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1911. Another heartwarming tale from the author of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm. In this story the reader follows a strong-willed widow, Nancy Carey, as she struggles for the future of her beautiful daughters Nancy and Kitty and her beloved son Peter. Good humor and folksy grit help Mother Carey keep poverty and the wrong fellows for her daughters at bay. See other titles by this author available from Kessinger Publishing.

Mother Carey's Chickens Details

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From Reader Review Mother Carey's Chickens for online ebook

Rebekah says

I concur with most of the comments in the previous reviews. I don't want to be repetitive so I will just add a few things. For a while this book is quite similar in tone and content to many other children's books I have read from the turn of the century. It noticeably picks up around chapter 20, however, and I found myself pausing with delight and saying to myself, "hey, this is really funny!" A few highlights: The Lords are introduced. This family is a piece of work. Henry Lord, especially, being a seriously messed up parent, to the point of tragedy. The bitter but brilliant Olive and the nerdy Cyril, with tons of potential (had there ever been a sequel) complete the family circle. The Lords are surely one of the most unique and non-stereotypical families in any literature of the time and genre.

There are several quite slapstick and delightful comedy scenes. Among them, The resurrection of "You dirty boy". It involves a much hated to the point of being a family joke, statue, that despite the family's best efforts refuses to be broken. The deed is finally accomplished after they move into the yellow house, by a fall from a loft, after a move, despite supremely careless packing, failed to destroy it. However Osh Popham glues the whole mess together from "a thousand" pieces much to the families chagrin, and presents it to them during a solemn housewarming ceremony. The description of Nancy teaching her brothers and sisters how to pretend-faint on command and en-masse creates a hilarious picture in the mind's eye. At her signal, this performance turned a serious and possibility weepy cliché moment into laughter instead of tears. There is a serious passage, as well, that is one of my favorites. As you no doubt have read from the other reviews, Mother Carey is a beautiful widow who is universally admired at first sight by all who meet her acquaintance. Here is a introspective glimpse into her secret thoughts and emotions:

Was she doing all that she could, she wondered as her steps
flew over the Yellow House, from attic to cellar. She could play
The piano and sing; she could speak three languages and read
Four; she had made her curtsy at two foreign courts; admiration and
Love had followed her ever since she could remember, and here
She was, a widow at forty, living in a half-deserted New England
Village, making parsnip stews for her children's dinner. Well,
it was a time of preparation, and its rigors and self-denials must be cheerfully faced.

Summer Magic being my number one comfort movie, it was amazing to read so many passages and scenes and dialogue that Sally Benson incorporated into the movie. The book is considerable fleshed out with more characters, etc., but regrettably, only a bit where Nancy meets her future love, Tom Hamilton. Miss Benson obviously read the book very carefully and loved it.

Cynthia Egbert says

There is no way for me to say enough good things about this book. Please just read it. If you love family and a happy ending and old fashioned values then you really need to read this book and have hope in the world again. And the cultural references, the large number of authors and mythology that Ms. Wiggin references is

AMAZING and made me so very happy.

Vivian says

The Carey family, composed of a naval father, an educated and refined mother, a son nearing college age, two daughters -- one 14 and the other 16, and a young son age five, have moved often due to their father's work. As this story begins the father has fallen ill and does not recover, leaving the family in a financial downturn but not destitute. The house help must be let go, furnishings sold, and a more affordable situation acquired. A house they saw once on a family vacation comes to mind. So commences a year of change in their lives. The story is much about the mother and the eldest daughter but includes them all and their neighbors and relations. If the plot sounds familiar it may be because you've seen the film which was taken from this book (with many artistic liberties), but which keeps the spirit of the story and characters.

In 1963 Disney made a film, starring Haley Mills, based on this book which was published in 1910. The film? SUMMER MAGIC. How on earth did I stumble upon this book? I requested it through inter-library loan at my library and when it finally came I had no clue as to why I requested it. What a delight to find myself reading the book which inspired a favorite film of mine! Sometime I'll need to read WATER BABIES by Kingsley, which was referenced quite often in this book.

I have a few vocabulary words and quotes I want to nail down. ---

p. 4 "encomiums" Encomium is a Latin word deriving from the Classical Greek ἐγκῆμιον (enkomion) meaning "the praise of a person or thing." Wikipedia

"As a matter of fact it required only a tolerable show of virtue for Peter to win encomiums at any time."

p. 40-42 (the father has recently died from an illness and the family has had to let the 'house help' go). Here is an example of a mother helping a child develop a valuable trait:

"There came a day when even Peter realized that life was real and life was earnest. When the floor was strewn with playthings his habit had been to stand amid the wreckage and smile, whereupon Joanna would fly and restore everything to its accustomed place. After the passing of Joanna, Mother Carey sat placidly in her chair in the nursery and Peter stood ankle deep among his toys, smiling.

"Now put everything where it belongs, sweet Pete," said mother.

"You do it," smiled Peter.

"I am very busy darning your stockings, Peter."

"I don't like to pick up, Muddy."

"No, it isn't much fun, but it has to be done."

Peter went over to the window and gazed at the landscape. "I dess I'll go play with Ellen," he remarked in honeyed tones.

"That would be nice, after you clear away your toys and blocks."

"I dess I'll play with Ellen first," suggested Peter, starting slowly towards the door.

"No, we always work first and play afterwards!" said mother, going on darning.

Peter felt caught in a net of irresistible and pitiless logic.

"Come and help me, Muddy?" he coaxed, and as she looked up he suddenly let fly all his armory of weapons at once, -- two dimples, tossing back of curls, parted lips, tiny white teeth, sweet voice.

Mother Carey's impulse was to cast herself on the floor and request him simply to smile on her and she would do his lightest bidding, but controlling her secret desires she answered: "I would help if you needed

me, but you don't. You're a great big boy now!"

"I'm not a great big boy!" cried Peter, "I'm only a great big little boy!"

"Don't waste time, sweet Pete; go to work!"

"I want Joanna!" roared Peter with the voice of an infant bull.

"So we all do. It's because she had to go that I'm darning stockings."

The net tightened round Peter's defenseless body and he hurled himself against his rocking-horse and dragged it brutally to a corner. Having disposed of most of his strength and temper in this operation, he put away the rest of his goods and chattels more quietly, but with streaming eyes and heaving bosom.

"Splendid!" commented Mother Carey. "Joanna couldn't have done it better, and it won't be half so much work next time." Peter heard the words "next time" distinctly, and knew the grim face of Duty at last, though he was less than five."

p. 50 "Beulah means land of promise; -- that's a good omen.

p. 52-53 (Mother Carey ponders her life's purpose)

..."If she could keep strength enough to guide and guard, train and develop them into happy, useful, agreeable human beings, -- masters of their own powers; wise and discreet enough, when years of discretion were reached, to choose right paths, -- that, she conceived, was her chief task in life, and no easy one.

"Happy I must contrive that they shall be," she thought, "for unhappiness and discontent are among the foxes that spoil the vines. Stupid they shall not be, while I can think of any force to stir their brains; they have ordinary intelligence, all of them, and they shall learn to use it; dull and sleepy children I can't abide. Fairly good they will be, if they are busy and happy, and clever enough to see the folly of being anything but good! And so, month after month, for many years to come, I must be helping Nancy and Kathleen to be the right sort of women, and wives, and mothers, and Gilbert and Peter the proper kind of men, and husbands, and fathers."

p. 83 (about moving to their new home before the end of the school term)

"It was finally decided that the girls should leave their spring term of school unfinished, and that the family should move to Beulah. ...

Mother Carey gave due reflection to the interrupted studies, but concluded that for two girls like Nancy and Kathleen the making of a new home would be more instructive and inspiring, and more fruitful in its results, than weeks of book learning."

p. 84

"Youth delights in change, in the prospect of new scenes and fresh adventures, and as it is never troubled by any doubts as to the wisdom of its plans, the Carey children were full of vigor and energy just now."

p. 112 (on spanking)

"Mother Carey had arms to carry, arms to enfold, arms to comfort and caress. She also had a fine, handsome, strong hand admirable for spanking, but she had so many invisible methods of discipline at her command that she never needed a visible spanker for Peter. "Spanking is all very well in its poor way," she used to say, "but a woman who has to fall back on it very often is sadly lackin in ingenuity."

p. 156 "ineradicable" adjective -- unable to be destroyed or removed.

..."His racy accounts of Mrs. Popham's pessimism, which had grown prodigiously from living in the house with his optimism; his anecdotes of Lallie Joy Popham, who was given to moods, having inherited portions of her father's incurable hopefulness, and fragments of her mother's ineradicable gloom, --these were of a character that made the finishing of the hall a matter of profound unimportance."

p. 157 "celerity" noun--swiftness of movement.

..."Mis' Bill Harmon's another 'hurrier,' -- ...she an' Mis' Popham hev been at it for fifteen years, but the village ain't ready to give out the blue ribbon yet. Last week my wife went over to Harmon's and Mis' Harmon said she was goin' to make some molasses candy that mornin'. Well, my wife hurried home, put on her molasses, made her candy, cooled it and worked it, and took some over to treat Mis' Harmon, who was jest gittin' her kittle out from under the sink!"

The Careys laughed heartily at this evidence of Mrs. Popham's celerity, while Osh, as pleased as possible, gave one dab with his paste brush and went on..."

p. 352 "celerity" again

"There was a brief interval for ice cream, accompanied by marble cake, gold cake, silver cake, election cake, sponge cake, cup cake, citron cake, and White Mountain cake, and while it was being eaten, Susie Bennett played The Sliding Waltz, The Maiden's Prayer, and Listen to the Mocking Bird with variations; variations requiring almost supernatural celerity."

p. 254 "execrable" adjective -- extremely bad or unpleasant.

..."These country schools never have any atmosphere of true scholarliness, and the speech and manners of both teachers and pupils are execrable."

p. 284 (the mother's thoughts to herself)

..."You can't have the joys of motherhood without some of its pangs! Think of your blessings, and don't be a coward!"

p. 308 (Nancy's thoughts on the occasion of her 17th birthday)

"A young girl's heart is ever yearning for and trembling at the future. In its innocent depths the things that are to be are sometimes rustling and whispering secrets, and sometimes keeping an exquisite, haunting silence. In the midst of the mystery the solemn young creature is sighing to herself, "What am I meant for? Am I everything? Am I nothing? Must I wait till my future comes to me, or must I seek it?"

Danette says

I loved this book. I couldn't put it down and shirked other duties in order to finish it in one day.

I happened upon it and picked it up when I heard it was the basis for one of my favorite movies, "Summer Magic". The book is written to children but I found much in the character of Mother Carey to emulate. She creates a happy home for her children and is committed to helping them develop a moral character. I could learn much from her winsome way of guiding, correcting, and encouraging her brood and others she welcomes into her home. I had tears in my eyes more than once.

I read a digital copy from the library but will now be keeping my eyes open for a hard copy for our home.

A book by an author who is no longer alive.

Kjirstin says

One of the Disney movies I watched a lot, growing up, was Summer Magic, so I was happy to discover that this is the book behind it. Even better, it's written by the author of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, which was

a book I remember reading and liking as a kid.

I enjoyed the book version of this story a lot. I liked that it fleshed out the detail that the movie was lacking, and I particularly liked the fact that the characters were more honest and showed more integrity than they did in the version "updated" for the '60s.

My only real complaint is that the ending was so very abrupt -- I'd have liked a little bit of "happily ever after" epilogue as payoff, but sadly it was denied me. Oh well. It was absolutely worth reading (I can probably come up with my own epilogue), and I've consequently picked up several of her other similar-genre books.

Trace says

UPDATE: August 16, 2018: I've just finished reading Stormy Petrel by Mary Stewart and in this delightful little book, I learned that Stormy Petrels are a type of "storm bird" - very small, very strong and very tough, spending almost all of their lives out at sea. Sailors used to call them "Mother Carey's Chickens". It finally dawned on me how Kate Douglas Wiggin chose the very fitting title of her book. Perhaps it was mentioned in this book - but I must have missed it until now!

LOVED this charming book that reminded me so very much of Little Women. Its a gem indeed, and a wonderful study in building community. I borrowed this via my library's interlibrary loan system, but I will have to be on the hunt for my very own copy. As I will want to read this again and again.

Mother Carey, recently widowed, on her desire to raise her 4 children:

"She had but one keen desire: to go to some quiet place where temptations for spending money would be as few as possible, and there live for three or four years, putting her heart and mind and soul on fitting the children for life. If she could keep strength enough to guide and guard, train and develop them into happy, useful, agreeable human beings, - masters of their own powers; wise and discreet enough, when years of discretion were reached, to choose right paths, - that, she conceived, was her chief task in life, and no easy one. "

Mother Carey, being intentional about helping her oldest son grow into a responsible young man:

"It was Nancy who as the eldest seemed the head of the family, but Gilbert, only a year or so her junior, ought to grow into the head, somehow or other. The way to begin would be to give him a few delightful responsibilities, such as would appeal to his pride and sense of importance, and gradually to mingle with them certain duties of headship neither so simple nor so agreeable. Beulah would be a delightful beginning."

Kathryn says

I thoroughly enjoyed the charm of this book. Mother Carey has her hands full when her husband dies and she is left to raise four children on her own. A true delight of a book.

Bookworm says

Undoubtedly her very best! I had watched the movie Summer Magic more than once, before I learned that Mother Carrie's Chicken's was the book it was taken off of.. The book is indeed better than the movie, and I proudly own my own copy!

Heidi says

This was a darling little story about a family struggling to survive gracefully. It was interesting to read a story about a loving strong mother and family during this time period.

Caroline says

Mother Carey's Chickens by Kate Douglas Wiggin, is a paean to motherhood. Like others in its genre, like Little Women or Little Lord Fauntelroy, it shows a wise little mother bringing up her lively children in relative poverty while inspiring them (and everyone around them) to be good and to help others. In the meantime the author pokes gentle good fun at the local Maine color.

In this incarnation, the mother is Mrs. Carey. Newly widowed, Mrs. Carey takes her four children and a niece to live in the tiny Maine town of Beulah. There, they learn to love country life, country living, country neighbors, country schools, and especially their new home, the "Yellow House." They have little misadventures and learn to be better people. It's moral and heartfelt and about as interesting as you would expect.

OldFashionedGirl says

This is a tender book of a family that loses their fortune and must learn how to live on a farm. But with their loving mother leading the way and helping her little "chickens" to grow into responsible and caring adults.

Kathryn says

Absolutely wonderful! And one of the most beautiful odes to motherhood I've ever read. Highly recommend!

Will try find time to write a review worthy of this special gem. (Available on Project Gutenberg.)

Kathleen says

I really liked the first half, but the second half wasn't quite as good. 3 1/2 stars.

Sara says

I completely loved this charming story! It felt very much like a Louisa May Alcott novel. The characters are bright and lovely and flawed and interesting. Is idyllic and inspiring. There were many moral gems woven beautifully into this dreamy tale.

Theresa says

This book was seriously a five star clear up to the very end. I was deeply involved with every character. I loved all of Mother Carey's "chickens". And I loved Mother Carey all the more for taking in the Lord children so they really felt loved.

I read with glee Nancy's letters to their landlord and his thoughts on what she wrote. I loved reading of how they fixed up the rooms in their homes. The way that Julia eventually came around. How all of their neighbors loved them so much that they constantly helped them out. Peter was at all times adorable!

Then the teacher came and I'm pretty sure there was a scene that he was looking at Nancy as a woman and not a girl. Maybe it was as a girl and not a woman. Regardless when the teacher is thanking Mother Carey for helping him feel loved I was under the impression that Nancy would end up with him. Or if she didn't there would be an explanation.

Then came the last chapter/ last four pages of the book where Tom comes along and Nancy is suddenly enamored with him and we are told that Olive is with the teacher and Kathleen is with Cyril. Wait what? When did any of that happen? Did they edit all of that out? And they suddenly the book was over. What? What happens to Gilbert? Am I to be satisfied with such an ending? No.

I remember feeling left out when she didn't further explain what happened to Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, but this was much more of a "just slap an end on it". This has left me feeling like I must read everything she ever wrote to see if that is her style. Maybe she liked to leave the ending open to our own imagination.
