



ODYSSEY

# Mary Poppins

COMES BACK



P. L. Travers

*With the original illustrations by Mary Shepard*

*"Outstanding."—Saturday Review*

Copyright © 1935 by P. L. Travers  
Copyright © renewed 1963 by P. L. Travers

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by Sandpiper, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published in hardcover by Harcourt Brace Young Classics, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1997.

SANDPIPER and the SANDPIPER logo are trademarks of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 215 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003.

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

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

They sat there, jogging up and down as the bus rumbled homewards. Mary Poppins' back, erect and angry, was like a silent warning. They dared not speak to her. But every time the bus turned a corner they saw the crumbs turning Catherine wheels on the shining brim of her hat. . . .

## CHAPTER

## 5

## THE NEW ONE

**B**UT *WHY* must we go for a walk with Ellen?" grumbled Michael, slamming the gate. "I don't like her. Her nose is too red."

"Sh!" said Jane. "She'll hear you."

Ellen, who was wheeling the perambulator, turned round.

"You're a cruel, unkind boy, Master Michael. I'm only doing my duty, I'm sure! It's no pleasure to me to be going for a walk in this heat—so there!"

She blew her red nose on a green handkerchief.

"Then why do you go?" Michael demanded.

"Because Mary Poppins is busy. So come along, there's a good boy, and I'll buy you a pennorth of peppermints."

"I don't want peppermints," muttered Michael. "I want Mary Poppins."

Plop-plop. Plop-plop. Ellen's feet marched slowly and heavily along the Lane.

"I can see a rainbow through every chink of my hat," said Jane.

"I can't," said Michael crossly. "I can only see my silk lining."

Ellen stopped at the corner, looking anxiously for traffic.

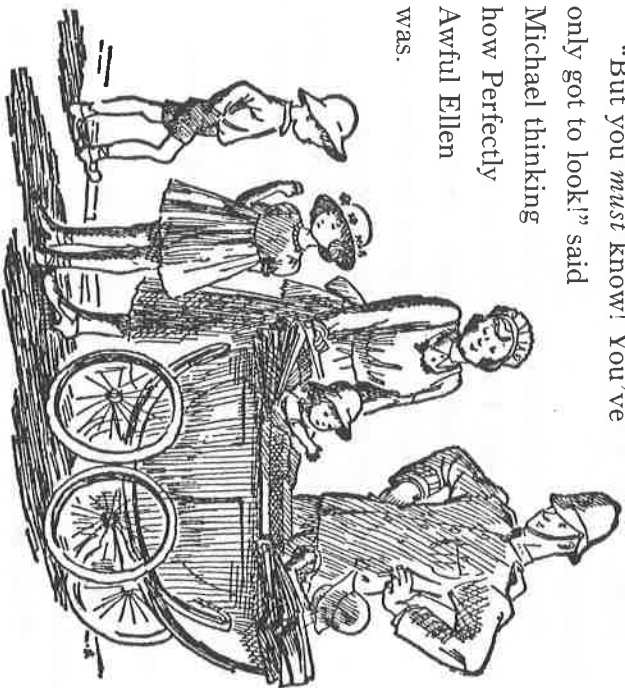
"Want any help?" enquired the Policeman, sauntering up to her.

"Well," said Ellen, blushing, "if you could take us across the road, I'd be much obliged. What with a bad cold, and four children to look after, I don't know if I'm on my head or my feet." She blew her nose again.

"But you *must* know! You've only got to look!" said

Michael thinking how Perfectly

Awful Ellen was.



But the Policeman apparently thought differently for he took Ellen's arm with one hand, and the handle of the perambulator with the other, and led her across the street as tenderly as though she were a bride.

"Ever get a day off?" he enquired, looking interestedly into Ellen's red face.

"Well," said Ellen. "Half-days, so to speak. Every second Saturday." She blew her nose nervously.

"Funny," said the Policeman. "Those are *my* days, too. And I'm usually just around here at two o'clock in the afternoon."

"Oh!" said Ellen, opening her mouth very wide.

"So!" said the Policeman, nodding at her politely.

"Well, I'll see," said Ellen. "Good-bye."

And she went trudging on, looking back occasionally to see if the Policeman was still looking.

And he always was.

"Mary Poppins never needs a policeman," complained Michael. "What *can* she be busy about?"

"Something important is happening at home," said Jane. "I'm sure of it."

"How do you know?"

"I've got an empty, waiting sort of feeling inside."

"Pooh!" said Michael. "I expect you're hungry! Can't we go faster, Ellen, and get it over?"

"That boy," said Ellen to the Park railing, "has a heart of stone. No, we can't, Master Michael, because of my feet."

"What's the matter with them?"

"They will only go so fast and no faster."

"Oh, *dear* Mary Poppins!" said Michael bitterly. He went sighing after the perambulator. Jane walked beside him counting rainbows through her hat. Ellen's slow feet tramped steadily onward. One-two. One-two. Plop-plop. Plop-plop. . . .

And away behind them in Cherry-Tree Lane the important thing was happening.

From the outside, Number Seventeen looked as peaceful and sleepy as all the other houses. But behind the drawn blinds there was such a stir and bustle that, if it hadn't been Summer-time, a passer-by might have thought the people in the house were Spring-cleaning or getting ready for Christmas.

But the house itself stood blinking in the sunshine, taking no notice. After all, it thought to itself, I have seen such bustlings often before and shall probably see them many times again, so why should I bother about it?

And just then, the front door was flung open by Mrs. Brill, and Doctor Simpson hurried out. Mrs. Brill stood dancing on her toes as she watched him go down

the garden path, swinging his little brown bag. Then she hurried to the Pantry and called excitedly—

"Where are you, Robertson? Come along, if you're coming!"

She scuttled up the stairs two at a time with Robertson Ay yawning and stretching, behind her.

"Sh!" hissed Mrs. Brill. "Sh!"

She put her finger to her lips and tip-toed to Mrs. Banks' door.

"Tch, tch! You can't see nothing but the wardrobe," she complained, as she bent to look through the key-hole. "The wardrobe and a bit of the winder."

But the next moment she started violently.

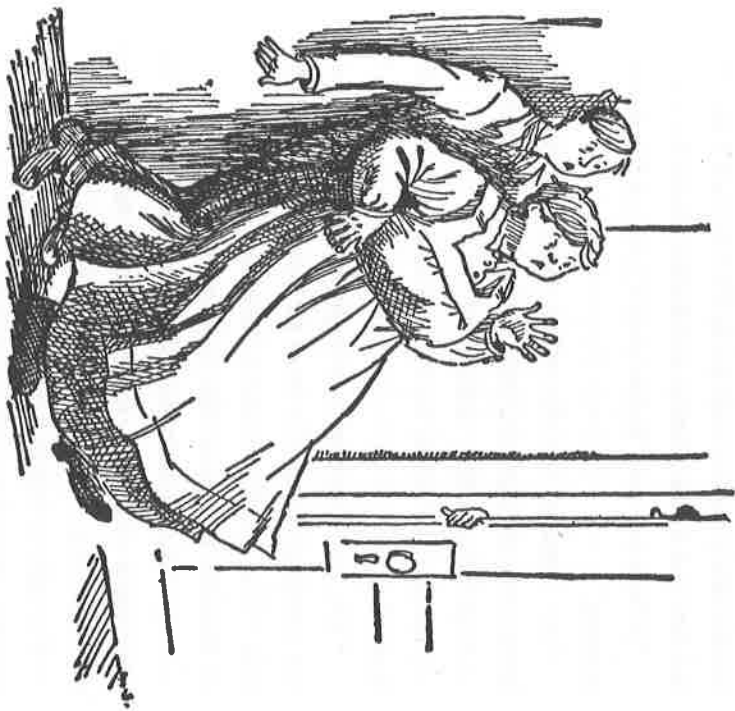
"My Glory-goodness!" she shrieked, as the door burst open suddenly, and she fell back against Robertson Ay.

For there, framed against the light, stood Mary Poppins, looking very stern and suspicious. In her arms she carried, with great care, something that looked like a bundle of blankets.

"Well!" said Mrs. Brill, breathlessly. "If it isn't you! I was just polishing the door-knob, putting a shine on it, so to say, as you came out."

Mary Poppins looked at the knob. It was very dirty.

"Polishing the key-hole is what I should have said!" she remarked tartly.



But Mrs. Brill took no notice. She was gazing tenderly at the bundle. With her large red hand she drew aside a fold of one of the blankets, and a satisfied smile spread over her face.

"Ah!" she cooed. "Ah, the Lamb! Ah, the Duck! Ah, the Trinket! And as good as a week of Sundays, I'll be bound!"

Robertson Ay yawned again and stared at the bundle with his mouth slightly open.

"Another pair of shoes to clean!" he said mournfully, leaning against the banisters for support.

"Mind you don't drop it, now!" said Mrs. Brill anxiously, as Mary Poppins brushed past her.

Mary Poppins glanced at them both contemptuously.

"If I were *some* people," she remarked acidly, "I'd mind my own business!"

And she folded the blanket over the bundle again and went upstairs to the Nursery.

"Excuse me, please! Excuse me!" Mr. Banks came rushing up the stairs, nearly knocking Mrs. Brill over as he hurried into Mrs. Banks' bedroom.

"Well!" he said, sitting down at the foot of the bed, "This is all very awkward. Very awkward indeed. I don't know that I can afford it. I hadn't bargained for five."

"I'm so sorry!" said Mrs. Banks, smiling at him happily.

"You're not sorry, not a bit. In fact you're very pleased and conceited about it. And there's no reason to be. It's a very small one."

"I like them that way," said Mrs. Banks. "Besides, it will grow."

"Yes, unfortunately!" he replied bitterly. "And I shall have to buy it shoes and clothes and a tricycle. Yes, and send it to school and give it a Good Start in Life. A very expensive proceeding. And then, after all that, when I'm an old man sitting by the fire, it will go away and leave me. You hadn't thought of that, I suppose?"

"No," said Mrs. Banks, trying to look sorry but not succeeding. "I hadn't."

"I thought not. Well, there it is. But, I warn you, I shall not be able to afford to have the bathroom re-tiled."

"Don't worry about that," said Mrs. Banks comfortingly. "I really like the old tiles best."

"Then you're a very stupid woman. That's all I have to say."

And Mr. Banks went away, muttering and blustering through the house. But when he got outside the front door, he flung back his shoulders, and pushed out his chest, and put a large cigar into his mouth. And soon after that he was heard telling Admiral Boom the news in a voice that was very loud and conceited and boastful. . . .

Mary Poppins stooped over the new cradle between John's and Barbara's cots and laid the bundle of blankets carefully in it.

"Here you are at last! Bless my beak and tail feathers—— I thought you were never coming! Which is it?" cried a croaking voice from the window.

Mary Poppins looked up.

The Starling who lived on the top of the Chimney was hopping excitedly on the window-sill.

"A girl. Annabel," said Mary Poppins shortly. "And I'll thank you to be a little quieter. Squawking and croaking there like a packet of Magpies!"

But the Starling was not listening. He was turning somersaults on the window-sill, clapping his wings wildly together each time his head came up.

"What a treat!" he panted, when at last he stood up straight. "What a TREAT! Oh, I could sing!"

"You couldn't. Not if you tried till Doomsday!" scoffed Mary Poppins.

But the Starling was too happy to care.

"A girl!" he shrieked, dancing on his toes. "I've had three broods this season and——would you believe it?——every one of them boys. But Annabel will make up to me for that!"

He hopped a little along the sill. "Annabel!" he burst out again, "That's a nice name! I had an Aunt called Annabel. Used to live in Admiral Boom's chimney and died, poor thing, of eating green apples and grapes. I warned her, I warned her! But she wouldn't believe me! So, of course——"

"Will you be quiet!" demanded Mary Poppins, making a dive at him with her apron.

"I will not!" he shouted, dodging neatly. "This is no time for silence. I'm going to spread the news."

He swooped out of the window.

"Back in five minutes!" he screamed at her over his shoulder, as he darted away.

Mary Poppins moved quietly about the Nursery, putting Annabel's new clothes in a neat pile.

The Sunlight, slipping in at the window, crept across the room and up to the cradle.

"Open your eyes!" it said softly. "And I'll put a shine on them!"

The coverlet of the cradle trembled. Annabel opened her eyes.

"Good girl!" said the Sunlight. "They're blue, I see. My favourite colour! There! You won't find a brighter pair of eyes anywhere!"

It slipped lightly out of Annabel's eyes and down the side of the cradle.

"Thank you very much!" said Annabel politely.

A warm Breeze stirred the muslin flounces at her head.

"Curls or straight?" it whispered, dropping into the cradle beside her.

"Oh, curls, please!" said Annabel softly.

"It does save trouble, doesn't it?" agreed the Breeze. And it moved over her head, carefully turning up the feathery edges of her hair, before it fluttered off across the room.

"Here we are! Here we are!"

A harsh voice shrilled from the window. The Starling had returned to the sill. And behind him, wobbling uncertainly as he alighted, came a very young bird.

Mary Poppins moved towards them threateningly.

"Now you be off!" she said angrily. "I'll have no sparrers littering up this Nursery——"

But the Starling, with the young one at his side, brushed haughtily past her.

"Kindly remember, Mary Poppins," he said icily, "that *all* my families are properly brought up. Littering, indeed!"

He alighted neatly on the edge of the cradle and steadied the Fledgling beside him.

The young bird stared about him with round, inquisitive eyes. The Starling hopped along to the pillow.

"Annabel, dear," he began, in a husky, wheedling voice, "I'm very partial to a nice, crisp, crunchy piece of Arrowroot Biscuit." His eyes twinkled greedily.

"You haven't one about you, I suppose?"



The curled head stirred on the pillow.

"No? Well, you're young yet for biscuits, perhaps. Your sister Barbara—nice girl, she was, very generous and pleasant—always remembered me. So if, in the future, *you* could spare the old fellow a crumb or two——"

"Of course I will," said Annabel from the folds of the blanket.

"Good girl!" croaked the Starling approvingly. He cocked his head on one side and gazed at her with his round bright eye. "I hope," he remarked politely, "you are not too tired after your journey."

Annabel shook her head.

"Where has she come from—out of an egg?" cheeped the Fledgling suddenly.

"Huh-huh!" scoffed Mary Poppins. "Do you think she's a sparrer?"

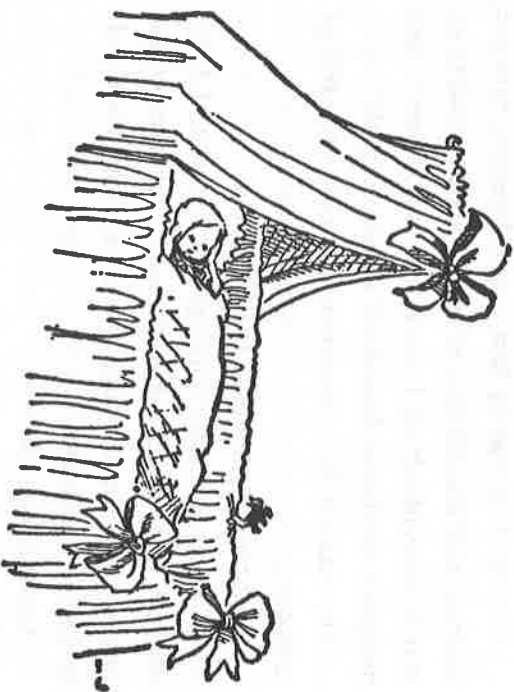
The Starling gave her a pained and haughty look.

"Well, what is she, then? And where did she come from?" cried the Fledgling shrilly, flapping his short wings and staring down at the cradle.

"*You* tell him, Annabel!" the Starling croaked.

Annabel moved her hands inside the blanket.

"I am earth and air and fire and water," she said softly. "I come from the Dark where all things have their beginning."



"Ah, such dark!" said the Starling softly, bending his head to his breast.

"It was dark in the egg, too," the Fledgling cheeped.

"I come from the sea and its tides," Annabel went on. "I come from the sky and its stars, I come from the sun and its brightness——"

"Ah, so bright!" said the Starling, nodding.

"And I come from the forests of earth."

As if in a dream, Mary Poppins rocked the cradle—to-and-fro, to-and-fro with a steady swinging movement.

"Yes?" whispered the Fledgling.

"Slowly I moved at first," said Annabel, "always sleeping and dreaming. I remembered all I had been and I thought of all I shall be. And when I had dreamed my dream I awoke and came swiftly."

She paused for a moment, her blue eyes full of memories.

"And then?" prompted the Fledgling.

"I heard the stars singing as I came and I felt warm wings about me. I passed the beasts of the jungle and came through the dark, deep waters. It was a long journey."

Annabel was silent.

The Fledgling stared at her with his bright inquisitive eyes.

Mary Poppins' hand lay quietly on the side of the cradle. She had stopped rocking.

"A long journey, indeed!" said the Starling softly, lifting his head from his breast. "And, ah, so soon forgotten!"

Annabel stirred under the quilt.

"No!" she said confidently. "I'll never forget."

"Stuff and Nonsense! Beaks and Claws! Of course you will! By the time the week's out you won't remember a word of it—what you are or where you came from!"

Inside her flannel petticoat Annabel was kicking furiously.

"I will! I will! How could I forget?"

"Because they all do!" jeered the Starling harshly.

"Every silly human except——" he nodded his head at Mary Poppins—"her! She's Different, she's the Oddity, she's the Mischief——"

"You Sparrer!" cried Mary Poppins, making a dart at him.

But with a rude laugh he swept his Fledgling off the edge of the cradle and flew with him to the window-sill.

"Tipped you last!" he said cheekily, as he brushed by. "Hullo, what's that?"

There was a chorus of voices outside on the landing and a clatter of feet on the stairs.

"I don't believe you! I won't believe you!" cried Annabel wildly.

And at that moment Jane and Michael and the Twins burst into the room.

"Mrs. Brill says you've got something to show us!" said Jane, flinging off her hat.

"What is it?" demanded Michael, gazing round the room.

"Show me! Me, too!" shrieked the Twins.

Mary Poppins glared at them. "Is this a decent nursery or the Zoological gardens?" she enquired angrily. "Answer me that!"

"The Zoo—er—I mean——" Michael broke off

hurriedly for he had caught Mary Poppins' eye. "I mean a Nursery," he said lamely.

"Oh, look, Michael, look!" Jane cried excitedly. "I told you something important was happening! It's a New Baby! Oh, Mary Poppins, can I have it to keep?"

Mary Poppins, with a furious glance at them all, stooped and lifted Annabel out of the cradle and sat down with her in the old arm-chair.

"Gently, please, gently!" she warned, as they crowded about her. "This is a baby, not a battle-ship!" "A boy-baby?" asked Michael.

"No, a girl—Annabel."

Michael and Annabel stared at each other. He put his finger into her hand and she clutched it tightly.

"My doll!" said John, pushing up against Mary Poppins' knee.

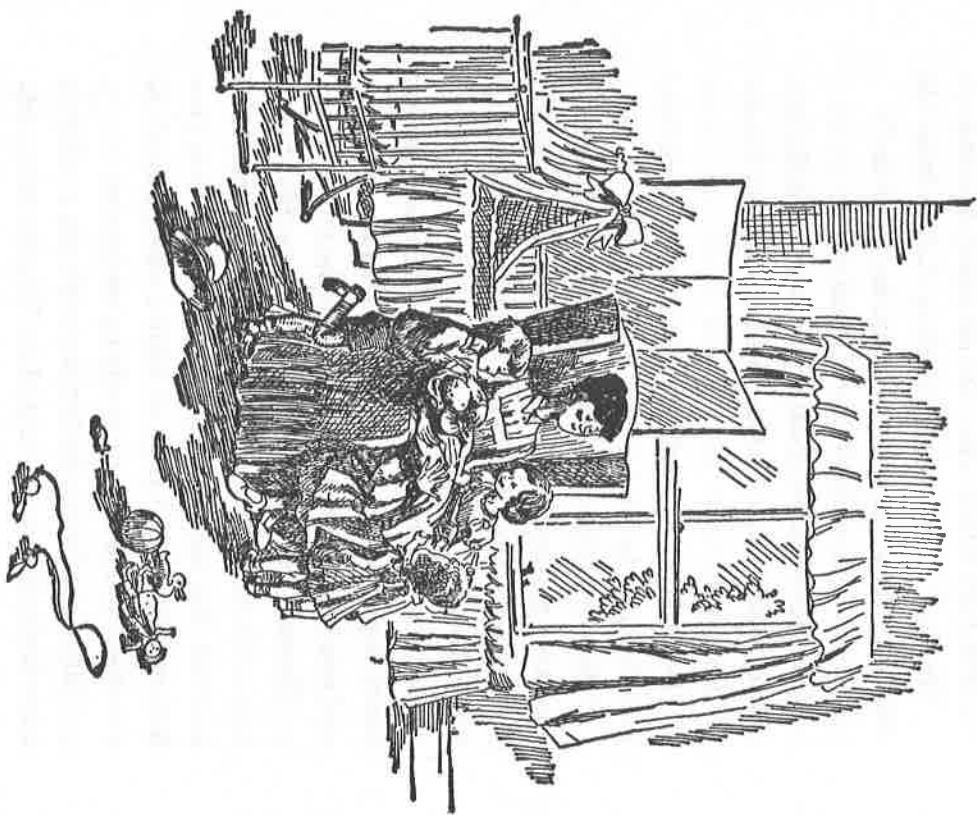
"My rabbit!" said Barbara, tugging at Annabel's shawl.

"Oh!" breathed Jane, touching the hair that the wind had curled. "How very small and sweet. Like a star. Where *did* you come from, Annabel?"

Very pleased to be asked, Annabel began her story again.

"I came from the Dark——" she recited softly.

Jane laughed. "Such funny little sounds!" she cried. "I wish she could talk and tell us."



*She sat down in the old arm-chair*

Annabel stared.

"But I *am* telling you," she protested, kicking.

"Ha-ha!" shrieked the Starling rudely from the window. "What did I say? Excuse me laughing!"

The Fledgling giggled behind his wing.

"Perhaps she came from a Toy-Shop," said Michael. Annabel, with a furious movement, flung his finger from her.

"Don't be silly!" said Jane. "Doctor Simpson must have brought her in his little brown bag!"

"Was I right or was I wrong?" The Starling's old dark eyes gleamed tauntingly at Annabel.

"Tell me that!" he jeered, flapping his wings in triumph.

But for answer Annabel turned her face against Mary Poppins' apron and wept. Her first cries, thin and lonely, rang piercingly through the house.

"There! There!" said the Starling gruffly. "Don't take on! It can't be helped. You're only a human child after all. But next time, perhaps, you'll believe your Betters! Elders and Betters! Elders and Betters!" he screamed, prancing conceitedly up and down.

"Michael, take my feather duster please, and sweep those birds off the sill!" said Mary Poppins ominously.

A squawk of amusement came from the Starling.

"We can sweep ourselves off, Mary Poppins, thank you! We were just going, anyway! Come along, Boy!"

And with a loud clucking chuckle he flicked the Fledgling over the sill and swooped with him through the window. . . .

In a very short time, Annabel settled down comfortably to life in Cherry-Tree Lane. She enjoyed being the centre of attraction and was always pleased when somebody leant over her cradle and said how pretty she was, or how good or sweet-tempered.

"Do go on admiring me!" she would say, smiling.

"I like it so much!"

And then they would hasten to tell her how curly her hair was and how blue her eyes, and Annabel would smile in such a satisfied way that they would cry, "How intelligent she is! You would almost think she understood!"

But *that* always annoyed her and she would turn away in disgust at their foolishness. Which was silly because when she was disgusted she looked so charming that they became more foolish than ever.

She was a week old before the Starling returned. Mary Poppins, in the dim glow of the night-light, was gently rocking the cradle when he appeared.

"Back again?" snapped Mary Poppins, watching him prance in. "You're as bad as a bad penny!" She gave a long disgusted sniff.

"I've been busy!" said the Starling. "Have to keep my affairs in order. And this isn't the *only* Nursery I

have to look after, you know!" His beady black eyes twinkled wickedly.

"Humph!" she said shortly, "I'm sorry for the others!"

He chuckled and shook his head.

"Nobody like her!" he remarked chirpily to the blind-tassel. "Nobody like her! She's got an answer for everything!" He cocked his head towards the cradle. "Well, how are things? Annabel asleep?"

"No thanks to you, if she is!" said Mary Poppins.

The Starling ignored the remark. He hopped to the end of the sill.

"I'll keep watch," he said, in a whisper. "You go down and get a cup of tea!"

Mary Poppins stood up.

"Mind you don't wake her, then!"

The Starling laughed pityingly.

"My dear girl, I have in my time brought up at least twenty broods of fledglings. I don't need to be told how to look after a mere baby."

"Humph!" Mary Poppins walked to the cupboard and very pointedly put the biscuit-tin under her arm before she went out and shut the door.

The Starling marched up and down the window-sill, backwards and forwards, with his wing-tips under his tail-feathers.

There was a small stir in the cradle. Annabel opened her eyes.

"Hullo!" she said. "I was wanting to see you."

"Ha!" said the Starling, swooping across to her.

"There's something I wanted to remember," said Annabel frowning, "and I thought you might remind me."

He started. His dark eye glittered.

"How does it go?" he said softly. "Like this?"

And he began in a husky whisper—"I am earth and air and fire and water——"

"No, no!" said Annabel impatiently. "Of course it doesn't."

"Well," said the Starling anxiously. "Was it about your journey? You came from the sea and its tides, you came from the sky and——"

"Oh, don't be so silly!" cried Annabel. "The only journey I ever took was to the Park and back again this morning. No, no—it was something *important*. Something beginning with B."

She crowed suddenly.

"I've got it!" she cried. "It's Biscuit. Half an Arrow-root Biscuit on the mantelpiece. Michael left it there after tea!"

"Is that all?" said the Starling sadly.

"Yes, of course," Annabel said fretfully. "Isn't it

enough? I thought you'd be glad of a nice piece of biscuit!"

"So I am, so I am!" said the Starling hastily.

"But——"

She turned her head on the pillow and closed her eyes.

"Don't talk any more now, please!" she said. "I want to go to sleep."

The Starling glanced across at the mantelpiece, and down again at Annabel.

"Biscuits!" he said, shaking his head. "Alas, Annabel, alas!"

Mary Poppins came in quietly and closed the door.

"Did she wake?" she said in a whisper.

The Starling nodded.

"Only for a minute," he said sadly. "But it was long enough."

Mary Poppins' eyes questioned him.

"She's forgotten," he said, with a catch in his croak. "She's forgotten it all. I knew she would. But, ah, my dear, what a pity!"

"Humph!"

Mary Poppins moved quietly about the Nursery, putting the toys away. She glanced at the Starling. He was standing on the window-sill with his back to her, and his speckled shoulders were heaving.

"Caught another cold?" she remarked sarcastically. He wheeled around.

"Certainly not! It's—ahem—the night air. Rather chilly, you know. Makes the eyes water. Well—I must be off!"

He waddled unsteadily to the edge of the sill. "I'm getting old," he croaked sadly. "That's what it is! Not so young as we were. Eh, Mary Poppins?"

"I don't know about *you*——" Mary Poppins drew herself up haughtily. "But I'm *quite* as young as I was, thank you!"

"Ah," said the Starling, shaking his head. "You're a Wonder. An absolute, Marvellous, Wonderful Wonder!" His round eye twinkled wickedly.

"I don't think!" he called back rudely, as he dived out of the window.

"Impudent Sparrer!" she shouted after him and shut the window with a bang....

