brim.

"It smells like boot-polish," she said.

"It is boot-polish," retorted Mr. Banks. "Robertson Ay has brushed my hat with the boot-brush—in fact, he has polished it."

Mrs. Banks' mouth fell with horror.

"I don't know what's come over this house," Mr. Banks went on. "Nothing ever goes right—hasn't for ages! Shaving water too hot, breakfast coffee too cold. And now—this!"

He snatched his hat from Mrs. Banks and caught up his bag.

"I am going!" he said. "And I don't know that I shall ever come back. I shall probably take a long sea-voyage."

Then he clapped the hat on his head, banged the front door behind him and went through the gate so quickly that he knocked over the Ice Cream Man, who had been listening to the conversation with interest.

"It's your own fault!" he said crossly. "You'd no right to be there!" And he went striding off towards the City, his polished hat shining like a jewel in the sun.

The Ice Cream Man got up carefully and, finding there were no bones broken, he sat down on the kerb, and made it up to himself by eating a large Ice Cream . . .

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Banks as she heard the gate slam. "It is quite true. Nothing *does* go right nowadays. First one thing and then another. Ever since Mary Poppins left without a Word of Warning everything has gone wrong."

She sat down at the foot of the stairs and took out her handkerchief and cried into it.



And as she cried, she thought of all that had happened since that day when Mary Poppins had so suddenly and so strangely disappeared.

"Here one night and gone the next—most upsetting!" said Mrs. Banks gulping.

Nurse Green had arrived soon after and had left at the end of a week because Michael had spat at her. She was followed by Nurse Brown who went out for a walk one day and never came back. And it was not until later that they discovered that all the silver spoons had gone with her.

And after Nurse Brown came Miss Quigley, the Governess, who had to be asked to leave because she played scales for three hours every morning before breakfast and Mr. Banks did not care for music.

"And then," sobbed Mrs. Banks to her handkerchief, "there was Jane's attack of measles, and the bath-room geyser bursting and the Cherry-Trees ruined by frost and——"

"If you please, m'm——!" Mrs. Banks looked up to find Mrs. Brill, the cook, at her side.

"The kitchen flue's on fire!" said Mrs. Brill gloomily.

"Oh, dear. What next?" cried Mrs. Banks. "You must tell Robertson Ay to put it out. Where is he?"

"Asleep, m'm, in the broom-cupboard. And when that boy's asleep, nothing'll wake him—not if it's an

Earthquake, or a regiment of Tom-toms," said Mrs. Brill, as she followed Mrs. Banks down the kitchen stairs.

Between them they managed to put out the fire but that was not the end of Mrs. Banks' troubles.

She had no sooner finished luncheon than a crash, followed by a loud thud, was heard from upstairs.

"What is it now?" Mrs. Banks rushed out to see what had happened.

"Oh, my leg, my leg!" cried Ellen, the housemaid. She sat on the stairs, surrounded by broken china, groaning loudly.

"What is the matter with it?" said Mrs. Banks sharply.

"Broken!" said Ellen dismally, leaning against the banisters.

"Nonsense, Ellen! You've sprained your ankle, that's all!"

But Ellen only groaned again.

"My leg is broken! What will I do?" she wailed, over and over again.

At that moment the shrill cries of the Twins sounded from the nursery. They were fighting for the possession of a blue celluloid duck. Their screams rose thinly above the voices of Jane and Michael, who were painting pictures on the wall and arguing as to

whether a green horse should have a purple or a red tail. And through this uproar there sounded, like the steady beat of a drum, the groans of Ellen the housemaid. "My leg is broken! What shall I do?"

"This," said Mrs. Banks, rushing upstairs, "is the Last Straw!"

She helped Ellen to bed and put a cold water bandage round her ankle. Then she went up to the Nursery.

Jane and Michael rushed at her.

"It should have a red tail, shouldn't it?" demanded Michael.

"Oh, Mother! Don't let him be so stupid. No horse has a red tail, has it?"

"Well, what horse has a purple tail? Tell me that!" he screamed.

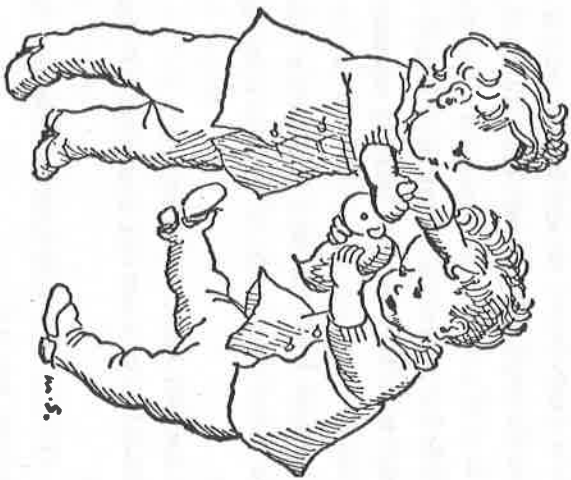
"My duck!" shrieked John, snatching the duck from Barbara.

"Mine, mine, mine!" cried Barbara, snatching it back again.

"Children! Children!" Mrs. Banks was wringing her hands in despair. "Be quiet or I shall Go Mad!"

There was silence for a moment as they stared at her with interest. Would she really? They wondered. And what would she be like if she did?

"Now," said Mrs. Banks. "I will *not* have this



behaviour. Poor Ellen has hurt her ankle, so there is nobody to look after you. You must all go into the Park and play there till Tea-time. Jane and Michael, you must look after the little ones. John, let Barbara have the duck now and you can have it when you go to bed. Michael, you may take your new kite. Now, get your hats, all of you!"

"But I want to finish my horse——" began Michael crossly.

"Why must we go to the Park?" complained Jane.

"There's nothing to do there!"

"Because," said Mrs. Banks, "I *must* have peace. And if you will go quietly and be good children there will be cocoanut cakes for tea."

And before they had time to break out again, she had put on their hats and was hurrying them down the stairs.

"Look both ways!" she called as they went through the gate, Jane pushing the Twins in the perambulator and Michael carrying his kite.

They looked to the right. There was nothing coming.

They looked to the left. Nobody there but the Ice Cream Man who was jingling his bell at the end of the Lane.

Jane hurried across.

Michael trailed after her.

"I hate this life," he said miserably to his kite.

"Everything always goes wrong always."

Jane pushed the perambulator as far as the Lake.

"Now," she said, "give me the duck!"

The Twins shrieked and clutched it at either end.

Jane uncurled their fingers.

"Look!" she said, throwing the duck into the Lake.

"Look, darlings, it's going to India!"

The duck drifted off across the water. The Twins stared at it and sobbed.

Jane ran round the Lake and caught it and sent it off again.

"Now," she said brightly, "it's off to Southampton!"

The Twins did not appear to be amused.

"Now to New York!" They wept harder than ever. Jane flung out her hands. "Michael, what *are* we to do with them? If we give it to them they'll fight over it and if we don't they'll go on crying."

"I'll fly the Kite for them," said Michael. "Look, children, look!"

He held up the beautiful green-and-yellow Kite and began to unwind the string. The Twins eyed it tearfully and without interest. He lifted the Kite above his head and ran a little way. It flapped along the air for a moment and then collapsed hollowly on the grass.

"Try again!" said Jane encouragingly.

"You hold it up while I run," said Michael.

This time the Kite rose a little higher. But, as it floated, its long tasselled tail caught in the branches of a lime tree and the Kite dangled limply among the leaves.

The Twins howled lustily.

"Oh, dear!" said Jane. "Nothing goes right nowadays."

"Hullo, hullo, hullo! What's all this?" said a voice behind them.

They turned and saw the Park Keeper, looking

very smart in his uniform and peaked cap. He was prodding up stray pieces of paper with the sharp end of his walking stick.

Jane pointed to the lime tree. The Keeper looked up. His face became very stern.

"Now, now, you're breaking the rules! We don't allow Litter here, you know—not on the ground nor in the trees neither. This won't do at all!"

"It isn't litter. It's a Kite," said Michael.

A mild, soft, foolish look came over the Keeper's face. He went up to the lime tree.

"A Kite? So it is. And I haven't flown a Kite since I was a boy!" He sprang up into the tree and came down holding the Kite tenderly under his arm.

"Now," he said excitedly, "we'll wind her up and give her a run and away she'll go!" He put out his hand for the winding-stick.

Michael clutched it firmly.

"Thank you, but I want to fly it myself."

"Well, but you'll let me help, won't you?" said the Keeper humbly. "Seeing as I got it down and I haven't flown a Kite since I was a boy?"

"All right," said Michael, for he didn't want to seem unkind.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried the Keeper gratefully. "Now, I take the Kite and walk ten paces down the green. And when I say 'Go!', you run. See!"



The Keeper walked away, counting his steps out loud.

"Eight, nine, ten."

He turned and raised the Kite above his head.

"Go!"

Michael began to run.

"Let her out!" roared the Keeper.

Behind him Michael heard a soft flapping noise.

There was a tug at the string as the winding-stick turned in his hand.

"She's afloat!" cried the Keeper.

Michael looked back. The Kite was sailing through the air, plunging steadily upwards. Higher and higher it dived, a tiny wisp of green-and-yellow bounding away into the blue. The Keeper's eyes were popping.

"I never saw such a Kite. Not even when I was a boy," he murmured, staring upwards.

A light cloud came up over the sun and puffed across the sky.

"It's coming towards the Kite," said Jane in an excited whisper.

Up and up went the tossing tail, darting through the air until it seemed but a faint dark speck on the sky. The cloud moved slowly towards it. Nearer, nearer!

"Gone!" said Michael, as the speck disappeared behind the thin grey screen.

Jane gave a little sigh. The Twins sat quietly in the perambulator. A curious stillness was upon them all. The taut string running up from Michael's hand seemed to link them all to the cloud, and the earth to the sky. They waited, holding their breaths, for the Kite to appear again.

Suddenly Jane could bear it no longer.

"Michael," she cried, "Pull it in! Pull it in!"

She laid her hand upon the tugging, quivering string.

Michael turned the stick and gave a long, strong pull. The string remained taut and steady. He pulled again, puffing and panting.

"I can't," he said. "It won't come."

"I'll help!" said Jane. "Now—pull!"

But, hard as they tugged, the string would not give and the Kite remained hidden behind the cloud.

"Let me!" said the Keeper importantly. "When I was a boy we did it this way."

And he put his hand on the string just above Jane's and gave it a short, sharp jerk. It seemed to give a little.

"Now—all together—pull!" he yelled.

The Keeper tossed off his hat, and, planting their feet firmly on the grass, Jane and Michael pulled with all their might.

"It's coming!" panted Michael.

Suddenly the string slackened and a small whirling shape shot through the grey cloud and came floating down.

"Wind her up!" the Keeper spluttered, glancing at Michael.

But the string was already winding round the stick of its own accord.

Down, down came the Kite, turning over and over in the air, wildly dancing at the end of the jerking string.

Jane gave a little gasp.

"Something's happened!" she cried. "That's not our Kite. It's quite a different one!"

They stared.

It was quite true. The Kite was no longer green-and-yellow. It had turned colour and was now navy-blue. Down it came, tossing and bounding.

Suddenly Michael gave a shout.

"Jane! Jane! It isn't a Kite at all. It looks like—oh, it looks like——"

"Wind, Michael, wind quickly!" gasped Jane. "I can hardly wait!"

For now, above the tallest trees, the shape at the end of the string was clearly visible. There was no sign of the green-and-yellow Kite, but in its place danced a figure that seemed at once strange and fa-

miliar, a figure wearing a blue coat with silver buttons and a straw hat trimmed with daisies. Tucked under its arm was an umbrella with a parrot's head for a handle, a brown carpet bag dangled from one hand while the other held firmly to the end of the shortening string.

"Ah!" Jane gave a shout of triumph. "It is she!"

"I knew it!" cried Michael, his hands trembling on the winding-stick.

"Lumme!" said the Park Keeper, blinking.

"Lumme!"

On sailed the curious figure, its feet neatly clearing the tops of the trees. They could see the face now and the well-known features—coal black hair, bright blue eyes and nose turned upwards like the nose of a Dutch doll. As the last length of string wound itself round the stick the figure drifted down between the lime trees and alighted primly upon the grass.

In a flash Michael dropped the stick. Away he bounded, with Jane at his heels.

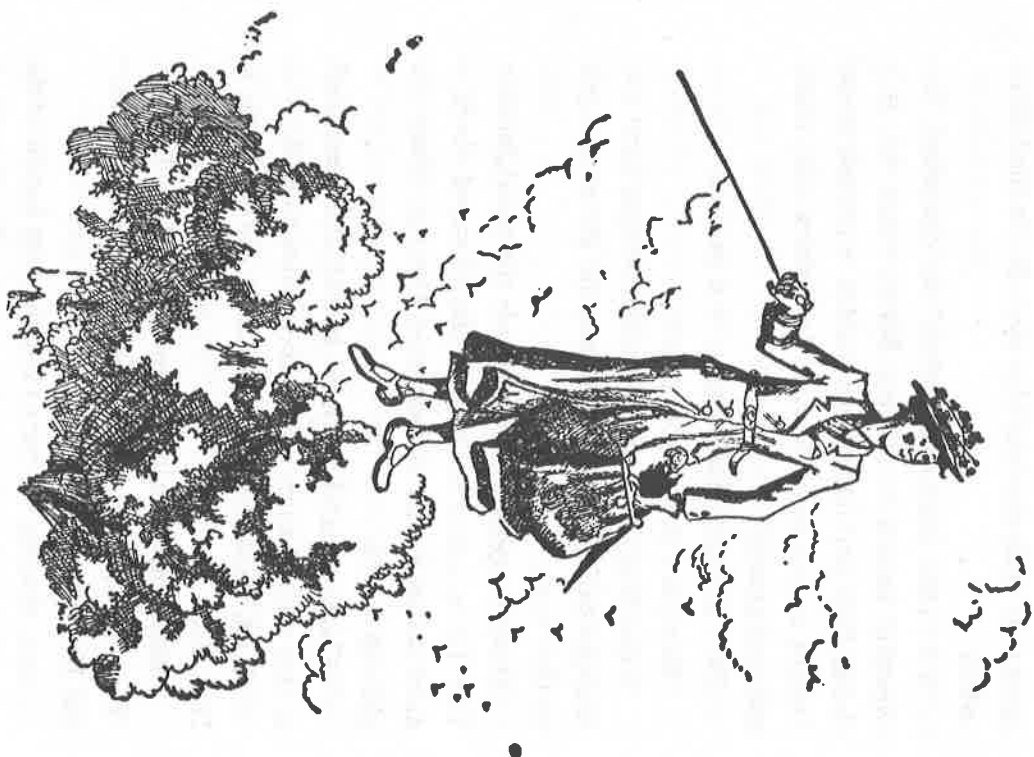
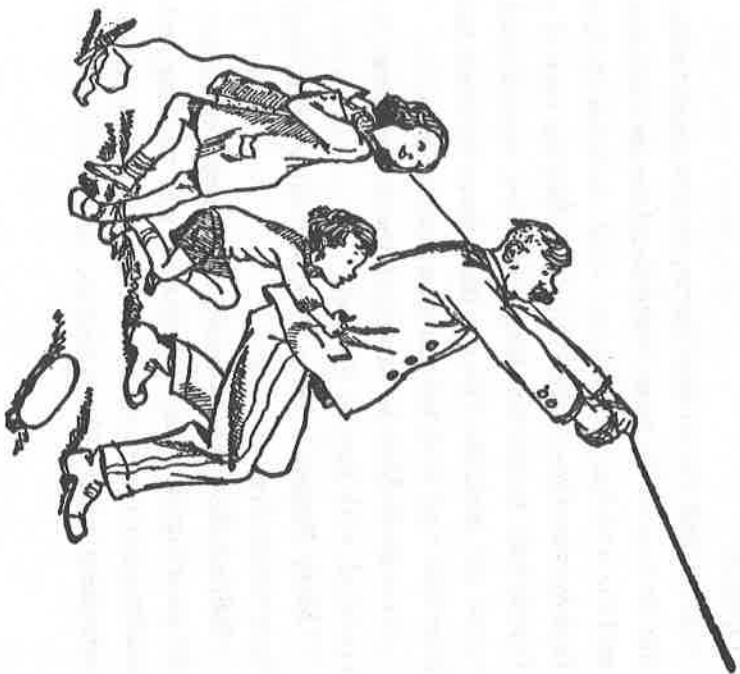
"Mary Poppins, Mary Poppins!" they cried, and flung themselves upon her.

Behind them the Twins were crowing like cocks in the morning and the Park Keeper was opening and shutting his mouth as though he would like to say something but could not find the words.

"At last! At last! At last!" shouted Michael wildly, clutching at her arm, her bag, her umbrella—anything, so long as he might touch her and feel that she was really true.

"We knew you'd come back! We found the letter that said *ou revoir!*" cried Jane, flinging her arms round the waist of the blue overcoat.

A satisfied smile flickered for a moment over Mary Poppins' face—up from the mouth, over the



*On sailed the curious figure,  
its feet neatly clearing the tops of the trees*

turned-up nose, into the blue eyes. But it died away swiftly.

"I'll thank you to remember," she remarked, disengaging herself from their hands, "that this is a Public Park and not a Bear Garden. Such goings on! I might as well be at the Zoo. And where, may I ask, are your gloves?"

They fell back, fumbling in their pockets.

"Humph! Put them on, please!"

Trembling with excitement and delight, Jane and Michael stuffed their hands into the gloves and put on their hats.

Mary Poppins moved towards the perambulator. The Twins cooed happily as she strapped them in more securely and straightened the rug. Then she glanced round.

"Who put that duck in the pond?" she demanded, in that stern, haughty voice they knew so well.

"I did," said Jane. "For the Twins. He was going to New York."

"Well, take him out, then!" said Mary Poppins. "He is not going to New York—wherever that is—but Home to Tea."

And, slinging her carpet bag over the handle of the perambulator, she began to push the Twins towards the gate.

The Park Keeper, suddenly finding his voice, blocked her way.

"See here," he said, staring. "I shall have to report this. It's against the Regulations. Coming down out of the sky, like that. And where from, I'd like to know, where from?"

He broke off, for Mary Poppins was eyeing him up and down in a way that made him feel he would rather be somewhere else.

"If I was a Park Keeper," she remarked, primly, "I should put on my cap and button my coat. Excuse me."

And, haughtily waving him aside, she pushed past with the perambulator.

Blushing, the Keeper bent to pick up his hat. When he looked up again Mary Poppins and the children had disappeared through the gate of Number Seventeen Cherry-Tree Lane.

He stared at the path. Then he stared up at the sky and down at the path again.

He took off his hat, scratched his head, and put it on again.

"I never saw such a thing!" he said, shakily. "Not even when I was a boy!"

And he went away muttering and looking very upset.

"Why, it's Mary Poppins!" said Mrs. Banks, as they came into the hall. "Where did *you* come from? Out of the blue?"

"Yes," began Michael joyfully, "she came down on the end——"

He stopped short for Mary Poppins had fixed him with one of her terrible looks.

"I found them in the Park, ma'am," she said, turning to Mrs. Banks, "so I brought them home!"

"Have you come to stay, then?"

"For the present, ma'am."

"But, Mary Poppins, last time you were here you left me without a Word of Warning. How do I know you won't do it again?"

"You don't, ma'am," replied Mary Poppins, calmly.

Mrs. Banks looked rather taken aback.

"But—but will you, do you think?" she asked uncertainly.

"I couldn't say, ma'am, I'm sure."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Banks, because, at the moment, she couldn't think of anything else.

And before she had recovered from her surprise, Mary Poppins had taken her carpet bag and was hurrying the children upstairs.

Mrs. Banks, gazing after them, heard the Nursery

door shut quietly. Then with a sigh of relief she ran to the telephone.

"Mary Poppins has come back!" she said happily, into the receiver.

"Has she, indeed?" said Mr. Banks at the other end. "Then perhaps I will, too."

And he rang off.

Upstairs Mary Poppins was taking off her overcoat. She hung it on a hook behind the Night-Nursery door. Then she removed her hat and placed it neatly on one of the bed-posts.

Jane and Michael watched the familiar movements. Everything about her was just as it had always been. They could hardly believe she had ever been away.

Mary Poppins bent down and opened the carpet bag.

It was quite empty except for a large Thermometer.

"What's that for?" asked Jane curiously.

"You," said Mary Poppins.

"But I'm not ill," Jane protested. "It's two months since I had measles."

"Open!" said Mary Poppins in a voice that made Jane shut her eyes very quickly and open her mouth.

The Thermometer slipped in.

"I want to know how you've been behaving since I went away," remarked Mary Poppins sternly. Then she took out the Thermometer and held it up to the light.

"Careless, thoughtless and untidy," she read out. Jane stared.

"Humph!" said Mary Poppins, and thrust the Thermometer into Michael's mouth. He kept his lips tightly pressed upon it until she plucked it out and read.

"A very noisy, mischievous, troublesome little boy."

"I'm not," he said angrily.

For answer she thrust the Thermometer under his nose and he spelt out the large red letters.

"A-V-E-R-Y-N-O-I-S——"

"You see?" said Mary Poppins looking at him triumphantly. She opened John's mouth and popped in the Thermometer.

"Peevish and Excitable." That was John's temperature.

And when Barbara's was taken Mary Poppins read out the two words, "Thoroughly spoilt."

"Humph!" she snorted. "It's about time I came back!"

Then she popped it quickly in her own mouth, left it there for a moment, and took it out.

"A very excellent and worthy person, thoroughly reliable in every particular."

A pleased and conceited smile lit up her face as she read her temperature aloud.

"I thought so," she said, priggin'ly. "Now—Tea and Bed!"

It seemed to them no more than a minute before they had drunk their milk and eaten their cocoanut cakes and were in and out of the bath. As usual, everything that Mary Poppins did had the speed of electricity. Hooks and eyes rushed apart, buttons darted eagerly out of their holes, sponge and soap ran up and down like lightning, and towels dried with one rub.

Mary Poppins walked along the row of beds tucking them all in. Her starched white apron crackled and she smelt deliciously of newly made toast.

When she came to Michael's bed she bent down, and rummaged under it for a minute. Then she carefully drew out her camp-bedstead with her possessions laid upon it in neat piles. The cake of Sunlight-soap, the toothbrush, the packet of hair-pins, the bottle of scent, the small folding arm-chair and the box of throat lozenges. Also the seven flannel nightgowns, the four cotton ones, the boots, the dominoes, the two bathing-caps and the postcard album.

Jane and Michael sat up and stared.

"Where did they come from?" demanded Michael.

"I've been under my bed simply hundreds of times and I know they weren't there before."

Mary Poppins did not reply. She had begun to undress.

Jane and Michael exchanged glances. They knew it was no good asking, because Mary Poppins never explained anything.

She slipped off her starched white collar and fumbled at the clip of a chain round her neck.

"What's inside that?" enquired Michael, gazing at a small gold locket that hung on the end of the chain.

"A portrait."

"Whose?"

"You'll know when the time comes—not before," she snapped.

"When will the time come?"

"When I go."

They stared at her with startled eyes.

"But, Mary Poppins," cried Jane, "you won't ever leave us again, will you? Oh, say you won't!"

Mary Poppins glared at her.

"A nice life I'd have," she remarked, "if I spent all my days with *you!*"

"But you will stay?" persisted Jane eagerly.

Mary Poppins tossed the locket up and down on her palm.

"I'll stay till the chain breaks," she said briefly.

And popping a cotton nightgown over her head, she began to undress beneath it.

"That's all right," Michael whispered across to Jane. "I noticed the chain and it's a very strong one!"

He nodded to her reassuringly. They curled up in their beds and lay watching Mary Poppins as she moved mysteriously beneath the tent of her nightgown. And they thought of her first arrival at Cherry-Tree Lane and all the strange and astonishing things that happened afterwards; of how she had flown away on her umbrella when the wind changed; of the long weary days without her and her marvellous descent from the sky this afternoon.

Suddenly Michael remembered something.

"My Kite!" he said, sitting up in bed. "I forgot all about it! Where's my Kite?"

Mary Poppins' head came up through the neck of the nightgown.

"Kite?" she said crossly. "Which Kite? What Kite?"

"My green-and-yellow Kite with the tassels. The one you came down on, at the end of the string."

Mary Poppins stared at him. He could not tell if she was more astonished than angry, but she looked as if she was both.

And her voice when she spoke, was more awful than her look.

"Did I understand you to say that——" she repeated the words slowly, between her teeth—"that I

came down from somewhere and on the end of a string?"

"But—you did!" faltered Michael. "To-day. Out of a cloud. We saw you."

"On the end of a string? Like a monkey or a spinning-top? Me, Michael Banks?"

Mary Poppins, in her fury, seemed to have grown to twice her usual size. She hovered over him in her nightgown, huge and angry, waiting for him to reply.

He clutched the bedclothes for support.

"Don't say any more, Michael!" Jane whispered warningly across from her bed. But he had gone too far now to stop.

"Then—where's my Kite?" he said recklessly. "If you didn't come down—er, in the way I said—where's my Kite? It's not on the end of the string."

"O-ho? And I am, I suppose?" she enquired with a scoffing laugh.

He saw then that it was no good going on. He could not explain. He would have to give it up.

"N—no," he said, in a thin, small voice. "No, Mary Poppins."

She turned and snapped out the electric light.

"Your manners," she remarked tartly, "have not improved since I went away! On the end of a string, indeed! I have never been so insulted in my life. Never!"

And with a furious sweep of her arm, she turned down her bed and flounced into it, pulling the blankets tight over her head.

Michael lay very quiet, still holding his bedclothes tightly.

"She did, though, didn't she? We saw her." He whispered presently to Jane.

But Jane did not answer. Instead, she pointed towards the Night-Nursery door.

Michael lifted his head cautiously.

Behind the door, on a hook, hung Mary Poppins' overcoat, its silver buttons gleaming in the glow of the night-light. And dangling from the pocket were a row of paper tassels, the tassels of a green-and-yellow Kite.

They gazed at it for a long time.

Then they nodded across to each other. They knew there was nothing to be said, for there were things about Mary Poppins they would never understand. But—she was back again. That was all that mattered. The even sound of her breathing came floating across from the camp-bed. They felt peaceful and happy and complete.

"I don't mind, Jane, if it has a purple tail," hissed Michael presently.

"No, Michael!" said Jane. "I really think a red would be better."



After that there was no sound in the nursery but the sound of five people breathing very quietly. . . .

"P-p! P-p!" went Mr. Banks' pipe.

"Click-click!" went Mrs. Banks' knitting needles.

Mr. Banks put his feet up on the study mantel-piece and snored a little.

After a while Mrs. Banks spoke.

"Do you still think of taking a long sea-voyage?" she asked.

"Er—I don't think so. I am rather a bad sailor. And my hat's all right now. I had the whole of it polished by the shoe-black at the corner and it looks as good as new. Even better. Besides, now that Mary Poppins is back, my shaving water will be just the right temperature."

Mrs. Banks smiled to herself and went on knitting.

She felt very glad that Mr. Banks was such a bad sailor and that Mary Poppins had come back.

Down in the Kitchen, Mrs. Brill was putting a fresh bandage round Ellen's ankle.

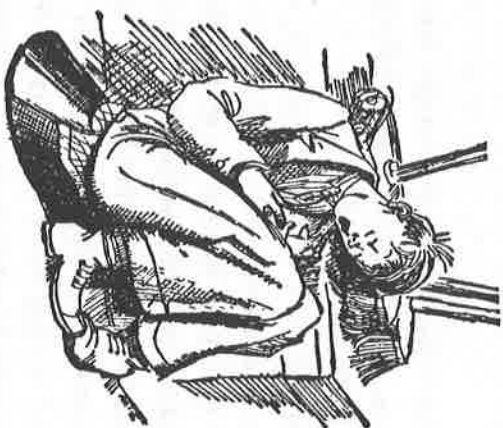
"I never thought much of her when she was here!" said Mrs. Brill, "but I must say that this has been a different house since this afternoon. As quiet as a Sunday and as neat as ninepence. I'm not sorry she's back."

"Neither am I, indeed!" said Ellen thankfully.

"And neither am I," thought Robertson Ay, listening to the conversation through the wall of the broom-cupboard. "Now I shall have a little peace."

He settled himself comfortably on the upturned coal-scuttle and fell asleep again with his head against a broom.

But what Mary Poppins thought about it nobody ever knew for she kept her thoughts to herself and never told anyone anything. . . .





*A day in the Park*

P. L. TRAVERS

# Mary Poppins

OPENS THE DOOR

*Illustrated by*  
Mary Shepard  
*and*  
Agnes Sims

AN ODYSSEY CLASSIC  
HARCOURT, INC.

Orlando Austin New York San Diego Toronto London

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[www.hmhco.com](http://www.hmhco.com)

First Harcourt Young Classic/Odyssey Classic editions 1997  
First published 1943

The Library of Congress has cataloged an earlier edition as follows:  
Travers, P. L., 1899-1996.  
Mary Poppins opens the door/P. L. Travers.  
p. cm.

Summary: Mary Poppins returns to the Banks family in a rocket and involves the Banks children in more magical adventures, including those with Peppermint Horses, the Marble Boy, and the Cat That Looked at the King.

[r. Fantasy.] I. Shepard, Mary, 1909- ill. II. Sims, Agnes. III. Title.  
PZ7.T68gMatro 1997  
[Fic] 75-30697

ISBN-13: 978-0-15-201722-4 ISBN-10: 0-15-201722-4

Text set in Old Style 7  
Display type hand-lettered by Georgia Deaver  
Designed by April Ward

Printed in the United States of America  
DOC 20 19  
4500479364

TO  
KATHARINE  
CORNELL

The Fifth of November is Guy Fawkes' Day in England. In peacetime it is celebrated with bonfires on the greens, fireworks in the parks and the carrying of "guys" through the streets. "Guys" are stuffed, straw figures of unpopular persons; and after they have been shown to everybody they are burnt in the bonfires amid great acclamation. The children black their faces and put on comical clothes, and go about begging for a Penny for the Guy. Only the very meanest people refuse to give pennies and these are always visited by Extreme Bad Luck.

The Original Guy Fawkes was one of the men who took part in the Gunpowder Plot. This was a conspiracy for blowing up King James I and the Houses of Parliament on November 5th, 1605. The plot was discovered, however, before any damage was done. The only result was that King James and his Parliament went on living but Guy Fawkes, poor man, did not. He was executed with the other conspirators. Nevertheless, it is Guy Fawkes who is remembered today and King James who is forgotten. For since that time, the Fifth of November in England, like the Fourth of July in America, has been devoted to Fireworks. From 1605 till 1939 every village green in the shires had a bonfire on Guy Fawkes' Day. In the village where I live, in Sussex, we made our bonfire in the Vicarage paddock and every year, as soon as it was lit, the Vicar's cow would begin to dance. She danced while the flames roared up to the sky, she danced till the ashes were black and cold. And the next morning—it was always the same—the Vicar would have no milk for his breakfast. It is strange to think of a simple cow rejoicing so heartily at the saving of Parliament so many years ago.

Since 1939, however, there have been no bonfires on the village greens. No fireworks gleam in the blackened parks and the streets are dark and silent. But this darkness will not last forever. There will some day come a Fifth of November—or another date, it doesn't matter—when fires will burn in a chain of brightness from Land's End to John O'Groats. The children will dance and leap about them as they did in the times before. They will take each other by the hand and watch the rockets breaking, and afterwards they will go home singing to the houses full of light. . . .

P. L. T. (1943)

## THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER\*

**I**T WAS one of those bleak and chilly mornings that remind you winter is coming. Cherry-Tree Lane was quiet and still. The mist hung over the Park like a shadow. All the houses looked exactly alike as the grey fog wrapped them round. Admiral Boom's flagstaff, with the telescope at the top of it, had entirely disappeared.

The Milkman, as he turned into the Lane, could hardly see his way.

"Milk Be-l-o-o-ow!" he called, outside the Admiral's door. And his voice sounded so queer and hollow that it gave him quite a fright.

"I'll go 'ome till the fog lifts," he said to himself.

"'Erel Look where you're goin'!" he went on, as a shape loomed suddenly out of the mist and bumped against his shoulder.

"Bumble, bumble, bum-bur-um-bumble," said a gentle, muffled voice.

\*See opposite page.

"Oh, it's you!" said the Milkman, with a sigh of relief.

"Bumble," remarked the Sweep again. He was holding his brushes in front of his face to keep his moustache dry.

"Out early, aren't you?" the Milkman said.

The Sweep gave a jerk of his black thumb towards Miss Lark's house.

"Had to do the chimbley before the dogs had breakfast. In case the soot gave them a cough," he explained.

The Milkman laughed rudely. For that was what everybody did when Miss Lark's two dogs were mentioned.

The mist went wreathing through the air. There was not a sound in the Lane.

"Ugh!" said the Milkman, shivering. "This quiet gives me the 'Orrors!"

And as he said that, the Lane woke up. A sudden roar came from one of the houses and the sound of stamping feet.

"That's Number Seventeen!" said the Sweep. "Excuse me, old chap. I think I'm needed." He cautiously felt his way to the gate and went up the garden path....

Inside the house, Mr. Banks was marching up and down, kicking the hall furniture.

"I've had about all I can stand!" he shouted, waving his arms wildly.

"You keep on saying that," Mrs. Banks cried. "But you won't tell me what's the matter." She looked at Mr. Banks anxiously.

"Everything's the matter!" he roared. "Look at this!" He wagged his right foot at her. "And this!" he went on, as he wagged his left.

Mrs. Banks peered closely at the feet. She was rather short-sighted and the hall was misty.

"I—er—don't see anything wrong," she began timidly.

"Of course you don't!" he said, sarcastically. "It's only imagination, of course, that makes me think Robertson Ay has given me one black shoe and one brown!" And again he wagged his feet.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Banks hurriedly. For now she saw clearly what the trouble was.

"You may well say 'Oh!' So will Robertson Ay when I give him the sack tonight."

"It's not his fault, Daddy!" cried Jane, from the stairs. "He couldn't see—because of the fog. Besides, he's not strong."

"He's strong enough to make my life a misery!" said Mr. Banks angrily.

"He needs rest, Daddy!" Michael reminded him, hurrying down after Jane.

"He'll get it!" promised Mr. Banks, as he snatched up his bag. "When I think of the things I could have done if I hadn't gone and got married! Lived alone in a Cave, perhaps. Or I might have gone Round the World."

"And what would *we* have done, then?" asked Michael.

"You would have had to fend for yourselves. And serve you right! Where's my overcoat?"

"You have it on, George," said Mrs. Banks, meekly.

"Yes!" he retorted. "And only one button! But anything's good enough for *me!* I'm only the man who Pays the Bills. I shall not be home for dinner."

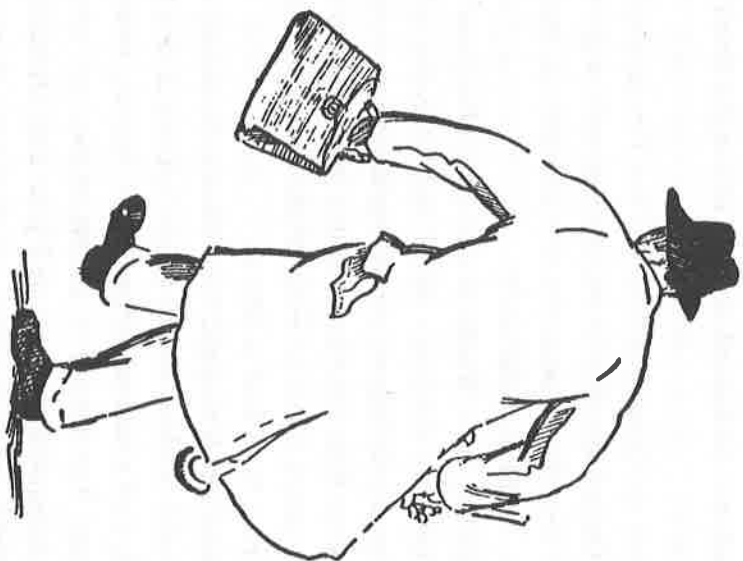
A wail of protest went up from the children.

"But it's Guy Fawkes' Day," wheedled Mrs. Banks. "And you so good at letting off rockets."

"No rockets for me!" cried Mr. Banks. "Nothing but trouble from morning till night!" He shook Mrs. Banks' hand from his arm and dashed out of the house.

"Shake, sir!" said the Sweep in a friendly voice as Mr. Banks knocked into him, "It's lucky, you know, to shake hands with a Sweep."

"Away, away!" said Mr. Banks wildly. "This is not my lucky day!"



The Sweep looked after him for a moment. Then he smiled to himself and rang the door-bell. . . .

"He doesn't mean it, does he, Mother? He *will* come home for the fireworks!" Jane and Michael rushed at Mrs. Banks and tugged at her skirt.

"Oh, I can't promise anything, children!" she

sighed, as she looked at her face in the front hall mirror.

And she thought to herself—Yes, I'm getting thinner. One of my dimples has gone already and soon I shall lose the second. No one will look at me any more. And it's all *her* fault!

By her, Mrs. Banks meant Mary Poppins, who had been the children's nurse. As long as Mary Poppins was in the house, everything had gone smoothly. But since that day when she had left them—so suddenly and without a Word of Warning—the family had gone from Bad to Worse.

Here am I, thought Mrs. Banks miserably, with five wild children and no one to help me. I've advertised. I've asked my friends. But nothing seems to happen. And George is getting crosser and crosser; and Annabel's teething; and Jane and Michael and the Twins are so naughty, not to mention that awful Income Tax——

She watched a tear run over the spot where the dimple had once been.

"It's no good," she said, with sudden decision. "I shall have to send for Miss Andrew."

A cry went up from all four children. Away in the Nursery, Annabel screamed. For Miss Andrew had once been their Father's governess and they knew how frightful she was.

"I won't speak to her!" shouted Jane, in a rage.

"I'll spit on her shoes if she comes!" threatened Michael.

"No, no!" wailed John and Barbara miserably.

Mrs. Banks clapped her hands to her ears. "Children, have mercy!" she cried in despair.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Ellen the housemaid, as she tapped Mrs. Banks on the shoulder. "The Sweep is 'ere for the Drawing-room Chimbley. But I warn you, ma'am, it's my Day Out! And I can't clean up after 'im. So there!" She blew her nose with a trumpeting sound.

"Excuse me!" said the Sweep cheerfully, as he dragged in his bags and brushes.

"'Oo's that?" came the voice of Mrs. Brill as she hurried up from the kitchen. "The Sweep? On Baking Day? No, you don't! I'm sorry to give you notice, ma'am. But if that Hottentot goes into the chimney, I shall go out of the door."

Mrs. Banks glanced round desperately.

"I didn't ask him to come!" she declared. "I don't even know if the chimney wants sweeping!"

"A chimney's always glad of a brush." The Sweep stepped calmly into the Drawing-room and began to spread out his sheet.

Mrs. Banks looked nervously at Mrs. Brill. "Perhaps Robertson Ay could help——" she began.

"Robertson is asleep in the pantry, wrapped in your best lace shawl. And nothing will wake him," said Mrs. Brill, "but the sound of the Last Thrombone. So, if you please, I'll be packing my bag. 'Ow! Let me go, you Hindoo!'"

For the Sweep had seized Mrs. Brill's hand and was shaking it vigorously. A reluctant smile spread over her face.

"Well—just this once!" she remarked cheerfully. And she went down the kitchen stairs.

The Sweep turned to Ellen with a grin.

"Don't touch me, you black heathen!" she screamed in a terrified voice. But he took her hand in a firm grip and she, too, began to smile. "Well, no messing up the carpet!" she warned him, and hurried off to her work.

"Shake!" said the Sweep, as he turned to the children. "It's sure to bring you luck!" He left a black mark on each of their palms and they all felt suddenly better.

Then he put out his hand to Mrs. Banks. And as she took his warm black fingers her courage came flowing back.

"We must make the best of things, darlings," she said. "I shall advertise for another nurse. And perhaps something good will happen."

Jane and Michael sighed with relief. At least she was not going to send for Miss Andrew.

"What do you do when *you* need luck?" asked Jane, as she followed the Sweep to the Drawing-room.

"Oh, I just shake hands with meself," he said, cheerfully, pushing his brush up the chimney.

All day long the children watched him and argued over who should hand him the brushes. Now and again Mrs. Banks came in, to complain of the noise and hurry the Sweep.

And all day long, beyond the windows, the mist crept through the Lane. Every sound was muffled. The birds were gone. Except for an old and moulting Starling who kept on peering through the cracks in the blinds as if he were looking for someone.

At last the Sweep crept out of the chimney and smiled at his handiwork.

"So kind of you!" said Mrs. Banks hurriedly. "Now, I'm sure you must want to pack up and go home——"

"I'm in no 'urry," remarked the Sweep. "Me Tea isn't ready till six o'clock and I've got an hour to fill in——"

"Well, you can't fill it in here!" Mrs. Banks shrieked. "I have to tidy up this room before my husband comes home!"



"I tell you what—" the Sweep said calmly. "If you've got a rocket or two about you, I could take them children into the Park and show 'em a few fireworks. It'd give you a rest and meself a Treat. I've always been very partial to rockets, ever since a boy—*and* before!"

A yell of delight went up from the children. Michael ran to a window and lifted the blind.

"Oh, look what's happened!" he cried in triumph. For a change had come to Cherry-Tree Lane. The chill grey mist had cleared away. The houses were lit with warm soft lights. And away in the West shone a glimmer of sunset, rosy and clear and bright.

"Remember your coats!" cried Mrs. Banks, as the children darted away. Then she ran to the cupboard under the staircase and brought out a nobbly parcel.

"Here you are!" she said breathlessly to the Sweep. "And, mind, be careful of sparks!"

"Sparks?" said the Sweep. "Why, sparks is my 'Obby. Them and the soot wot comes after!"

The children leapt like puppies about him as he went down the garden path. Mrs. Banks sat down for two minutes' rest on one of the sheet-covered chairs. The Startling looked in at her for a moment. Then he shook his head disappointedly and flew away again. . . .

Daylight was fading as they crossed the road. By the Park railings Bert, the Matchman, was spreading out his tray. He lit a candle with one of his matches and began to draw pictures on the pavement. He nodded gaily to the children as they hurried through the Gates.

"Now, all we need," the Sweep said fussily, "is a clear patch of grass——"

"Which you won't get!" said a voice behind them.

"The Park is closed at 5:30."

Out from the shadows came the Park Keeper, looking very belligerent.

"But it's Guy Fawkes' Day—the Fifth of November!" the children answered quickly.

"Orders is orders!" he retorted, "and all days are alike to me."

"Well, where can we let off the fireworks?" Michael demanded impatiently.

A greedy look leapt to the Keeper's eyes.

"You got some fireworks?" he said hungrily. "Well, why not say so before!" And he snatched the parcel from the Sweep and began to untie the string. "Matches—that's what we need!" he went on, panting with excitement.

"Here," said the Matchman's quiet voice. He had

followed the children into the Park and was standing behind them with his lighted candle.

The Park Keeper opened a bundle of Squibs.

"They're *ours*, you know!" Michael reminded him.

"Ah, let me help you—do!" said the Keeper. "I've never 'ad fun on Guy Fawkes' Day—never since I was a boy!"

And without waiting for permission, he lit the Squibs at the Matchman's candle. The hissing streams of fire poured out, and pop, pop, pop, went the crackers. The Park Keeper seized a Catherine Wheel and struck it on a branch. The rings of light began to turn and sparkled on the air. And after that he was so excited that nothing could stop him. He went on lighting fuse after fuse as though he had gone mad.

Flower Pots streamed from the dewy grass and Golden Rain flowed down through the darkness. Top Hats burned for a bright short moment; Balloons went floating up to the branches; and Firesnakes writhed in the shadows. The children jumped and squeaked and shouted. The Park Keeper ran about among them like a large frenzied dog. And amid the noise and the sparkling lights the Matchman waited quietly. The flame of his candle never wavered as they lit their fuses from it.

"Now!" cried the Keeper, who was hoarse with shouting. "Now we come to the rockets!"

All the other fireworks had gone. Nothing remained in the nobbly parcel except three long black sticks.

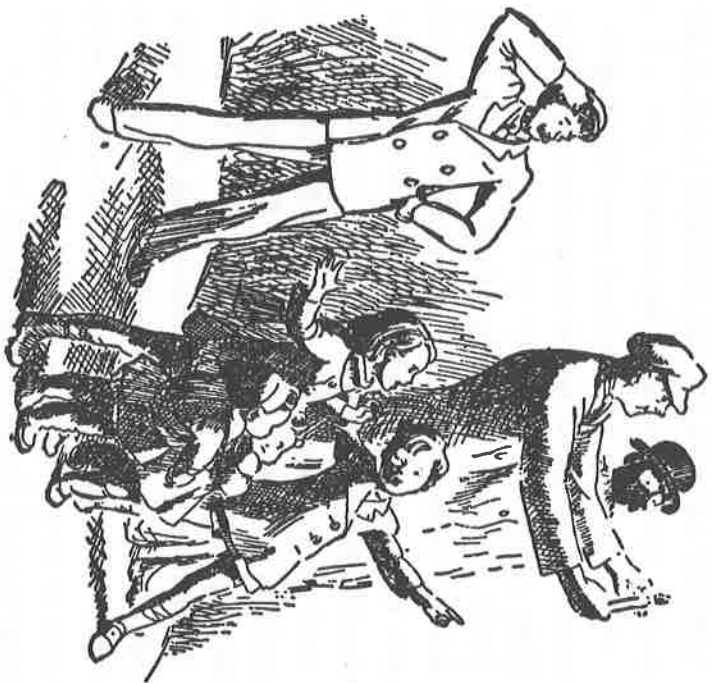
"No you don't!" said the Sweep, as the Keeper snatched them. "Share and share. That's fair!" He gave the Keeper one rocket and kept the others for himself and the children.

"Make way, make way!" said the Keeper importantly, as he lit the fuse at the candle flame and stuck the stick in the ground.

Hissing and guttering, the spark ran down like a little golden thread. Then—whoop! went the stick as it shot away. Up in the sky the children heard a small faraway bang. And a swirl of red-and-blue stars broke out and rained upon the Park.

"Oh!" cried the children. And "Oh!" cried the Sweep. For that is the only word anyone can say when a rocket's stars break out.

Then it was the Sweep's turn. The candle-light gleamed on his black face as he lit the fuse of his rocket. Then came a whoop and another bang and white-and-green stars spread over the sky like the ribs of a bright umbrella. And again the watchers all cried "Oh!" and sighed for sheer joy.



"It's our turn now!" cried Jane and Michael. And their fingers trembled as they lit the fuse. They pressed the stick down into the earth and stepped back to watch. The thread of golden fire ran down. Whe-e-e-ew! Up went the stick with a singing sound, up to the very top of the sky. And Jane and Michael held their breath as they waited for it to burst.

At last, far away and very faint, they heard the little bang.

Now for the stars, they thought to themselves.

But—alas!—nothing happened.

"Oh!" said everyone again—not for joy this time, but for disappointment. For no stars broke from the third rocket. There was nothing but darkness and the empty sky.

"Tricksy—that's what they are!" said the Sweep.

"There are some as just doesn't go off! Well, come on home, all. There's no good staring. Nothing will come down now!"

"Closing Time! Everyone out of the Park!" cried the Park Keeper importantly.

But Jane and Michael took no notice. They stood there watching, hand in hand. For their hopeful eyes had noticed something that nobody else had seen. Up in the sky a tiny spark hovered and swayed in the darkness. What could it be? Not the stick of the rocket, for that must have fallen long ago. And certainly not a star, they thought, for the little spark was moving.

"Perhaps it's a special kind of rocket that has only one spark," said Michael.

"Perhaps," Jane answered quietly, as she watched the tiny light.

They stood together, gazing upwards. Even if there was only one spark they would watch till it went out. But, strangely enough, it did not go out. In fact, it was growing larger.

"Let's get a move on!" urged the Sweep. And again the Park Keeper cried:

"Closing Time!"

But still they waited. And still the spark grew ever larger and brighter. Then suddenly Jane caught her breath. And Michael gave a gasp. Oh, was it possible—? Could it be—? they silently asked each other.

Down came the spark, growing longer and wider. And as it came, it took on a shape that was strange and also familiar. Out of the glowing core of light emerged a curious figure—a figure in a black straw hat and a blue coat trimmed with silver buttons—a figure that carried in one hand something that looked like a carpet bag, and in the other—oh, could it be true?—a parrot-headed umbrella.

Behind them the Matchman gave a cry and ran through the Park Gates.

The curious figure was drifting now to the tops of the naked trees. Its feet touched the highest bough of an oak and stepped down daintily through the branches. It stood for a moment on the lowest bough and balanced itself neatly.

Jane and Michael began to run and their breath broke from them in a happy shout.

"Mary Poppins! Mary Poppins! Mary Poppins!" Half-laughing, half-weeping, they flung themselves upon her.

"You've c-come b-back, at l-last!" stammered Michael excitedly, as he clutched her neatly shod foot. It was warm and bony and quite real and it smelt of Black Boot-polish.

"We knew you'd come back. We trusted you!" Jane seized Mary Poppins' other foot and dragged at her cotton stocking.

Mary Poppins' mouth crinkled with the ghost of a smile. Then she looked at the children fiercely.

"I'll thank you to let go my shoes!" she snapped. "I am not an object in a Bargain Basement!"

She shook them off and stepped down from the tree, as John and Barbara, mewling like kittens, rushed over the grass towards her.

"Hyenas!" she said with an angry glare, as she loosened their clutching fingers. "And what, may I ask, are you all doing—running about in the Park at night and looking like Blackamoors?"

Quickly they pulled out handkerchiefs and began to rub their cheeks.

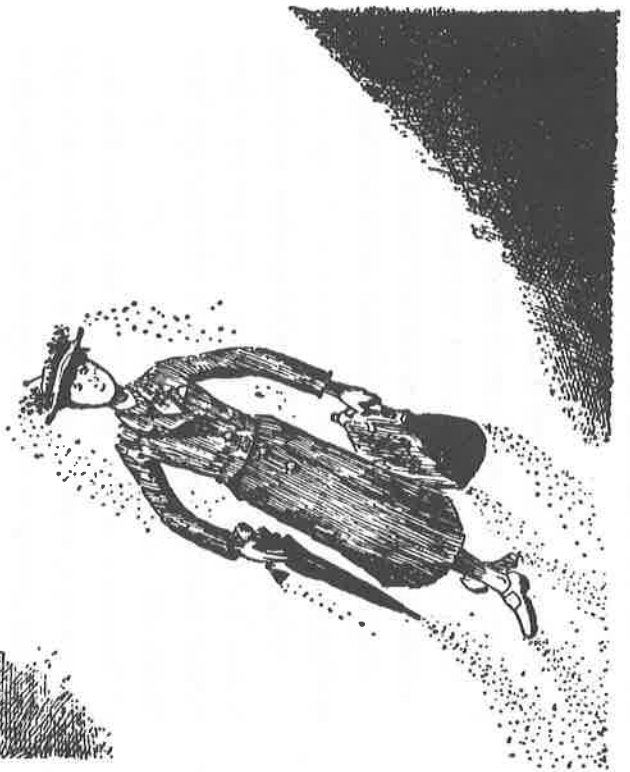
"My fault, Miss Poppins," the Sweep apologised. "I been sweeping the Drawing-room chimbley."

"Somebody will be sweeping *you*, if you don't look out!" she retorted.

"But-but! Glog-glog! Er-rumph! Glug-glug!" Speechless with astonishment, the Park Keeper blocked their path.

"Out of my way, please!" said Mary Poppins, haughtily brushing him aside as she pushed the children in front of her.

"This is the Second Time!" he gasped, suddenly finding his voice. "First it's a Kite and now it's a— You can't do things like this, I tell you! It's against the Law. And, furthermore, it's all against Nature."



*Out of the glowing core of light emerged a curious figure*

He flung out his hand in a wild gesture and Mary Poppins popped into it a small piece of cardboard.

"Wot's this?" he demanded, turning it over.

"My Return Ticket," she calmly replied.

And Jane and Michael looked at each other and nodded wisely together.

"Ticket—wot ticket? Buses have tickets and so do trains. But you came down on I-don't-know-what! Where did you come from? 'Ow did you get 'ere? That's what I want to know!"

"Curiosity Killed a Cat!" said Mary Poppins primly. She pushed the Park Keeper to one side and left him staring at the little green ticket as though it were a ghost.

The children danced and leapt about her as they came to the Park Gates.

"Walk quietly, please," she told them crossly. "You are not a School of Porpoises! And which of you, I'd like to know, has been playing with lighted candles?"

The Matchman scrambled up from his knees.

"I lit it, Mary," he said eagerly. "I wanted to write you a——" He waved his hands. And there on the pavement, not quite finished, was the one word

WELCOM

Mary Poppins smiled at the coloured letters.

"That's a lovely greeting, Bert," she said softly.

The Matchman seized her black-gloved hand, and looked at her eagerly. "Shall I see you on Thursday, Mary?" he asked.

She nodded. "Thursday, Bert," she said. Then she flung a withering look at the children. "No dawdling, if you please!" she commanded, as she hurried them across the Lane to Number Seventeen.

Up in the Nursery Annabel was screaming her head off. Mrs. Banks was running along the hall, calling out soothing phrases. As the children opened the Front Door, she gave one look at Mary Poppins, and collapsed upon the stairs.

"Can it be you, Mary Poppins?" she gasped.

"It can, ma'am," Mary Poppins said calmly.

"But—where did you spring from?" Mrs. Banks cried.

"She sprang right out of a——" Michael was just about to explain when he felt Mary Poppins' eyes upon him. He knew very well what that look meant. He stammered and was silent.



"I came from the Park, ma'am," said Mary Poppins, with the patient air of a martyr.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Mrs. Banks from her heart. Then she remembered all that had happened since Mary Poppins had left them. I mustn't seem too pleased, she thought. Or she'll be more uppish than ever!

"You left me Without a Word, Mary Poppins," she said with an air of dignity. "I think you might tell me when you're coming and going. I never know where I am."

"Nobody does, ma'am," said Mary Poppins, as she calmly unbuttoned her gloves.

"Don't you, Mary Poppins?" asked Mrs. Banks, in a very wistful voice.

"Oh, *she* knows," Michael answered daringly. Mary Poppins gave him an angry glare.

"Well, you're here now, anyway!" Mrs. Banks cried. She felt extremely relieved. For now she need neither advertise nor send for Miss Andrew.

"Yes, ma'am. Excuse me," said Mary Poppins.

And she neatly stepped past Mrs. Banks and put her carpet bag on the bannisters. It slid up swiftly with a whistling sound and bounced into the Nursery. Then she gave the umbrella a little toss. It spread its black silk wings like a bird and flew up after the carpet bag with a parrot-like squawk.

The children gave an astonished gasp and turned to see if their Mother had noticed.

But Mrs. Banks had no thought for anything but to get to the telephone.

"The Drawing-room chimney has been cleaned. We are having Lamb Chops and peas for dinner. And Mary Poppins is back!" she cried, breathlessly.

"I don't believe it!" crackled Mr. Banks' voice. "I shall come and see for myself!"

Mrs. Banks smiled happily as she hung up the receiver. . . .

Mary Poppins went primly up the stairs and the children tore past her into the Nursery. There on the hearth lay the carpet bag. And standing in its usual corner was the parrot-headed umbrella. They had a settled, satisfied air as though they had been there for years. In the cradle, Annabel, blue in the face, was trying herself into knots. She stared in surprise at Mary Poppins, and smiled a toothless smile. Then she put on her Innocent Angel look and began to play tunes on her toes.

"Humph!" said Mary Poppins grimly, as she put her straw hat in its paper bag. She took off her coat and hung it up on the hook behind the door. Then she glanced at herself in the Nursery mirror and stooped to unlock the carpet bag.

It was quite empty except for a curled-up Tape Measure.

"What's that for, Mary Poppins?" asked Jane.

"To measure you," she replied quickly. "To see how you've grown."

"You needn't bother," Michael informed her.

"We've all grown two inches. Daddy measured us."

"Stand straight, please!" Mary Poppins said calmly, ignoring the remark. She measured him from his head to his feet and gave a loud sniff.

"I might have known it!" she said, snorting.

"You've grown Worse and Worse."

Michael stared. "Tape Measures don't tell words, they tell inches," he said, protestingly.

"Since when?" she demanded haughtily, as she thrust it under his nose. There on the Tape were the tell-tale words in big blue letters:

W-O-R-S-E A-N-D W-O-R-S-E

"Oh!" he said, in a horrified whisper.

"Head up, please!" said Mary Poppins, stretching the Tape against Jane.

"Jane has grown into a Wilful, Lazy, Selfish child," she read out in triumph.

The tears came pricking into Jane's eyes. "Oh,

I haven't, Mary Poppins!" she cried. For, funny enough, she only remembered the times when she had been good.

Mary Poppins slipped the Tape round the Twins. "Quarrelsome" was their measurement. "Fretful and Spoit," was Annabel's.

"I thought so!" Mary Poppins said, sniffing. "I've only got to turn my back for you to become a Menagerie!"

She drew the Tape round her own waist; and a satisfied smile spread over her face.

"Better Than Ever. Practically Perfect," her own measurement read.

"No more than I expected," she preened. And added, with a furious glare, "Now, spit-spot into the Bathroom!"

They hurried eagerly to obey her. For now that Mary Poppins was back, everything went with a swing. They undressed and bathed in the wink of an eye. Nobody dawdled over Supper, nobody left a crumb or a drop. They pushed in their chairs, folded their napkins and scrambled into bed.

Up and down the Nursery went Mary Poppins, tucking them all in. They could smell her old familiar smell, a mixture of toast and starchy aprons. They could feel her old familiar shape, solid and real



beneath her clothes. They watched her in adoring silence, drinking her in.

Michael, as she passed his bed, peered over the edge and under it. There was nothing there except dust and slippers. Then he peeped under Jane's bed. Nothing there, either.

"But where are you going to sleep, Mary Poppins?" he enquired curiously.

As he spoke, she touched the door of the clothes cupboard. It burst open noisily and out of it, with a graceful sweep, came the old camp bed. It was made up, ready to be slept in. And upon it, in a neat pile, were Mary Poppins' possessions. There were the Sun-light Soap and the hairpins, the bottle of scent, the folding armchair, the toothbrush and the lozenges. The nightgowns, cotton, and flannel as well, were tidily laid on the pillow. And beside them were the boots and the dominoes, and the bathing-caps and the postcard album.

The children sat up in a gaping row.

"But how did it get in there?" demanded Michael.

"There wasn't a sign of it today. I know, 'cos I hid there from Ellen!"

He dared not go on with his questions, however, for Mary Poppins looked so haughty that the words froze on his lips. With a sniff, she turned away from him and unfolded a flannel nightgown.

Jane and Michael looked at each other. And their eyes said all that their tongues could not. It's no good expecting her to explain, they told each other silently.

They watched her comical scarecrow movements as she undressed beneath the nightgown. Clip, clip—the buttons flew apart. Off went her petticoat—swish, swish, swish! A peaceful feeling stole into the children. And they knew that it came from Mary Poppins. Dreamily watching the wriggling nightgown, they thought of all that had happened. How she had first arrived at the house, blown by the West Wind. How her umbrella had carried her off when the wind went round to the East. They thought how she had come back to them on the day when they flew the Kite; and how she had ridden away once more and left them lonely for her comforting presence.

Well, now—they sighed happily—she was back again, and just the same as ever. Here she was, settling down in the Nursery, as calmly as though she had never left it. The thoughts he was thinking rose up in Michael like bubbles in soda water. And before he could stop them, they burst right out.

"Oh, Mary Poppins," he cried, eagerly, "it's been just awful without you!"

Her lip quivered. It seemed as though a smile might break out. But it changed its mind and didn't.

"*You've* been awful—that's more like it! This

house is nothing but a Bear Garden. I wonder anyone stays in it!"

"But *you* will, won't you?" he said wheedlingly. "We'll be good as gold, if only you'll stay!" Jane promised solemnly.

She looked from one to the other calmly, seeing right down inside their hearts and understanding everything.

"I'll stay——" she said, after a little pause. "I'll stay till the door opens." And as she spoke she gazed thoughtfully at the door of the Nursery.

Jane gave a little anxious cry. "Oh, don't say that, Mary Poppins!" she wailed. "That door is always opening!"

Mary Poppins glared.

"I meant the Other Door," she said, as she butted up her nightgown.

"What can she mean?" Jane whispered to Michael.

"I know what she means," he answered cleverly.

"There isn't any other door. And a door that isn't there, *can't* open. So she's going to stay forever." He hugged himself happily at the thought.

Jane, however, was not so sure. I wonder, she thought to herself.

But Michael went on cheerfully babbling.

"I'm glad I shook hands with the Sweep," he said.

"It brought us wonderful luck. Perhaps he'll do the Nursery next and shake hands with *you*, Mary Poppins!"

"Pooh!" she replied, with a toss of her head. "I don't need any luck, thank you!"

"No," he said thoughtfully, "I suppose you don't. Anyone who can come out of a rocket—as you did to-night—must be born lucky. I mean—er—oh, don't *look* at me!"

He gave a little beseeching cry, for Mary Poppins was glaring at him in a way that made him shudder. Standing there in her flannel nightgown, she seemed to freeze him in his cosy bed.

"I wonder if I heard you correctly?" she enquired in an icy voice. "Did I understand you to mention *Me*—in connection with a Rocket?" She said the word "Rocket" in such a way as to make it seem quite shocking.

In terror, Michael glanced about him. But no help came from the other children. And he knew he would have to go through with it.

"But you did, Mary Poppins!" he protested bravely. "The rocket went pop! and there you were, coming out of it down the sky!"

She seemed to grow larger as she came towards him.

"Pop?" she repeated, furiously. "I popped—and came out of a rocket?"

He shrank back feebly against the pillow. "Well—that's what it looked like—didn't it, Jane?"

"Hush!" whispered Jane, with a shake of her head. She knew it was no good arguing.

"I have to say it, Mary Poppins! We saw you!" Michael wailed. "And if *you* didn't come out of the rocket, what did! There weren't any stars!"

"Pop!" said Mary Poppins again. "Out of a rocket with a pop! You have often insulted me, Michael Banks, but this is the Very Worst. If I hear any more about Pops—or Rockets——" She did not tell him what she would do but he knew it would be dreadful.

"Wee-twee! Wee-twee!"

A small voice sounded from the window-sill. An old Starling peered into the Nursery and flapped his wings excitedly.

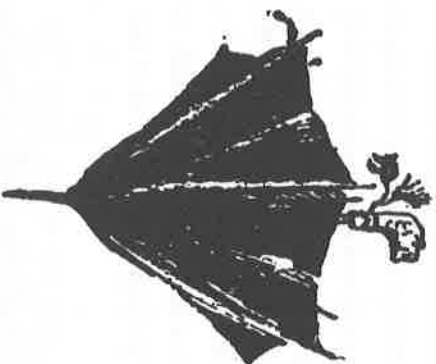
Mary Poppins bounded to the window.

"Be off, you sparrer!" she said fiercely. And as the Starling darted away she switched out the light and pounced into bed. They heard her angrily muttering "Pop!" as she pulled the blankets up.

Then silence settled over them like a soft comforting cloud. It had almost folded them to sleep when the faintest murmur came from Jane's bed.

"Michael!" she said, in a careful whisper. He sat up cautiously and looked in the direction of her pointing finger.

From the corner by the fireplace came a little glow of light. And they saw that the folds of the parrot umbrella were full of coloured stars—the kind of stars you expect to see when a rocket breaks in the sky. Their eyes grew wide with astonishment as the parrot's head bent down. Then, one by one, its beak plucked the stars from the silken folds and threw them on the floor. They gleamed for a moment, gold and silver, then faded and went out. Then the parrot head straightened upon the handle, and Mary Poppins' black umbrella stood stiff and still in its corner.



The children looked at each other and smiled. But they said nothing. They could only wonder and be silent. They knew there were not enough words in the Dictionary for the things that happened to Mary Poppins.

"Tick-tock!" said the clock on the mantelpiece.

"Go to sleep, children! Tick, tock, tick!"

Then they closed their eyes on the happy day and the clock kept time with their quiet breathing.

Mr. Banks sat and snored in his study with a newspaper over his face.

Mrs. Banks was sewing new black buttons on his old overcoat.

"Are you still thinking what you might have done if you hadn't got married?" she asked.

"Eh, what?" said Mr. Banks, waking up. "Well, no. It's much too much trouble. And now that Mary Poppins is back, I shan't have to think about anything."

"Good," said Mrs. Banks, sewing briskly. "And I'll try and teach Robertson Ay."

"Teach him what?" Mr. Banks said, sleepily.

"Not to give you one black and one brown, of course!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Mr. Banks insisted. "The mixture was much admired at the Office. I shall always wear them that way in future."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Banks, smiling happily. On the whole, she felt glad Mr. Banks had married. And now that Mary Poppins was back, she would tell him so more often. . . .

Downstairs in the kitchen sat Mrs. Brill. The Policeman had just brought Ellen home and was staying for a Cup of Tea.

"That Mary Poppins!" he said, sipping. "She's 'ere today and gone tomorrer, just like them Willy-the-Wisps!"

"Ow! Don't say that!" said Ellen, sniffing. "I thought she was come to stay."

The Policeman gave her his handkerchief.

"Maybe she will!" he told her fondly. "You never can tell, you know."

"Well, I'm sure I hope so," sighed Mrs. Brill. "This 'ouse is a Model Residence whenever she's in it."

"I hope so, too. I need a rest," said Robertson Ay to the brooms. And he snuggled down under Mrs. Banks' shawl and went to sleep again.

But what Mary Poppins hoped, none of them knew. For Mary Poppins, as everyone knows, never told anyone anything. . . .

