

# *The Secret Garden* – Summary

## **Chapter I**

The omniscient narrator of *The Secret Garden* begins by enumerating the many defects of Mary Lennox, the ten-year-old girl who is the novel's protagonist. Mary is ugly, with skin made yellow by constant illness. At the outset of the novel, she is living in India with her parents, who have neither time nor affection for her. Her mother, who had never wanted a child at all, has entrusted Mary to the care of a number of Indian servants, whose only instructions are to keep the unloved child out of her mother's sight. Mrs. Lennox is described as a famously beautiful, elegant woman, who does nothing but attend fashionable parties. Though everyone is acquainted with and admires Mrs. Lennox, nearly no one knows that she has a little girl, so totally is the embarrassingly ugly child kept from public view. As the servants are obliged to give Mary whatever she wants (lest her parents be disturbed by her crying), Mary becomes terribly spoiled, selfish, and dictatorial. She loves no one, and no one cares at all for her.

This already unhappy state of affairs is made worse when a cholera epidemic breaks out in the Indian village where the Lennoxes are living. The family does not manage to flee in time to escape the epidemic because Mary's mother, in the spirit of thoughtless egotism that is typical of her, has insisted upon staying to attend a dinner party. On the morning that the cholera finally strikes the Lennox bungalow, Mary's Ayah (the Indian woman who serves as her nanny) does not come to tend to her. Left utterly unsupervised, Mary wanders into the garden and begins to play by herself beneath a tree. There, she overhears a conversation between her mother and a British officer, after which the events of the morning are explained to her. The fact that her Ayah has died of the cholera does not bother Mary at all, as she did not love her nanny or anyone else.

The household is seized by terror and confusion, and in the ensuing chaos Mary is completely forgotten. She shuts herself in her room, and does nothing but cry and sleep for more than a day. When she finally ventures out, the house seems eerily deserted, as though it has been abandoned. Mary drinks a glass of wine left standing on the dining-room table. The wine causes her to fall into a deep sleep that lasts many hours. When she awakes, a small green snake with glittering eyes is the only living creature besides Mary herself left in the bungalow—everyone else, including her parents, has died or fled. A party of British soldiers finds her there and takes the newly-orphaned child away with them.

## **Chapter II**

Mary is sent to live with an English clergyman and his family in the period immediately following the death of her parents. Her misfortune has done little to change her worldview, however, and she instantly despises the clergyman's five children and the poverty of the family's circumstances. They, for their part, are quite frank in their dislike for her, and she finds herself ostracized by the other children. They delight in making fun of her, and, upon finding her playing at gardening, give her a mocking nickname borrowed from a nursery rhyme: "Mistress Mary, Quite Contrary."

Basil, the favourite among the children, informs Mary that she is to be sent to England to live with her uncle, Archibald Craven. As she has heard of neither England nor her uncle, this comes as something of a surprise to her. It is also

from Basil that Mary begins to hear the peculiar rumours that surround her uncle: it is said that he is a hunchback and hermit who lives in a mysterious, rambling old house in the middle of nowhere. Though Mary roundly spurns Basil and his story, she is preoccupied by what he has told her. A few days later, she does indeed set sail for England, in the care of an officer's wife who is on her way to leave her own children in a boarding school.

In London, Mary is handed over to Archibald Craven's housekeeper, Mrs. Medlock. The pair loathe each other on sight—a turn of events that is quite common for Mary, whose plain face and bitter disposition seem to impress everyone unfavourably. It is in Mrs. Medlock's company that Mary first begins to feel lonely.

Mrs. Medlock and her charge take a train to Yorkshire, the site of Misselthwaite Manor. Mrs. Medlock passes the journey by telling Mary dismal stories about the house and its master. Archibald Craven is indeed a hunchback, and a widower; the death of his lovely wife had been, for him, the end of any possibility of happiness. Most of his house's hundred rooms are now kept locked and shuttered. To Mary, her uncle's story seems like a fairytale, or "like something in a book." As she contemplates this, it begins to rain, and Mary is lulled to sleep.

### **Chapter III**

When Mary awakes, the train has arrived in Yorkshire. She and Mrs. Medlock board a carriage there, which takes them through a village and over Missel Moor, until they finally reach the manor. There, the travellers are greeted by Mr. Pitcher, her uncle's manservant, who tells them that Mr. Craven does not wish to see them. Medlock shuts Mary up in a room by herself, and reminds her again that she is not to explore the house or its grounds, as Mr. Craven "won't have it." Mary's contrariness reaches new levels of intensity.

### **Chapter IV**

Martha, one of the manor's numerous maidservants, greets Mary when she awakens on her first morning at Misselthwaite. Mary tells Martha how much she hates the moor; Martha replies that she will come to love it, just as Martha does herself. The housemaid is quite casual in her speech, and talks to the girl as though the two were equals. This much upsets Mistress Mary, who is used to the extreme servility of the servants who took care of her in India. When Mary asks Martha to help her in getting dressed, Martha is completely shocked. It had never occurred to her that the child might not be capable of dressing herself. In her surprise, she lapses into the dialect (meaning a form of speech particular to the people of a region) of Yorkshire. This dialect is characteristic of the speech of nearly everyone on the moor (except for the residents of the manor house itself).

Martha goes on to say that she suspects Mary's circumstances were so very different in India because there are "such a lot o' blacks there." In fact, she had imagined that Mary herself was black. Mary is outraged at this suggestion, for blacks "are not people"; in response, she insults Martha viciously and then bursts into tears. Martha, troubled by this tantrum, comforts her and agrees to help her dress.

Mary finds that the mourning black she was wearing upon her arrival at Misselthwaite has been replaced by a new set of white woollen clothes. For once, she is pleased by the change, as she "hates black things." As she helps Mary dress, Martha is again surprised by the child's behaviour: she stands very still, as though she were a doll, and does nothing to help herself. When the maid asks why she insists on being dressed, Mary replies with a phrase she learned from her Indian servants: "It was the custom."

Martha begins to tell Mary about her family: her mother, father, and eleven brothers and sisters. She mentions that one of her younger brothers, Dickon, has an almost magical way with animals and keeps a wild pony as a pet. For the first time in her life, Mary finds herself interested in something other than herself: she is attracted by the idea of Dickon.

Mary refuses to eat the breakfast that is brought to her, which exasperates Martha, who has often seen her siblings go hungry. At Martha's suggestion (and in the hopes that she might see Dickon), Mary decides to explore the moor. Before she ventures out, however, Martha mentions that, somewhere on the grounds of Misselthwaite, there is a garden that has been shut up for ten years. It was once Mistress Craven's garden and, after her death, Master Craven locked its door and buried the key. Mary begins searching for the secret garden as soon as she leaves the manor. She first explores the kitchen gardens, and, over one of the garden walls, sees a robin redbreast, whose lovely appearance and cheerful song please Mary deeply. She feels certain that the tree on which he is perched is in the secret garden. In one of the kitchen gardens, Mary comes across a gruff old gardener named Ben Weatherstaff. When she mentions seeing the robin, the old man breaks into a beautiful soft whistle; Mary is terribly surprised, as the sound is so at odds with his surly appearance. The robin appears a few moments later, and lands near the old man's feet. Ben Weatherstaff tells Mary that the robin had been lonely after the rest of his brood flew away; longing for company, the robin befriended the gardener. Mary realizes that she too is lonely, and that this is one of the reasons for her contrariness. Ben Weatherstaff observes that Mary and he are alike, in that they are both unattractive and have terrible tempers; Mary is greatly discomfited, as no one has ever spoken to her with such bluntness.

The robin breaks into song, in an attempt to make friends with Mary; as she has no friends in the entire world, she is almost painfully delighted. Mary attempts to ask Ben Weatherstaff about the secret garden, but he refuses to answer and walks away without a word of goodbye.

## **Chapter V**

Mary passes a number of weeks in which each of her days is like the others: she awakens, eats breakfast, and then wanders the moor all day. Her time out of doors begins to cause a change in her: she slowly begins to grow stronger and healthier, and her imagination, which had laid dormant during her time in India, is quickened by her exploration of the manor grounds and her search for the secret garden.

Outside one of Misselthwaite's walled gardens, Mary has a second encounter with Ben Weatherstaff's robin. She is terribly pleased to see him, and chases after the robin as he flies along the garden wall—she even goes so far as to chirp and whistle at him, even though she does not know how. In her pursuit of the robin, she becomes certain that he lives in the secret garden. She cannot, however, find its door.

That night, Martha tells Mary further stories of the secret garden, even though Master Craven has forbidden the servants to discuss it. The garden once belonged to Mrs. Craven, and she and her husband had spent many intimate hours there in the years of their marriage. It had been Mrs. Craven's custom to sit in a rose-covered bower at the top of one of the garden's trees, and, one day, she fell from it when a branch gave way. She died of her injuries, and, after her death, Archibald Craven could no longer bear the garden and had it locked shut.

Hearing this story, Mary feels a great pity for her uncle. As she listens to the wind blowing over the moor, she is able to discern another sound beneath it: the

sound of someone, a child, crying. Martha denies hearing any such sound, though Mary does not believe her.

## **Chapter VI**

The following day, a rainstorm keeps Mary indoors. She realizes that she is beginning to like both Martha and her stories of her family, and feels an affinity with both Dickon and Martha's mother, though she has never met either of them. To keep herself occupied despite the rain, Mary sets out to search for Misselthwaite's library, and to explore its hundreds of shuttered rooms. She is not concerned that anyone will try to stop her, because no one in the manor much troubles themselves with her. In Yorkshire, unlike in India, Mary must fend for herself.

As she walks through the manor's corridors, Mary notices many portraits of grand, antique-looking men and women hanging upon the walls; their faces seem to wonder at how a girl from India came to live on their estate. She is much interested in the portraits of children, and even speaks to one of a girl who looks like Mary herself: the girl is curious looking, and a green parrot is perched upon her finger. Mary wishes the girl in the portrait were there to keep her company; she feels that there is no one at all alive in Misselthwaite save for herself.

Upon entering one of the rooms that open onto the corridor, Mary finds yet another portrait of the girl who looks so like her. The girl's stare unnerves her, and she leaves to explore a number of other rooms, stopping finally in one that might have once been a lady's sitting room. There, Mary happens upon a collection of ivory elephants; as she knows all about both ivory and elephants from her life in India, she is quite taken with them. Suddenly, she hears a soft rustling sound behind her, and turns to find a family of gray mice living in one of the room's velvet cushions. Mary thinks to herself that, though the mice and she may be the only living things in the manor at that moment, the mice, having each other, are not lonely at all.

Upon going back into the corridor, Mary again hears a child's cry; when she goes off in search of its source, she is apprehended by a furious Mrs. Medlock, who takes her back to her room.

## **Chapter VII**

On the following day, the storm has passed, and Martha tells Mary that spring will soon come to the moor. Martha is planning to go home to visit her family, as it is her only free day of the month. Mary asks Martha if she might someday visit her family's cottage. Martha is not certain if it will be possible, but says that she will ask her mother, who is quite clever about such things. After a pause, Mary remarks that she likes both Martha's mother and Dickon, though she has seen neither of them; she bitterly adds that she suspects that they would not like her, because no one does. Martha asks the girl if she likes herself, and Mary surprises both of them by saying, "Not at all."

After Martha sets out for home, Mary goes out into the gardens, where she finds Ben Weatherstaff in a good humour. Ben tells her that the earth itself is glad, as it has been eagerly waiting for spring. As the two stand talking, the robin appears and lights at their feet. Mary tentatively asks Ben Weatherstaff if anything is still living in the secret garden, and he replies that only the robin knows, as no one else has been inside in ten years. It occurs to Mary that she was born ten years ago, at around the same time that the garden was bolted shut.

Mary wanders off, following the wall of the garden without a door. She realizes that she is fond of a number of people for the first time in her life—of Martha, and Dickon, and Martha's mother, and of the robin, whom she thinks of as a per-

son. The robin follows her, and Mary again tries to talk to him in chirps and twitters. The bird leads her to a mound of freshly turned earth, which, when Mary examines it closely, contains a tarnished key that has long been buried. It may, Mary thinks, be the key to the secret garden.

### **Chapter VIII**

Mary determines to search for the door of the secret garden. She desperately wishes to find the garden because it has been locked for so long—if she could only go inside, she thinks, she could invent her own games and play them there alone, and no one would ever know where she was, nor how and where to find her. It is this thought that so compels her.

That Mary is compelled at all, by anything, signals quite a change in her character, since she had always been entirely passive during her life in India. At Misselthwaite, in the fresh air of the moor, she is beginning to be involved in the world around her, and her imagination is reviving.

Though Mary closely examines the thick ivy that grows upon the stone walls of the garden, she cannot find the door, and, at length, returns to the manor. There, Martha announces that her family was thoroughly spellbound by her stories of the child from India. In fact, Martha's mother is terribly concerned about Mary, and has sent her a skipping rope as a present. Though she is grateful for the gift (particularly from a family as impoverished as Martha's), Mary does not quite know how to thank Martha for it. She is very formal, shaking Martha's hand rather than kissing her, as it is more common for a child to do.

Mary goes out into the garden to practice with the skipping rope, and there runs into Ben Weatherstaff and the robin. As Mary is skipping down the path with the robin beside her, a gust of wind disturbs some of the ivy growing upon the stone wall. Beneath the ivy is a door, which Mary unlocks with the key she unearthed the day before. She finds herself standing inside the secret garden.

### **Chapter IX**

Inside the secret garden, Mary finds a great many rosebushes, and standard roses that have been allowed to grow as large as trees; the flowerless vines of climbing roses have overgrown all else, and make lovely curtains in the air. It is a strange and silent place, for no one has entered it for ten years; Mary thinks it must be very different from gardens that have not been so abandoned. Since it is winter, everything in the garden has gone brown or gray, and Mary cannot be certain whether the flora are dead or alive. She fiercely hopes that everything in the garden has not died.

Mary feels that the garden is "a world all her own," and that there might be no one at all alive for hundreds of miles—and yet she is not lonely while she is there. She finds a few green shoots pushing up through the earth, eager for spring. Mary is quite thrilled at the thought that something is still living in the garden, and sets about weeding the space around these early flowers, so that they might grow more quickly. She occupies herself with this weeding all day.

That night, at the manor, Mary asks Martha for tools to help her in gardening. Martha tells Mary to write a letter to Dickon: he would certainly agree to buy tools and flower seeds on one of his trips to Thwaite, the village nearby. Mary writes the letter, and is very excited by the idea that Dickon will bring the supplies to her himself—she had never expected to see the boy whom even the animals adore. Martha also mentions that her mother has agreed to have Mary visit the cottage, and Mary realizes that she is eager to meet her as well, for "She doesn't seem to be like the mothers in India." When Martha briefly steps out of the room,

Mary hears the same far-off crying as she did during the storm. Martha again refuses to admit that she too hears the sound, and flees the room to avoid answering Mary's questions.

### **Chapter X**

In the week after her first entry beyond its walls, Mary comes to think of the secret garden as a "fairy-tale sort of place"—as a place that is magical and strange and all her own. Each day, she plays with her skipping-rope and digs and weeds in the garden, in an effort to cultivate the few plants she knows to be alive. Mary is becoming healthier, and less contrary, and more engaged in the world with each day that she passes at Misselthwaite.

During this time, her acquaintance with Ben Weatherstaff develops into friendship, and Mary attempts to covertly ask him for advice on gardening. Ben Weatherstaff tells her that he once tended the garden of a woman who "loved [roses] like they was children or robins," and, though she died, he still cares for her roses once or twice a year. Mary asks him if roses die when they are left to themselves, and how one might determine if they are dead or alive. Ben replies that one must wait till spring to know for certain. She continues questioning him about his work with the abandoned roses until he becomes unaccountably angry with her and walks off once again.

After this encounter, Mary follows one of the laurel-paths into the woods in search of rabbits. She hears an odd whistling sound and, following it, comes upon a boy playing a wooden pipe beneath one of the trees. The boy is surrounded by animals—a pheasant, a squirrel, two rabbits—and Mary knows him almost immediately as Dickon Sowerby, the famous animal-charmer. She is thrilled to see him, but, as she is not used to boys, initially feels rather shy in his company. Dickon tells Mary that he received Martha's letter, and gives her the gardening tools and seeds that she had asked him to buy. Mary is very taken with the ease of Dickon's Yorkshire speech, as well as with his ruddy looks and patchwork clothing; to her, there is "a clean fresh scent of heather and grass and leaves about him, as if he were made of them." Thinking of this, Mary is suddenly and completely at ease with him, and forgets her shyness.

After a few moments, the robin redbreast joins the pair beneath the tree. The boy appears to speak to the bird in robin-language, asking if he is a friend of Mary's. Dickon explains to Mary how to tend the seeds he has brought her, and then asks to see the place where she intends to plant them, as he wishes to help. Mary is extremely anxious about sharing the secret of the garden with him. Dickon tells her that she needn't mistrust him, for he keeps such secrets all the time, to protect his wild things from the violence of other boys. Mary says that she has "stolen a garden," but fiercely proclaims that it is hers, and she will not surrender it. She does, however, want Dickon to see it, and so leads him there.

### **Chapter XI**

Dickon tells Mary that he had heard of the secret garden from Martha, but never imagined that he would step inside it. He begins to investigate which of the plants are alive, and remarks that the secret garden would make a marvellous nesting place for birds, as there are no people there to harm them. The two busily set to work, clearing away the dead wood and more of the weeds. Dickon is impressed at how much Mary, who knew nothing of gardening, has been able to accomplish on her own. Mary replies, simply, that she likes the smell of the earth.

Mary asks Dickon if he will help her with the garden, and Dickon happily agrees. Noting how many of the plants are still alive, Dickon wonders aloud if perhaps someone else hasn't been in the garden in the ten years since Master

Craven locked its door. Mary tells Dickon that she wishes to grow flowers that look like bells, in defiance of the nursery taunt that the clergyman's children shouted at her, "Mistress Mary, quite contrary, How does your garden grow? With silver bells, and cockle shells, And marigolds all in a row." Mary tells Dickon that she likes him, and asks, in Yorkshire dialect, if he likes her as well. He asserts that both he and the robin like her a great deal. Their work is interrupted when Mary is called back to the house for her supper. She frets that she will never see Dickon again. Mary worries that, like a sprite or a wood-fairy, he will simply vanish as suddenly as he appeared. She does, however, completely trust that he will keep the secret of the garden.

## **Chapter XII**

Back at the manor house, Mary tells Martha that she has met Dickon. Martha is much amused when Mary exclaims that she finds him beautiful. Mary discovers that her uncle has returned from his trip abroad. Susan Sowerby, Dickon and Martha's mother, had confronted him in Thwaite village upon his return, and reproached him for neglecting Mary. Master Craven therefore wants to see Mary immediately, as he is leaving Misselthwaite again the following day. Mary is delighted at his imminent departure, but dreads meeting him: she is certain they will despise each other.

Mrs. Medlock leads Mary to Master Craven's sitting room, where they find him sitting before a fire. Mary then sees that he is not precisely a hunchback, though his shoulders are crooked—in fact, he would be handsome if not for the terrible misery in his face. He admits that he simply forgot to attend to Mary, and asks her if she would like a governess or nurse to keep her company. Mary fervently declares that she would much rather play on the moor, and grow strong before she begins her education. He agrees, and asks if there is anything at all she wants. Mary replies that she wants nothing more than "a bit of earth" for her gardening. Mr. Craven is quite moved by this request, as it reminds him of his late wife's love of gardens, and tells her that she may have any piece of land she wants, from anywhere on the manor grounds.

Mary rushes back to the nursery and tells Martha that her uncle has given her permission to keep a bit of earth and to visit with Martha's family. She then hurries back to the secret garden in search of Dickon, but finds that he has left for home. There is a note affixed to one of the rose bushes, on which Dickon has drawn a picture of a bird on its nest and a promise to return.

## **Chapter XIII**

That night, the sound of the rain drumming upon the windows awakens Mary. She is greatly miserable at the onset of the storm, because she knows that it will keep her confined to the manor house all the following day. Once so awakened, she is too upset to go back to sleep. The wind and rain sound to Mary like human wails—"like a person lost on the moor and wandering on and on crying."

After lying awake for nearly an hour, Mary hears something beneath the sound of the storm: the same cries she heard in the corridor, as of a child weeping. In complete defiance of Mrs. Medlock's command that she keep to her room, she goes off in search of its source. Mary follows the noise through Misselthwaite's darkened corridors, until she finds the door to a room in which a light is still burning.

Upon entering the room, Mary finds a thin, curious-looking boy lying upon a massive four-poster bed. The boy is as white as a statue, as though he has been ill, and he is crying. Each child is not certain whether the other is a ghost, or a dream, and, for a long while, they simply stare speechlessly at one other.

The boy is Colin Craven, Master Craven's son. He was born ten years before, in the same year in which Mary was born and the secret garden locked shut. Colin's father cannot bear to see him, as Colin reminds him of his late wife; the boy resembles her, and was born only shortly before she died. Archibald is ashamed of how sickly Colin is, and has forbidden the servants to speak of him. Everyone fears that he will become a hunchback and die before he reaches adulthood. Colin himself hates to be looked at, because he despises the pity and morbid fascination he inspires. He refuses to leave the manor house, and spends all his time shut up in his grand gloomy room. Colin does not mind, however, if Mary looks at him, as he is greatly interested in who she is and where she comes from. Mary is only too happy to stay in the hidden room and talk to the hidden boy—both remind her of the secret garden. Colin tells Mary that his father gives him anything he wants to amuse himself with; everyone must obey his wishes, as it "makes [him] ill to be angry."

When Mary mentions the secret garden to Colin, he begins bombarding her with questions. He threatens to force the servants tell him everything they know about the garden, and calmly states again that everyone must obey his wishes, as he may one day be master of Misselthwaite—provided that he lives.

To distract him from the question of the garden, Mary asks Colin if he truly believes that he will die. Colin tells her that he imagines that he will, for people have been saying that he will not live to adulthood since his birth. Colin's doctor is Archibald Craven's brother, and it would suit the doctor well if Colin died, since the manor would then belong to him. It was the thought of his impending death that caused Colin to weep.

Colin tells Mary that he wants to see the secret garden more desperately than he has ever wanted anything, and that he intends to make the servants take him to it. Mary anxiously replies that the garden will be utterly spoiled if everyone knows of it. It is glorious because it is a secret. Colin, who has never had a secret before, agrees to keep this one.

At Colin's instruction, Mary draws back a rose-colored curtain hanging over the mantelpiece to reveal a picture of a laughing woman with grey eyes exactly like Colin's own. Colin tells Mary that this is a portrait of his mother. It is kept covered for two contradictory reasons: on the one hand, Colin dislikes that she is laughing while he is so ill and unhappy; on the other, he thinks of her as his treasure, one which he does not wish to share with anyone. He almost hates her for dying, for he believes that he would not have been sick, and his father would not have despised him, if only she had lived. Mary tells Colin that she will continue looking for the door to the garden, and the two children decide to keep their meeting a secret. Before leaving, Mary sings him to sleep with a Hindustani lullaby that her Ayah used to sing to her.

#### **Chapter XIV**

The next day, the rainstorm continues unabated. Mary tells Martha that she has met Colin. Martha was supposed to be guarding Colin's room during the night, but had fallen asleep and thus made it possible for Mary to creep in unnoticed. She is certain that she will lose her position in the house, but Mary reassures her, saying that Colin will not permit that to happen. Martha tells Mary that all the servants fear Colin's wrath, for he knows that "[their] souls are not [their] own"—that is, he knows that, since they are servants, they are utterly dependent upon him for their survival.

Mary tells Martha that Colin wishes to visit with her every day. Martha is astonished, for Colin is famous for throwing tantrums when confronted with strangers; it is as though Mary "bewitched him." Mary says that it was not magic that

drew the two of them together. She also vows that she will not see Colin if he becomes angry with her, to which Martha implacably replies that everyone must obey his wishes. A bell summons Martha to Colin's room, where he tells her that he wishes to speak with Mary immediately. Mary agrees, as she actually wants to see Colin—though not so much as she wants to see Dickon.

In his opulent room, Mary tells Colin that he reminds her of a child rajah (king) that she saw while she was in India. The rajah's servants were obliged to comply with his every command, or they would lose their lives. Mary tells him that he is very unlike Dickon, who can charm the moor animals as fakirs in India can charm snakes. Dickon has taught her to love the moor, and she tells Colin that he would too, if only he could see it. Annoyed, he replies that he is far too ill to go out on the moor. Mary is unsympathetic to his talk of illness and death, and tells him that he needn't die, even if everyone expects and wants him to: she declares, "If everyone wished I would [die], I wouldn't." Colin thinks a moment, and then says that only one person did not seem to think he would die. This person, a great doctor from London, had said that Colin might live if only he could make up his mind to do so.

Mary thinks that a visit from Dickon could help Colin make up his mind to live, for Dickon cares so much for living things, for the plants and animals of the moor. The two cease to think of death, and begin to talk about Dickon and his family, as well as of the coming spring—to act, in short, like the children they actually are. In the midst of their laughter, Mrs. Medlock and Colin's uncle, Dr. Craven, enter the room. The adults are shocked to see the two children together, but Colin, in his Rajah-like way, informs them that Mary and he are now friends, and will see each other whenever they please. The doctor tells Colin that he mustn't forget that he is ill. Colin, his strange eyes glittering, tells him that that is precisely why he loves for Mary to visit him: she makes him forget his illness.

## **Chapter XV**

After a week of rain, and Colin nearly constant, welcome company, Mary is able to return to the secret garden. To Mary, Colin doesn't seem at all ill when he is amused or engaged in something. Mrs. Medlock, though she is somewhat upset by Mary's subterfuge, tells her that the servants are delighted that she has begun visiting Colin, for he is much less difficult and unhappy; she jokes that Mary is like a second nurse.

In her talks with Colin, Mary has attempted to be cautious in speaking of the secret garden. She is not yet certain whether he is trustworthy. Mary also wants to determine if it would be possible to take Colin into the garden without anyone knowing that she has done so: in this way he could get the fresh air and sunlight that he so sorely needs. These things have certainly had a remarkable effect upon her: she is already far healthier and happier than she was when she first arrived in England.

If Colin could leave the manor, Mary thinks, he could also enjoy the invaluable company of Dickon and the robin. Colin has already said that he would not mind if Dickon looked upon him, for "He's a sort of animal charmer and [Colin is] a boy animal." On the day of Mary's return to the secret garden, it seems as though spring has finally come to the moor to stay. The buds and shoots are forcing their way up through the soil, and birdsong fills the air.

Dickon is already in the garden when she arrives, and he has brought his pet crow, Soot, and his pet fox, Captain, with him. A number of crocuses have come into bloom, and Mary bends to kiss them, much to Dickon's surprise. She remarks that one cannot kiss a person as one kisses a flower, and he replies that he has often kissed his mother with the same kind of simple delight.

As the two excitedly wander around the garden, marvelling at all the fresh growth, the robin redbreast appears. The robin is building a nest in the garden, and Mary and Dickon must keep very still, as though they themselves were trees, to avoid frightening him.

Mary tells Dickon about her new friendship with Colin. Dickon is glad that he will no longer have to hide the fact of Colin from Mary, since he abhors keeping secrets. Everyone in Thwaite village knows of Colin, but they refrain from talking of him out of pity for the widowed Mr. Craven. Dickon remarks that Master Craven cannot look at his son while he is awake because his eyes are so like his mother's. Colin does not wish to die—instead, he wishes that he had never been born, for his father does not love or want him. Colin will never be well, Dickon declares, so long as he thinks of nothing but sickness and death. If only Colin could come to the garden, he would be waiting for the flowers to bloom, rather than for his body to weaken. Dickon and Mary resolve to find a means of bringing Colin to the secret garden.

### **Chapter XVI**

When Mary goes back to the manor for lunch, Martha tells her that Colin is anxiously awaiting her visit. Mary replies that she cannot possibly see him at the moment, as Dickon is waiting for her; with that, she rushes back to the garden. Martha warns her that Colin is going to be thrown into a terrible humour if she refuses him.

Martha is sitting in Mary's room upon her return. Mary is greatly irritated to hear that Colin has nearly thrown a tantrum in waiting for her. Neither of the children is accustomed to considering the needs of anyone but themselves, and Mary does not see how her own selfishness, in wanting Dickon's company as Colin wants hers, is like Colin's.

Mary goes to see Colin in his room, and finds him lying very still in bed. His stillness is ominous, as he had begun to sit up on the divan during their week indoors; the divan is far better than the bed for his weakened back. Colin threatens to forbid Dickon to come to Misselthwaite if Mary elects to spend time with him rather than with Colin. Mary is furious, and tells Colin that she will never speak to him again if he interferes with her friendship with Dickon. The two have a heated argument about Dickon: Colin calls him common (meaning poor and uncultivated), to which Mary replies that he is an angel, "a thousand times better than a common rajah." This is the first time anyone has argued with Colin in all his life.

When Colin reminds Mary that he is going to die, she replies vehemently that he isn't dying at all—he is merely feeling sorry for himself and pleading for sympathy and attention. She storms out of his room and discovers Colin's nurse, who, having found their argument terribly amusing, is laughing to herself in the hallway. Mary finds a number of packages, sent to her by Master Craven, waiting for her in her room. There are a number of beautiful picture books, and a few games, and a golden pen and inkstand. Mary is delighted that he has remembered her at all. As she is contemplating showing her lovely gifts to Colin, she remembers that he once told her that his hysterical tantrums come upon him whenever he imagines that he can feel the beginnings of a lump on his back. His nervousness especially happens when he is cross or tired, and Mary realizes that he may have been thinking of his hump, and of his imminent death, during all the hours he was awaiting her return to Misselthwaite. Mary decides that she may relent, and see Colin in the morning.

## **Chapter XVII**

That night, Mary is awakened by the sound of screams and cries from Colin's distant room. Initially, Mary is quite frightened by his cries, but grows more and more furious with Colin as his tantrum continues. Colin's nurse rushes to Mary's room and begs her to come and scold him, or at least distract him, before he does himself harm. Mary is much amused that all of the adults in the manor are turning to her for help-if only because they suspect that she is even more difficult than Colin himself.

Mary bursts into Colin's chamber and, in a childish rage, tells him that she hates him, and hopes that he will indeed scream himself to death. Colin is so shocked that he stops screaming and simply gapes at her. He tells her that he is certain that his back is beginning to grow a hump, and that he soon will die. Mary scoffs at this idea, and demands to see Colin's back. He fearfully shows it to her. Mary, finding nothing whatsoever the matter, tells Colin that his back is perfectly straight, and she will laugh at him if he says otherwise. This ultimatum has a transformative effect on Colin, who has always been told how frail and doomed he is; Mary is the first to suggest that his illness is, perhaps, largely the work of his imagination.

Colin takes Mary's hand and says that he will go out into the fresh air if she and Dickon agree to accompany him. Mary does agree, and lulls him to sleep with another story of the secret garden.

## **Chapter XVIII**

Mary wakes late the next morning, and Martha tells her that Colin wants very much to see her-he does not, however, command her to visit him, which is a great step for him. Mary goes to him briefly, to tell him that she may have found the secret garden; she then rushes out to find Dickon.

Dickon is already in the secret garden when she arrives, surrounded by his wild pets: the fox, the crow, a moor pony named Jump, and two squirrels named Nut and Shell. Mary tells him the story of Colin's tantrum, and Dickon becomes even more determined to bring Colin to the garden. Mary replies, in Yorkshire dialect, that he and his pets ought first come to visit Colin in the manor house. Dickon agrees.

Back at the manor, Mary tells Colin of this plan. The two speak of their mutual friendlessness, for they have always disliked people, and been disliked by them. They also speak of how this dislike is changing, for they are growing fond of each other, and of Dickon, and of the robin. Mary then finally trusts Colin enough to tell him that she and Dickon have been inside the secret garden, and that he may soon go there.

## **Chapter XIX**

Dr. Craven arrives at the manor to examine Colin after his tantrum. Mrs. Medlock meets him in the hall, and informs him of the wondrous effect Mary has had upon him. The two adults go up to Colin's chamber to find him sitting up, laughing and talking freely with Mary. Dr. Craven warns Colin that his planned trip out of doors may exhaust him, to which Colin imperiously replies that it will do nothing of the sort. Colin tells the doctor that he will permit no one but Mary and Dickon to accompany him. Dr. Craven, although he is displeased by Colin's improved health (since he wishes to inherit the manor house upon the boy's death), is relieved at the mention of Dickon's name. Dickon is famed upon the moor for his strength and trustworthiness. Colin again tells the doctor that Mary helps him to forget his illness, and it is this forgetting which makes him well.

Downstairs, Mrs. Medlock tells Dr. Craven that she has spoken to Susan Sowerby of the new developments at Misselthwaite. Mrs. Sowerby was pleased to hear of them, and remarked that children need the company of other children to teach them that the world is not theirs alone.

Mary returns to Colin's room, throws open the windows, and instructs him to breathe deeply of the fresh air of spring. She tells him that the air of the moor makes Dickon feel as though "he could live forever and ever"; Colin is much taken with the idea of immortality, which, naturally, had never before occurred to him. Mary describes the new-growing spring plants for him, and mentions that Dickon has been caring for a newborn motherless lamb that he found upon the moor.

The two children have breakfast brought to them in Colin's chamber, and Colin notifies the servants, in his most Rajah-like fashion, that Dickon and his menagerie are coming to visit him that afternoon. Dickon does indeed come, looking very much the animal charmer with his squirrels upon his shoulders, the fox and crow at his heels, and a newborn lamb in his arms. Colin is dumbfounded and made shy by how wondrous Dickon is. Dickon, for his part, is completely at ease, despite how out of place his moorland boots and rough clothes seem in the manor house. The three children speak again of the garden, and begin preparations to bring Colin there.

## **Chapter XX**

Though a week of windy chill delays Colin's first outing, Dickon visits the manor house daily to bring Colin and Mary news of the garden and of the advancing spring. Colin is adamant that the garden's secrecy be preserved, and the three children plan a means of bringing him there without making the location of the garden known to all.

Colin summons the head gardener, Mr. Roach, to his chamber and commands him to keep everyone away from the garden paths and walls, as he intends to go out that afternoon. Roach, speaking to Mrs. Medlock outside Colin's room, remarks upon Colin's regal bearing and casual tone of command. Medlock replies that Mary's influence will temper that tendency in Colin—she will show him that the whole of the world does not belong to him.

During lunch, Colin tells Mary how eager he is to see the spring, as he has never seen it before. Mary replies that, as there is no springtime in India, she too had never seen it before coming to Misselthwaite. Colin's nurse then dresses him, and a footman carries him out in his wheeled chair. He is delighted by the greenness of the landscape and the smell of new flowers in the air.

As they walk toward the secret garden, Mary points out for Colin all of the places she mentioned in her stories of the moor. Colin is enraptured, and his eyes grow larger and larger—"as if it were they which were listening—listening, instead of his ears." In the garden itself, Colin's ivory skin begins to grow rosy, as though he were being brought to life. He exclaims that he will get well, and "live forever and ever and ever."

## **Chapter XXI**

In the garden, Mary and Dickon begin speaking Yorkshire dialect, and, for the first time, Colin joins them. He wonders aloud if the beauty of the landscape is not, perhaps, somehow intended for him.

Mary and Dickon set about showing him all the treasures of the garden, but hesitate when Colin asks about the great grey tree from which his mother fell to her death. Dickon remarks that roses will soon grow over its bark, hiding the dead wood and making it the loveliest thing in the garden. By a stroke of magical

good fortune, the robin briefly appears and distracts Colin from his contemplation of the tree. Mrs. Sowerby, Dickon's mother, suspects that Colin's mother is somehow still in the secret garden, still watching over her son, and that it is her influence that has brought the three children to the garden. Privately, Mary believes this to be a part of what she calls "Magic," of the kind that Dickon works on everything that comes near to him.

Colin tells Mary and Dickon that he intends to come out with them every day, and that soon he shall walk on his own and be strong enough to work in the garden. Suddenly, the furious face of Ben Weatherstaff appears over the garden wall; he is astonished to see the children in the formerly locked garden. In his shock at seeing Colin, Ben Weatherstaff calls him "the poor cripple" and asks if he has crooked legs and a crooked back. Colin is incensed, and, with surprising strength, suddenly rises from his wheeled chair and commands the old man to look at him, so that Ben might attest to his unquestionable soundness. He then instructs Ben Weatherstaff to join them in the garden, so that he might speak with him.

### **Chapter XXII**

Mary runs out to meet Ben Weatherstaff, leaving Dickon and Colin in the garden. Colin asks Dickon if it is his Magic that makes it possible for Colin to stand; Dickon replies that it is not his, but the same Magic that makes the flowers grow. Mary, during her walk back to the garden, chants encouragement to Colin under her breath, thinking that this, too, is a form of Magic.

Ben Weatherstaff enters the garden and finds Colin standing quite straight (though he is surreptitiously leaning against a nearby tree). Ben Weatherstaff tells Colin that he is only able to keep his position at Misselthwaite because Mistress Craven was fond of him. Ben also informs the children that he has secretly come to the garden once a year for ten years, as Mistress Craven had asked him to care for it if anything were ever to happen to her. Ben, despite the locked door, stubbornly obeyed her orders.

Colin announces that it is now his garden, though he will permit the old man to come there as well—provided that Ben keeps the secret. Before the sun sets, Colin ceremoniously plants a single rose to mark the garden as his own.

### **Chapter XXIII**

Dr. Craven is waiting for Colin and Mary to return to Misselthwaite. Mary is taken aback by Colin's exceeding rudeness in his conversation with the doctor, and determines to bring the rudeness to Colin's attention. She tells him that everyone has always given him his own way, as they regarded him as a pitiable creature; it is to this that he owes his peculiarities. Colin is surprised by Mary's frankness, as Mary was by Ben Weatherstaff's. He tells her that he intends to cease being so peculiar, and that the "white Magic" of the secret garden will help him to do so.

Mary, Dickon, Colin, and Ben Weatherstaff spend all their days in the secret garden, observing the progress of the spring. Colin and Dickon engage themselves in passionate study of the growth of the plants and the habits of the animals that live upon the moor. Colin resolves to become a great scientist, and begins with a quasi-scientific inquiry into the making of Magic.

Colin summons his three companions to hear him lecture on the subject of Magic. He tells them that there is a great deal of Magic at play in the world; one need only harness it. One may see it in the work of the springtime on the garden, since "Magic is always pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing." Colin believes that he can call upon that same Magic to make him well by fervently repeating what he wishes to happen.

At Colin's word, all four sit cross-legged beneath a tree, as though at a prayer-meeting, while Colin chants his desires over and over again. Colin then walks about the garden to test his newfound strength, with Mary, Dickon, Ben, and Dickon's many creatures following along behind in a kind of processional. Colin determines to keep his improving health a secret from everyone in the manor, so that his new potency will come as a complete surprise to his father upon Master Craven's return.

#### **Chapter XXIV**

In the evenings, while tending his own garden, Dickon begins to tell his mother, Susan Sowerby, about the new developments at the manor. The three children have agreed to let Mrs. Sowerby in on their jealously guarded secret because they regard her as being at least as trustworthy as Dickon. Dickon also tells his mother of the elaborate charade being carried on by Mary and Colin: these two must do a great deal of absurd play-acting so that Colin's improvement will remain a secret. They have, however, encountered a bit of a problem: they have both developed ravenous appetites, but are afraid to eat too much at the manor, lest they attract suspicion. Mrs. Sowerby, much amused by this predicament, decides to send them fresh milk and bread to take the edge off of their hunger. Later, Mary and Colin send Mrs. Sowerby some of their pocket money so that she might procure fresh potatoes and eggs for them; they then roast these on the moor.

The three children continue their "experiments" with magic: each day, they sit in a prayer-circle while Colin sermonizes to them about the healing powers of magic. Dickon asks Yorkshire's champion wrestler for an exercise program to make Colin stronger, and the trio begin to follow this program religiously. Colin grows healthier and more vigorous with astonishing speed—making it all the more difficult to keep up his charade of illness.

#### **Chapter XXV**

The first half of this chapter concerns itself with the observations of the robin redbreast, which is watching all of the children's activities in the garden. He and his mate are sitting on their nest, waiting for their eggs to hatch, throughout the early part of spring.

Colin and Mary are obliged to stay indoors on rainy days. At Mary's suggestion, they begin exploring the hundred rooms of the manor house. They remark that Mary no longer looks like the portrait of the girl and her pet parrot: she has been utterly transformed by the garden and the springtime, and is now quite pretty.

Mary notices that Colin has drawn back the rose-colored curtain in his room so that the portrait of his mother is now visible. Colin says that "Magic filled his room" two nights before, and thus compelled him to pull back the curtain. Now that he is healthy, he feels that her laughter is meant for him, as a kind of unspoken blessing. Mary remarks that she has often thought that Colin is a great deal like his mother; it is as though he is "her ghost made into a boy." Colin is greatly moved by this idea, because it suggests that his father might become fond of him.

#### **Chapter XXVI**

While Colin is lecturing in the garden, Ben Weatherstaff marvels at how strong he has become, and at how much he looks like his mother. Colin says that his experiment has succeeded, and that he intends to write a book about Magic quite soon. Suddenly overwhelmed by the miracle of his own health, he leaps up and shouts that he "shall live forever and ever and ever." Ben Weatherstaff suggests that Colin sing the Doxology (a Protestant Christian hymn) to express his joy and

thankfulness. Dickon tells them that he and his mother believe that the skylarks themselves sing this hymn, which runs: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above ye Heavenly Host, Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." Colin immediately likes the song, and remarks that it means precisely what he does when he says that he is thankful to the Magic; perhaps God and Magic "are the same thing."

Suddenly, Mrs. Sowerby appears at the garden door, and Dickon immediately runs to her. She is a beautiful woman with gentle, all-encompassing eyes; she wears a long blue cloak that appears very picturesque in the dappled sunlight. She, too, is taken aback by how

much Colin looks like his mother. Mrs. Sowerby is full of affection for him, and calls Colin "lad" as if he were her own child. She also embraces Mary, exclaims of her prettiness, and compares her to one of her own daughters.

The children show Mrs. Sowerby every part of the secret garden; Colin and Mary are irresistibly drawn to the "warm, supported feeling" that she inspires in both of them. Colin asks her if she believes in Magic, and she ardently replies that she does, although she doesn't call it by that name. For Mrs. Sowerby, it does not matter what its proper name is: it is merely "the Big Good Thing," the "Joy Maker."

The group vows to make a visit to the Sowerbys' cottage. Mrs. Sowerby says that Master Craven must come home soon, so that he might see the dramatic change in his son. Colin is very touched, and says that he wishes that she were his mother as well as Dickon's. She embraces him and tells him that his own mother is present in the garden.

## **Chapter XXVII**

The omniscient narrator opens the chapter by musing on the wonder of human invention, and suggests that one of the most remarkable ones of the previous (the 19th) century was the idea that "thoughts ... are as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison." She then notes the way in which both Colin and Mary have changed their negative thoughts to positive ones, and have flourished as a result. The narrator also says that only the courageous are able to do this; Master Craven, by contrast, has not been courageous—his mind is still full of his grief.

The narrator finds Master Craven in the Austrian Tyrol, having "forgotten and deserted his home and his duties." At first, the natural landscape does nothing to soothe his anguish. Then his eye comes to rest on a cluster of flowers—forget-me-nots—and he finds himself marvelling at their beauty. Looking at them, he feels "almost alive." Back at Misselthwaite, the garden too is coming alive—and Master Craven is coming alive with it. His body and soul begin to become still stronger during his time in Italy, at Lake Como, where he goes after his departure from Austria.

One night, he dreams of the Mistress Craven; she is calling his name and asking him to come find her in their garden. The next morning, he receives a letter from Susan Sowerby, advising him to come back to Misselthwaite at once; he must see Colin, she says, as his late wife would want him to. She does not explain why. Archibald immediately makes preparations to return home by rail.

On the journey to England, Master Craven muses about his son and his history: he thinks of the way he has neglected Colin, for he has never felt at all like the father of such a hysteric. He thinks of the way Colin's eyes—so like and yet so horribly unlike his mother's—fill him with aversion. And yet, he remains serene, and resolves to at least try to rectify his relationship with his son upon his return.

Master Craven is much pleased by his return to moor, and stops at Susan Sowerby's house to make a tiny gift to her children. At the manor, he immediately

sets off for the garden to look for his son, as Mrs. Medlock says that he will find Colin there. He is astonished to hear sounds of children running and laughing, coming from beyond the secret garden's wall. Suddenly, the door is flung open, and Colin tumbles out into his father's arms. Master Craven, ecstatic to find him healthy, embraces Colin, and asks his son to show him around the secret garden. Colin does so, and tells him the entire story of its discovery and its reawakening.

The three of them—Colin, Mary, and Master Craven—walk back to the manor house. Each and every person is utterly astounded by Archibald's happiness and Colin's vigour, now that it is no longer a secret.