

*Colin and the garden*

he told Colin the names of all the plants. The sun shone, the birds sang, and in every corner of the garden there was something interesting to look at. The three children talked and laughed, and by the end of the afternoon all three were speaking Yorkshire together.

'I'll come back here every afternoon,' said Colin. 'I want to watch things growing.'

'Soon you'll be strong enough to walk and dig. You'll be



*Dickon pushed the wheelchair all round the garden.*



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able to help us with the gardening,' said Dickon kindly.

'Do you really think I'll be able to . . . to walk and . . . dig?' asked Colin.

'Of course you will. You've got legs, like us!'

'But they're not very strong,' answered Colin. 'They shake, and . . . and I'm afraid to stand on them.'

'When you want to use them, you'll be able to,' said Dickon. The garden was quiet for a moment.

Suddenly Colin said, 'Who's that?' Mary turned her head, and noticed Ben Weatherstaff's angry face looking at her over the garden wall.

'What are you doing in that garden, young miss?' he shouted. He had not seen Colin or Dickon.

'The robin showed me the way, Ben,' she replied.

'You . . . you—' He stopped shouting and his mouth dropped open as he saw Dickon pushing a boy in a wheelchair over the grass towards him.

'Do you know who I am?' asked the boy in the chair.

Old Ben stared. 'You've got your mother's eyes,' he said in a shaking voice. 'Yes, I know you. You're Mr Craven's son, the little boy with the crooked back.'

Colin forgot that he had ever had backache. 'My back's as straight as yours is!' he shouted.

Ben stared and stared. He only knew what he had heard from the servants. 'You haven't got a crooked back?' he asked. 'Or crooked legs?'

That was too much. Colin was furious, and it made him feel strong.



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Of course, it was most important that no one should see Colin, Mary, or Dickon entering the secret garden. So Colin gave orders to the gardeners that they must all keep away from that part of the garden in future.

The next afternoon Colin was carried downstairs by a man servant, and put in his wheelchair outside the front door. Dickon arrived, with his crow, two squirrels and the fox, and started pushing the wheelchair gently away from the house, and into the gardens. Mary walked beside the chair.

Spring had really arrived now and it seemed very exciting to Colin, who had lived indoors for so long. He smelt the warm air from the moor, and watched the little white clouds in the blue sky. In a very short time he heard Mary say, 'This is where I found the key . . . and this is the door . . . and this . . . this is the secret garden!'

Colin covered his eyes with his hands until he was inside the four high walls, and the door was shut again. Then he looked round at the roses climbing the old red walls, the pink and white flowers on the fruit trees, and the birds and the butterflies everywhere. The sun warmed his face, and he suddenly knew he felt different.

'Mary! Dickon!' he cried. 'I'm going to get better! I'm going to live for ever and ever and ever!'

As Dickon pushed the wheelchair all round the garden,



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That was the first of many beautiful afternoons in the secret garden. Colin was brought there by Dickon and Mary nearly every day, and he saw all the changes that happened there during the spring and early summer. Ben Weatherstaff, now in the secret, joined them as often as he could.

One day Colin spoke to all of them. 'Listen, everybody. I think there's something like magic that makes gardens grow and things happen. Perhaps if I believe in it, the magic will make me strong. Let's all sit down in a circle and ask the magic to work.'

So they all sat on the grass in a circle, Dickon with his crow, his fox and the two squirrels, Mary, Colin, and Ben. Colin repeated these words several times. 'The sun's shining. That's the magic. Being strong. That's the magic. Magic! Help me! Magic! Help me!'

At last Colin stopped. 'Now I'm going to walk round the garden,' he said, and took Dickon's arm. Slowly he walked from one wall to another, followed closely by Mary and Ben. And when he had walked all the way round, he said, 'You see! I can walk now! The magic worked!'

'It's wonderful!' cried Mary. 'Your father will think he is dreaming when he sees you!'

'I won't tell him yet. I'm going to keep it a secret from everybody. I'll come to the garden and walk and run a little more every day until I'm as healthy as any other boy. Then, when my father comes home, I'll walk up to him and say, "Here I am, Father. You see? I'm not going to die!"'



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Now began a difficult time for Colin and Mary. Dickon told his mother about it one evening as he was digging the cottage garden.

'You see, mother, they don't want the doctor or the servants to guess that Colin can walk and is getting better. So they have to pretend he's still ill and just as disagreeable as he used to be!'

'If they're running about all day in the fresh air, that'll make them hungry, I should think!'

'Yes, that's the problem. They're both getting fatter and healthier, and they really enjoy their food now. But they have to send some of it back to the kitchen, uneaten. If they eat it all, people will realize how healthy they are! Sometimes they're very hungry!'

'I know what we can do,' said Mrs Sowerby. 'You can take some fresh milk and some of my newly baked bread to the garden in the mornings. If they have that, it'll do them a lot of good! What a game those children are playing! And she laughed until tears came to her eyes.'

One afternoon when they were all working in the garden, the door opened and a woman came quietly in.

'It's Mother!' cried Dickon, and ran towards her. 'I told her where the door



*'It's Mother!'*



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was, because I knew she would keep the secret.'

Colin held out his hand to her. 'I've wanted to see you for a long time,' he said.

'Dear boy!' Susan Sowerby whispered, holding his hand. 'You're so like your mother!'

'Do you think,' asked Colin carefully, 'that will make my father like me?'

'I'm sure it will,' she answered warmly. 'He must see you – he must come home now.'

'You see how healthy the boy is, Susan?' asked old Ben. 'Look how strong and straight his legs are now!'

'Yes,' she laughed. 'Playing and working outside, and eating good Yorkshire food, has made him strong. And Miss Mary too,' she added, turning to Mary. 'Mrs Medlock heard that your mother was a pretty woman. You'll soon be as pretty as she was.'

'Do you believe in magic?' Colin asked her.

'I do,' she answered, 'but everybody gives it a different name. It makes the sun shine and the seeds grow – and it has made you healthy.'

She sat down on the grass and stayed for a while, talking and laughing with the children in the quiet, sunny garden. When she stood up to leave, Colin suddenly put out a hand to her.

'I wish – you were my mother!' he whispered.

Mrs Sowerby put her arms round him and held him to her. 'Dear boy! You're as close to your mother as you could be, here in her garden. And your father'll come back soon!'



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'Come here, Dickon!' he shouted, and threw off his blanket. Dickon was by his side in a second. Mary felt sick with fear. Could Colin stand?

Then Colin's thin feet were on the grass and he was standing, holding Dickon's arm. He looked strangely tall, and he held his head very high.

'Look at me!' he shouted at Ben. 'Just look at me!'

'He's as straight as any boy in Yorkshire!' said Dickon.

Tears were running down Ben's brown old face. 'They said you were going to die!' he whispered.

'Well, you can see that's not true,' said Colin. 'Now, get down from the wall and come here. I want to talk to you. You've got to help us keep the garden a secret.'

'Yes, sir,' said old Ben, as he dried his eyes.



'Look at me!' Colin shouted at Ben. 'Just look at me!'