

One Day of Mary

**Isabel Ecclestone
Mackay**

**Illustrated by
Charles F. Peters**

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ONE DAY OF MARY

By ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES F. PETERS

Mrs. Elder tucked a last sweet-lavendered garment within a full sweet-lavendered drawer and sighed. She enjoyed the sigh. From some point of outside observation she seemed to be watching herself sitting there, alone in the quiet bedroom, her hands folded in her lap; an open drawer, filled with small and dainty garments, in front of her. She saw herself as a pathetic figure (charmingly pathetic of course) and the sigh was in keeping with the picture. All in the same flash of thought she saw herself speaking of the incident to her dear friend Dora Hammond. She would say to Dora, with gentle apology:

“Somehow I cannot think of Mary as really grown up. I know, of course, that she is a young mother with a child of her own now, but to me she is still little Mary—my little girl. I suppose (she would smile faintly here) it is because she was my only one.”

Dora would understand. Dora would say, “Poor dear, but you shouldn’t allow yourself—” and she would interrupt Dora with a quick, “Oh no, of course I don’t. Only on her birthday, you know, she seems to come back to me like she used to be. I look through the drawer where her little, old-fashioned darling dresses are kept and—somehow I feel less lonely.”

Dora would appreciate exactly how she felt.

But not Tom. Tom never appreciated anything like that. If she mentioned its being Mary’s birthday, Tom would say, “So it is—dash it! I can’t remember dates. Better send the girl a cheque, eh? Or do you know of something she specially wants?” And if she were to so much as refer to the quiet room and the drawerful of little clothes, he would laugh bluffly, “Well, mother, I should think you’d be mighty glad to have her all brought up and comfortably settled. I know I am.” Men have no fine feeling.

Mary would be—yes, Mary actually was—twenty-five years old that day. Ah! but when Mary wore the little dresses in the drawer Mary had been only five—a merry, romping, delicious five! Mrs. Elder allowed the tears to gather in her eyes. The flat was so quiet—no little steps upon the stairs, no eager, shouting voice Dora would appreciate that.



He had even called upon her at her hotel.

She shut the drawer with another sigh and wiped away the tears delicately. As she did so she noticed that she was using her very best handkerchief—a most peculiar handkerchief, cunningly embroidered. It had been given to her, she remembered, by that Hindoo gentleman who had been so embarrassingly grateful for an impulsive act of hers which had removed a fat and smiling Hindoo babe from a position of some danger. The child, he said, belonged to him, and, as he persisted in believing that she had saved its life, he had been, well, orientally grateful. He had even called upon her at her hotel (she and Tom had been travelling at the time) and had pressed her to accept rich silks and odd looking jewellery which was, of course, out of the question. She had at once seen herself in the character of the gentle lady who condescends sweetly and gravely to the-so-to-be-pitied brown brother and had hastened to assure him that she desired no reward for having helped, even in a small way, a little child. She had known what it was to have a little child, she said. She had sighed. The brown man's eyes had grown very liquid. Was it then departed—that little one? Oh no, she told him, only grown up. He had looked surprised at that. (After all he was only a man—like Tom). But there had been a compelling expression in his eyes—he had very curious eyes, really, which had lured her on to tell him about

Mary and about the quiet flat, the little dresses—Mary at five years old. “The happiest time of my life,” she had said. “People say that children are tiresome, but oh, no! What would I not give for one day of little Mary, back again!”

“It is then the great wish of a life?” The Hindoo gentleman had asked this in a curiously thrilling voice and most correct English.

She had assured him that it was. He had smiled. It was a sudden, delightful smile like a child’s, and with the smile he had gathered up the refused jewellery and the silks which had accompanied it—all except a peculiar ring, of little value (she was wearing it now) and the embroidered square which she presumed was a handkerchief.

“Ah!” he had said, “then that is what I shall give—a day of the little child! But not now. One must be patient until the name day—when all will be propitious.” Then as she had opened her lips to ask what he meant he had stopped her with an absurdly gracious, “Do not speak of it! For one so grateful it is a trifle! On the name day you will remember.”

He had gone away immediately, leaving her with the ring and the handkerchief. She had felt relieved. After all, though a gentleman, he was certainly not a white one.

She had forgotten all about it.

And now, oddly enough, she was remembering—even every word he had said—and the compelling look—on Mary’s birthday—just as he had said—odd! She would tell Dora.

Complacently she rubbed the ring (which she must have put on that morning by mistake) with the handkerchief (which she had taken from the box by chance) and her mind reverted to the business of the day. There was much to be done—that embroidered tea-cloth to finish for Mrs. Edward Stitt’s holiday-sale, some invitations to answer, a luncheon to attend, dinner to order—no, with a thrill of gratification she remembered that she and Tom were dining out. With a final sigh she turned from the sacred bureau—and started to her feet with a plump “Good Heavens!”

From somewhere in the silent house had come a smashing crash—Mrs. Elder hurried to the door, adjusting her glasses as she went. She was not alarmed—no one ever burgled in Hoppleton—but she was annoyed. She did not like sudden noises. And she remembered the new family who had moved next door. There were three children. Unfortunately even an apartment house cannot choose its neighbors. She had seen them yesterday

—one of eight years—one of five and one just toddling. She had said to Tom, “We must ask the janitor to get the latch of the back gate fixed at once,” and Tom had said “Why?” in that un-understanding way of his.

Well—this was what happened when back gates are left unfastened. It was probably the milk bottles on the back balcony!—But it wasn’t the milk bottles—a small sound from behind her told her that the crash had taken place inside the flat and a sudden throwing open of the sitting-room door revealed to horrified eyes an unimagined catastrophe—the Ming vase!

The Ming vase was—had been—a wonderful object. It had stood on a tabouret by itself in the bay window. It was undoubtedly Chinese. “Ming I suppose?” a very cultured caller had once said and, “Oh, yes, certainly Ming,” Mrs. Elder had answered. It really didn’t matter that neither of them knew what “Ming” was; no one else in Hoppleton knew either. And, poets to the contrary, there is much in a name. From being merely a Chinese ornament, the Ming vase had become a precious thing.

And now—now it lay, broken, unglorious, littering the parlor floor!

Beside the remains, and gazing at them, a small child was standing. She was an odd looking little creature, being dressed in what was once known as a “French” dress, very long as to body and very short and full as to skirt, various layers of undergarments frilled beneath, most unsuitable! The child’s hair, too, unlike the hair of all proper children, was not bobbed. It was long, lean hair and nothing had been done to fatten it. It was drawn primly back into a long lean pigtail. The child’s face was very solemn.

“*Well!*” said Mrs. Elder. It seemed to be all she could say. But one can do a lot with proper expression. The child looked up from the ruins with a start.



“It felled,” she said in explanatory tones, adding, “I was looking what it was like in its insides.”

Mrs. Elder leaned suddenly against the door-post. She needed its support. When the child had raised its eyes she had been the victim of a most peculiar hallucination. She closed her eyes. It is the proper thing to do in the case of an hallucination. Mrs. Elder closed her eyes tightly. When she opened them again the child was still looking at her. And the child who looked at her was her own child. The child was Mary.

The human mind adjusts itself with incredible rapidity.

“What are you doing in this room?” asked Mary’s mother with asperity. “Haven’t I told you—”

“Go ’way!” said the child pouting her upper lip. “Where is my mama? I want my own mama!”

“Look at that vase, that valuable vase!” went on Mrs. Elder, now trembling with indignation. “My Ming vase. The only Ming vase in Hoppleton—you naughty, disobedient child! Wait till your father hears of this!”

The last words seemed to come automatically, and, strangely enough, they had an effect. The child ceased to pout.

“Don’t tell daddy!” she said coaxingly.

A memory stirred in Mrs. Elder’s brain—. Tom was certainly unnecessarily strict with the child. On the other hand, Tom had never properly appreciated the Ming vase.

“I shall certainly have to tell him,” she said, but the ring of determination had gone from her voice, and the child grinned understandingly.

“How did you get in?” added Mrs. Elder, sternly. The child looked at her with a manifest wonder which at once made apparent the absurdity of her question.

“I didn’t get in. I am in,” said the child.

“What I mean is,” Mrs. Elder went on hastily, “who dressed you in that absurd frock?” Again the foolishness of the question was patent.

“My mama dressed me,” said the child, “it’s not a ’surb frock!”

“Well, come and let us see if we can find something more suitable.”

Taking the child’s hand, Mrs. Elder led the way into the bedroom. She felt very much worried and confused. There were, of course, clothes in the drawer, but they, she remembered with a slight shock, were very much like the clothes the child was wearing—wait, though! There was that little embroidered slipover which she had made for Mrs. Stitt’s sale. Hurriedly she took it from her neat pile of finished work.

“This,” she said, “is a pretty little frock. But you must be very careful of it. You must not dirty it, of course.”

She spread out the plainly cut but daintily embroidered slip before the child.

“It is a nighty-gown,” said Mary, drawing back, “I won’t wear a nighty-gown.”

“Don’t say *won’t* to me, miss!” said Mary’s mother. “Come now, let mother, put on the pretty frock like a dear little girl.”

“I won’t,” said the dear little girl, and incontinently she began to howl lustily.

It was terrible! At the first scream Mrs. Elder felt the preliminary twinge of what she was accustomed to call, proprietorially, “My neuralgia.” It shot through her astonished head like a burning dart. As the yells proceeded it grew unbearable—besides, the neighbors!

“Stop it!” she ordered. “Stop it this minute!” Her voice was almost as shrill as the child’s. “Do you hear me?—oh, good gracious, stop it!”

Mary did not stop it, so she shook Mary.

It was apparently the right thing to do. Mary’s yells diminished.

“If you make that noise again,” said Mrs. Elder, “I’ll—I’ll tell your father.” This also seemed correct. Mary allowed herself to be quieted. The new frock was slipped on.

“To-morrow,” said Mrs. Elder, “we shall have your hair bobbed. A big butterfly bow may make it passable.”

She buttoned up the frock and, at the top button her hand touched the round, slim neck. With an irresistible feeling which seemed to come suddenly from a long distance, she caught the child to her and kissed the soft warm flesh. This was Mary—little Mary! How wonderful! The child wriggled away.

“I don’t like kisses—much,” she said politely. “Do you know where my dolly is?” Then in a shriller voice as she noticed the blank look on Mrs. Elder’s face, “Where is my dolly? I want my dolly!”

With an effort Mrs. Elder seemed to remember. The doll? Oh yes, Mary’s doll. It was in the attic, at the bottom of the green trunk.

“Yes, dear,” she said, “mother will get it. And—and you won’t touch anything while I am gone, will you?”

The doll took only a few moments to find. But a few moments were apparently all that Mary needed. It doesn’t take long to empty a basketful of carefully sorted embroidery silks upon the floor, nor to make oneself “Smell

pretty” with a half-bottle of cologne, nor to try extensive experiments with face powder and cold cream.

“Oh, *child!*” said Mary’s mother, and then she thought of the formula which of late years she had found increasingly protective, “I think you had better run home now.”

Even as the words came, came also realization. Mary couldn’t run home. *This* was Mary’s home. How awf—wonderful!

With a cold feeling at her heart she offered the doll. The child seized it delightedly, only to drop it with dangerous force upon a chair.

“It’s made all smellie!” cried Mary, her face puckering.

“Nonsense! It’s camphor-balls,” snapped Mrs. Elder. She was beginning to feel snappy; shaky, too. The medley of cologne and camphor mounted to her head. “Pick up those silks at once,” she demanded, “and never, never touch my basket again!” Her eye fell upon the unfinished tea-cloth and a vision of her ordered and orderly life, now, like the Ming vase, smashed into bits, floated before her with tantalizing clarity—That tea-cloth! She had promised it for to-morrow. She had left herself just time enough to finish it. She had timed it exactly so that it might be in Mrs. Stitt’s hands not too late for admiring comment but not sufficiently early for flattering imitation. “Dear Mrs. Elder,” Mrs. Stitt would say, “what beautiful work you do and how wonderfully you do it!” Of course she, Maria Elder, did not value these little triumphs and embroidery was a means of filling in lonely moments, still—

“Stop jumping off that chair, Mary! This room is not a barn.”

“Let’s play it’s a barn!” said Mary, her face breaking into an eager, childish smile.

“Are you crazy?” asked Mrs. Elder coldly, “what you had better do now is to sit down quietly. I will give you some sewing.”

“I don’t like sewing,” said Mary.

“You will have to like it.”

“Can I make a dolly dress?”

“Perhaps—that is to say, presently. I haven’t time to cut one out now. I will give you this beautiful square of white cotton and you may hem a handkerchief.”

Mary yawned. "I'm hungry," she announced in a hurt voice, apropos of nothing.

Mrs. Elder started. It was twelve o'clock, and at one-fifteen she was due to lunch down town at the "Appletree Inn"—the new (and only) lunch room—over which all Hoppleton was bubbling. The occasion, too, was a unique one, being no less than the entertainment of Miss Marion Singlesby as guest of honor. Miss Singlesby was—had once been—a leader of feminism. She had, it is true, fallen on evil times, having led feminism about as far as it could go, and being, as it were, out of a job. Her famous lecture, "Shall woman be classed with the alien and insane?" was now only a memory, since, with the presentation of a vote, women had been automatically removed from these unfortunate classes. Nevertheless, Miss Singlesby was a person. She was at least interestingly reminiscent of old wars and battles long ago, and not to be present at the luncheon given in her honor would be distinctly, a social slip.

Mrs. Elder became conscious of a frantic feeling, a caged and fettered feeling. She threw open the window. As in a dream she heard herself speaking to Dora Hammond, "Of course I go to all these affairs, my dear. I feel it is my duty. I don't really enjoy them, you know. They seem so trivial. They are trivial, but until the whole scheme of woman's activities is rearranged what can one do? When Mary was a child it was quite different. Then I had a long and happy day—full of pleasant cares—but now—" Had she ever really said that? It was so confusing—

Mary cut short the thread of her thought with something between a shriek and a sob. Mrs. Elder turned quickly, but not quickly enough to save the unique tea-cloth from its baptism of blood. Mary, poor little darling, had cut her finger with the scissors and, childlike, had seized the nearest article for first-aid purposes.

"Oh, oh!" cried Mary, "Oh, oh! I've cutted my finger and I'm hungry—and I want my m-mama!"

"I am your mother," said Mrs. Elder with ominous calm. "Stop that disgraceful noise! Perhaps this will teach you to avoid sharp scissors!"

In the bathroom, with the windows tightly (shut sound travels so easily up and down an apartment shaft) she bandaged the cut finger and, afterwards, with hands that shook a little, she provided lunch. Oddly enough she seemed to have forgotten what the child ate. But she remembered telling Dora Hammond that Mary had been practically brought up on milk and eggs

—so wholesome. She therefore provided milk and eggs. The child looked at them with a look of infinite loathing.

“I don’t like milk,” said Mary, “please.”

“All little girls like milk,” said Mary’s mother, “it makes them grow big and strong.”

“And I can’t eat eggs—the yellow makes me feel wiggily.”

“Nonsense! Eggs are—eat your lunch at once!”

But Mary did not eat it at once. Neither did she eat it later. But she showed what can be done with egg in the way of table decoration. Finally she lunched off buttered toast and cocoa.

“You are a very different little girl from what you used to be,” said Mrs. Elder feelingly.

“What did I used to be?” asked the child.

It was a pertinent question. Mrs. Elder’s confused mind could not cope with it.

“I mean,” she explained lamely, “you’re not a bit like I told Dora—I mean, I cannot understand you. You—you don’t seem to obey me or—love me as you should.”

The child became suddenly demure and very polite.

“I like my own mama best, please,” she said primly.

“But I am your own mama. Why do you say such foolish things?”

The child shook her head. She stammered a little, as Mary had always stammered under stress.

“My mama was p-pretty,” she declared, “and f-father, and she l-laughed and her t-teeth stuck in tight.”

Mrs. Elder remembered with considerable annoyance that she had an appointment with her dentist at four. It was true that her plate had become loosened. Still—

“You are a very rude little girl!” she said, “and the proper place for rude children is bed. It is time for your afternoon sleep anyway.”

“I don’t have afternoon sleeps now,” protested Mary, “not since before last birthday. I’m too big.”

But Mrs. Elder was adamant. She remembered very well explaining to Dora how essential afternoon sleep is to a growing child and how she had insisted upon Mary's having one every day until she went to school. Besides, she simply couldn't stand any more! She had reached the limit.

The ordinary limit, she meant, because, as any mother will tell you, there is a limit beyond the limit, where small children are concerned. One reaches the outside edge and still goes on. Mrs. Elder found that you may put a child to bed at midday but you can't make it sleep. After a half hour of exhausting moral suasion and a certain amount of suasion other than moral, she was willing to admit defeat. Mary arose, abused yet triumphant, and demanded leave to play with the little girls next door.

"But they are quite new little girls," sighed her mother, "we don't know anything about them."

That, it appeared, was the very reason Mary wished to play with them. New little girls were "so in'dresting."

"But children are not allowed in the apartment house garden," said Mrs. Elder.

That, also, was a mere detail; Mary preferred the street to play in, anyway. The little girl next door played in the street!—No—Mary must play indoors. And indoors she played for a strenuous hour, during which the "Party above" thumped sharply on the floor. After that she was allowed to go out, "for a few moments."

Mrs. Elder sat down amid the debris of her once ordered and orderly room. She was, she said to herself, more exhausted than if she had done a week's washing. Yet her task had been nothing save the pleasant and homey one of looking after a little child. Her hands, as she folded away the ruined tea-cloth, were hot and dry. Her head ached. Catching a glimpse of her face in the glass she hardly knew it. Instead of a neatly sweet and placid expression and a becoming pallor, she saw a countenance flushed and perturbed, eyes which looked at once strained and hard, and lips set in a thin tightness anything but gentle.

With a violent effort she attempted to settle to her work. Work would compose her thoughts: besides, as she had so often happily explained to Dora Hammond, mothers of small darlings must learn to use the "in-between" moments as they come.

shriek from outside the open window brought her to her feet. But it was **A** nothing!—only that the second youngest of the children next door had come a cropper while playing “Crack the whip.” Mary, she saw, was picking him up from the gutter and dusting him off. For a duster she used the dainty skirt of the new embroidered frock.

“Ma-ry!” called Mrs. Elder from the window, “didn’t I tell you not to get that dress dirty?”

But Mary, now posing as whiphandle in another instalment of the game, did not even hear.

Mrs. Elder sat down once more. She tried to think. Unfortunately she couldn’t think. Her thoughts piled upon themselves in the most confusing manner.

“Blood-pressure!” murmured Mrs. Elder. It was the latest Hoppleton shibboleth.

She found herself wondering about Tom. How would Tom “take” Mary? She found herself thinking with relief that Tom had rather a good way of taking things. He might be slow at understanding the deeper feelings but otherwise he was a capable man. He might even be capable of Mary. He might “take the child in hand.” She wondered that she had ever considered Tom too strict with Mary. He had been very much, she remembered, the stern father. “Dash it, the kid’s got to have *some* training!” he had said. Well—she agreed with Tom. She would have no objection—but here a disquieting thought intervened. Tom had been different—lately. She remembered his conduct only last week when they had visited the young Blakelys who had two very boisterous children. Tom had been perfectly silly about these children. He had allowed them to play all kinds of pranks, to make frightful noises—had encouraged them in fact. And Mr. Blakely had said, “Tom, old man, you’re getting to the grand-pa stage,” and Ida Blakely had laughed and said, “Yes, Tom is just like father. I hardly dare let the kiddies go home for a visit, he spoils them so! But he was horribly strict with us. I think men mellow earlier than women.”

Mrs. Elder’s heart was conscious of panic. Was Tom “mellowing?” Would he be “mellow” with regard to Mary—Good heavens!

A shrill peal of laughter on the severely silent apartment staircase made her forget Tom. Mary was returning, bringing her “little friends.” They

bounced into the room glowing, laughing and louder, if less glorious, than an army with banners.

“We’ve come up,” explained Mary unnecessarily. “Annie wants a napple and Teddie wants a norange and I’m so dretful hungry I want both.”

Mrs. Elder fed them. It seemed the only thing to do, and when they had departed, happily vociferous, she met the reproaches of a scandalized janitor with the calmness of despair.

“Not wishin’ to give offence to such good tenants as you, mum, it wouldn’t never do.” There was much more, including, “the owner being terrible particular,” and “as much as my place is worth, mum.”

Well! They would have to leave the apartment, that was plain. She had never liked living in an apartment. But wait! Was that quite true? She had said that she did not like it, that never a day passed that she did not miss the old house of her early married life. But why should she see that house as a sort of nightmare, a nightmare including dusty furnaces, tiresome stairs, hot water heated on a kitchen range, no gas, and endless window-cleaning? Why did the apartment which she had so deplored take on a semblance of a place of peace and janitors and steam-heat?

She sighed. It was an entirely different sigh from the sigh she had sighed that morning over the open drawer. It came from a different place.



Tom came in with Mary on his shoulder.

She tried again to work, but could do nothing, and had done nothing when Tom came home. She heard him coming from as far off as the

apartment door. He was laughing—not an ordinary apartment laugh, but a big detached-house “Ha, ha!” There was a rush up the stair and a bump against the (newly varnished) door, and Tom came in with Mary on his shoulder, helpless with giggling.

“Here she is, mother!” sang out Tom, depositing the giggling child amid the immaculate cushions of the sofa. “My! isn’t she the dirty little tyke! Better dump her right in the bath.”

“She was perfectly clean when I let her go out to play,” said Mrs. Elder, “and that is the only decent dress she has. I told her to be careful of it.”

“Oh—well! What do you expect? Kids will be kids! Why don’t you put her into overalls and turn her loose?”

“She would look nice in overalls—a big girl of five.”

“Oh, bah!” said Tom.

“Come on, kid,” he added, “daddy will give you a wipe-off.”

She could hear them giggling in the bathroom.

There was no doubt about it—Tom had mellowed!

Dinner that night was a wild affair. Mary had insisted upon eating everything she shouldn’t and Tom had let her eat it. There was a conspiracy between them. Tom had wiped up the cambric-tea she spilled, with his own table napkin, and had set a plate over the spot. He had encouraged her to talk in spite of her mother’s protest that no well-bred child monopolizes the conversation, and he had actually laughed when the child had said, “Where is my pretty, fat mama gone?” Instead of a stern rebuke, he had said, “Say, isn’t she the cute, little, noticing thing?”

It was all very dreadful—but bed-time came at last. Mary in her nightie looked very small and somehow pathetic. But Mrs. Elder was too exhausted to perceive it. She had no energy even to resent the child’s muttered addition to her prayers, “And please God, bring back my nice, fat mama—Amen.”

Tom looked up with a grin from his paper as she returned to the sitting-room.

“Say this is nicer than going out to dinner with a guy we hardly know, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Elder remembered with a sickening sense of loss that she and Tom were supposed to dine with the Aldridges! The most exclusive dinner-givers

in Hoppleton. And this was the first time!

“Oh dear!” sighed Mrs. Elder. And quite without warning she began to cry.

Her husband looked puzzled.

“But you said you didn’t care about dinners,” he remarked rumpling his hair. “You said you went (and made me go) only because social life is a sort of duty. You said that what you really loved were the old days when—”

“Oh—oh, I don’t care *what* I said!” sobbed Mrs. Elder. At which, like a wise man, Mr. Elder returned to his paper.

She quieted down presently. After all, she was quite too tired for anything requiring effort. She picked up the new novel which her “Book Club” was reading just then. It was an advanced novel and they were reading it in order to discuss its advancement. “For, of course,” as Mrs. Elder herself had said to the President, “it is our duty to read these books. We cannot condemn what we have not read.”

It was rather an absorbing book. From the first chapter Mrs. Elder saw plainly that she would certainly condemn it—when she had finished it. It was this type of book which was throwing down the barriers which had kept her own youth and the youths of most of her Club members so—so different from the youth of the present day. Looking up she made the remark to Tom.

“But everything’s different!” said Tom stupidly.

“Ideals should never be different!” said Mrs. Elder quite in her old gentle manner.

“Why not?” said Tom. He was always asking silly questions like that.

It was quite late when she laid the book aside. She felt better. The flat was very quiet—or was it?

“What’s that?” asked Tom, sitting up. “By Jove, it’s the kid crying!” He was into the bedroom in a moment and back again with a worried face.

“She’s feverish!” he said in a frightened voice. “She’s fretting too. She says she’s got a pain.”

“That’s because you let her eat too much,” said Mrs. Elder, no longer gentle, “and I told you that apple-pie and cheese at night was certain to—”

“Oh, stow it!” said Tom, “the kid’s sick. Let’s get the doctor!”

“I shall get,” said Mrs. Elder coldly, “a hot-water bottle and nothing more.”

“Peppermint!” insisted Tom.

Mrs. Elder compromised on the peppermint.

Both were applied, but the child was restless.

“Sing!” she demanded fretfully.

Mrs. Elder sang. She had been having lessons lately, not because, as she explained, she ever expected to be a great singer, but it is one’s duty to use what one has.

“Not like that!” A small, hot hand fell lightly on the singer’s lips. “I don’t *like* that singing!” said Mary.

(Really, someone would have to teach her manners.)

“Try her with a story!” suggested Tom anxiously.

Mrs. Elder did. She tried her with several stories. Mary was wide awake now and willing to go on forever. The pain was better, too, until it was time for a fresh story.

“Gee! doesn’t she know how to put it over!” grinned the fatuous Tom.

“I am going to bed,” said Mrs. Elder and there was finality in her tone.

“What time is it?” she roused herself to say as Tom prepared to follow her.

“Quarter to twelve,” said Tom.

“What an awful day!” said Mrs. Elder.

She was drifting off to sleep—farther and farther—delicious drowsiness—she was almost gone—almost—

“Mama! Mama!”

Mrs. Elder sat up as if galvanized. The shrill cry of a child was in her ears, her blood was pounding—

Somewhere in the house a clock began to strike. She counted “One—two—twelve!”

She sprang out of bed. Her eyes went frantically to the cot which she had placed along the farther wall—it did not seem to be there—it wasn’t there—

there was nothing along the farther wall—*nothing!*

“What’s the trouble, mother?” A sleepy voice recalled her. Tom had raised himself, blinking, upon his elbow.

Mrs. Elder sat down suddenly on the bed. She felt faint. Her voice was a whisper.

“I—I thought I heard Mary call.”

Tom dropped upon his pillow with an irritated thud.

“Oh, cheese it!” said Tom.

It was exceedingly rude. But Tom never did understand how she felt about Mary!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *One Day of Mary* by Isabel Ecclestone Mackay]