

MARY CARY
"FREQUENTLY MARTHA"

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**TO
VIRGINIA**



"THEY DIDN'T MEET AT ALL LIKE I EXPECTED"

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MARY CARY

I

AN UNTHANKFUL ORPHAN

My name is Mary Cary. I live in the Yorkburg Female Orphan Asylum. You may think nothing happens in an Orphan Asylum. It does. The orphans are sure enough children, and real much like the kind that have Mothers and Fathers; but though they don't give parties or wear truly Paris clothes, things happen, and that's why I am going to write this story.

To-day I was kept in. Yesterday, too. I don't mind, for I would rather watch the lightning up here than be down in the basement with the others. There are days when I love thunder and lightning. I can't flash and crash, being just Mary Cary; but I'd like to, and when it is done for me it is a relief to my feelings.

The reason I was kept in was this. Yesterday Mr. Gaffney, the one with a sunk eye and cold in his head perpetual, came to talk to us for the benefit of our characters. He thinks it's his duty, and, just naturally loving to talk, he wears us out once a week anyhow. Yesterday, not agreeing with what he said, I wouldn't pretend I did, and I was punished prompt, of course.

I don't care for duty-doers, and I tried not to listen to him; but tiresome talk is hard not to hear—it makes you so mad. Hear him I did, and when, after he had ambled on until I thought he really was castor-oil and I had swallowed him, he blew his nose and said:

"You have much, my children, to be thankful for, and for everything you should be thankful. Are you? If so, stand up. Rise, and stand upon your feet."

I didn't rise. All the others did—stood on their feet, just like he asked. None tried their heads. I was the only one that sat, and when he saw me, his sunk eye almost rolled out, and his good eye stared at me in such astonishment that I laughed out loud. I couldn't help it, I truly couldn't.

I'm not thankful for everything, and that's why I didn't stand up. Can you be thankful for toothache, or stomachache, or any kind of ache? You cannot. And not meant to be, either.

The room got awful still, and then presently he said:

"Mary Cary"—his voice was worse than his eye—"Mary Cary, do you mean to say you have not a thankful heart?" And he pointed his finger at me like I was the Jezebel lady come to life.

I didn't answer, thinking it safer, and he asked again:

"Do I understand, Mary Cary"—and by this time he was real red-in-the-face mad—"do I understand you are not thankful for all that comes to you? Do I understand aright?"

"Yes, sir, you understand right," I said, getting up this time. "I am not thankful for everything in my life. I'd be much thankfuller to have a Mother and Father on earth than to have them in heaven. And there are a great many other things I would like different." And down I sat, and was kept in for telling the truth.

Miss Bray says it was for impertinence (Miss Bray is the Head Chief of this Institution), but I didn't mean to be impertinent. I truly didn't. Speaking facts is apt to make trouble, though—also writing them. To-day Miss Bray kept me in for putting something on the blackboard I forgot to rub out. I wrote it just for my own relief, not thinking about anybody else seeing it. What I wrote was this:

"Some people are crazy all the time;
All people are crazy sometimes."

That's why I'm up in the punishment-room to-day, and it only proves that what I wrote is right. It's crazy to let people know you know how queer they are. Miss Bray takes personal everything I do, and when she saw that blackboard, up-stairs she ordered me at once. She loves to punish me, and it's a pleasure I give her often.

I brought my diary with me, and as I can't write when anybody is about, I don't mind being by myself every now and then. Miss Bray don't know this, or my punishment would take some other form.

I just love a diary. You see, its something you can tell things to and not get in trouble. When writing in it I can relieve my feelings by saying what I think, which Miss Katherine says is risky to do to people, and that it's safer to keep your feelings to yourself. People don't really care about them, and there's nothing they get so tired of hearing about. A diary doesn't talk, neither do animals; but a diary understands better than animals, and you can call things by their right name in a book which it isn't safe to do out loud, even to a dog.

I know I am not unthankful, and I would much rather have a Father and Mother on earth than to have them in heaven, but I guess I should have kept my preferences to myself. Somehow preferences seem to make people mad.

But a Mother and Father in heaven *are* too far away to be truly comforting. I like the people I love to be close to me. I guess that is why, when I was little, I used to hold out my arms at night, hoping my Mother would come and hold me tight. But she never came, and now I know it's no use.

There are a great many things that are no use. One is in telling people what they don't want to know. I found that out almost two years ago, when I wasn't but ten. The way I found out was this.

One morning, it was an awful cold morning, Miss Bray came into the dining-room just as we were taking our seats for breakfast, and she looked so funny that everybody stared, though nobody dared to even smile visible. All the children are afraid of Miss Bray; but at that time I hadn't found out her true self, and, not thinking of consequences, I jumped up and ran over to her and whispered something in her ear.

"What!" she said. "What did you say?" And she bent her head so as to hear better.

"You forgot one side of your face when fixing this morning," I said, still whispering, not wanting the others to hear. "Only one side is pink—" But I didn't get any further, for she grabbed my hand and almost ran with me out of the room.

"You piece of impertinence!" she said, and her eyes had such sparks in them I knew my judgment-day had come. "You little piece of impertinence! You shall be punished well for this." I was. I didn't mean to be impertinent. I thought she'd like to know. I thought wrong.

I loathe Miss Bray. The very sight of her shoulders in the back gets me mad all over without her saying a word, and everything in me that's wrong comes right forward and speaks out when she and I are together. She thinks she could run this earth better than it's being done, and she walks like she was the Superintendent of most of it. But I could stand that. I could stand her cheeks, and her frizzed front, and a good many other things; but what I can't stand is her passing for being truthful when she isn't. She tells stories, and she knows I know it; and from the day I found it out I have stayed out of her way; and were she the Queen of Europe,

Asia, and Africa, and the United States I'd want her to stand out of mine. I truly would.

Her outrageousest story I heard her tell myself. It was over a year ago, and we were in the room where the ladies were having a Board meeting. I had come in to bring some water, and had a waiter full of glasses in my hands, and was just about to put them on the table when I heard Miss Bray tell her Lie.

That's what she did. She Lied!

Those glasses never touched that table. My hands lost their hold, and down they came with a crash. Every one smashed to smithereens, and I standing staring at Miss Bray. The way she told her story was this. The Board deals us out for adoption, and that morning they were discussing a request for Pinkie Moore, and, as usual, Miss Bray didn't want Pinkie to go. You see, Pinkie was very useful. She did a lot of disagreeable things for Miss Bray, and Miss Bray didn't want to lose her. And when Mrs. Roane, who is the only Board lady truly seeing through her, asked, real sharplike, why Pinkie shouldn't go this time, Miss Bray spoke out like she was really grieved.

"I declare, Mrs. Roane," she said—and she twirled her keys round and round her fingers, and twitched the nostril parts of her nose just like a horse—"I declare, Mrs. Roane, I hate to tell you, I really do. But Pinkie Moore wouldn't do for adoption. She has a terrible temper, and she's so slow nobody would keep her. And then, too"—her voice was the Pharisee kind that the Lord must hate worse than all others—"and then, too, I am sorry to say Pinkie is not truthful, and has been caught taking things from the girls. I hope none of you will mention this, as I trust by watching over her to correct these faults. She begs me so not to send her out for adoption, and is so devoted to me that—" And just then she saw me, which she hadn't done before, I being behind Mrs. Armstead, and she stopped like she had been hit.

For a minute I didn't breathe. I didn't. All I did was to stare—stare with mouth open and eyes out; and then it was the glasses went down and I flew into the yard, and there by the pump was Pinkie.

"Oh, Pinkie!" I said. "Oh, Pinkie!" And I caught her round the waist and raced up and down the yard like a wild man from Borneo. "Oh, Pinkie, what do you think?" Poor Pinkie, thinking a mad dog had bit me, tried to make me stop, but stop I wouldn't until there was no more breath. And

then we sat down on the woodpile, and I hugged her so hard I almost broke her bones.

First I was so mad I couldn't cry, and then crying so I couldn't speak. But after a while words came, and I said:

"Pinkie Moore, are you devoted to Miss Bray? Are you? I want the truest truth. Are you devoted to her?"

"Devoted to Miss Bray? Devoted!" And poor little Pinkie, who has no more spirit than a poor relation, spoke out for once. "I hate her!" she said. "I hate her worse than prunes; and if somebody would only adopt me, I'd be so thankful I'd choke for joy, except for leaving you." Then she boohoo'd too, and the tears that fell between us looked like we were artesian wells—they certainly did.

But Pinkie didn't know what caused my tears. Mine were mad tears, and not being able to tell her why they came, I had to send her to the house to wash her face. I washed mine at the pump, and then worked off some of my mad by sweeping the yard as hard as I could, wishing all the time Miss Bray was the leaves, and trying to make believe she was. I was full of the things the Bible says went into swine, and I knew there would be trouble for me before the day was out. But there wasn't. Not even for breaking the pump-handle was I punished, and Miss Bray tried so hard to be friendly that at first I did not understand. I do now.

That was my first experience in finding out that some one who looked like a lady on the outside was mean and deceitful on the inside, and it made me tremble all over to find it could be so. Since then I have never pretended to be friends with Miss Bray. As for her, she hates me—hates me because she knows I know what sort of a person she is, a sort I loathe from my heart.

When I first got my diary I thought I was going to write in it every day. I haven't, and that shows I'm no better on resolves than I am on keeping step. I never keep step. Sometimes I've thought I was really something, but I'm not. Nobody much is when you know them too well. It is a good thing for your pride when you keep a diary, specially when you are truthful in it. Each day that you leave out is an evidence of character—poor character—for it shows how careless and put-off-y you are; both of which I am.

But it isn't much in life to be an inmate of a Humane Association, or a Home, or an Asylum, or whatever name you call the place where job-lot

charity children live. And that's what I am, an Inmate. Inmates are like malaria and dyspepsia: something nobody wants and every place has. Minerva James says they are like veterans—they die and yet forever live.

Well, anyhow, whenever I used to do wrong, which was pretty constant, I would say to myself it didn't matter, nobody cared. And if I let a chance slip to worry Miss Bray I was sorry for it; but that was before I understood her, and before Miss Katherine came. Since Miss Katherine came I know it's yourself that matters most, not where you live or where you came from, and I'm thinking a little more of Mary Cary than I used to, though in a different way. As for Miss Bray, I truly try at times to forget she's living.

But she's taught me a good deal about Human Nature, Miss Bray has. About the side I didn't know. It's a pity there are things we have to know. I think I will make a special study of Human Nature. I thought once I'd take up Botany in particular, as I love flowers; or Astronomy, so as to find out all about those million worlds in the sky, so superior to earth, and so much larger; but I think, now, I'll settle on Human Nature. Nobody ever knows what it is going to do, which makes it full of surprises, but there's a lot that's real interesting about it. I like it. As for its Bray side, I'll try not to think about it; but if there are puddles, I guess it's well to know where, so as not to step in them. I wish we didn't have to know about puddles and things! I'd so much rather know little and be happy than find out the miserable much some people do.

Anyhow, I won't have to remember all I learn, for Miss Katherine says there are many things it's wise to forget, and whenever I can I'll forget mean things. I'd forget Miss Bray's if she'd tell me she was sorry and cross her heart she'd never do them again. But I don't believe she ever will. God is going to have a hard time with Miss Bray. She's right old to change, and she's set in her ways—bad ways.

II

THE COMING OF MISS KATHERINE

Now, why can't I keep on at a thing like Miss Katherine? Why? Because I'm just Mary Cary, mostly Martha; made of nothing, came from nowhere, and don't know where I'm going, and have no more system in my nature than Miss Bray has charms for gentlemen.

But Miss Katherine—well, there never was and never will be but one Miss Katherine, and there's as much chance of my being like her as there is of my reaching the stars. I'll never be like her, but she's my friend. That's the wonderful part of it. She's my friend. And when you've got a friend like Miss Katherine you've got strength to do anything. To stand anything, too.

The beautiful part of it is that I live with her; that is, she lives in the Asylum, and I sleep in the room with her.

It happened this way. Last summer I didn't want to do anything but sit down. It was the funniest thing, for before that I never did like to sit down if I could stand up, or skip around, or climb, or run, or dance, or jump. I never could walk straight or slow, and I never can keep step.

Well, last summer I didn't want to move, and I couldn't eat, and I didn't even feel like reading. I'd have such queer slipping-away feelings right in my heart that I'd call myself a drop of ink on a blotter that was spreading and spreading and couldn't stop. Sometimes I would think I was sinking down and down, but I really wasn't sinking, for I didn't move. I only felt like I was, and I was afraid to go to sleep at night for fear I would die, and I stayed awake so as to know about it if I did.

And then I began to be afraid of dying, and my heart would beat so I thought it would wear out. But I didn't tell anybody how I felt. I was ashamed of being afraid, and I just told God, because I knew He could understand better than anybody else; and I asked Him please to hold on to me, I not being able to do much holding myself, and He held. I know it, for I felt it.

You see, Mrs. Blamire—she's Miss Bray's assistant—was away; Miss Bray was busy getting ready to go when Mrs. Blamire came back; and Miss Jones was pickling and preserving. I didn't want to bother her, so I dragged on, and kept my feelings to myself.

The girls were awful good to me. Real many have relations in Yorkburg, and if I'd eaten all the fruit they sent me I'd been a tutti-frutti; but I couldn't eat it. And then one day I began to talk so queer they were frightened, and told Miss Bray, and she sent for the doctor quick. That afternoon they took me to the hospital, and the last thing I saw was little Josie White crying like her heart would break with her arms around a tree.

"Please don't die, Mary Cary, please don't die!" she kept saying over and over, and when they tried to make her go in she bawled worse than ever. I tried to wave my hand.

"I'm not going to die, I'm coming back," I said, and that's all I remember.

I knew they put me in something and drove off, and then I was in a little white bed in a big room with a lot of other little beds in it; and after that I didn't know I was living for three weeks. But I talked just the same. They told me I made speeches by the hour, and read books out loud, and recited poems that had never been printed. But when I stopped and lay like the dead, just breathing, the girls say they heard there were no hopes, and a lot of them just cried and cried. It was awful nice of them, and if they hadn't cut my hair off I would have made a real pretty corpse.

The day I first saw Miss Katherine really good she was standing by my bed, holding my wrist in one hand and her watch in another, and I thought she was an angel and I was in heaven. She was in white, and I took her little white cap for a crown, and I said:

"Are you my Mother?"

She nodded and smiled, but she didn't speak, and I asked again:

"Are you my Mother?"

"Your right-now Mother," she said, and she smiled so delicious I thought of course I was in heaven, and I spoke once more.

"Where's God?"

Then she stooped down and kissed me.

"In your heart and mine," she answered. "But you mustn't talk, not yet. Shut your eyes, and I will sing you to sleep." And I shut them. And I knew I was in heaven, for heaven isn't a place; it's a feeling, and I had it.

And that's how I met Miss Katherine.

Her father and mother are dead, just like mine. Her father was Judge Trent, and his father once owned half the houses in Yorkburg, but lost them some way, and what he didn't lose Judge Trent did after the war.

When her father died Miss Katherine wouldn't live with either of her brothers, or any of her relations, but went to Baltimore to study to be a nurse. After she graduated she didn't come back for three or four years, and she hadn't been back six months when I was taken sick. And now I sing:

"Praise God from whom that sickness flew."

Sing it inside almost all the time.

Miss Katherine don't have to be a nurse. She has a little money. I don't know how much, she never mentioning money before me; but she has some, for I heard Miss Bray and Mrs. Blamire talking one night when they thought I was asleep; and for once I didn't interrupt or let them know I was awake.

I had been punished so often for speaking when I shouldn't that this time I kept quiet, and when they were through I couldn't sleep. I was so excited I stayed awake all night. And from joy—pure joy.

I had only been back from the hospital a week, and was in the room next to Mrs. Blamire's, where the children who are sick stay, when I heard Miss Bray talking to Mrs. Blamire, and at something she said I sat up in bed. Right or wrong, I tried to hear. I did.

They were sitting in front of the fire, and Miss Bray leaned over and cracked the coals.

"Have you heard that Miss Katherine Trent is coming here as a trained nurse?" she said, and she put down the poker, and, folding her arms, began to rock.

"You don't mean it!" said Mrs. Blamire, and her little voice just cackled. "Coming here? To this place? I do declare!" And she drew her chair up closer, being a little deaf.

"That's what she's going to do." Miss Bray took off her spectacles. "The Board can't afford to pay her a salary, but she's offered to come without one, and next week she'll start in."

"Katherine Trent always was queer," she went on, still rocking with all her might. "She can get big prices as a nurse, though she doesn't have to

nurse at all, having money enough to live on without working. And why she wants to come to a place like this and fool with fifty-odd children and get no pay for it is beyond my understanding. It's her business, however, not mine, and I'm glad she's coming."

"I do declare!" And Mrs. Blamire clapped her hands like she was getting religion. "My, but I'm glad! Miss Katherine Trent coming here! And next week, you say? I do declare!" And her gladness sounded in her voice. It was a different kind from Miss Bray's. Even in the dark I could tell, for hers was thankfulness for the children. Miss Bray was glad for herself.

That was almost a year ago, and now my hair has come out and curls worse than ever. It's very thick, and it's brown—light brown.

I'm always intending to stand still in front of the glass long enough to see what I do look like, but I'm always in such a hurry I don't have time. I know my eyes are blue, for Miss Katherine said this morning they got bigger and bluer every day, and if I didn't eat more I'd be nothing but eyes. If you don't like a thing, can you eat it? You cannot. That is, in summer you can't. In winter it's a little easier.

I never have understood how Miss Katherine could have come to an Orphan Asylum to live and to eat Orphan Asylum meals when she could have eaten the best in Yorkburg. And Yorkburg's best is the best on earth. Everybody says that who's tried other places, even Miss Webb, who gets right impatient with Yorkburg's slowness and enjoyment of itself.

And Miss Katherine is living here from pure choice. That's what she is doing, and she's made living creatures of us, just like God did when He breathed on Adam and woke him up.

At the hospital she used to ask me all about the Asylum, and, never guessing why, I told her all I knew, except about Miss Bray. Miss Katherine had known the Asylum all her life, but had only been in it twice—just passing it by, not thinking. When I got better and could talk as much as I pleased, she wanted to know how many of us there were, what we did, and how we did it: what we ate, and what kind of underclothes we wore in winter, and how many times a week we bathed all over; when we got up, and what we studied, and how long we sewed each day, and how long we played, and when we went to bed—and all sorts of other things. I wondered why she wanted to know, and when I found out I could have laid right down and died from pure gladness. I didn't, though.

Once I asked her what made her do it, and she laughed and said because she wanted to, and that she was much obliged to me for having found her work for her. But I believe there's some other reason she won't tell.

And why I believe so is that sometimes, when she thinks I am asleep, I see her looking in the fire, and there's something in her face that's never there at any other time. It's a remembrance. I guess most hearts have them if they live long enough. But you'd never think Miss Katherine had one, she's so glad and cheerful and busy all the time. I wonder if it's a sweetheart remembrance? I know three of her beaux; one in Yorkburg and two from away, who have been to see her frequent times; but a beau is different from a sweetheart. I'm sure that look means something secret, and I bet it's a man. Who is he? I don't know. I wish he was dead. I do!

When I first came back from the hospital my little old sticks of legs wouldn't hold me up, and down I would go. But I didn't mind that. I just minded not going to sleep at night. But sleep wouldn't come, and I'd get so wide awake trying to make it that I began to have a teeny bit of fever again, and then it was Miss Katherine asked if she might take me in her room. I was nervous and still needed attention, she said, and—magnificent gloriousness!—I was sent to her room to stay until perfectly well, and I'm here yet. Perfectly well because I am here!

That first night when I got into the little white bed next to her bed, and knew she was going to be there beside me, I couldn't go to sleep right off. I kept wishing I was King David, so I could write a book of gratitudes and psalms and praises, and that was the first night I ever really prayed right. I didn't ask for a thing except for help to be worth it—the trouble she was taking for just little me, a charity child. Just me!

And oh, the difference in her room and the room I had left! She had had it painted and papered herself, for it hadn't been used since kingdom come, and the cobwebs in it would have filled a barrel. It had been a packing-room, and when Miss Katherine first saw it she just whistled soft and easy; but when she was through, it was just a dream.

It is a big room at the end of the wing, and it has three windows in it: one in the front and one in the back and one opposite the door you come in. And when the paper was put on you felt like you were in a great big garden of roses; pink roses, for they were running all over the walls, and they were so natural I could smell them. I really could.

Miss Katherine brought her own furniture and things, and she put a carpet on the floor, all over, not just strips. And the windows had muslin curtains

at them with cretonne curtains just full of pink roses, looped back from the muslin ones; and the couch and the cushions and some chairs were all covered with the same kind of pink roses. And as for the bed, it was too sweet for anybody to lie on—that is, for anybody but Miss Katherine to lie on.

There was a big closet for her clothes, and a writing-desk which had been in the family a hundred years—maybe a thousand. I don't know. And one side of the room was filled with books in shelves which old Peter Sands made and painted white for her. She lets me look at them as much as I want, and says I can read as many as I choose when I am old enough to understand them. She didn't mention any time to begin trying to understand, and so I started at once, and I've read about forty already.

There aren't a great many pictures on Miss Katherine's walls. Just a few besides the portraits of her father and mother, oil paintings. And oh, dear children what are to be, I'm going to have my picture painted as soon as I marry your father, so you can know what I looked like in case I should die without warning. I want you to have it, knowing so well what it means to have nothing that belonged to your mother, I not having anything—not even a strand of hair or a message.

Sometimes I wonder if I ever really did have a Mother, or if the doctor just left me somewhere and nobody wanted me. I must have had one, for Betty Johnson says a baby's bound to. That a father isn't so specially necessary, but you've got to have a Mother. Mine died when I was born. I wonder how that happened when there wasn't anybody in all this great big earth to take care of me except my father, who didn't know how. He died, too, and then I was an Orphan.

This is a strange world, and it's better not to try to understand things.

In the winter time Miss Katherine always has a beautiful crackling fire in her room, and some growing flowers and green things. It was a revelation to the girls, her room was. Not fine, and it didn't cost much, but you felt nicer and kinder the minute you went in it. And it made Mrs. Reagan's grand parlors seem like shining brass and tinkling cymbals. I wonder why?

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