

The Problem with Mary

by Maggie Lawson

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Mary jiggled her leg and nibbled her nails as she sat in the waiting room. Doctor Dolittle had made a fine transition from veterinarian to psychologist but still, these sessions always had her anxious. The painting of cute little lambs frolicking in a meadow, that hung over the receptionist's desk, certainly didn't help either.

Mary turned her head to avoid the painting, and cast her eyes over her fellow patients. The young man opposite her was an odd sight. Although an adult, he dressed in school boy shorts and sported a brown paper bandage about his brow. A faint odour of vinegar drifted from his direction.

"See what you have done now," Jack muttered. "Yes, it is your fault...no, I don't want your sweets; I'm still mad at you."

It appeared as though Jack was talking to himself, he was in fact, addressing his imaginary sister, Jill. Jack's story was quite sad really. Jack was the only child of Mrs O'Brien, a strict and harsh woman, who regularly belittled Jack for his clumsiness. Apart from being gravitationally challenged, he had been a perfectly normal character until suffering a nasty head injury. After waking from a three week coma, Jack claimed his sister had pushed him down the hill. The doctors couldn't find anything physically wrong to attribute Jack's psychosis to and surmised that Jack's subconscious mind had created Jill to avoid further taunting.

Seated to Jack's left was a disheveled woman, aged and dirty, feeding treats to her perfectly quaffed dog. Mary recognized her as Old Mother Hubbard, a befuddled old woman who lavished all her attention on her beloved pet. She hadn't always been the crazy old

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lady she is today, in fact, she was previously known as the very beautiful, Lady Elisabeth Bird. There was a common misconception amongst Earthlings that Lady Bird was a bug. Understandable, given the rhyme from whence she came. Lady Bird had suffered a terrible loss. While at the Grand Ball, her 'special needs' daughter, Ann, had set their family home alight, resulting in the deaths of her four brothers and sisters. Unable to accept this terrible event, Lady Bird suffered a psychotic break, fracturing her character. The poor old dear never could forgive herself for leaving her children at home, alone, while she danced the night away.

Psychological issues weren't as prevalent in Nurserytown as they were in Darklands, but still, they had their fair share.

"Mary, will you come through please."

Mary looked up at Doctor Dolittle, smiling and peering over the top of his wire framed glasses, beckoning for her to follow.

Doctor Dolittle's office reflected his mixed disciplines, beautifully painted images of animals and Jung inspired posters graced the walls. The leather chaise, on which Mary lay, was a rich chocolate brown and deceptively soft.

"Now, Mary, tell me how your week has been; have you made any progress?"

Doctor Dolittle's calm and reassuring voice suited his grandfatherly appearance; Mary found it so easy to talk to him.

"I tried those relaxation techniques Doc, but it didn't help. I mean, maybe it would have if Georgie didn't know how to push my buttons and all, but he does. He knows just how to push me over the edge."

"Hmm, I think it's time we addressed the real problem Mary. You can't go through life avoiding everything that is painful. Truth is, there are dozens of 'Georgies' out there who will provoke you. If we deal with the event in your past that started all this then maybe we can solve this problem."

"Yeah well good luck with that Doc, you know what happens every time I try to talk about it; how can we fix what I can't discuss?"

Forty-five minutes later Mary stepped out in to the day and headed home, wishing she could shake off her dark mood. The doctor had some good ideas but Mary doubted it would be easy to solve such a long standing problem.

It was a beautiful day, blues skies dappled with white cotton ball clouds, and a warm summer breeze that waltzed with lanky larkspurs. It was like this everyday, all year, without fail but the stunning weather made no difference to Mary at all. Having the misfortune of being a nursery rhyme character condemned her to living in Nurserytown's endless sunshine filled days and starry filled nights. Of course, not all genre-lands in the Writer's Dimension were this way. Adventure Island was prone to violent squalls, earthquakes and volcanoes, all at a moments notice and Darklands was continually shrouded in a darkening damp fog.

Arriving home Mary found a courier bag leaning up against the front door; it was addressed to her. Carrying it inside Mary fetched her cigarettes and the bottle of scotch from the cupboard before opening the plastic package. From inside it, she withdrew a large, brown sealed envelope. Mary felt her heart quicken as she realized what it was. Moving over to the dining table Mary poured a glass of scotch and lit a cigarette. There she sat, drinking and smoking for an hour or more, trying to find the courage she needed.

With trembling hands Mary held the truth, wondering if she really wanted to know; a myriad of questions hammering her heart. Opening the bulging brown package would change everything, that, she was sure of. Taking a temporary reprieve, Mary poured another glass of scotch, lit another cigarette, and stared down at her foreboding messenger.

As Mary's yellowed fingers shook, gray ash fell on the package, partially obscuring her last name.

Maybe it's an omen. If Georgie is cheating on me again, it's over; that's it, I'm done.

Mary's unkempt black curls bobbed wildly as she threw back her head and finished the last of her scotch, feeling its warmth spread through her throat. Breathing deeply, she grabbed the

package pushing aside her fears. Sliding a finger under the sealed flap, Mary broke its hold causing the envelope to spill its contents; a single cassette, red folder, and hand written note.

Dear Mrs Porgie,

As per your request, I followed your husband over the past month, noting and recording his daily activities. You will find enclosed a detailed report to this effect and a video which you might find of interest.

Yours sincerely

Jack Nimble

Mary's pulse quickened as she grabbed the red folder, surveying its contents with increasing anger.

"That filthy womanizing slob," Mary hissed, as the truth about her husband revealed itself.

The chair hit the ground with a clunk as Mary spun from the table, cassette in hand, and scurried into the living room. Crouching before the video player, Mary struggled to control her trembling rage long enough to insert the cassette and, with her jaw clenched and dark blue eyes ablaze, grabbed the remote. The three or four seconds it took for the video machine to start the tape were enough for Mary to grab the scotch bottle and light a cigarette. In between swigs and puffs Mary learned just how ugly the truth could be.

The dull and grainy images on the television were of her soon to be ex-husband and a pretty giggling woman. Mary's furrowed brow soon lifted as her eyes widened with disbelief upon recognizing Lucy Locket

. "No!," she whispered. "My best friend?"

Rage filled her chest as she stood up, dropping both the scotch and half burned cigarette, in the process.

"I-I I'm gonna kill that mother..."

Mary's screamed insult stopped mid word, her eyes rolling

back in her up-turned head. The boiling rage that had contorted her features was suddenly replaced with a serene smile as Mary brought her head back to the fore. Her previously dark blue eyes, now a rich sea green, were void of any emotion despite the perfectly sweet smile curling her full red lips.

“There is no problem here, everything is peachy keen.”

Bo Peep's voice was significantly different than Mary's husky, smoke aged voice. Anyone hearing Bo Peep's girlishly musical speech coming out of Mary's mouth would have been quite surprised at its ill fitting tones. Well, anyone except Mary's husband, of course.

Georgie was all too familiar with Bo Peep, having first met her at B.B Wolf's Steakhouse, over in Lullabye Grove. That is where Georgie had taken Mary on their first date, unaware of her issues with meat. Rather than finding Mary's multiple personalities a problem, Georgie foresaw the benefits of having a wife who switched into a smiling and subservient woman every time something overly distressing occurred. It seemed, to Georgie, that he would have his cake and eat it too.

Turning up the driveway of 27 Mother Goose Parade, Georgie belched, savouring the repeating flavour of his recently finished steak dinner, and wondered what Mary had prepared for dessert. He never ate his main meals at home. Mary's aversion to meat had her preparing only an assortment of vegetarian foods, which, for Georgie's gluttonous appetite, simply wasn't acceptable.

Georgie dislodged his sizable girth from the driver's seat, huffing and puffing with the effort. Finding his balance, he waddled to the finely crafted front door, barely able to pass through its generous width. It was just as well that this is the house that Jack built because any less sturdy construction would have buckled and bowed under Georgie's weight.

“What's for dessert,” he demanded, dropping himself into the nearest chair.

“Oh, I made a fabulous apple pie with lashing of fresh whipped cream, just how you like it, my darling,” cooed Bo Peep, carrying the large, freshly baked pie to the table. “Would you like a

drink with that, Sweetie?"

Georgie looked into her green eyes and smirked. "No; take your clothes off."

"No problem my love, anything you want, it's all peachy keen."

Bo Peep always obliging, much to Georgie's delight.

Mary awoke the next morning oblivious of the events that had transpired the night before. The missing chunks of memory no longer bothered her, accepting that she had forgotten for a reason. A rumbling gasping snort from beside her brought a shudder to her thin body.

Oh God, he is so disgusting. Her lips, curling with revulsion, as she watched saliva dribble from the corner of his mouth, finding a path between folds of fatty flesh. Mary quickly exited the bed, fearful her husband would wake and expect servicing. She hadn't knowingly had sex with her husband for seven years or more, too sickened by the sweaty slobbering pig he had become.

Mary showered; scrubbing her skin raw and red until she was absolutely sure no taint of her husband's odour remained. She did not need to remember last night to know he had used her. Mary remembered back to when Georgie had cut a fine figure in designer suits. Unfortunately his self indulgent nature had ruined not only his figure, but their marriage as well. Food was not Georgie's only insatiable appetite. Numerous women had been feasted upon, adding to Mary's disgust of him.

Feeling fresh and clean, Mary prepared herself a breakfast of coffee and cigarettes mentally scolding herself for not eating better. Gazing out the window, she smiled as she allowed herself to imagine a life without her husband. The aroma of coffee and cigarettes wafted through the house drawing Georgie from his slumber. Rolling out of bed he reached for yesterday's clothing and dressed without showering.

"What's for breakfast?," came his usual 'good morning'.

"Coffee's made."

"Is that it? Coffee!"

"Make yourself some toast," Mary replied flatly as she continued with her fantasy.

"Just for once would it be too much to expect a decent breakfast. I am your husband after all, the man of the house and it's about time you started treating me with the respect I deserve."

Mary calmly lowered her cup, twisted in her chair and locked eyes with Georgie before speaking.

"Do not speak to me about what you deserve."

For such a corpulent figure Georgie crossed the floor at impressive speed catching Mary's black curls in his hand as he bent her head back.

"Don't you dare speak to me like that you freak. Do you realize how lucky you are? Who else would marry such a useless head-case huh?"

Mary tried to turn her head, desperate to avoid the splattering saliva and rank stench coming from Georgie's mouth, but her hair, imprisoned between sausage-like fingers, prevented her escape. As nausea swirled in her stomach, Mary was forced to endure the abusive tirade

. "If it weren't for me you'd be a miserable old spinster still living at home with your father. I did him a favour taking you off his hands and I don't blame him one bit for killing your stupid lamb. You were such a pathetic loser. What kind of moron takes a lamb to school huh? I'll tell you who; stupid, ugly, idiots like you who can't get real friends. That's who. I just wish I had been there to see him slit its throat in front of you. Mmmm, I can smell it now, roast lamb. Did he serve it with mint sauce? I bet it tasted great, in fact, why don't we cook up a juicy lamb roast right now so you can relive that special meal"

A sweet smile slipped over Mary's face.

"No problem darling, that sounds just peachy keen."

Georgie had been so wrapped up in his sadistic taunt that he had failed to notice Bo Peep's emergence until she uttered that familiar phrase. Releasing her hair from his grip, Georgie

straightened up, a sly smile dimpling his pudgy cheeks.

“Now, how about that breakfast,”

“Not a problem, darling. Anything for the man of the house.”

Bo Peep, vacant and smiling, wrapped an apron about her waist as she made her way to the kitchen.

Georgie chuckled, feeling rather smug, as he sat at the breakfast table, drinking Mary's unfinished coffee. He did not hear Bo Peep return from the kitchen, feeling only the searing pain the butcher's knife delivered as it sliced through blubbery tissue, finding home between Georgie's ninth and tenth thoracic vertebrae. A strangled gurgling gasp was the only sound he made before departing the Writer's Dimension.

Bo Peep smiled as she surveyed her handy work.

“No problem here, everything is just peachy keen.”

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