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The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett · *1911 · original English text*

A sour, unloved child is sent from India to a Yorkshire manor, finds a locked garden, and learns to work, to run, and to care. The garden's waking is also Colin's and Mary's. Burnett calls the change "Magic," and the book's best wisdom is plainer: tend a rose, and a thistle cannot grow.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a locked garden, and the work of making things grow, teach a neglected girl and a hidden boy to live, and can it reach a grieving father as well?

"Where you tend a rose, my lad, / A thistle cannot grow."
Near the close, as the garden and the children come alive together

Mary begins contrary and thin-tempered. The moor wind, Dickon's kindness, and a bit of earth change her. She finds Colin, who has been taught to die; together they work the secret garden. Archibald Craven, wandering in grief, is called home to a son on his feet. The "Magic" the children name is close to gratitude, work, and love of living things.

KEY CHARACTERS

Mary Lennox
Plain, spoiled, and lonely at first; the moor and the garden teach her to work and to love.

Colin Craven
The hidden heir, raised to believe he will die; he learns to stand and to command his own life justly.

Dickon Sowerby
Martha's brother; a Yorkshire boy who befriends animals and knows the ways of growing things.

Archibald Craven
Mary's uncle and Colin's father; a grieving widower who has locked the garden and almost his son.

Martha Sowerby
A kind, plain-spoken housemaid who will not flatter Mary and who first mentions the locked garden.

Ben Weatherstaff
The old gardener who knew the garden in Mrs. Craven's time and keeps a robin as a friend.

Mrs. Medlock
The housekeeper who carries Mary north and tries to keep the house's secrets shut.

TEND A ROSE

> *"Might I," quavered Mary, "might I have a bit of earth?"*
> **Mary Lennox** · Chapter XII

> *"Where you tend a rose, my lad, / A thistle cannot grow."*
> Near the close

Grades 3–5
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01
Mistress Mary, Quite Contrary
CHAPTERS I–IV

Mary Lennox, left plain and sour after cholera in India, is sent to Misselthwaite Manor and meets Martha, the sturdy Yorkshire housemaid.

- Her parents had not wanted her; servants had spoiled and neglected her by turns.
- Mrs. Medlock tells her the house is huge, the master is grieving, and much of it is shut.
- Martha talks of the moor, of Dickon, and of a garden that has been locked for years.

> *"Mistress Mary, quite contrary"*
> The old rhyme used of Mary early in the book

02
The Key and the Door
CHAPTERS V–XI

Mary explores the grounds, hears crying in the house, finds a buried key and a door in a wall, and meets Dickon, who talks to animals and knows how to plant.

- Ben Weatherstaff, the gardener, is dry and honest; a robin seems to watch Mary.
- The robin helps her find the key; ivy hides the door to the secret garden.
- Dickon brings tools and seeds and keeps her secret as safely as a missel thrush's nest.

03
A Bit of Earth
CHAPTER XII

Mary is called to see her uncle before he goes abroad. When he asks what she wants, she asks for a bit of earth.

- Archibald Craven is unhappy, restless, and almost a stranger to the house.
- Mary's request sounds queer even to her; she means a place to plant seeds and make things grow.
- He tells her she may take earth anywhere it is not wanted, and to make it come alive.

> *"Might I," quavered Mary, "might I have a bit of earth?"*
> **Mary Lennox** · Chapter XII, "Might I Have a Bit of Earth?"

04
I Am Colin
CHAPTERS XIII–XX

Mary finds the crying boy: Colin Craven, hidden and sure he will die and grow a hump. She tells him of the garden; they quarrel and then begin to hope.

- Colin is the master's son, kept in a room of fear and doctors' talk.
- Mary's temper meets his; she will not pity him into dying.
- Dickon is brought in; the three children take Colin, in his chair, into the garden.

05
The Magic, and a Father Called Home
CHAPTERS XXI–XXVII

Colin stands, works, and learns to laugh. A letter and a dream call Mr. Craven home to the garden, where his son walks to meet him.

- They call the strength that comes into Colin "Magic," and they work as well as wish.
- Ben Weatherstaff is let into the secret and weeps to see the boy on his feet.
- Mr. Craven had told Mary to take her bit of earth; he returns to find more than earth alive.

> *"Magic is in her just as it is in Dickon"*
> **Colin Craven** · Late in the garden chapters, of Mary

Work and Growth · Healing · Home · Friendship · Grief and Hope

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 3–5

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #17396, not a later abridgment.
2. Mary's request is split in the line: "Might I," quavered Mary, "might I have a bit of earth?"
3. The well-known sentence "If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden" is not in this hosted text. Do not quote it as if it were.
4. The children call their help "Magic." Read it as their name for work, gratitude, and living strength, not as a spell-book.
5. The Yorkshire speech (tha', thee, missel thrush) is part of Dickon's and Martha's honesty; it is not comic decoration only.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #17396, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-secret-garden/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.