Chapter 23

Magic

Dr Craven had been waiting some time at the house when they returned to it. He had indeed begun to wonder if it might not be wise to send some one out to explore the garden paths. When Colin was brought back to his room the poor man looked him over seriously.

'You should not have stayed so long,' he said. 'You must not overexert yourself.'

'I am not tired at all,' said Colin. 'It has made me well. To-morrow I am going out in the morning as well as in the afternoon.'

'I am not sure that I can allow it,' answered Dr Craven. 'I am afraid it would not be wise.'

'It would not be wise to try to stop me,' said Colin quite seriously. 'I am going.'

Even Mary had found out that one of Colin's chief peculiarities was that he did not know in the least what a rude little brute he was with his way of

ordering people about. He had lived on a sort of desert island all his life and as he had been the king of it he had made his own manners and had had no one to compare himself with. Mary had indeed been rather like him herself and since she had been at Misselthwaite had gradually discovered that her own manners had not been of the kind which is usual or popular. Having made this discovery she naturally thought it of enough interest to communicate to Colin. So she sat and looked at him curiously for a few minutes after Dr Craven had gone. She wanted to make him ask her why she was doing it and of course she did.

'What are you looking at me for?' he said.

'I'm thinking that I am rather sorry for Dr Craven.'

'So am I,' said Colin calmly, but not without an air of some satisfaction. 'He won't get Misselthwaite at all now I'm not going to die.'

'I'm sorry for him because of that, of course,' said Mary, 'but I was thinking just then that it must have been very horrid to have had to be polite for ten years to a boy who was always rude. I would never have done it.'

'Am I rude?' Colin inquired undisturbedly.

'If you had been his own boy and he had been a slapping sort of man,' said Mary, 'he would have slapped you.'

'But he daren't,' said Colin.

'No, he daren't,' answered Mistress Mary, thinking the thing out quite without prejudice. 'Nobody ever dared to do anything you didn't like—because you were going to die and things like that. You were such a poor thing.'

'But,' announced Colin stubbornly, 'I am not going to be a poor thing. I won't let people think I'm one. I stood on my feet this afternoon.'

'It is always having your own way that has made you so queer,' Mary went on, thinking aloud.

Colin turned his head, frowning.

'Am I queer?' he demanded.

'Yes,' answered Mary, 'very. But you needn't be cross,' she added impartially, 'because so am I queer—and so is Ben Weatherstaff. But I am not as queer as I was before I began to like people and before I found the garden.'

'I don't want to be queer,' said Colin. 'I am not going to be,' and he frowned again with determination.

It was done quickly enough indeed. Ben Weatherstaff went his way forgetting rheumatics. Dickon took his spade and dug the hole deeper and wider than a new digger with thin white hands could make it. Mary slipped out to run and bring back a watering-can. When Dickon had deepened the hole Colin went on turning the soft earth over and over. He looked up at the sky, flushed and glowing with the strangely new exercise, slight as it was.

'I want to do it before the sun goes quite—quite down,' he said.

Mary thought that perhaps the sun held back a few minutes just on purpose. Ben Weatherstaff brought the rose in its pot from the greenhouse. He hobbled over the grass as fast as he could. He had begun to be excited, too. He knelt down by the hole and broke the pot from the mould.

'Here, lad,' he said, handing the plant to Colin. 'Set it in the earth thysel' same as th' king does when he goes to a new place.'

The thin white hands shook a little and Colin's flush grew deeper as he set the rose in the mould and held it while old Ben made firm the earth. It was filled in and pressed down and made steady. Mary was leaning forward on her hands and knees. Soot had flown down and marched forward to see what was being done. Nut and Shell chattered about it from a cherry-tree.

'It's planted!' said Colin at last. 'And the sun is only slipping over the edge. Help me up, Dickon. I want to be standing when it goes. That's part of the Magic.'

And Dickon helped him, and the Magic—or whatever it was—so gave him strength that when the sun did slip over the edge and end the strange lovely afternoon for them there he actually stood on his two feet—laughing.

'I'm no one,' said old Ben dryly. 'An' I didn't come through th' door. I come over th' wall. Th' rheumatics held me back th' last two year'.'

'Tha' come an' did a bit o' prunin'!' cried Dickon. 'I couldn't make out how it had been done.'

'She was so fond of it—she was!' said Ben Weatherstaff slowly. 'An' she was such a pretty young thing. She says to me once, "Ben," says she laughin', "if ever I'm ill or if I go away you must take care of my roses." When she did go away th' orders was no one was ever to come nigh. But I come,' with grumpy obstinacy. 'Over th' wall I come—until th' rheumatics stopped me—an' I did a bit o' work once a year. She'd gave her order first.'

'It wouldn't have been as wick as it is if tha' hadn't done it,' said Dickon. 'I did wonder.'

'I'm glad you did it, Weatherstaff,' said Colin. 'You'll know how to keep the secret.'

'Aye, I'll know, sir,' answered Ben. 'An' it'll be easier for a man wi' rheumatics to come in at th' door.'

On the grass near the tree Mary had dropped her trowel. Colin stretched out his hand and took it up. An odd expression came into his face and he began to scratch at the earth. His thin hand was weak enough but presently as they watched him—Mary with quite breathless interest—he drove the end of the trowel into the soil and turned some over.

'You can do it! You can do it!' said Mary to herself. 'I tell you, you can!'

Dickon's round eyes were full of eager curiousness but he said not a word. Ben Weatherstaff looked on with interested face.

Colin persevered. After he had turned a few trowelfuls of soil he spoke exultantly to Dickon in his best Yorkshire.

'Tha' said as tha'd have me walkin' about here same as other folk—an' tha' said tha'd have me diggin'. I thowt tha' was just leein' to please me. This is only th' first day an' I've walked—an' here I am diggin'.'

Ben Weatherstaff's mouth fell open again when he heard him, but he ended by chuckling.

'Eh!' he said, 'that sounds as if tha'd got wits enow. Tha'rt a Yorkshire lad for sure. An' tha'rt diggin', too. How'd tha' like to plant a bit o' somethin'? I can get thee a rose in a pot.'

'Go and get it!' said Colin, digging excitedly. 'Quick! Quick!'

He was a very proud boy. He lay thinking for a while and then Mary saw his beautiful smile begin and gradually change his whole face.

'I shall stop being queer,' he said, 'if I go every day to the garden. There is Magic in there—good Magic, you know, Mary. I am sure there is.'

'So am I,' said Mary.

'Even if it isn't real Magic,' Colin said, 'we can pretend it is. Something is there—something!'

'It's Magic,' said Mary, 'but not black. It's as white as snow.'

They always called it Magic and indeed it seemed like it in the months that followed—the wonderful months—the radiant months—the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden! If you have never had a garden, you cannot understand, and if you have had a garden you will know that it would take a whole book to describe all that came to pass there. At first it seemed that green things would never cease pushing their way through the earth, in the grass, in the beds, even in the crevices of the walls. Then the green things began to show buds and the buds began to unfurl and show colour, every shade of blue, every shade of purple, every tint and hue of crimson. In its happy days flowers had been tucked away into every inch and hole and corner. Ben Weatherstaff had seen it done and had himself scraped out mortar from between the bricks of the wall and made pockets of earth for lovely clinging things to grow on. Iris and white lilies rose out of the grass in sheaves, and the green alcoves filled themselves with amazing armies of the blue and white flower lances of tall delphiniums or columbines or campanulas.

'She was main fond o' them—she was,' Ben Weatherstaff said. 'She liked them things as was allus pointin' up to th' blue sky, she used to tell. Not as she was one o' them as looked down on th' earth—not her. She just loved it but she said as th' blue sky allus looked so joyful.'

The seeds Dickon and Mary had planted grew as if fairies had tended them. Satiny poppies of all tints danced in the breeze by the score, gaily defying flowers which had lived in the garden for years and which it might be confessed seemed rather to wonder how such new people had got there. And the roses—the roses! Rising out of the grass, tangled round the sun-dial, wreathing the tree trunks and hanging from their branches, climbing up the walls and spreading over them with long garlands falling in cascades—they came alive day by day, hour by hour. Fair fresh leaves, and buds—and buds—tiny at first but swelling

and working Magic until they burst and uncurled into cups of scent delicately spilling themselves over their brims and filling the garden air.

Colin saw it all, watching each change as it took place. Every morning he was brought out and every hour of each day when it didn't rain he spent in the garden. Even gray days pleased him. He would lie on the grass 'watching things growing,' he said. If you watched long enough, he declared, you could see buds unsheath themselves. Also you could make the acquaintance of strange busy insect things running about on various unknown but evidently serious errands, sometimes carrying tiny scraps of straw or feather or food, or climbing blades of grass as if they were trees from whose tops one could look out to explore the country. A mole throwing up its mound at the end of its burrow and making its way out at last with the long-nailed paws which looked so like elfish hands, had absorbed him one whole morning. Ants' ways, beetles' ways, bees' ways, frogs' ways, birds' ways, plants' ways, gave him a new world to explore and when Dickon revealed them all and added foxes' ways, otters' ways, ferrets' ways, squirrels' ways, and trout's and water-rats' and badgers' ways, there was no end to the things to talk about and think over.

And this was not the half of the Magic. The fact that he had really once stood on his feet had set Colin thinking tremendously and when Mary told him of the spell she had worked he was excited and approved of it greatly. He talked of it constantly.

'Of course there must be lots of Magic in the world,' he said wisely one day, 'but people don't know what it is like or how to make it. Perhaps the beginning is just to say nice things are going to happen until you make them happen. I am going to try and experiment.'

The next morning when they went to the secret garden he sent at once for Ben Weatherstaff. Ben came as quickly as he could and found the Rajah standing on his feet under a tree and looking very grand but also very beautifully smiling.

'Good morning, Ben Weatherstaff,' he said. 'I want you and Dickon and Miss Mary to stand in a row and listen to me because I am going to tell you something very important.'

'Aye, aye, sir!' answered Ben Weatherstaff, touching his forehead. (One of the long concealed charms of Ben Weatherstaff was that in his boyhood he had once run away to sea and had made voyages. So he could reply like a sailor.)

'Lots o' fools,' said Ben. 'Th' world's full o' jackasses brayin' an' they never bray nowt but lies. What did tha' shut thysel' up for?'

'Every one thought I was going to die,' said Colin shortly. 'I'm not!'

And he said it with such decision Ben Weatherstaff looked him over, up and down, down and up.

'Tha' die!' he said with dry exultation. 'Nowt o' th' sort! Tha's got too much pluck in thee. When I seed thee put tha' legs on th' ground in such a hurry I knowed tha' was all right. Sit thee down on th' rug a bit young Mester an' give me thy orders.'

There was a queer mixture of crabbed tenderness and shrewd understanding in his manner. Mary had poured out speech as rapidly as she could as they had come down the Long Walk. The chief thing to be remembered, she had told him, was that Colin was getting well—getting well. The garden was doing it. No one must let him remember about having humps and dying.

The Rajah condescended to seat himself on a rug under the tree.

'What work do you do in the gardens, Weatherstaff?' he inquired.

'Anythin' I'm told to do,' answered old Ben. 'I'm kep' on by favor—because she liked me.'

'She?' said Colin.

'Tha' mother,' answered Ben Weatherstaff.

'My mother?' said Colin, and he looked about him quietly. 'This was her garden, wasn't it?'

'Aye, it was that!' and Ben Weatherstaff looked about him too. 'She were main fond of it.'

'It is my garden now, I am fond of it. I shall come here every day,' announced Colin. 'But it is to be a secret. My orders are that no one is to know that we come here. Dickon and my cousin have worked and made it come alive. I shall send for you sometimes to help—but you must come when no one can see you.'

Ben Weatherstaff's face twisted itself in a dry old smile.

'I've come here before when no one saw me,' he said.

'What!' exclaimed Colin. 'When?'

'Th' last time I was here,' rubbing his chin and looking round, 'was about two year' ago.'

'But no one has been in it for ten years!' cried Colin. 'There was no door!'

'Tha's doin' Magic thysel',' he said. 'It's same Magic as made these 'ere work out o' th' earth,' and he touched with his thick boot a clump of crocuses in the grass.

Colin looked down at them.

'Aye,' he said slowly, 'there couldna' be bigger Magic then that there—there couldna' be.'

He drew himself up straighter than ever.

'I'm going to walk to that tree,' he said, pointing to one a few feet away from him. 'I'm going to be standing when Weatherstaff comes here. I can rest against the tree if I like. When I want to sit down I will sit down, but not before. Bring a rug from the chair.'

He walked to the tree and though Dickon held his arm he was wonderfully steady. When he stood against the tree trunk it was not too plain that he supported himself against it, and he still held himself so straight that he looked tall.

When Ben Weatherstaff came through the door in the wall he saw him standing there and he heard Mary muttering something under her breath.

'What art sayin'?' he asked rather testily because he did not want his attention distracted from the long thin straight boy figure and proud face.

But she did not tell him. What she was saying was this:

'You can do it! You can do it! I told you you could! You can do it! You can do it! You can!'

She was saying it to Colin because she wanted to make Magic and keep him on his feet looking like that. She could not bear that he should give in before Ben Weatherstaff. He did not give in. She was uplifted by a sudden feeling that he looked quite beautiful in spite of his thinness. He fixed his eyes on Ben Weatherstaff in his funny imperious way.

'Look at me!' he commanded. 'Look at me all over! Am I a hunchback? Have I got crooked legs?'

Ben Weatherstaff had not quite got over his emotion, but he had recovered a little and answered almost in his usual way.

'Not tha',' he said. 'Nowt o' th' sort. What's tha' been doin' with thysel'—? hidin' out o' sight an' lettin' folk think tha' was cripple an' half-witted?'

'Half-witted!' said Colin angrily. 'Who thought that?'

'I am going to try a scientific experiment,' explained the Rajah. 'When I grow up I am going to make great scientific discoveries and I am going to begin now with this experiment.'

'Aye, aye, sir!' said Ben Weatherstaff promptly, though this was the first time he had heard of great scientific discoveries.

It was the first time Mary had heard of them, either, but even at this stage she had begun to realize that, queer as he was, Colin had read about a great many singular things and was somehow a very convincing sort of boy. When he held up his head and fixed his strange eyes on you it seemed as if you believed him almost in spite of yourself though he was only ten years old—going on eleven. At this moment he was especially convincing because he suddenly felt the fascination of actually making a sort of speech like a grown-up person.

'The great scientific discoveries I am going to make,' he went on, 'will be about Magic. Magic is a great thing and scarcely any one knows anything about it except a few people in old books—and Mary a little, because she was born in India where there are fakirs. I believe Dickon knows some Magic, but perhaps he doesn't know he knows it. He charms animals and people. I would never have let him come to see me if he had not been an animal charmer—which is a boy charmer, too, because a boy is an animal. I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of it and make it do things for us—like electricity and horses and steam.'

This sounded so imposing that Ben Weatherstaff became quite excited and really could not keep still.

'Aye, aye, sir,' he said and he began to stand up quite straight.

'When Mary found this garden it looked quite dead,' the orator proceeded. 'Then something began pushing things up out of the soil and making things out of nothing. One day things weren't there and another they were. I had never watched things before and it made me feel very curious. Scientific people are always curious and I am going to be scientific. I keep saying to myself, 'What is it? What is it?' It's something. It can't be nothing! I don't know its name so I call it Magic. I have never seen the sun rise but Mary and Dickon have and from what they tell me I am sure that is Magic too. Something pushes it up and draws it. Sometimes since I've been in the garden I've looked up through the trees at the sky and I have had a strange feeling of being happy as if something were pushing and drawing in my chest and making me breathe

fast. Magic is always pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing. Everything is made out of Magic, leaves and trees, flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people. So it must be all around us. In this garden—in all the places. The Magic in this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to be a man. I am going to make the scientific experiment of trying to get some and put it in myself and make it push and draw me and make me strong. I don't know how to do it but I think that if you keep thinking about it and calling it perhaps it will come. Perhaps that is the first baby way to get it. When I was going to try to stand that first time Mary kept saying to herself as fast as she could, 'You can do it! You can do it!' and I did. I had to try myself at the same time, of course, but her Magic helped me—and so did Dickon's. Every morning and evening and as often in the daytime as I can remember I am going to say, 'Magic is in me! Magic is making me well! I am going to be as strong as Dickon, as strong as Dickon!' And you must all do it, too. That is my experiment. Will you help, Ben Weatherstaff?'

'Aye, aye, sir!' said Ben Weatherstaff. 'Aye, aye!'

'If you keep doing it every day as regularly as soldiers go through drill we shall see what will happen and find out if the experiment succeeds. You learn things by saying them over and over and thinking about them until they stay in your mind forever and I think it will be the same with Magic. If you keep calling it to come to you and help you it will get to be part of you and it will stay and do things.'

'I once heard an officer in India tell my mother that there were fakirs who said words over and over thousands of times,' said Mary.

'I've heard Jem Fettleworth's wife say th' same thing over thousands o' times—callin' Jem a drunken brute,' said Ben Weatherstaff dryly. 'Summat allus come o' that, sure enough. He gave her a good hidin' an' went to th' Blue Lion an' got as drunk as a lord.'

Colin drew his brows together and thought a few minutes. Then he cheered up.

'Well,' he said, 'you see something did come of it. She used the wrong Magic until she made him beat her. If she'd used the right Magic and had said something nice perhaps he wouldn't have got as drunk as a lord and perhaps—perhaps he might have bought her a new bonnet.'

Chapter 22

When the Sun Went Down

WHEN his head was out of sight Colin turned to Mary.

'Go and meet him,' he said; and Mary flew across the grass to the door under the ivy.

Dickon was watching him with sharp eyes. There were scarlet spots on his cheeks and he looked amazing, but he showed no signs of falling.

'I can stand,' he said, and his head was still held up and he said it quite grandly.

'I told thee tha' could as soon as tha' stopped bein' afraid,' answered Dickon. 'An' tha's stopped.'

'Yes, I've stopped,' said Colin.

Then suddenly he remembered something Mary had said.

'Are you making Magic?' he asked sharply.

Dickon's curly mouth spread in a cheerful grin.

Ben Weatherstaff chuckled and there was shrewd admiration in his little old eyes.

'Tha'rt a clever lad as well as a straight-legged one, Mester Colin,' he said. 'Next time I see Bess Fettleworth I'll give her a bit of a hint o' what Magic will do for her. She'd be rare an' pleased if th' sinetifik 'speriment worked—an' so 'ud Jem.'

Dickon had stood listening to the lecture, his round eyes shining with curious delight. Nut and Shell were on his shoulders and he held a long-eared white rabbit in his arm and stroked and stroked it softly while it laid its ears along its back and enjoyed itself.

'Do you think the experiment will work?' Colin asked him, wondering what he was thinking. He so often wondered what Dickon was thinking when he saw him looking at him or at one of his 'creatures' with his happy wide smile.

He smiled now and his smile was wider than usual.

'Aye,' he answered, 'that I do. It'll work same as th' seeds do when th' sun shines on 'em. It'll work for sure. Shall us begin it now?'

Colin was delighted and so was Mary. Fired by recollections of fakirs and devotees in illustrations Colin suggested that they should all sit cross-legged under the tree which made a canopy.

'It will be like sitting in a sort of temple,' said Colin. 'I'm rather tired and I want to sit down.'

'Eh!' said Dickon, 'tha' musn't begin by sayin' tha'rt tired. Tha' might spoil th' Magic.'

Colin turned and looked at him—into his innocent round eyes.

'That's true,' he said slowly. 'I must only think of the Magic.'

It all seemed most majestic and mysterious when they sat down in their circle. Ben Weatherstaff felt as if he had somehow been led into appearing at a prayer-meeting. Ordinarily he was very fixed in being what he called 'agen' prayer-meetin's' but this being the Rajah's affair he did not resent it and was indeed inclined to be gratified at being called upon to assist. Mistress Mary felt solemnly enraptured. Dickon held his rabbit in his arm, and perhaps he made some charmer's signal no one heard, for when he sat down, cross-legged like the rest, the crow, the fox, the squirrels and the lamb slowly drew near

and made part of the circle, settling each into a place of rest as if of their own desire.

'The 'creatures' have come,' said Colin gravely. 'They want to help us.'

Colin really looked quite beautiful, Mary thought. He held his head high as if he felt like a sort of priest and his strange eyes had a wonderful look in them. The light shone on him through the tree canopy.

'Now we will begin,' he said. 'Shall we sway backward and forward, Mary, as if we were dervishes?'

'I canna' do no swayin' back'ard and for'ard,' said Ben Weatherstaff. 'I've got th' rheumatics.'

'The Magic will take them away,' said Colin in a High Priest tone, 'but we won't sway until it has done it. We will only chant.'

'I canna' do no chantin',' said Ben Weatherstaff a trifle testily. 'They turned me out o' th' church choir th' only time I ever tried it.'

No one smiled. They were all too much in earnest. Colin's face was not even crossed by a shadow. He was thinking only of the Magic.

'Then I will chant,' he said. And he began, looking like a strange boy spirit. 'The sun is shining—the sun is shining. That is the Magic. The flowers are growing—the roots are stirring. That is the Magic. Being alive is the Magic—being strong is the Magic. The Magic is in me—the Magic is in me. It is in me—it is in me. It's in every one of us. It's in Ben Weatherstaff's back. Magic! Magic! Come and help!'

He said it a great many times—not a thousand times but quite a goodly number. Mary listened entranced. She felt as if it were at once queer and beautiful and she wanted him to go on and on. Ben Weatherstaff began to feel soothed into a sort of dream which was quite agreeable. The humming of the bees in the blossoms mingled with the chanting voice and drowsily melted into a doze. Dickon sat cross-legged with his rabbit asleep on his arm and a hand resting on the lamb's back. Soot had pushed away a squirrel and huddled close to him on his shoulder, the gray film dropped over his eyes. At last Colin stopped.

'Now I am going to walk round the garden,' he announced.

Ben Weatherstaff's head had just dropped forward and he lifted it with a jerk.

'You have been asleep,' said Colin.

'Look at me!' he flung up at Ben Weatherstaff. 'Just look at me—you! Just look at me!'

'He's as straight as I am!' cried Dickon. 'He's as straight as any lad i' Yorkshire!'

What Ben Weatherstaff did Mary thought queer beyond measure. He choked and gulped and suddenly tears ran down his weather-wrinkled cheeks as he struck his old hands together.

'Eh!' he burst forth, 'th' lies folk tells! Tha'rt as thin as a lath an' as white as a wraith, but there's not a knob on thee. Tha'lt make a mon yet. God bless thee!'

Dickon held Colin's arm strongly but the boy had not begun to falter. He stood straighter and straighter and looked Ben Weatherstaff in the face.

'I'm your master,' he said, 'when my father is away. And you are to obey me. This is my garden. Don't dare to say a word about it! You get down from that ladder and go out to the Long Walk and Miss Mary will meet you and bring you here. I want to talk to you. We did not want you, but now you will have to be in the secret. Be quick!'

Ben Weatherstaff's crabbed old face was still wet with that one queer rush of tears. It seemed as if he could not take his eyes from thin straight Colin standing on his feet with his head thrown back.

'Eh! lad,' he almost whispered. 'Eh! my lad!' And then remembering himself he suddenly touched his hat gardener fashion and said, 'Yes, sir! Yes, sir!' and obediently disappeared as he descended the ladder.