

"Oh? Then what happens in between? ... Between the first and last stroke," he explained hurriedly.

Mary Poppins turned and glared at him.

"Never trouble Trouble till Trouble troubles you!" she advised griggishly.

Michael gets his answer later, when the first strike of midnight ends the old year. Then remarkable things happen. Toys come alive: a Golden Pig, Alfred the Elephant, Pinnie the Monkey, and an old Blue Duck. They lead Jane and Michael out of the house and to the Park, where the following exchange takes place:

"Alfred flung up his flannel trunk and eagerly sniffed the air. / 'Ha!' He remarked delightedly 'We're safely inside, Pig, don't you think?' / 'Inside what?' asked Michael curiously. / 'The Crack,' said Alfred, flapping his ears."

Then many other characters from nursery rhymes, such as Humpty-Dumpty, and stories, such as Robinson Crusoe, appear. They have all escaped from their books because, before leaving the Nursery, Mary Poppins had propped open their books. Jane wonders at the characters' ability to slip out of their books and into the "real" world and asks whether they can often do so. Crusoe answers, "Alas, no! Only at the end of the year. The Crack's our one and only chance."

"What crack?" demanded Michael. "The Crack between the Old Year and the New. The Old Year dies on the first Stroke of Midnight and the New Year is born on the Last Stroke. And in between - while the other ten strokes are sounding - there lies the secret Crack.' [Sleeping Beauty continues:] 'And inside the Crack all things are as one. The eternal opposites meet and kiss. The wolf and the lamb lie down together, the dove and the serpent share one nest. The stars bend down and touch the earth and the young and the old forgive each other. Night and day meet here, so do the poles. The East leans over towards the West and the circle is complete. This is the time and place, my darlings - the *only* time and the *only* place - where everybody lives happily ever after.'

Mary Poppins also enters the Park. "But why is she here?" demanded Jane, as she watch that shape come down the clearing. 'Mary Poppins is not a fairy-tale.' / 'She's even better!' said Alfred loyally, 'She's a fairy-tale come true.