



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Mistress Mary

L. Frank Baum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And how about the cockle-shells?"

"Them also I know," said Mary eagerly, for she was glad her father should find her so well acquainted with the field flowers; "there is nothing prettier than the

big white flowers of the cockle-shells. But tell me, papa, what have the flowers to do with your coming home?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mind that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"'Tis aptly said. But prithee, maid,
Why thus your garden fill
When ev'ry field the same flowers yield
To pluck them as you will?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, Squire!" sobbed Mary, "I am in great trouble.

"Each dingle-bell I loved so well
Before my eyes is dying,
And much I fear my brother dear
In sickness now is lying!"

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

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

each other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

runs beside the wood."

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

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

And Mary exclaimed,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to watch the flowers in the field; and if you will come and visit them each day, you will find the time of waiting very short indeed."

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

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

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

"I knew you were coming soon, papa."

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

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

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

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