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## The Penguin and Mary Poppins

Before he ever moved to Gotham City, before he grew into the overweight, obsessive sad sack of his later years, The Penguin was a poet and a dandy who lived in London. He wrote complex villanelles and threw lavish dinner parties at which he only became more charming the more he drank. He wore a monocle and a top hat and carried an umbrella.

One evening, at one of his dinner parties, after hours spent sipping absinthe, The Penguin ran up to the roof of his building, opened up his large, black umbrella, and leapt off into the air. As he coasted to the ground, he hollered out lines from Blake, stuff about grabbing life by the fat of its stomach and giving it a twist. He was that crazy. He was that bursting with life.

From that night on, he made it his habit to jump off roofs, ever higher, while clutching an umbrella. After a while, he got pretty good at it, too. He saw that by kicking his legs and twisting his back a certain way, he could actually prolong his flight, coasting all over the place, sometimes only landing after several daring minutes aloft.



It came to pass that The Penguin started hearing more and more about a certain nanny named Mary Poppins. She, too, he was told, had been floating around London hanging from an umbrella handle. Everywhere he went The Penguin kept hearing about her, how it was simply insane that they had not yet met each other.

So finally, a dinner party was arranged by someone who knew them both, and on the evening of the party, The Penguin walked into the drawing room, saw Mary Poppins on the divan, doffed his top hat, and bowed low, as was his style in those days.

He had planned a few things to say and do when first meeting Mary Poppins. He thought he might lift up his umbrella as though challenging her to a duel. He imagined she would smile and take up her own frilly, perhaps pink umbrella, and then, together, they would dance about the room, leaping over furniture, parrying and thrusting, perhaps even winding things up breathing heavily, nose to nose.

Instead what happened was The Penguin became very shy and quiet. As he stood there staring at her, his top hat felt needlessly clumsy and his monocle too small for his face, and the squinting needed to keep it in place was giving him a slight headache. For the first time in his life, The Penguin felt ludicrous.

“I imagine you two must have an infinite amount of things to speak of,” said their host as he sat them together at the dinner table. The Penguin nodded uncertainly.



After three or four minutes it became clear that The Penguin and Mary Poppins had absolutely nothing to say to one another that did not deal exclusively with umbrella travel— getting stuck in trees, the shoulder aches, anxiety about tipping over in the wind.

Everyone at the table just sat there staring at them expectantly, which made the whole thing even more awkward.

Trying to move things along, Mary Poppins asked The Penguin if he liked to sing, to which The Penguin responded, “Only when I’m drunk.” Then she asked if he enjoyed children, to which he replied, “Yes, in a sweet wine sauce.”

The Penguin then asked Mary Poppins how she kept people from looking up her skirt when she flew. She smiled politely, then turned to the man on her left and asked him how he was enjoying the lamb.

The man on her left was wearing an elegant, aristocratic cape. Mary, a bit drunk on the sherry, noted that if he spread his cape out he might be able to glide about like a bat. The man on her left chuckled and suggested that after dinner they head up to the roof and give it a try, which they did. ♣