

CHAPTER 2

The First Book of the Series: Mary Poppins

Mary Poppins, the first book of the series (with 161 pages of text), begins in the house at Number 17, Cherry Tree Lane, the home of the Banks family, consisting of Mr. Banks (appropriately a bank officer), his harassed wife, their four children (Jane, Michael, and the twins John and Barbara), a cook, a serving girl, and a general-work man who avoids work as much as he can. There was a nanny also, but she has left without notice, leaving Mrs. Banks frantic about how to replace her.

The house itself is the smallest in the Lane, dilapidated, and in need of painting. The condition of the house is an objective correlative of the state of the Banks family and, indeed, of most of us most of the time. ("Objective correlative" is a fancy term invented by T. S. Eliot for an external thing or state of affairs that symbolizes and evokes an internal emotional response in a reader.)

On the day the book begins, a strong cold East Wind is blowing (the capitalization in the book alerting us to the fact that this East Wind is more than air movement from a particular direction - it symbolizes change from the symbolic East, the place of enlightenment). The children, looking out the nursery window, see Mary Poppins arrive, not in a normal way, but blown along by the East Wind, carried over the gate of the house, and put down at the front door. Mrs. Banks immediately hires her, although Mary Poppins