

THE MAKING OF MARY

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The Making of Mary by Jean Forsyth

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JEAN FORSYTH

**THE MAKING OF
MARY**

McIlwraith, Jean Weston

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THE MAKING
OF MARY



BY

JEAN FORSYTH

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STURDY northeast wind was rattling the doors and windows of a deserted farmhouse in Western Michigan. The building was not old, measured by years, but it had never been painted or repaired, and its wooden face, prematurely lined with weather stains, looked as if it had borne the wear and tear of centuries. The windows, like lidless eyes, stared vacantly at the flat stubble fields and the few spindling trees, a dreary apology for an orchard. There were plenty of shingles off the roof to allow

the inquisitive rain-drops to follow one another through the rafters, and thence to the floor of the room below, where the darkness was creeping out of the corners to take possession.

The house had been but recently vacated, for there was still a "slab" smoldering on the hearth of the wide fireplace in the outer kitchen, and something that looked almost human, wrapped in a ragged bedquilt, was lying much too near it for safety. A friendly gust of wind came down the chimney, bringing back the smoke, and drawing a faint cough from the bundle. Another gust and another cough, and then a sneeze which burst open the quilt, to disclose an ill-clad little girl, six or seven years old.

She gazed about with drowsy blue eyes till terror of the darkness made her draw the tattered comforter over her head again, and crouching nearer to the smolder-

ing log, she tried to warm her fingers and toes. More wind down the chimney made more smoke, and sent the child coughing back from the fireplace. She was wide awake now, and stood listening. Sounds there were, indeed, but not one that could be associated with any living thing in the house. She felt her way around the walls to where the candle used to be, but it was gone. There was no furniture to stumble over, and when she came to the side of the wall in the inner room from which the stairway crept up, she mounted it on her hands and knees, trembling, partly with cold, partly with fear at the noise made by the flapping of the sole of one of her old shoes. There was a step missing at the turn of the stairs, but the child knew where the vacancy was, and pulling herself over it, she reached the landing, felt all around the walls there, and made the circuit of the three

small rooms in the same fashion. They were entirely empty.

Cautiously the girl stole down the broken stairs and back to her former place by the smoking slab, where she curled herself up into the old quilt again, as into a mother's arms, and spoke aloud, though there was none to listen but the obstreperous wind :

" Anyhow she won't be here to lick me no more ! " That thought seemed to compensate for darkness and loneliness. The voices of wind and rain were apparently more kindly than the human tones to which she had been accustomed, and soothed by their stormy lullaby, the little maid fell asleep.

The sunshine poured freely into the forsaken house next morning, drying up the damp floors, and turning to gold the scrap of yellow hair that showed through a hole in the old quilt. Presently the small girl shook the covering away from her and

stood up, to yawn and stretch herself out of the stiffness from a night spent on the hard floor. She was not a pretty child, unless naturally curling fair hair, that would be fairer when it was washed, could make her so. The long, thin legs that came below her torn dress made her too tall for her age, and what might have been a passable mouth was spoiled by the departure of two of the front "baby" teeth and the tardy arrival of the later contingent.

Part of the day the child seemed satisfied with her new-found liberty. Having discovered a stale crust or two in a cupboard, she wanted no more, for her diet had never been luxurious. Into every corner of the house she intruded her small freckled nose, pulling down from shelves all sorts of odds and ends that had been left behind as worthless at the fitting.

There was an old straw bonnet