

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

First published 1911.

This edition copyright © 2025 Windermere Press.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

FRONT COVER ARTWORK:
Captain Lord House, Kennebunkport, Maine
by Willard Metcalf
(circa 1920)

*Mother Carey's
Chickens*

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

ILLUSTRATED BY
ALICE BARBER STEPHENS



PUBLISHER'S NOTE



This edition was prepared from the 1911 edition of *Mother Carey's Chickens* published by the Houghton Mifflin Company. Minor edits have been made to update spelling and punctuation to modern standards, but otherwise the contents of the book are presented as originally published and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Windermere Press.

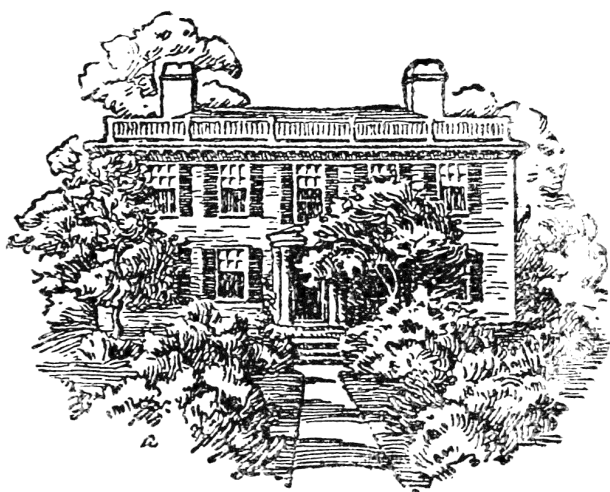


TABLE OF CONTENTS



1. Mother Carey Herself	7
2. The Chickens	15
3. The Common Denominator	25
4. The Broken Circle	30
5. How About Julia?	36
6. Nancy's Idea	50
7. "Old Beasts into New"	64
8. The Knight of Beulah Castle	72
9. Gilbert's Embassy	84
10. The Careys' Flitting	98
11. The Service on the Threshold	110
12. Cousin Ann	121
13. The Pink of Perfection	133
14. Ways and Means	143
15. Belonging to Beulah	155
16. The Post Bag	163
17. Jack of All Trades	173
18. The House of Lords	186
19. Old and New	196
20. The Painted Chamber	207
21. A Family Rhomboid	217
22. Cradle Gifts	229

23. Nearing Shiny Wall	240
24. A Letter from Germany	249
25. "Following the Gleam"	269
26. A Zoölogical Father	282
27. The Carey Housewarming	293
28. "Tibi Splendet Focus"	304
29. "Th' Action Fine"	312
30. The Inglenook	327
31. Grooves of Change	345
32. Doors of Daring	359
33. Mother Hamilton's Birthday	367
34. Nancy Comes Out	379
35. The Crimson Rambler	388

Chapter One

Mother Carey Herself



By and by there came along a flock of petrels, who are Mother Carey's own chickens They flitted along like a flock of swallows, hopping and skipping from wave to wave, lifting their little feet behind them so daintily that Tom fell in love with them at once."

Nancy stopped reading and laid down the copy of *The Water Babies* on the sitting-room table. "No more just now, Peter-bird," she said; "I hear mother coming."

It was a cold, dreary day in late October, with an east wind and a chill of early winter in the air. The cab stood in front of Captain Carey's house, with a trunk beside the driver and a general air of expectancy on the part of neighbors at the opposite windows.

Mrs. Carey came down the front stairway followed by Gilbert and Kathleen; Gilbert with his mother's small bag and travelling cloak, Kathleen with her umbrella; while little Peter

flew to the foot of the stairs with a small box of sandwiches pressed to his bosom.

Mrs. Carey did not wear her usual look of sweet serenity, but nothing could wholly mar the gracious dignity of her face and presence. As she came down the stairs with her quick, firm tread, her flock following her, she looked the ideal mother. Her fine height, her splendid carriage, her deep chest, her bright eye and fresh color all bespoke the happy, contented, active woman, though something in the way of transient anxiety lurked in the eyes and lips.

"The carriage is too early," she said; "let us come into the sitting room for five minutes. I have said my good-byes and kissed you all a dozen times, but I shall never be done until I am out of your sight."

"O mother, mother, how can we let you go!" wailed Kathleen.

"Kitty! how can you!" exclaimed Nancy. "What does it matter about us when mother has the long journey and father is so ill?"

"It will not be for very long—it can't be," said Mrs. Carey wistfully. "The telegram only said 'symptoms of typhoid'; but these low fevers sometimes last a good while and are very weakening, so I may not be able to bring

father back for two or three weeks; I ought to be in Fortress Monroe day after tomorrow; you must take turns in writing to me, children!"

"Every single day, mother!"

"Every single thing that happens."

"A fat letter every morning," they promised in chorus.

"If there is any real trouble remember to telegraph your Uncle Allan—did you write down his address, 11 Broad Street, New York? Don't bother him about little things, for he is not well, you know."

Gilbert displayed a notebook filled with memoranda and addresses.

"And in any small difficulty send for Cousin Ann," Mrs. Carey went on.

"The mere thought of her coming will make me toe the mark, I can tell you that!" was Gilbert's rejoinder.

"Better than any ogre or bug-a-boo, Cousin Ann is, even for Peter!" said Nancy.

"And will my Peter-bird be good and make Nancy no trouble?" said his mother, lifting him to her lap for one last hug.

"I'll be an angel boy pretty near all the time," he asserted between mouthfuls of apple, "or most pretty near," he added prudently, as

if unwilling to promise anything superhuman in the way of behavior. As a matter of fact it required only a tolerable show of virtue for Peter to win encomiums at any time. He would brush his curly mop of hair away from his forehead, lift his eyes, part his lips, showing a row of tiny white teeth; then a dimple would appear in each cheek and a seraphic expression (wholly at variance with the facts) would overspread the baby face, whereupon the beholder—Mother Carey, his sisters, the cook or the chambermaid, everybody indeed but Cousin Ann, who could never be wheedled—would cry “Angel boy!” and kiss him. He was even kissed now, though he had done nothing at all but exist and be an enchanting personage, which is one of the injustices of a world where a large number of virtuous and well-behaved people go unkissed to their graves!

“I know Joanna and Ellen will take good care of the housekeeping,” continued Mrs. Carey, “and you will be in school from nine to two, so that the time won’t go heavily. For the rest I make Nancy responsible. If she is young, you must remember that you are all younger still, and I trust you to her.”

“The last time you did it, it didn’t work very well!” And Gilbert gave Nancy a sly wink to recall a little matter of family history when there had been a delinquency on somebody’s part.

Nancy’s face crimsoned and her lips parted for a quick retort, and none too pleasant a one, apparently.

Her mother intervened quietly. “We’ll never speak of ‘last times,’ Gilly, or where would any of us be? We’ll always think of ‘next’ times. I shall trust Nancy next time, and next time and next time, and keep on trusting till I can trust her forever!”

Nancy’s face lighted up with a passion of love and loyalty. She responded to the touch of her mother’s faith as a harp to the favoring wind, but she said nothing; she only glowed and breathed hard and put her trembling hand about her mother’s neck and under her chin.

“Now it’s time! One more kiss all around. Remember you are Mother Carey’s own chickens! There may be gales while I am away, but you must ride over the crests of the billows as merry as so many flying fish! Good-bye! Good-bye! Oh, my littlest Peter-bird, how can mother leave you?”

"I opened the lunch box to see what Ellen gave you, but I only broke off two teenty, weenty corners of sandwiches and one little new-moon bite out of a cookie," said Peter, creating a diversion according to his wont.

Ellen and Joanna came to the front door and the children flocked down the frozen pathway to the gate after their mother, getting a touch of her wherever and whenever they could and jumping up and down between whiles to keep warm. Gilbert closed the door of the carriage, and it turned to go down the street. One window was open, and there was a last glimpse of the beloved face framed in the dark blue velvet bonnet, one last wave of a hand in a brown muff.

"Oh! she is so beautiful!" sobbed Kathleen, "her bonnet is just the color of her eyes; and she was crying!"

"There never was anybody like mother!" said Nancy, leaning on the gate, shivering with cold and emotion. "There never was, and there never will be! We can try and try, Kathleen, and we *must* try, all of us; but mother wouldn't have to try; mother must have been partly born so!"