

When I Was a Little Girl

BY MARION FOSTER WASHBURN.

The Walsey nursery was all in confusion. Norman, the seven-year-old, had his sweet face all twisted out of shape. It was so swollen that the gap where his front teeth were missing no longer showed, and laughter had become so painful an affair that joking or merriment of any kind had been strictly forbidden. In short, Norman had the mumps.

Five-year-old Carleton was waiting his turn to share his brother's affliction. He wished it would hurry up, for in the meanwhile all the interest centered about the other boy. He didn't feel well, but didn't know how to say so, and had been trying to scare up a good hard ache that would challenge attention. His mother had looked solemnly at him, and removed him for untruthfulness. In short, Carleton was in the dumps.

Dear little Dorothy felt the disturbance, and flew about like a distracted but important bantam; she told Carleton not to speak cross to mamma, and "pooned" Norman, who looked unwell, and gave him his medicine. But her zeal had outrun her discretion, and she had fallen with the medicine glass and spilled all the medicine; then she tried to wipe it up before Maggie, the nurse, could get those with a dry cloth, and, being still blind with tears, had fallen again, and bumped the other side of her head. So Dorothy was laid on the big bed with brown papers over her bumps.

Baby John was "coming down." He didn't relish the process at all, and was quite unaware of the fact that he was an object of envy to Carleton. The disease as yet showed itself only in two small swellings on his neck. So Baby John was fretful with his bumps (dumps).

Maggie, the nurse, had been up many times in the night. She had made restless Norman's bed a dozen times. She had to go to the doctor's for more medicine, and she was of the opinion that what they called "scalded milk" baby, was good old-fashioned thumps.

So mamma decided to play trumps. She picked up the baby and put him where he always found comfort, bumps or no bumps. She distributed some marshmallows, to be sucked very slowly. She established Carleton in his rocking-chair, just at her feet, and she sat between the two beds herself. Then she began in a low voice:

"When I was a little girl I used to make mistakes myself, about things, something as Carleton has done just now. I suppose I began as he began, by pretending things. I pretended I was sick when I didn't want to go to school. I pretended I was tired when my mother wanted me to do things, and I pretended so well that I fooled myself, even. So then I soon got all mixed about truth, and when I did tell a regular story I hardly knew it. Somehow, though, I always knew when other people told stories. I could catch them at it as quick as anything, and I thought then, as I think now, that 'liar' (whispering) was the very worst thing you could call anybody. Well, it took a good while for my papa and mamma to find out that the little girl whom they loved so dearly told stories.

"Well, they tried all kinds of things to cure me. They told me they wouldn't punish me for anything I did wrong if I told them the truth about it, and that helped a good deal, though it didn't always work. For instance, one day I was late at school. The real reason I was late was because I had stopped at a store to buy some candy and had bought caramels, and as they were very hard to chew, I had to wait outside for quite a while to get rid of the candy in my mouth, although the trolley bell was ringing when I got to the schoolhouse. When I got into my room a little of that candy was still in my mouth, and the sticky brown juice had stained my lips, though I didn't know it. As I went into the room I hurried to my seat, and said out loud:

"'Goodness! Am I late? Our clock must be slow.'"

"What's that, Mary?" said my teacher. "Come here to the desk." So I went up to her and said a big "I'm late." "When I started from home," I said, "our clock said only half-past 8, I don't see how I'm late."

"Did you not stop on the road?" asked the teacher.

"Yes'm, my shoes came unbuttoned and I stopped to fix it. But that oughtn't to take such a lot of time."

"No, it oughtn't," the teacher said. "Was that all, Mary?"

"Well, I stopped to mail a letter for mamma, but the only trouble was a minute's worth I, my eyes on a bird feeding, looking, I am sure, as surprised and innocent a little girl as ever came late to school.

"And was that all, Mary?" my teacher insisted. "You see, I had been late several times, and had always had such good excuses that she was beginning to think something was wrong. And so she asked again, 'Was that all, Mary?'"

"Yes'm," said I, and there was the flat lie (whispering).

"What's the matter with your mouth," teacher went on, "have you hurt it?"

"Yes'm," said I again, thinking very fast. I knew then the juice must be showing, and I put up my handkerchief quick to hide it.

"How did you do it?" she went on. "Why, I—I bumped against the corner of the big door, hurrying into school so fast." I said, and the tears rushed into my eyes, for I really didn't like to tell such stories, and just last night in my prayers I had asked the dear God to help me to be truthful. The tears quite melted my good teacher's heart, and she stooped forward and kissed me. After she kissed me she looked very queer. I tasted pretty sweet, I expect, and smelled of chocolate.

"Mary," she said, quite solemnly, "tell me the truth: have you been eating candy this morning?"

"Oh, no'm!" I cried very earnestly, for you see the whole roomful was listening, and I could not have them all think I had told a story.

"Mary," the teacher said again, "are you sure? Think one minute before you answer." But, although I was quiet, I didn't think. I heard the big clock tick off the seconds of the longest minute I ever knew, and I heard a big boy giggle in the back seat. That settled it. I wasn't going to have any big boy laugh at me.

"No'm," said I, when the minute was up. "I haven't had any candy for a week."

"You may go to your seat, Mary, and wait after school," said my teacher.

"I'll wait after school all right, but I haven't had any candy," I muttered as I went down the aisle between the desks.

"My! how you must have felt!" said Norman, sympathetically.

"I should say so! That was a dreadful day. I studied as I never studied before, for I didn't dare to do any thinking, and I recited my lessons so well that the teacher was almost sure I must have told the truth. My heart was heavy as lead all the time, and at the hands of the clock didn't seem to move at all. At last 12 o'clock came, and all the other children went out, and I was alone with my teacher, Miss Smith.

"Was she a nice teacher?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes, very. I had loved her dearly before, but this day I pretty near hated her, because I had done wrong and wanted to forget it, and she wouldn't let me. As she came down the aisle toward me I thought all kinds of wicked things about her, and my little teeth together hard, and stared straight at her, to show I wasn't afraid. She smiled at me kindly, and sat down in the next seat in front of me, facing me, and put her hand on mine.

"Next," said she, softly, "you have been so good all day I cannot think you would tell me an untruth now. Was that candy or blood on your mouth?"

"Blood," said I, between my shut teeth, relieved to think that she didn't know.

"Mary!" she cried, reproachfully.

"Well, if you don't believe me what's the use of asking me?" I said.

"That was all at me, and I looked back without a wink. I got quite interested in seeing how long I could keep from winking. I suppose she saw I wasn't soft and loving and good, for she got up and went to the closet where she kept her hat and cloak.

"You may get on your things, Mary, and wait for me," she said. So I got ready and waited for her. She went beside me, and when we came to the school store where we children bought candy and books I knew she would soon know the truth. Sure enough, the shop woman promptly told her that I had bought caramels of her that very morning, and so late she had warned me I would be tardy. Miss Smith never said a word; only went out and walked solemnly across the street, and I guessed where she was going, so I was not surprised when she went up the steps of my mother's house and rang the bell.

"Oh, mamma," cried Norman, "did she tell your mother?"

"Yes," said I.

"And what did she say? Oh, what did she say?"

"My dear, I don't know. They had a very long, sorry-sounding sort of talk, and sometimes they asked me questions, but I was too miserable to notice much of anything.

"What's miserable?" asked Carleton.

"The way you felt a while ago, only worse. As if nothing would ever be nice again. I felt like crying, only I didn't think crying would do any good. Neither would it."

"Poor mamma," murmured Dorry, half asleep. "Did oo want to cry?"

"By and by my teacher went away and my mother and I sat there in the twilight; that means just as it was beset to grow dark; and pretty soon I found my dear mother weeping.

"That melted me, and I began to cry, too, and presently crept up into her lap and whispered into her ear:

"Oh, mamma, I'm so sorry!"

"Well, my darling little girl," said my mother, "how many times have you said that before? Do you think just saying you are sorry makes you good? Do you think sorrow will make people forget that you told an untruth, and will make them believe you again when you speak? How many times have you said to me, 'I'm sorry and I won't do it any more.' And yet that promise, too, you have broken. No, Mary, I cannot believe what you say any longer. Your words are crooked. You will have to show that you mean to keep your promise."

"How?" I asked, eagerly to get back the old happiness into my mother's face and my own wretched little heart.

"'But her mother isn't going to send any invitations. She invites people herself. She said so!' I cried. Mamma shook her head.

"'Then I can't let you go,' said she. 'But why not?' I cried.

"'Not until I hear from her mother.' 'Her mother isn't going to invite anybody, I say. What difference does that make?'"

"I want to know if there really is going to be a party," my mother said. "But of course there is! Didn't I tell you?"

"She looked at me sadly, and my father, too, sat silently regarding me. Then suddenly the blood rushed over my face and neck until I felt as if it would burst out of my veins. For I knew that they did not believe me. I was thoroughly unhappy. I wanted to go to that party very much, yet I could not go unless the little girl's mother invited me.

"'I'll ask her to invite me!' I said despondently.

"'What will you say when she asks you why your mother wants her to write the invitation?' asked my father. 'Goodness! I should have to say that they would not believe me without a note from her. She would know that I was a little girl who didn't tell the truth. I sat silent a long while. At last a bright idea occurred to me.

"'Will you believe Mamma if I bring her to you?' I asked eagerly. Mamma was the little girl's name.

"'Yes, they would believe Mamma.' 'But how will you explain to her?' my father asked. And again I was silent. I thought quickly of excuses I could make to Mamma, of stories I could tell her, but I couldn't plan a lie, just now, after having had such a time all day, and it made no difference how quickly the idea of lying came into my head.

"I didn't go to the party. I stayed home and was miserable, but I learned something, for when Mamma asked me why I didn't come, I answered:

"'Mamma wouldn't let me.' 'Why wouldn't she?' Mamma asked. 'I thought of a dozen excuses, none of them, of course, true ones, but I would not use them.' 'You didn't want to tell?' I said at last.

"'Oh, you were being punished!' cried Mamma, in a jeering tone.

"I remember well how ashamed I was, but I answered bravely:

"'Yes, I was being punished.' 'That was a very bad thing at home. They didn't believe anything I said. Mamma did seem to believe me a little when I told her about my talk with Mamma, but I could see she wasn't quite sure, and I cried my eyes out over it. Here I had told the truth, when it was pretty hard, too, and got no credit for it. I felt badly used, but it didn't do any good. Even my little brother was believed, although I was not. Many times, when I wanted them to know something, I had to get him to tell them for me. How often I wish I could make me feel! And then as days and days went on I found that my teacher, too, would not make up. She and I used to be great friends, but now we were not. If I was late, she would not let me speak at school, and I brought a note from my mother. This made all the children smile at me, and they, too, knew that I was—that I was—well, you know what they thought."

"'Did they think you were a—?' a storyteller," asked Norman.

"'Yes, wasn't it dreadful? By and by I got in black despair!'"

"'What's black despair?'" asked Carleton. Dorothy had gone to sleep.

"'I felt as if the world grew dark. As the sun didn't shine, as if nothing would ever make me good and happy again.'"

"'What did?' asked Norman.

"'Well, first of all I began to speak the truth. I spoke it all the time, and I carried notes from my mother to my teacher, and from my teacher to my mother, to show it was the truth. Then I took my little brother around with me almost everywhere, so that he could tell them that what I said was true.'"

"'Didn't he ever tell naughty stories?'" asked Carleton.

"'No, he never did. You see, I saw how bad I felt, and he never wanted to have to feel like that. Little by little I found that they began to believe me again. Little by little Miss Smith began to smile at me, and she was friendly and didn't forget the day when she said, 'If I offered her a note from my mother explaining that she wished me to leave school early that afternoon, in order to go to the dentist.'"

"'Yes'm, mind the note, my dear! I believe you.'"

"'I believe you! They were the sweetest words in the world to me. The tears rushed to my eyes, and I threw my arms around her neck, sobbing out:

"'Oh, mamma, 'Thank you!' thank you! I forgot all about the other children, but as I went to my seat I noticed that they looked kindly at me, and, really, they always believed me, too, after that. They had seen how sorry I was and how Miss Smith believed me. I asked Miss Smith to go kindly, after I don't believe I've ever told a wrong story. Anyway, I try not to tell the truth.'"

"'And so do I,' cried Norman.

"'And I,' said Carleton.

"'We'll try together. And now here comes Maggie. What do you think she has in that paper bag?'"

Mamma went away to lay down the sleeping baby. The paper bag contained bananas, bought on the way home from the doctor's, and Norman sat up in bed with a towel in front of him and chattered happily, as Carleton while they both nibbled the fruit. All was quiet for a time in the Walsey nursery.

**Hateful Men.**  
Walt—Had fifteen women at my house this afternoon. Some sort of club my wife belongs to.

**Nefarious Plot.**  
Sam—If you're white to be de candidate, I kin put you on ter some these 'niggers' on ob de folks what's up in yo'!

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"Tommy—The Sphinx is a woman with a great head. She has not talked for 2,000 years."

Little girl of a standing entranced before the window of a toy shop: "Oh, mother! If you was my little girl, wouldn't I take you in and buy you some of those lovely things!"

"Are you going to stay with us all summer, auntie?"

"Yes, dearie, are you pleased?"

"Yes'm," said mamma said "if you did stay would mamma send and save enough on her wages to buy me a bicycle?"

"Oh, mamma, don't read any more about cannibals being wicked for cooking the missionaries. Why, my own dad's as bad as any of them. I heard him tell you himself that at dinner last night he toasted all his friends."

Little Oscar had just received a train of cars for his birthday and he insisted on taking them to bed with him. His mother protested. "You should not take the cats to bed with you," she said.

"Why not?" asked Oscar. "These are sleeping cars."

"Mamma—You dear, sweet little cherub! Do you want to give away all of that money your uncle gave you? There was over a dollar."

"I spent some of it, mamma."

"Did you? How much is there left?"

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