



A day in the Park

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1997

P. L. TRAVERS

Mary Poppins

Opens the Door



ILLUSTRATED BY

Mary Shepard and Agnes Sims

This file contains only the chapter called
"The Marble Boy," pages 95-218.

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To
Katharine Cornell

tail curled round it and its whiskers folded against its cheeks. Dappled with small, blue, shining flowers, its green eyes gazing across the room, silent and still on the mantelpiece, sat Michael's China Cat.

"Well, of all the hard-hearted, unfeeling children!" Mr. Banks stared up at them, shocked and hurt.

But that only made them laugh more loudly. They giggled and coughed and choked and exploded till Mary Poppins bent back her head and fixed them with one of her fiercest glares.

Then there was silence. Not even a hiccup. For that look, as Jane and Michael knew, was enough to stop anyone laughing. . . .



CHAPTER FOUR



The Marble Boy

And don't forget to buy me an evening paper!" said Mrs. Banks, as she handed Jane two pennies and kissed her goodbye.

Michael looked at his Mother reproachfully.

"Is that all you're going to give us?" he asked. "What'll happen if we meet the Ice Cream Man?"

"Well," said Mrs. Banks reluctantly. "Here's another sixpence. But I do think you children get too many treats. I didn't have Ices every day when I was a little girl."

Michael looked at her curiously. He could not believe she had ever been a little girl. Mrs. George Banks in short skirts and her hair tied up with ribbons? Impossible!

"I suppose," he said smugly, "you didn't deserve them!"

And he tucked the sixpence carefully into the pocket of his sailor suit.

"That's Fourpence for the Ice Creams," said Jane. "And we'll buy a *Lot-o'-Fun* with the rest."

"Out of my way, Miss, if you please!" said a haughty voice behind her.

As neat and trim as a fashion-plate, Mary Poppins came down the steps with Annabel. She dumped her into the perambulator and pushed it past the children.

"Now, Quick March into the Park!" she snapped. "And no meandering!"

Down the path straggled Jane and Michael, with John and Barbara at their heels. The sun spread over Cherry Tree Lane like a bright enormous umbrella. Thrushes and blackbirds sang in the trees. Down at the corner Admiral Boom was busily mowing his lawn.

From the distance came sounds of martial music. The Band was playing at the end of the Park. Along the walks went the flowery sunshades and beneath them sauntered gossiping ladies, exchanging the latest news.

The Park Keeper, in his summer suit—blue with a red stripe on the sleeve—was keeping an eye on everyone as he tramped across the lawns.

"Observe the Rules! Keep Off the Grass! All Litter to be Placed in the Baskets!" he shouted.

Jane gazed at the sunny, dreamy scene. "It's just like Mr. Twigley's box," she said with a happy sigh.

Michael put his ear to the trunk of an oak.

"I believe I can hear it growing!" he cried. "It makes a small, soft, creeping sound——"

"You'll be creeping in a minute! Right back home, unless you hurry!" Mary Poppins warned him.

"No Rubbish Allowed in the Park!" shouted the Keeper, as she swept along the Lime Walk.

"Rubbish yourself!" she retorted briskly, with a haughty toss of her head.

He took off his hat and fanned his face as he stared at her retreating back. And you knew from the way Mary Poppins smiled that she knew quite well he was staring. How could he help it, she thought to herself. Wasn't she wearing her new white jacket, with the pink collar and the pink belt and the four pink buttons down the front?

"Which way are we going today?" asked Michael.

"That remains to be seen!" she answered him priggishly.

"I was only enquiring——" Michael argued.

"Don't, then!" she advised, with a warning sniff.

"She never lets me say anything!" he grumbled under his hat to Jane. "I'll go dumb some day and then she'll be sorry!"

Mary Poppins thrust the perambulator in front of her as though she were running an obstacle race.

"This way, please!" she commanded presently, as she swung the pram to the right.

And they knew, then, where they were going. For the little path that turned out of the Lime Walk led away towards the Lake.

There, beyond the tunnels of shade, lay the shining patch of water. It sparkled and danced in its net of sunlight and the children felt their hearts beat faster as they ran through the shadows towards it.

"I'll make a boat, and sail it to Africa!" shouted Michael, forgetting his crossness.

"I'll go fishing!" cried Jane, as she galloped past him.

Laughing and whooping and waving their hats, they came to the shining water. All round the Lake stood the dusty green benches, and the ducks went quacking along the edge, greedily looking for crusts.

At the far end of the water stood the battered marble statue of the Boy and the Dolphin. Dazzling white and bright it shone, between the Lake and the sky. There was a small chip off the Boy's nose and a line like a black thread round his ankle. One of the fingers of his left hand was broken off at the joint. And all his toes were cracked.

There he stood, on his high pedestal, with his arm flung lightly round the neck of the Dolphin. His head, with its ruffle of marble curls, was bent towards the water. He gazed down at it thoughtfully with wide marble eyes. The name NELEUS was carved in faded gilt letters at the base of the pedestal.

"How bright he is today!" breathed Jane, blinking her eyes at the shining marble.

And it was at that moment that she saw the Elderly Gentleman.

He was sitting at the foot of the statue, reading a book with the aid of a magnifying glass. His bald head was sheltered from the sun by a knotted silk handkerchief, and lying on the bench beside him was a black top hat.

The children stared at the curious figure with fascinated eyes.

"That's Mary Poppins' favourite seat! She *will* be cross!" exclaimed Michael.

"Indeed? And when was I ever cross?" her voice enquired behind him.

The remark quite shocked him. "Why, you're *often* cross, Mary Poppins!" he said. "At least fifty times a day!"

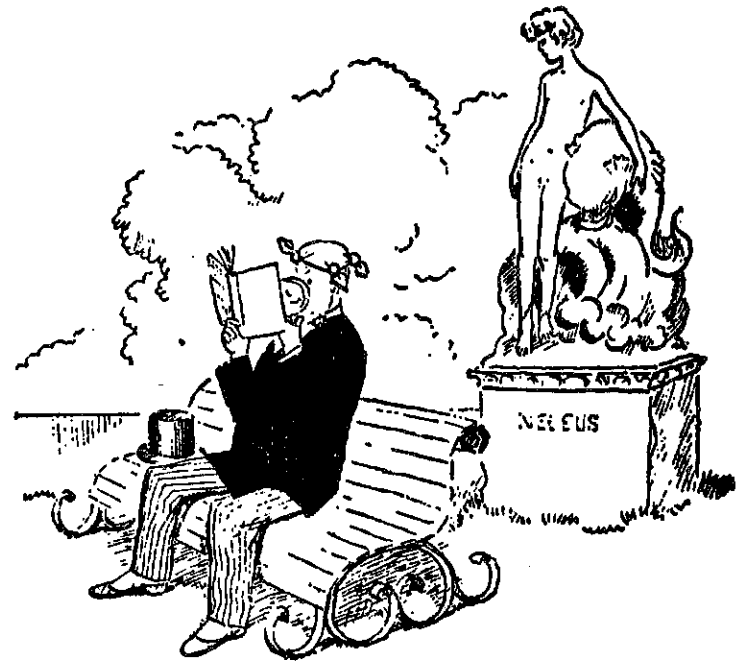
"Never!" she said with an angry snap. "I have the patience of a Boa Constrictor! I merely Speak My Mind!"

She flounced away and sat down on a bench exactly opposite the Statue. Then she glared across the Lake at the Elderly Gentleman. It was a look that might have killed anybody else. But the Elderly Gentleman was quite unaffected. He went on poring over his book and took no notice of anyone. Mary Poppins, with an infuriated sniff, took her mending-bag from the perambulator and began to darn the socks.

The children scattered round the sparkling water.
 "Here's my boat!" shrieked Michael, snatching a piece of coloured paper from a litter basket.



"I'm fishing," said Jane, as she lay on her stomach and stretched her hand over the water. She imagined a fishing-rod in her fingers and a line running down, with a hook and a worm. After a little while, she knew, a fish would swim lazily up to the hook and give the worm a tweak. Then, with a jerk, she would land him neatly and take him home in her hat. "Well, I never!" Mrs. Brill would say. "It's just what we needed for supper!"



Beside her the Twins were happily paddling. Michael steered his ship through a terrible storm. Mary Poppins sat primly on her bench and rocked the perambulator with one foot. Her silver needle flashed in the sunlight. The Park was quiet and dreamy and still.

Bang!

The Elderly Gentleman closed his book and the sound shattered the silence.

"Oh, I say!" protested a shrill sweet voice. "You might have let me finish!"

Jane and Michael looked up in surprise. They stared. They blinked. And they stared again. For there, on the grass before them, stood the little marble statue. The marble Dolphin was clasped in his arms and the pedestal was quite empty.

The Elderly Gentleman opened his mouth. Then he shut it and opened it again.

"Er—did you say something?" he said at last, and his eyebrows went up to the top of his head.

"Yes, of course I did!" the Boy replied. "I was reading over your shoulder there——" he pointed towards the empty pedestal, "and you closed the book too quickly. I wanted to finish the Elephant story and see how he got his Trunk."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the Elderly Gentleman. "I had no idea—er—of such a thing. I always stop reading at four, you see. I have to get home to my Tea."

He rose and folded the handkerchief and picked up the black top hat.

"Well, now that you've finished," the Boy said calmly, "you can give the book to me!"

The Elderly Gentleman drew back, clutching the book to his breast.

"Oh, I couldn't do that, I'm afraid," he said. "You see, I've only just bought it. I wanted to read it when I was young, but the grown-ups always got it first.

And now that I've got a copy of my own, I really feel I must keep it."

He eyed the statue uneasily as though he feared that at any moment it might snatch the book away.

"I could tell you about the Elephant's Child——" Jane murmured shyly to the Boy.

He wheeled around with the fish in his arms.

"Oh, Jane—would you really?" he cried in surprise. His marble face gleamed with pleasure.

"And I'll tell you *Yellow Dog Dingo*," said Michael, "and *The Butterfly That Stamped*."

"No!" said the Elderly Gentleman suddenly. "Here am I with a suit of clothes and a hat. And he's quite naked. I'll give him the book! I suppose," he added, with a gloomy sigh, "I was never meant to have it."

He gave the book a last long look, and, thrusting it at the Marble Boy, he turned away quickly. But the Dolphin wriggled and caught his eye and he turned to the Boy again.

"By the way," he said, curiously, "I wonder how you caught that Porpoise? What did you use—a line or a net?"

"Neither," replied the Boy, with a smile. "He was given to me when I was born."

"Oh—I see." The Elderly Gentleman nodded, though he still looked rather puzzled. "Well—I must be getting along. Good-day!" He lifted the black top hat politely and hurried off down the path.



"Thank you!" the Marble Boy shouted after him, as he eagerly opened the book. On the fly-leaf was written, in spidery writing, "*William Weatherall Wilkins.*"

"I'll cross out his name and put mine instead." The Boy smiled gaily at Jane and Michael.

"But what is your name? And how can you read?" cried Michael, very astonished.

"My name is Neleus," the Boy said laughing. "And I read with my eyes, of course!"

"But you're only a statue!" Jane protested. "And statues don't usually walk and talk. However did you get down?"

"I jumped," replied Neleus, smiling again, as he tossed his marble curls. "I was so disappointed not to finish that story, that something happened to my feet. First they twitched, and then they jumped and the next thing I knew I was down on the grass!" He curled his little marble toes and stamped on the earth with his marble feet. "Oh, lucky, lucky human beings to be able to do this every day! I've watched you so often, Jane and Michael, and wished I could come and play with you. And now at last my wish has come true. Oh, tell me you're glad to see me!"

He touched their cheeks with his marble fingers and crowed with joy as he danced around them. Then before they could utter a word of welcome he sped like a hare to the edge of the Lake and dabbled his hand in the water.

"So—this is what water feels like!" he cried. "So deep and so blue—and as light as air!" He leaned out over the sparkling Lake and the Dolphin gave a flick of its tail and slipped from his arms with a splash.

"Catch him! He'll sink!" cried Michael quickly.

But the Dolphin did nothing of the kind. It swam round the Lake and threshed the water; it dived and caught its tail in its mouth and leapt in the air and dived again. The performance was just like a turn in

the circus. And as it sprang, dripping, to the arms of its master, the children could not help clapping.

"Was it good?" asked Neleus enviously. And the Dolphin grinned and nodded.

"Good!" cried a well-known voice behind them. "I call it extremely naughty!"

Mary Poppins was standing at the edge of the Lake and her eyes were as bright as her darning needle. Neleus sprang to his feet with a little cry and hung his head before her. He looked very young and small and shy as he waited for her to speak.

"Who said you might get down, may I ask?" Her face had its usual look of fury.

He shook his head guiltily.

"No one," he mumbled. "My feet jumped down by themselves, Mary Poppins."

"Then they'd better jump up again, spit-spot. You've no right to be off your pedestal."

He tilted back his marble head and the sunlight glanced off his small chipped nose.

"Oh, can't I stay down, Mary Poppins?" he pleaded. "Do let me stay for a little while and play with Jane and Michael! You don't know how lonely it is up there, with only the birds to talk to!" The earnest marble eyes entreated her. "Please, Mary Poppins!" he whispered softly, as he clasped his marble hands.

She gazed down thoughtfully for a moment, as though she were making up her mind. Then her eyes

softened. A little smile skipped over her mouth and crinkled the edge of her cheek.

"Well, just for this afternoon!" she said. "This one time, Neleus! Never again!"

"Never—I promise, Mary Poppins!" He gave her an impish grin.

"Do you know Mary Poppins?" demanded Michael. "Where did you meet her?" he wanted to know. He was feeling a little jealous.

"Of course I do!" exclaimed Neleus laughing. "She's a very old friend of my Father's."

"What is your Father's name? Where is he?" Jane was almost bursting with curiosity.

"Far away. In the Isles of Greece. He is called the King of the Sea." As he spoke, the marble eyes of Neleus brimmed slowly up with sadness.

"What does he do?" demanded Michael. "Does he go to the City—like Daddy?"

"Oh, no! He never goes anywhere. He stands on a cliff above the sea, holding his trident and blowing his horn. Beside him my Mother sits, combing her hair. And Pelias, that's my younger brother, plays at their feet with a marble shell. And all day long the gulls fly past them, making black shadows on their marble bodies, and telling them news of the harbour. By day they watch the red-sailed ships going in and out of the bay. And at night they listen to the wine-dark waters that break on the shore below."

"How lovely!" cried Jane. "But why did you leave them?"

She was thinking that she would never have left Mr. and Mrs. Banks and Michael alone on the cliffs of Greece.

"I didn't want to," said the Marble Boy. "But what can a statue do against men? They were always coming to stare at us—peeking and prying and pinching our arms. They said we were made a long time ago by a very famous artist. And one day somebody said—'I'll take *him!*'—and he pointed at me. So—I had to go."

He hid his eyes for a moment behind the Dolphin's fin.

"What happened then?" demanded Jane. "How did you get to our Park?"

"In a packing-case," said Neleus calmly, and laughed at their look of astonishment. "Oh, we always travel that way, you know. My family is very much in demand. People want us for Parks or Museums or Gardens. So they buy us and send us by Parcel Post. It never seems to occur to them that some of us might be—lonely." He choked a little on the word. Then he flung up his head with a lordly gesture. "But don't let's think about that!" he cried. "It's been much better since you two came. Oh, Jane and Michael, I know you so well—as if you were part of my family. I know about Michael's Kite and his Compass; and the Doulton Bowl, and Robertson Ay,

and the things you have for supper. Didn't you ever notice me listening? And reading the fairy-tales over your shoulders?"

Jane and Michael shook their heads.

"I know *Alice in Wonderland* by heart," he went on. "And most of *Robinson Crusoe*. And *Everything a Lady Should Know*, which is Mary Poppins' favourite. But best of all are the coloured comics, especially the one called *Lot-o'-Fun*. What happened to Tiger Tim this week? Did he get away safely from Uncle Moppsy?"

"The new one comes out today," said Jane. "We'll all read it together!"

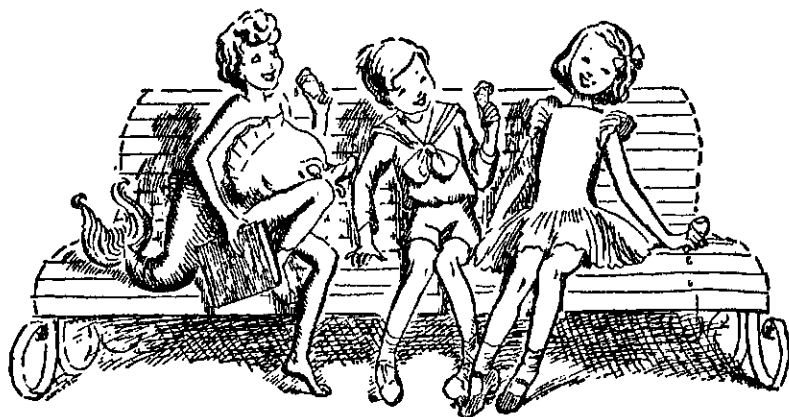
"Oh, dear! How happy I am!" cried Neleus. "The Elephant's Child, and a new *Lot-o'-Fun*, and my legs like the wings of a bird. I don't know when my Birthday is, but I think it must be today!" He hugged the Dolphin and the book in his arms and capered across the grass.

"Hi! Ting-aling-aling! Look where you're going!" the Ice Cream Man gave a warning cry. He was wheeling his barrow along by the Lake. The printed notice in front of it said:

STOP ME AND BUY ONE
WHAT WONDERFUL WEATHER!

"Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!" cried the children wildly, as they ran towards the barrow.

"Chocolate!" said Michael.



"Lemon!" cried Jane.

And the fat little Twins put out their hands and gladly took what was given them.

"And wot about you!" said the Ice Cream Man, as Neleus came and stood shyly beside him.

"I don't know what to choose," said Neleus. "I never had one before."

"Wot! Never 'ad a Nice? Wot's the matter—weak stummick? A boy your size should know all about Ices! 'Ere!" The Ice Cream Man fished inside his barrow and brought out a Raspberry Bar. "Take this and see 'ow you like it!"

Neleus broke the bar with his marble fingers. He popped one half in the Dolphin's mouth and began to lick the other.

"Delicious," he said, "much better than seaweed."

"Seaweed? I should think so! Wot's seaweed got to do with it? But—talking of seaweed, that's a nice big Cod!" The Ice Cream Man waved his hand at the Dolphin. "If you took it along to the Fishmonger 'e'd give you a fancy price."

The Dolphin gave its tail a flick and its face looked very indignant.

"Oh, I don't want to sell him," said Neleus quickly. "He isn't just a fish—he's a friend!"

"A fishy kind of friend!" said the man. "Why doesn't 'e tell you to put on your clothes? You'll catch your death running round stark naked. Well, no offence meant! Ting-aling! Ting-aling!" He rode away whistling and ringing his bell.

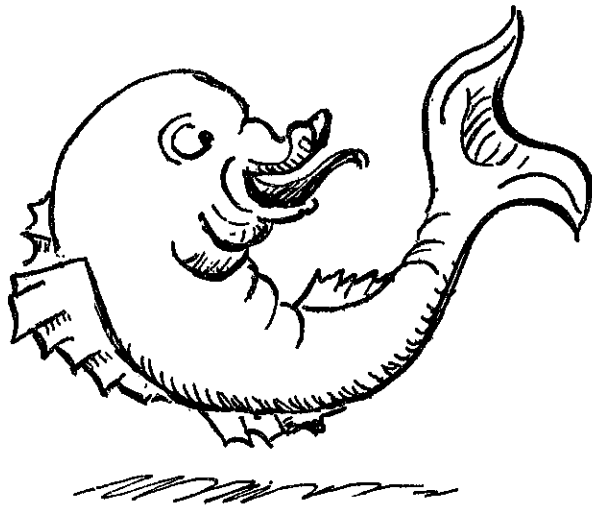
Neleus glanced at the children out of the corner of his eye and the three burst out into peals of laughter.

"Oh, dear!" cried Neleus, gasping for breath. "I believe he thinks I'm human! Shall I run and tell him he's made a mistake? That I haven't worn clothes for two thousand years and never caught even a sniffle?"

He was just about to dart after the barrow when Michael gave a shout.

"Look out! Here's Willoughby!" he cried, and swallowed the rest of his Ice in one gulp.

For Willoughby, who belonged to Miss Lark, had a habit of jumping up at the children and snatching the food from their hands. He had rough, bouncy, vulgar manners and no respect for anyone. But what



else could you expect of a dog who was half an Airedale and half a Retriever and the worst half of both?

There he came, lolloping over the grass, sticking out his tongue. Andrew, who was as well-bred as Willoughby was common, tripped gracefully after him. And Miss Lark herself followed breathlessly.

"Just out for a spin before Tea!" she trilled. "Such a beautiful day and the dogs insisted—Good gracious, what is that I see?"

She broke off, panting, and stared at Neleus. Her face, already red, grew redder, and she looked extremely indignant.

"You naughty, wicked boy!" she cried. "What are you doing to that poor fish? Don't you know it will die if it stays out of water?"

Neleus raised a marble eyebrow. The Dolphin swung its tail over its mouth to hide a marble smile.

"You see?" said Miss Lark. "It's writhing in agony! You must put it back into water this minute!"

"Oh, I couldn't do that," said Neleus quickly. "I'm afraid he'd be lonely without me." He was trying to be polite to Miss Lark. But the Dolphin was not. He flapped his tail and wriggled and grinned in a very discourteous manner.

"Don't answer me back! Fish are never lonely! You are just making silly excuses."

Miss Lark made an angry gesture towards the green bench.

"I do think, Mary Poppins," she said, "you might keep an eye on the children! This naughty boy, whoever he is, must put that fish back where he got it!"

Mary Poppins favoured Miss Lark with a stare. "I'm afraid that's quite impossible, ma'am. He'd have to go too far."

"Far or near—it doesn't matter. He must put it back this instant. It's cruelty to animals and it shouldn't be allowed. Andrew and Willoughby—come with me! I shall go at once and tell the Lord Mayor!"

Away she bustled, with the dogs at her heels. Willoughby, as he trotted by, winked rudely at the Dolphin.

"And tell him to put his clothes on! He'll get

sunburnt, running about like that!" shrieked Miss Lark, as she hurried off.

Neleus gave a little spurt of laughter and flung himself down on the grass.

"Sunburnt!" he choked. "Oh, Mary Poppins, does nobody guess I'm made of marble?"

"Humph!" replied Mary Poppins, snorting. And Neleus tossed her a mischievous smile.

"That's what the Sea Lions say!" he said. "They sit on the rocks and say 'Humph!' to the sunset!"

"Indeed?" she said tartly. And Jane and Michael waited, trembling, for what was surely coming. But nothing happened. Her face had an answering look of mischief and the blue eyes and the marble eyes smiled gently at each other.

"Neleus," she said quietly, "you have ten minutes more. You can come with us to the Bookstall and back."

"And then——?" he said, with a questioning look, as he tightened his arms round the Dolphin.

She did not answer. She looked across the sparkling Lake and nodded towards the pedestal.

"Oh, can't he stay longer, Mary Poppins——?" the children began to protest. But the eager question froze on their lips, for Mary Poppins was glaring.

"I said ten minutes," she remarked. "And ten minutes is what I meant. You needn't look at me like that, either. I am not a Grisly Gorilla."

"Oh, don't start arguing!" cried Neleus. "We

mustn't waste a second!" He sprang to his feet and seized Jane's hand. "Show me the way to the Bookstall!" he said. And drew her away through the spreading sunlight and over the grassy lawns.

Behind them Mary Poppins lifted the Twins into the perambulator and hurried along with Michael.

Lightly across the summer grasses ran Jane and the Marble Boy. His curls flew out on the wind with hers and her hot breath blew on his marble cheeks. Within her soft and living fingers the marble hand grew warmer.

"This way!" she cried, as she tugged at his arm and drew him into the Lime Walk.

At the end of it, by the Far Gate, stood the gaily painted bookstall. A bright sign nailed above it said:

MR. FOLLY
BOOKS PAPERS AND MAGAZINES
YOU WANT THEM
I'VE GOT THEM

A frill of coloured magazines hung round the Bookstall; and as the children raced up, Mr. Folly popped his head through a gap in the frill. He had a round, quiet, lazy face that looked as though nothing in the world could disturb it.

"Well, if it isn't Jane Banks and Friend!" he remarked mildly. "I think I can guess what you've come for!"

"*The Evening News* and *Lot-o'-Fun*," panted Jane, as she put down the pennies.

Neleus seized the coloured comic and skimmed the pages quickly.

"Does Tiger Tim get away?" cried Michael, as he dashed up, breathless, behind them.

"Yes, he does!" cried Neleus, with a shout of joy. "Listen! Tiger Tim Escapes Clutches of Uncle Moppsy. His New Adventure with Old Man Dog-face. Watch Out For Another Tiger Tim Story Next Week!"

"Hooray!" shouted Michael, peering round the Dolphin's shoulder to get a look at the pictures.

Mr. Folly was eyeing Neleus with interest. "That's a fine young whale you got there, sonny! Seems almost 'uman. Where did you catch him?"

"I didn't," said Neleus, glancing up. "He was given to me as a present."

"Fancy that! Well, he makes a nice pet! And where do *you* come from? Where's yer Ma?"

"She's a long way from here," replied Neleus gravely.

"Too bad!" Mr. Folly wagged his head. "Dad away, too?" Neleus smiled and nodded.

"You don't say! Goodness, you must be lonely!" Mr. Folly glanced at the marble body. "And cold as well, I shouldn't wonder, with not a stitch on your bones!" He made a jingling noise in his pocket and thrust out his hand to Neleus.

"There! Get yourself something to wear with that. Can't go around with nothing on. Pneumonia, you know! And chilblains!"

Neleus stared at the silver thing in his hand.

"What is it?" he asked curiously.

"That's a 'Arf-crown," said Mr. Folly. "Don't tell me you never saw one!"

"No, I never did," said Neleus, smiling. And the Dolphin gazed at the coin with interest.

"Well, I declare! You poor little chap! Stark naked and never seen a 'Arf-crown! Someone ought to be taking care of you!" Mr. Folly glanced reproachfully at Mary Poppins. And she gave him an outraged glare.

"Someone *is* taking care of him, thank you!" she said. As she spoke she unbuttoned her new white jacket and slipped it round Neleus' shoulders.

"There!" she said gruffly. "You won't be cold now. And no thanks to *you*, Mr. Folly!"

Neleus looked from the coat to Mary Poppins and his marble eyes grew wider. "You mean—I can keep it always?" he asked.

She nodded, and looked away.

"Oh, dear sweet Sea Lion—thank you!" he cried, and he hugged her waist in his marble arms. "Look at me, Jane, in my new white coat! Look at me, Michael, in my beautiful buttons." He ran excitedly from one to the other to show off his new possession.

"That's right," said Mr. Folly, beaming. "Much

better be sure than sorry! And the 'Arf-crown will buy you a nice pair of trousers——"

"Not tonight," interrupted Mary Poppins. "We're late as it is. Now Best Foot Forward and home we go, and I'll thank you all not to dawdle."

The sun was swiftly moving westwards as she trundled the pram down the Lime Walk. The Band at the end of the Park was silent. The flowery sunshades had all gone home. The trees stood still and straight in the shadows. The Park Keeper was nowhere to be seen.

Jane and Michael walked on either side of Neleus and linked their hands through his marble arms. A silence was over the human children and over the marble child between them.

"I love you, Neleus," Jane said softly. "I wish you could stay with us always."

"I love you, too," he answered, smiling. "But I must go back. I promised."

"I suppose you couldn't leave the Dolphin?" said Michael, stroking the marble fin.

Jane looked at him angrily.

"Oh, Michael—how can you be so selfish! How would you like to spend your life, all alone up there on a pedestal?"

"I'd like it—if I could have the Dolphin, and call Mary Poppins a Sea Lion!"

"I tell you what, Michael!" said Neleus quickly. "You can't have the Dolphin—he's part of me. But

the Half-crown isn't. I'll give you that." He pushed the money into Michael's hand. "And Jane must have the book," he went on. "But promise, Jane, and cross your heart, that you'll let me read it over your shoulder. And every week you must come to the bench and read me the new *Lot-o'-Fun*."

He gave the book a last long look and tucked it under her arm.

"Oh, I promise, Neleus!" she said faithfully, and crossed her heart with her hand.

"I'll be waiting for you," said Neleus softly. "I'll never, never forget."

"Walk up and don't chatter!" hissed Mary Poppins, as she turned towards the Lake.

The perambulator creaked and groaned as it trundled on its way. But high above the creak of the wheels they could hear a well-known voice. They tiptoed up behind Mary Poppins as she walked to the shadowy water.

"I never done it!" the voice protested. "And wouldn't—not if you paid me!"

At the edge of the Lake, by the empty pedestal, stood the Lord Mayor with two Aldermen. And before them, waving his arms and shouting, and generally behaving in a peculiar manner, was the Park Keeper.

"It's none of my doing, Your Honour!" he pleaded. "I can look you straight in the eye!"

"Nonsense, Smith!" said the Lord Mayor sternly.

"You are the person responsible for the Park statues. And only you could have done it!"

"You might as well confess!" advised the First Alderman.

"It won't save you, of course," the Second added, "but you'll *feel* so much better!"

"But I didn't *do* it, I'm telling you!" The Park Keeper clasped his hands in a frenzy.

"Stop quibbling, Smith. You're wasting my time!" The Lord Mayor shook his head impatiently. "First, I have to go looking for a naked boy who I hear is maltreating some wretched fish. A salmon, Miss Lark said—or was it a halibut? And now, as if this wasn't enough, I find the most valuable of our statues is missing from its pedestal. I am shocked and disgusted. I trusted you, Smith. And look how you repay me!"

"I *am* looking. I mean, I don't *have* to look! Oh, I don't know what I'm saying, Your Grace! But I *do* know I never touched that statchew!"

The Keeper glanced round wildly for help and his eye fell on Mary Poppins. He gave a cry of horrified triumph and flung out his hand accusingly.

"Your Worship, *there's* the guilty party! She done it or I'll eat me 'At!"

The Lord Mayor glanced at Mary Poppins and back to the Park Keeper.

"I'm ashamed of you, Smith!" he shook his head sorrowfully. "Putting the blame on a perfectly re-

spectable, innocent young woman taking her charges for an afternoon airing! How could you?"

He bowed courteously to Mary Poppins, who returned the bow with a lady-like smile.

"Innocent! 'Er!" the Park Keeper screamed. "You don't know what you're sayin', my Lord! As soon as that girl comes into the Park, the place begins to go crosswise. Merry-go-rounds jumpin' up in the sky, people coming down on kites and rockets, the Prime Minister bobbing round on balloons—and it's all *your* doing—you Caliban!" He shook his fist wildly at Mary Poppins.

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! His mind is unhinged!" said the First Alderman sadly.

"Perhaps we'd better get some handcuffs," the Second whispered nervously.

"Do what you like with me! 'Ang me, why don't yer? But it wasn't me wot done it!" Overcome with misery, the Park Keeper flung himself against the pedestal and sobbed bitterly.

Mary Poppins turned and beckoned to Neleus. He ran to her side on marble feet and leaned his head gently against her.

"Is it time?" he whispered, glancing up.

She nodded quickly. Then bending she took him in her arms and kissed his marble brow. For a moment Neleus clung to her as though he could never let her go. Then he broke away, smothering a sob.

"Goodbye, Jane and Michael. Don't forget me!"

He pressed his chilly cheek to theirs. And before they could even say a word he had darted away among the shadows and was running towards his pedestal.

"I never 'ad no luck!" wailed the Keeper. "Never since I was a boy!"

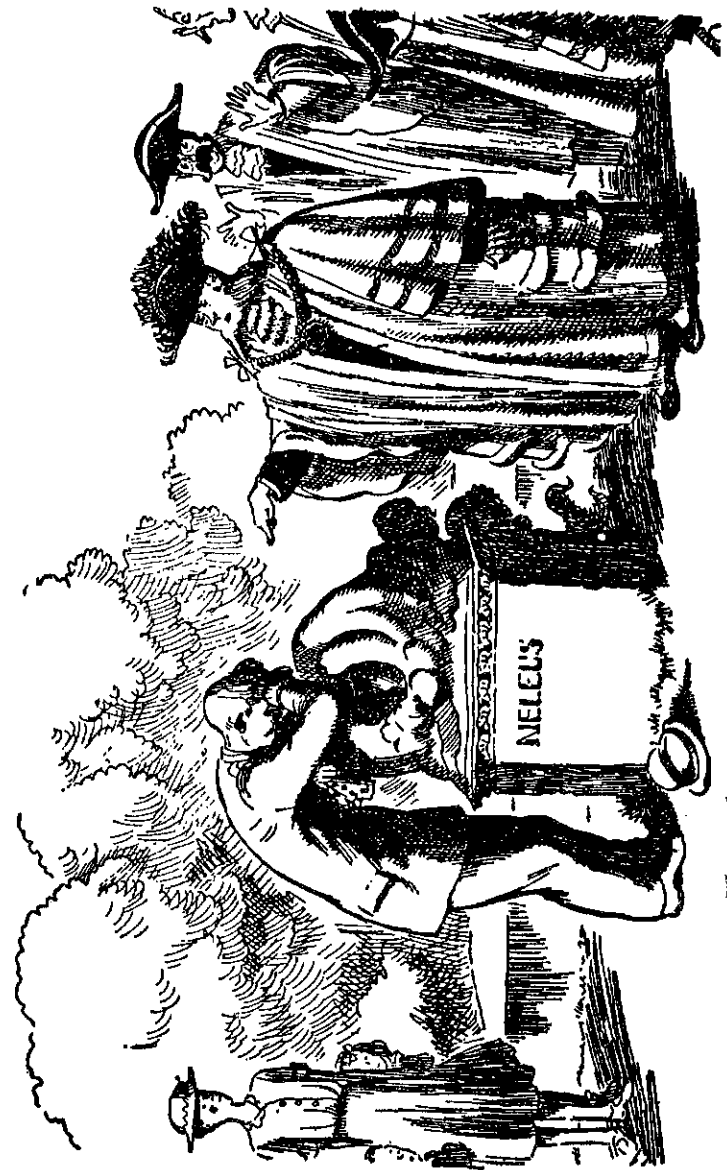
"And you won't have any now, my man, unless you put back that statue." The Lord Mayor fixed him with an angry eye.

But Jane and Michael were looking neither at the Park Keeper nor the Lord Mayor. They were watching a curly head appear at the far side of the pedestal.

Up scrambled Neleus, over the ledge, dragging the Dolphin after him. His marble body blazed white and bright in a fading shaft of sunlight. Then with a gesture, half-gay, half-sad, he put up a little marble hand and waved them all farewell. As they waved back he seemed to tremble, but that may have been the tears in their eyes. They watched him draw the Dolphin to him, so close that its marble melted to his. Then he smoothed his curls with a marble hand and bent his head and was still. Even Mary Poppins' pink-and-white jacket seemed turned to lifeless marble.

"I can't put it back if I never took it!" the Park Keeper went on sobbing and shouting.

"Now, see here, Smith——" the Lord Mayor began. Then he gave a gasp and staggered sideways with his hand clasped to his brow. "My Jumping



The Park Keeper flung himself against the pedestal

Giraffes! It's come back——" he cried. "And there's something different about it!"

He peered more closely at the statue and burst into roars of delighted laughter. He took off his hat and waved it wildly and slapped the Park Keeper on the back.

"Smith—you rogue! So *that* was your secret! Why didn't you tell us at first, my man? It certainly is a splendid surprise! Well, you needn't go on pretending now——"

For the Park Keeper, speechless with amazement, was goggling up at Neleus.

"Gentlemen!" The Lord Mayor turned to the Aldermen. "We have sadly misjudged this poor fellow. He has proved himself not only an excellent servant of the community—but an artist as well. Do you see what he has done to the statue? He has added a little marble coat with collar and cuffs of pink. A *great* improvement, to my mind, Smith! I *never* approved of naked statues."

"Nor I!" the First Alderman shook his head.

"Certainly not!" said the Second.

"Never fear, my dear Smith. You shall have your reward. From today your wages will be raised one shilling and an extra stripe will be sewn on your sleeve. Furthermore, I shall speak of you to His Majesty when I make my next report."

And the Lord Mayor, with another ceremonious

bow to Mary Poppins, swept majestically away, humbly followed by the two Aldermen.

The Park Keeper, looking as though he were not sure if he were on his head or his heels, stared after them. Then he turned his popping eyes to the statue and stared again at that. The Marble Boy and his marble fish gazed thoughtfully down at the Lake. They were as still and quiet and silent as they had always been.

"Now home again, home again, jiggety-jog!" Mary Poppins raised a beckoning finger and the children followed without a word. The Half-crown lay in Michael's palm, burning and bright and solid. And cold as the marble hand of Neleus was the book beneath Jane's arm.

Along the Walk they marched in silence thinking their secret thoughts. And presently, on the grass behind them, there came the thud of feet. They turned to find the Park Keeper running heavily towards them. He had taken off his coat and was waving it, like a blue-and-red flag, at the end of his walking stick. He pulled up, panting, beside the perambulator and held out the coat to Mary Poppins.

"Take it!" he said breathlessly. "I just been looking at that Boy back there. He's wearin' yours—with the four pink buttons. And you'll need one when it gets chilly."

Mary Poppins calmly took the coat and slipped it

over her shoulders. Her own reflection smiled conceitedly at her from the polished brass buttons.

"Thank you," she said primly, to the Park Keeper.

He stood before her in his shirt-sleeves, shaking his head like a puzzled dog.

"I suppose *you* understand what it all means?" he said wistfully.

"I suppose I do," she replied smugly.

And without another word, she gave the perambulator a little push and sent it bowling past him. He was still staring after her, scratching his head, as she passed through the gate of the Park.

Mr. Banks, on his way home from the Office, whistled to them as they crossed the Lane.

"Well, Mary Poppins!" he greeted her. "You're very smart in your blue-and-red jacket! Have you joined the Salvation Army?"

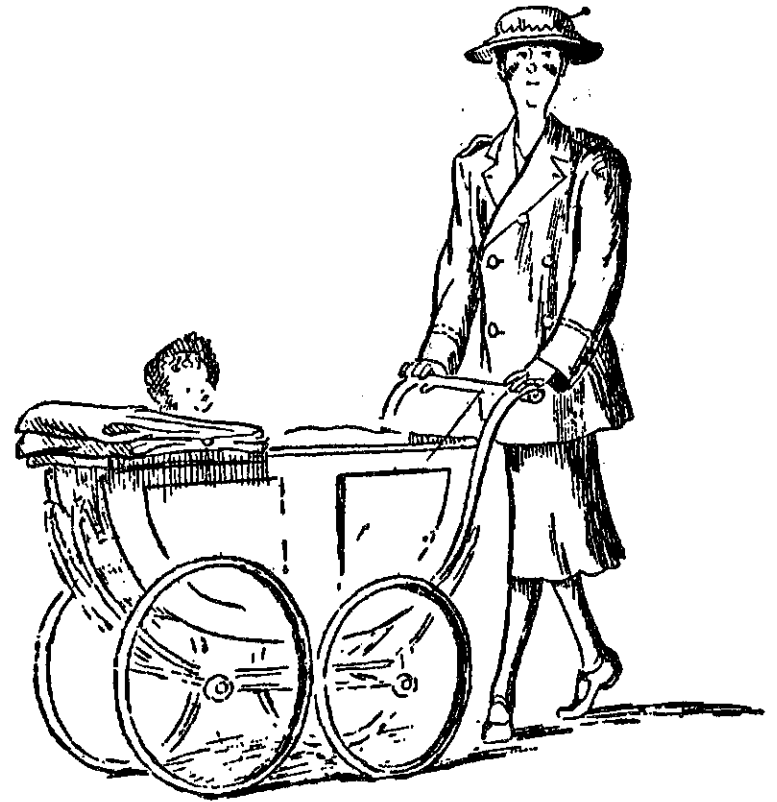
"No, sir," she replied, primly. And the look she gave him made it quite clear she had no intention of explaining.

"It's the Park Keeper's coat," Jane told him hurriedly.

"He gave it to her just now," added Michael.

"What—Smith? He gave her the jacket of his uniform? Whatever for?" exclaimed Mr. Banks.

But Jane and Michael were suddenly silent. They could feel Mary Poppins' gimlet eyes making holes in the backs of their heads. They dared not go on with the story.

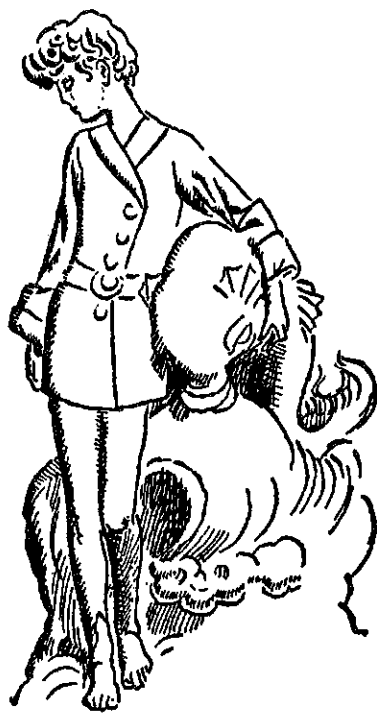


"Well, never mind!" said Mr. Banks calmly. "I suppose she did something to deserve it!"

They nodded. But they knew he would never know what she had done, not even if he lived to be fifty. They walked up the garden path beside him, clasping the coin and the book.

And as they went they thought of the child who had given them those gifts, the Marble Boy who for

one short hour had danced and played in the Park. They thought of him standing alone on his pedestal, with his arm flung lovingly round his Dolphin—forever silent, forever still and the sweet light gone from his face. Darkness would come down upon him and the stars and the night would wrap him round. Proud and lonely he would stand there, looking down upon the waters of the little Lake, dreaming of the great sea and his home so far away. . . .



CHAPTER FIVE

*Peppermint Horses*

Hi!" shouted Mr. Banks, angrily, as he rattled the umbrellas in the Elephant's Leg that stood in the front hall.

"What is it now, George?" called Mrs. Banks, from the foot of the kitchen stairs.

"Somebody's taken my walking sticks!" Mr. Banks sounded like a wounded tiger.

"Here they are, Sir!" said Mary Poppins, as she tripped down from the Nursery. In one hand she carried a silver-headed ebony cane. From the other swung a grey ash stick with a curved nobbly handle. Without another word, and looking very superior, she handed the sticks to Mr. Banks.

"Oh!" he said, rather taken aback. "Why did you want them, Mary Poppins? I hope you haven't got a bad leg!"

"No, thank you, Sir!" she said with a sniff. And you knew by the haughty tone of her voice that