THE SECRET GARDEN

THE SECRET GARDEN

Frances Hodgson Burnett



COLLECTOR'S EDITIONS

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THE SECRET GARDEN

CHAPTER ONE

There is no one left

When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle, everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression. Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another. Her father had held a position under the English Government and had always been busy and ill himself, and her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people. She had not wanted a little girl at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an *ayah*, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the memsahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible. So when she was a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby she was kept out of the way, and when she became a sickly, fretful, toddling thing she was kept out of the way also. She never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her *ayah* and

the other native servants, and as they always obeyed her and gave her her own way in everything, because the memsahib would be angry if she was disturbed by her crying, by the time she was six years old she was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived. The young English governess who came to teach her to read and write disliked her so much that she gave up her place in three months, and when other governesses came to try to fill it they always went away in a shorter time than the first one. So if Mary had not chosen to really want to know how to read books, she would never have learned her letters at all.

One frightfully hot morning, when she was about nine years old, she awakened feeling very cross, and she became crosser still when she saw that the servant who stood by her bedside was not her *ayah*.

'Why did you come?' she said to the strange woman. 'I will not let you stay. Send my *ayah* to me.'

The woman looked frightened, but she only stammered that the *ayah* could not come, and when Mary threw herself into a passion and beat and kicked her, she looked only more frightened and repeated that it was not possible for the *ayah* to come to missie sahib.

There was something mysterious in the air that morning. Nothing was done in its regular order and several of the native servants seemed missing, while those whom Mary saw slunk or hurried about with ashy

and scared faces. But no one would tell her anything, and her *ayah* did not come. She was actually left alone as the morning went on, and at last she wandered out into the garden and began to play by herself under a tree near the veranda. She pretended that she was making a flowerbed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus blossoms into little heaps of earth, all the time growing more and more angry and muttering to herself the things she would say and the names she would call Saidie when she returned.

'Pig! Pig! Daughter of Pigs!' she said, because to call a native a pig is the worst insult of all.

She was grinding her teeth and saying this over and over again when she heard her mother come out on the veranda with someone. She was with a fair young man, and they stood talking together in low strange voices. Mary knew the fair young man who looked like a boy. She had heard that he was a very young officer who had just come from England. The child stared at him, but she stared most at her mother. She always did this when she had a chance to see her, because the memsahib – Mary used to call her that oftener than anything else – was such a tall, slim, pretty person and wore such lovely clothes. Her hair was like curly silk and she had a delicate little nose which seemed to be disdaining things, and she had large laughing eyes. All her clothes were thin and floating, and Mary said they

were 'full of lace'. They looked fuller of lace than ever this morning, but her eyes were not laughing at all. They were large and scared and lifted imploringly to the fair boy officer's face.

'Is it so very bad? Oh, is it?' Mary heard her say.

'Awfully,' the young man answered in a trembling voice. 'Awfully, Mrs Lennox. You ought to have gone to the hills two weeks ago.'

The memsahib wrung her hands.

'Oh, I know I ought!' she cried. 'I only stayed to go to that silly dinner-party. What a fool I was!'

At that very moment such a loud sound of wailing broke out from the servants' quarters that she clutched the young man's arm, and Mary stood shivering from head to foot. The wailing grew wilder and wilder.

'What is it? What is it?' Mrs Lennox gasped.

'Someone has died,' answered the boy officer. 'You did not say it had broken out among your servants.'

'I did not know!' the memsahib cried. 'Come with me! Come with me!' and she turned and ran into the house.

After that, appalling things happened, and the mysteriousness of the morning was explained to Mary. The cholera had broken out in its most fatal form and people were dying like flies. The *ayah* had been taken ill in the night, and it was because she had just died that the servants had wailed in the huts. Before the next day

three other servants were dead and others had run away in terror. There was panic on every side, and dying people in all the bungalows.

During the confusion and bewilderment of the second day Mary hid herself in the nursery and was forgotten by everyone. Nobody thought of her, nobody wanted her, and strange things happened of which she knew nothing. Mary alternately cried and slept through the hours. She only knew that people were ill and that she heard mysterious and frightening sounds. Once she crept into the dining-room and found it empty, though a partly finished meal was on the table and chairs and plates looked as if they had been hastily pushed back when the diners rose suddenly for some reason. The child ate some fruit and biscuits, and being thirsty she drank a glass of wine which stood nearly filled. It was sweet, and she did not know how strong it was. Very soon it made her intensely drowsy, and she went back to her nursery and shut herself in again, frightened by cries she heard in the huts and by the hurrying sound of feet. The wine made her so sleepy that she could scarcely keep her eyes open and she lay down on her bed and knew nothing more for a long time.

Many things happened during the hours in which she slept so heavily, but she was not disturbed by the wails and the sound of things being carried in and out of the bungalow.

When she awakened she lay and stared at the wall. The house was perfectly still. She had never known it to be so silent before. She heard neither voices nor footsteps, and wondered if everybody had got well of the cholera and all the trouble was over. She wondered also who would take care of her now her *ayah* was dead. There would be a new *ayah*, and perhaps she would know some new stories. Mary had been rather tired of the old ones. She did not cry because her nurse had died. She was not an affectionate child and had never cared much for anyone. The noise and hurrying about and wailing over the cholera had frightened her, and she had been angry because no one seemed to remember that she was alive. Everyone was too panic-stricken to think of a little girl no one was fond of. When people had the cholera it seemed that they remembered nothing but themselves. But if everyone had got well again, surely someone would remember and come to look for her.

But no one came, and as she lay waiting the house seemed to grow more and more silent. She heard something rustling on the matting, and when she looked down she saw a little snake gliding along and watching her with eyes like jewels. She was not frightened, because he was a harmless little thing who would not hurt her, and he seemed in a hurry to get out of the room. He slipped under the door as she watched him.

'How queer and quiet it is,' she said. 'It sounds as if there was no one in the bungalow but me and the snake.'

Almost the next minute she heard footsteps in the compound, and then on the veranda. They were men's footsteps, and the men entered the bungalow and talked in low voices. No one went to meet or speak to them, and they seemed to open doors and look into rooms.

'What desolation!' she heard one voice say. 'That pretty, pretty woman! I suppose the child, too. I heard there was a child, though no one ever saw her.'

Mary was standing in the middle of the nursery when they opened the door a few minutes later. She looked an ugly, cross little thing and was frowning because she was beginning to be hungry and feel disgracefully neglected. The first man who came in was a large officer she had once seen talking to her father. He looked tired and troubled, but when he saw her he was so startled that he almost jumped back.

'Barney!' he cried out. 'There is a child here! A child alone! In a place like this! Mercy on us, who is she?'

'I am Mary Lennox,' the little girl said, drawing herself up stiffly. She thought the man was very rude to call her father's bungalow 'A place like this!' 'I fell asleep when everyone had the cholera and I have only just wakened up. Why does nobody come?'

'It is the child no one ever saw!' exclaimed the man, turning to his companions. 'She has actually been forgotten!'

'Why was I forgotten?' Mary said, stamping her foot. 'Why does nobody come?'

The young man whose name was Barney looked at her very sadly. Mary even thought she saw him wink his eyes as if to wink tears away.

'Poor little kid!' he said. 'There is nobody left to come.'

It was in that strange and sudden way that Mary found out that she had neither father nor mother left; that they had died and been carried away in the night, and that the few native servants who had not died also had left the house as quickly as they could get out of it, none of them even remembering that there was a missie sahib. That was why the place was so quiet. It was true that there was no one in the bungalow but herself and the little rustling snake.

CHAPTER TWO

Mistress Mary quite contrary

Mary had liked to look at her mother from a distance, and she had thought her very pretty, but as she knew very little of her, she could scarcely have been expected to love her or to miss her very much when she was gone. She did not miss her at all, in fact, and as she was a self-absorbed child she gave her entire thought to herself, as she had always done. If she had been older she would no doubt have been very anxious at being left alone in the world, but she was very young, and as she had always been taken care of, she supposed she always would be. What she thought was that she would like to know if she was going to nice people, who would be polite to her and give her her own way as her *ayah* and the other native servants had done.

She knew that she was not going to stay at the English clergyman's house where she was taken at first. She did not want to stay. The English clergyman was poor and he had five children nearly all the same age and they wore shabby clothes and were always quarrelling and snatching toys from each other. Mary hated their

untidy bungalow and was so disagreeable to them that after the first day or two nobody would play with her. By the second day they had given her a nickname which made her furious.

It was Basil who thought of it first. Basil was a little boy with impudent blue eyes and a turned-up nose and Mary hated him. She was playing by herself under a tree, just as she had been playing the day the cholera broke out. She was making heaps of earth and paths for a garden and Basil came and stood near to watch her. Presently he got rather interested and suddenly made a suggestion.

'Why don't you put a heap of stones there and pretend it is a rockery?' he said. 'There in the middle,' and he leaned over her to point.

'Go away!' cried Mary. 'I don't want boys. Go away!'

For a moment Basil looked angry, and then he began to tease. He was always teasing his sisters. He danced round and round her and made faces and sang and laughed.

'Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells, and cockle shells,
And marigolds all in a row.'

He sang it until the other children heard and laughed, too; and the crosser Mary got, the more they sang 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary'; and after that as long as

she stayed with them they called her 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary' when they spoke of her to each other, and often when they spoke to her.

'You are going to be sent home,' Basil said to her, 'at the end of the week. And we're glad of it.'

'I am glad of it, too,' answered Mary. 'Where is home?'

'She doesn't know where home is!' said Basil, with seven-year-old scorn. 'It's England, of course. Our grandmama lives there, and our sister Mabel was sent to her last year. You are not going to your grandmama. You have none. You are going to your uncle. His name is Mr Archibald Craven.'

'I don't know anything about him,' snapped Mary.

'I know you don't,' Basil answered. 'You don't know anything. Girls never do. I heard father and mother talking about him. He lives in a great, big, desolate old house in the country, and no one goes near him. He's so cross he won't let them, and they wouldn't come if he would let them. He's a hunchback, and he's horrid.'

'I don't believe you,' said Mary; and she turned her back and stuck her fingers in her ears, because she would not listen any more.

But she thought over it a great deal afterward; and when Mrs Crawford told her that night that she was going to sail away to England in a few days and going to her uncle, Mr Archibald Craven, who lived at

Misselthwaite Manor, she looked so stony and stubbornly uninterested that they did not know what to think about her. They tried to be kind to her, but she only turned her face away when Mrs Crawford attempted to kiss her, and held herself stiffly when Mr Crawford patted her shoulder.

'She is such a plain child,' Mrs Crawford said pityingly afterward. 'And her mother was such a pretty creature. She had a very pretty manner, too, and Mary has the most unattractive ways I ever saw in a child. The children call her "Mistress Mary Quite Contrary", and though it's naughty of them, one can't help understanding it.'

'Perhaps if her mother had carried her pretty face and her pretty manners oftener into the nursery, Mary might have learned some pretty ways, too. It is very sad, now the poor beautiful thing is gone, to remember that many people never even knew that she had a child at all.'

'I believe she scarcely ever looked at her,' sighed Mrs Crawford. 'When her *ayah* was dead there was no one to give a thought to the little thing. Think of the servants running away and leaving her all alone in that deserted bungalow. Colonel McGrew said he nearly jumped out of his skin when he opened the door and found her standing by herself in the middle of the room.'

Mary made the long voyage to England under the care of an officer's wife, who was taking her children to

leave them in a boarding-school. She was very much absorbed in her own little boy and girl, and was rather glad to hand the child over to the woman Mr Archibald Craven sent to meet her in London. The woman was his housekeeper at Misselthwaite Manor, and her name was Mrs Medlock. She was a stout woman, with very red cheeks and sharp black eyes. She wore a very purple dress, a black silk mantle with jet fringe on it and a black bonnet with purple velvet flowers which stuck up and trembled when she moved her head. Mary did not like her at all, but as she very seldom liked people, there was nothing remarkable in that; besides which it was very evident Mrs Medlock did not think much of her.

'My word! she's a plain little piece of goods!' she said. 'And we'd heard that her mother was a beauty. She hasn't handed much of it down, has she, ma'am?'

'Perhaps she will improve as she grows older,' the officer's wife said good-naturedly. 'If she were not so sallow and had a nicer expression, her features are rather good. Children alter so much.'

'She'll have to alter a good deal,' answered Mrs Medlock. 'And there's nothing likely to improve children at Misselthwaite – if you ask me!'

They thought Mary was not listening because she was standing a little apart from them at the window of the private hotel they had gone to. She was watching the passing buses and cabs and people, but she heard

quite well and was made very curious about her uncle and the place he lived in. What sort of a place was it, and what would he be like? What was a hunchback? She had never seen one. Perhaps there were none in India.

Since she had been living in other people's houses and had had no *ayah*, she had begun to feel lonely and to think queer thoughts which were new to her. She had begun to wonder why she had never seemed to belong to anyone even when her father and mother had been alive. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but she had never seemed to really be anyone's little girl. She had had servants, and food and clothes, but no one had taken any notice of her. She did not know that this was because she was a disagreeable child; but then, of course, she did not know she was disagreeable. She often thought that other people were, but she did not know that she was so herself.

She thought Mrs Medlock the most disagreeable person she had ever seen, with her common, highly coloured face and her common fine bonnet. When the next day they set out on their journey to Yorkshire, she walked through the station to the railway carriage with her head up and trying to keep as far away from her as she could, because she did not want to seem to belong to her. It would have made her very angry to think people imagined she was her little girl.

But Mrs Medlock was not in the least disturbed by her and her thoughts. She was the kind of woman who would 'stand no nonsense from young ones'. At least, that is what she would have said if she had been asked. She had not wanted to go to London just when her sister Maria's daughter was going to be married, but she had a comfortable, well-paid place as housekeeper at Misselthwaite Manor, and the only way in which she could keep it was to do at once what Mr Archibald Craven told her to do. She never dared even to ask a question.

'Captain Lennox and his wife died of the cholera,' Mr Craven had said in his short, cold way: 'Captain Lennox was my wife's brother and I am their daughter's guardian. The child is to be brought here. You must go to London and bring her yourself.'

So she packed her small trunk and made the journey.

Mary sat in her corner of the railway carriage and looked plain and fretful. She had nothing to read or to look at, and she had folded her thin little black-gloved hands in her lap. Her black dress made her look yellower than ever, and her limp light hair straggled from under her black crêpe hat.

'A more marred-looking young one I never saw in my life,' Mrs Medlock thought. (Marred is a Yorkshire word and means spoiled and pettish.) She had never seen a child who sat so still without doing anything; and

at last she got tired of watching her and began to talk in a brisk, hard voice.

'I suppose I may as well tell you something about where you are going to,' she said. 'Do you know anything about your uncle?'

'No,' said Mary.

'Never heard your father and mother talk about him?'

'No,' said Mary, frowning. She frowned because she remembered that her father and mother had never talked to her about anything in particular. Certainly they had never told her things.

'Humph,' muttered Mrs Medlock, staring at her queer, unresponsive little face. She did not say any more for a few moments, and then she began again.

'I suppose you might as well be told something – to prepare you. You are going to a queer place.'

Mary said nothing at all, and Mrs Medlock looked rather discomfited by her apparent indifference, but, after taking a breath, she went on.

'Not but that it's a grand big place in a gloomy way, and Mr Craven's proud of it in his way – and that's gloomy enough, too. The house is six hundred years old, and it's on the edge of the moor, and there's near a hundred rooms in it, though most of them's shut up and locked. And there's pictures and fine old furniture and things that's been there for ages, and there's a big park round it and gardens and trees with branches trailing to

the ground – some of them.' She paused and took another breath. 'But there's nothing else,' she ended suddenly.

Mary had begun to listen in spite of herself. It all sounded so unlike India, and anything new rather attracted her. But she did not intend to look as if she were interested. That was one of her unhappy, disagreeable ways. So she sat still.

'Well,' said Mrs Medlock. 'What do you think of it?'

'Nothing,' she answered. 'I know nothing about such places.'

That made Mrs Medlock laugh a short sort of laugh.

'Eh!' she said, 'but you are like an old woman. Don't you care?'

'It doesn't matter,' said Mary, 'whether I care or not.'

'You are right enough there,' said Mrs Medlock. 'It doesn't. What you're to be kept at Misselthwaite Manor for I don't know, unless because it's the easiest way. *He's* not going to trouble himself about you, that's sure and certain. He never troubles himself about no one.'

She stopped herself as if she had just remembered something in time.

'He's got a crooked back,' she said. 'That set him wrong. He was a sour young man and got no good of all his money and big place till he was married.'

Mary's eyes turned towards her, in spite of her intention not to seem to care. She had never thought of the hunchback's being married, and she was a trifle

surprised. Mrs Medlock saw this, and as she was a talkative woman, she continued with more interest. This was one way of passing some of the time, at any rate.

'She was a sweet, pretty thing, and he'd have walked the world over to get her a blade o' grass she wanted. Nobody thought she'd marry him, but she did, and people said she married him for his money. But she didn't – she didn't,' positively. 'When she died – '

Mary gave a little involuntary jump.

'Oh! did she die?' she exclaimed, quite without meaning to. She had just remembered a French fairy-story she had once read called '*Riquet à la Houppe*'. It had been about a poor hunchback and a beautiful princess, and it had made her suddenly sorry for Mr Archibald Craven.

'Yes, she died,' Mrs Medlock answered. 'And it made him queerer than ever. He cares about nobody. He won't see people. Most of the time he goes away and when he is at Misselthwaite he shuts himself up in the West Wing and won't let anyone but Pitcher see him. Pitcher's an old fellow, but he took care of him when he was a child and he knows his ways.'

It sounded like something in a book, and it did not make Mary feel cheerful. A house with a hundred rooms, nearly all shut up and with their doors locked – a house on the edge of a moor – whatsoever a moor was – sounded dreary. A man with a crooked back who shut himself up also! She stared out of the window with

her lips pinched together, and it seemed quite natural that the rain should have begun to pour down in grey slanting lines and splash and stream down the window-panes. If the pretty wife had been alive, she might have made things cheerful by being something like her own mother and by running in and out and going to parties as she had done in frocks 'full of lace'. But she was not there any more.

'You needn't expect to see him, because ten to one you won't,' said Mrs Medlock. 'And you mustn't expect that there will be people to talk to you. You'll have to play about and look after yourself. You'll be told what rooms you can go into and what rooms you're to keep out of. There's gardens enough. But when you're in the house don't go wandering and poking about. Mr Craven won't have it.'

'I shall not want to go poking about,' said sour little Mary; and just as suddenly as she had begun to be rather sorry for Mr Archibald Craven, she began to cease to be sorry and to think he was unpleasant enough to deserve all that had happened to him.

And she turned her face toward the streaming panes of the window of the railway carriage and gazed out at the grey rainstorm which looked as if it would go on for ever and ever. She watched it so long and steadily that the greyness grew heavier and heavier before her eyes and she fell asleep.