**MARY, MARY**by Jean Kerr *Mary*

I suppose I should take a course and find out what a girl should answer when a gentle. man says "Tell me, pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you?" Though it would hardly pay. It doesn\*t come up that often. Oh, I suppose most little girls learned things like that when they were three years old. *(Sits on the ottoman.)* But I\*m a very retarded case. It\*s only just this year I learned how to put my hair up in rollers. Before that I wore it pinned back in a bun. And when it had to be cut, *I* cut it, or I went somewhere and *they* cut it. Lately I\*ve been going to Elizabeth Arden Salon, and I want you to know that it\*s a whole new way of life. At Arden\*s they don\*t just cut your hair—never. They *shape* it. And they honestly think a good shaping is as important as a cure for cancer. The hairdresser really blanched when he saw my bun. I could hear him thinking, "Thank God she came to me—another month and it might have been too late. I\*d love to think I was a puzzle. A woman of mystery. Smiling and enigmatic on the surface—but underneath, a tigress. *(Change of mood, straight. forward.)* I hate to admit it, but what you see is all there is. Underneath this plain, girlish exterior, there\*s a very plain girl. I decided *that* when I was thirteen years old. At thirteen, all by yourself, I guess I decided that. Oh, there were people around, but I can\*t say they gave me any argument. Do you ever look at little girls?You take two little girls. One of them is pink and round, with curly hair and yards of eyelashes. The other one is pale and bony, with thin, wispy hair and two little ears poking through—like the handles on a sugar bowl. Okay, which one of these little girls is going to have to wear braces on her teeth?That was me. Braces on my teeth, band-aids on my knees, freckles on my nose. All elbows and shoulder blades. For two years running I got picked to play the consumptive orphan in "Michael O\*Halloran." Once I sent away secretly for Stillman\*s freckle cream. I guess I used too much, because I just peeled and peeled. I had to pretend it was a sunburn. When I was a kid, I mean really a kid, I never worried about the way I looked, because I thought—I *knew—I\*d* grow up to be beautiful just like my sister Clara. She had bright red hair and brown eyes and she always had a faintly startled look, as if she\*d just come out of a dark theater into the sunlight. People who met her would be so busy staring they\*d forget to finish their sentences. I thought it was insurance. Clara was six years older than I was, and I thought ‘I\*ll grow up to look just like that.\* One day I was measuring myself—I was about fourteen— and I realized I hadn\*t grown at all, not an inch, in a whole year. And then it came to me. I wasn\*t going to grow any more. I was *up.* And I didn\*t look anything at all like Clara. I went rushing to my father, and I asked him when I was going to look like Clara. Poor man. He didn\*t know what to say. He said "Darling, we wouldn\*t want two Claras. You\*re the bright one." That did it. I could have faced being plain, but to be plain *and* bright! In the high school I went to, that was a beatable combination. I used to imagine all the time that I was really Catherine Earnshaw. The girl in "Wuthering Heights." Cathy. I used to dream that somewhere there was a strange, dark man whose heart was quietly breaking for *me.* On rainy nights I\*d open the window and imagine I could hear him calling—"Oh, my wild, sweet Cathy!" The colds I got! And of course the only dark man I ever saw was the middle-aged dentist who used to adjust the braces on my teeth.