tell him and he could stay in his room and never get any fresh air and die if he liked! It would serve him right! She felt so sour and unrelenting that for a few minutes she almost forgot about Dickon and the green veil creeping over the world and the soft wind blowing down from the moor.

Martha was waiting for her and the trouble in her face had been temporarily replaced by interest and curiosity. There was a wooden box on the table and its cover had been removed and revealed that it was full of neat packages.

'Mr Craven sent it to you,' said Martha. 'It looks as if it had picture-books in it.'

Mary remembered what he had asked her the day she had gone to his room. 'Do you want anything—dolls—toys—books?' She opened the package wondering if he had sent a doll, and also wondering what she should do with it if he had. But he had not sent one. There were several beautiful books such as Colin had, and two of them were about gardens and were full of pictures. There were two or three games and there was a beautiful little writing-case with a gold monogram on it and a gold pen and inkstand.

Everything was so nice that her pleasure began to crowd her anger out of her mind. She had not expected him to remember her at all and her hard little heart grew quite warm.

'I can write better than I can print,' she said, 'and the first thing I shall write with that pen will be a letter to tell him I am much obliged.'

If she had been friends with Colin she would have run to show him her presents at once, and they would have looked at the pictures and read some of the gardening books and perhaps tried playing the games, and he would have enjoyed himself so much he would never once have thought he was going to die or have put his hand on his spine to see if there was a lump coming. He had a way of doing that which she could not bear. It gave her an uncomfortable frightened feeling because he always looked so frightened himself. He said that if he felt even quite a little lump some day he should know his hunch had begun to grow. Something he had heard Mrs Medlock whispering to the nurse had given him the idea and he had thought over it in secret until it was quite firmly fixed in his mind. Mrs Medlock had said his father's back had begun to show its crookedness in that way when he was a child. He had never told any one but Mary

that most of his 'tantrums' as they called them grew out of his hysterical hidden fear. Mary had been sorry for him when he had told her.

'He always began to think about it when he was cross or tired,' she said to herself. 'And he has been cross to-day. Perhaps—perhaps he has been thinking about it all afternoon.'

She stood still, looking down at the carpet and thinking.

'I said I would never go back again—' she hesitated, knitting her brows—'but perhaps, just perhaps, I will go and see—if he wants me—in the morning. Perhaps he'll try to throw his pillow at me again, but—I think—I'll go.'

'Get out of the room!' he shouted and he caught hold of his pillow and threw it at her. He was not strong enough to throw it far and it only fell at her feet, but Mary's face looked as pinched as a nutcracker.

'I'm going,' she said. 'And I won't come back!'

She walked to the door and when she reached it she turned round and spoke again.

'I was going to tell you all sorts of nice things,' she said. 'Dickon brought his fox and his rook and I was going to tell you all about them. Now I won't tell you a single thing!'

She marched out of the door and closed it behind her, and there to her great astonishment she found the trained nurse standing as if she had been listening and, more amazing still—she was laughing. She was a big handsome young woman who ought not to have been a trained nurse at all, as she could not bear invalids and she was always making excuses to leave Colin to Martha or any one else who would take her place. Mary had never liked her, and she simply stood and gazed up at her as she stood giggling into her handkerchief.

'What are you laughing at?' she asked her.

'At you two young ones,' said the nurse. 'It's the best thing that could happen to the sickly pampered thing to have some one to stand up to him that's as spoiled as himself;' and she laughed into her handkerchief again. 'If he'd had a young vixen of a sister to fight with it would have been the saving of him.'

'Is he going to die?'

'I don't know and I don't care,' said the nurse. 'Hysterics and temper are half what ails him.'

'What are hysterics?' asked Mary.

'You'll find out if you work him into a tantrum after this—but at any rate you've given him something to have hysterics about, and I'm glad of it.'

Mary went back to her room not feeling at all as she had felt when she had come in from the garden. She was cross and disappointed but not at all sorry for Colin. She had looked forward to telling him a great many things and she had meant to try to make up her mind whether it would be safe to trust him with the great secret. She had been beginning to think it would be, but now she had changed her mind entirely. She would never

They were a nice agreeable pair as they glared at each other. If they had been two little street boys they would have sprung at each other and had a rough-and-tumble fight. As it was, they did the next thing to it.

'You are a selfish thing!' cried Colin.

'What are you?' said Mary. 'Selfish people always say that. Any one is selfish who doesn't do what they want. You're more selfish than I am. You're the most selfish boy I ever saw.'

'I'm not!' snapped Colin. 'I'm not as selfish as your fine Dickon is! He keeps you playing in the dirt when he knows I am all by myself. He's selfish, if you like!'

Mary's eyes flashed fire.

'He's nicer than any other boy that ever lived!' she said. 'He's—he's like an angel!' It might sound rather silly to say that but she did not care.

'A nice angel!' Colin sneered ferociously. 'He's a common cottage boy off the moor!'

'He's better than a common Rajah!' retorted Mary. 'He's a thousand times better!'

Because she was the stronger of the two she was beginning to get the better of him. The truth was that he had never had a fight with any one like himself in his life and, upon the whole, it was rather good for him, though neither he nor Mary knew anything about that. He turned his head on his pillow and shut his eyes and a big tear was squeezed out and ran down his cheek. He was beginning to feel pathetic and sorry for himself—not for any one else.

'I'm not as selfish as you, because I'm always ill, and I'm sure there is a lump coming on my back,' he said. 'And I am going to die besides.'

'You're not!' contradicted Mary unsympathetically.

He opened his eyes quite wide with indignation. He had never heard such a thing said before. He was at once furious and slightly pleased, if a person could be both at the same time.

'I'm not?' he cried. 'I am! You know I am! Everybody says so.'

'I don't believe it!' said Mary sourly. 'You just say that to make people sorry. I believe you're proud of it. I don't believe it! If you were a nice boy it might be true—but you're too nasty!'

In spite of his invalid back Colin sat up in bed in quite a healthy rage.

Chapter XVII

A Tantrum

She had got up very early in the morning and had worked hard in the garden and she was tired and sleepy, so as soon as Martha had brought her supper and she had eaten it, she was glad to go to bed. As she laid her head on the pillow she murmured to herself:

'I'll go out before breakfast and work with Dickon and then afterward—I believe—I'll go to see him.'

She thought it was the middle of the night when she was wakened by such dreadful sounds that she jumped out of bed in an instant. What was it—what was it? The next minute she felt quite sure she knew. Doors were opened and shut and there were hurrying feet in the corridors and some one was crying and screaming at the same time, screaming and crying in a horrible way.

'It's Colin,' she said. 'He's having one of those tantrums the nurse called hysterics. How awful it sounds.'

As she listened to the sobbing screams she did not wonder that people were so frightened that they gave him his own way in everything rather than hear them. She put her hands over her ears and felt sick and shivering.

'I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do,' she kept saying. 'I can't bear it.'

Once she wondered if he would stop if she dared go to him and then she remembered how he had driven her out of the room and thought that perhaps the sight of her might make him worse. Even when she pressed her hands more tightly over her ears she could not keep the awful sounds out. She hated them so and was so terrified by them that suddenly they began to make her angry and she felt as if she should like to fly into a tantrum herself and frighten him as he was frightening her. She was not used to any one's tempers but her own. She took her hands from her ears and sprang up and stamped her foot.

'He ought to be stopped! Somebody ought to make him stop! Somebody ought to beat him!' she cried out.

Just then she heard feet almost running down the corridor and her door opened and the nurse came in. She was not laughing now by any means. She even looked rather pale.

'He's worked himself into hysterics,' she said in a great hurry. 'He'll do himself harm. No one can do anything with him. You come and try, like a good child. He likes you.'

'He turned me out of the room this morning,' said Mary, stamping her foot with excitement.

The stamp rather pleased the nurse. The truth was that she had been afraid she might find Mary crying and hiding her head under the bedclothes.

'That's right,' she said. 'You're in the right humor. You go and scold him. Give him something new to think of. Do go, child, as quick as ever you can.'

It was not until afterward that Mary realized that the thing had been funny as well as dreadful—that it was funny that all the grown-up people were so frightened that they came to a little girl just because they guessed she was almost as bad as Colin himself.

She flew along the corridor and the nearer she got to the screams the higher her temper mounted. She felt quite wicked by the time she reached

Mary's lips pinched themselves together. She was no more used to considering other people than Colin was and she saw no reason why an ill-tempered boy should interfere with the thing she liked best. She knew nothing about the pitifulness of people who had been ill and nervous and who did not know that they could control their tempers and need not make other people ill and nervous, too. When she had had a headache in India she had done her best to see that everybody else also had a headache or something quite as bad. And she felt she was quite right; but of course now she felt that Colin was quite wrong.

He was not on his sofa when she went into his room. He was lying flat on his back in bed and he did not turn his head toward her as she came in. This was a bad beginning and Mary marched up to him with her stiff manner.

'Why didn't you get up?' she said.

'I did get up this morning when I thought you were coming,' he answered, without looking at her. 'I made them put me back in bed this afternoon. My back ached and my head ached and I was tired. Why didn't you come?'

'I was working in the garden with Dickon,' said Mary.

Colin frowned and condescended to look at her.

'I won't let that boy come here if you go and stay with him instead of coming to talk to me,' he said.

Mary flew into a fine passion. She could fly into a passion without making a noise. She just grew sour and obstinate and did not care what happened.

'If you send Dickon away, I'll never come into this room again!' she retorted.

'You'll have to if I want you,' said Colin.

'I won't!' said Mary.

'I'll make you,' said Colin, 'They shall drag you in.'

'Shall they, Mr Rajah!' said Mary fiercely. 'They may drag me in but they can't make me talk when they get me here. I'll sit and clench my teeth and never tell you one thing. I won't even look at you. I'll stare at the floor!'

become a 'gardener's garden' it would be a wilderness of growing things before the springtime was over.

'There'll be apple blossoms an' cherry blossoms overhead,' Dickon said, working away with all his might. 'An' there'll be peach an' plum trees in bloom against th' walls, an' th' grass'll be a carpet o' flowers.'

The little fox and the rook were as happy and busy as they were, and the robin and his mate flew backward and forward like tiny streaks of lightning. Sometimes the rook flapped his black wings and soared away over the tree-tops in the park. Each time he came back and perched near Dickon and cawed several times as if he were relating his adventures, and Dickon talked to him just as he had talked to the robin. Once when Dickon was so busy that he did not answer him at first, Soot flew on to his shoulders and gently tweaked his ear with his large beak. When Mary wanted to rest a little Dickon sat down with her under a tree and once he took his pipe out of his pocket and played the soft strange little notes and two squirrels appeared on the wall and looked and listened.

'Tha's a good bit stronger than tha' was,' Dickon said, looking at her as she was digging. 'Tha's beginning to look different, for sure.'

Mary was glowing with exercise and good spirits.

'I'm getting fatter and fatter every day,' she said quite exultantly. 'Mrs Medlock will have to get me some bigger dresses. Martha says my hair is growing thicker. It isn't so flat and stringy.'

The sun was beginning to set and sending deep gold-coloured rays slanting under the trees when they parted.

'It'll be fine to-morrow,' said Dickon. 'I'll be at work by sunrise.'

'So will I,' said Mary.

She ran back to the house as quickly as her feet would carry her. She wanted to tell Colin about Dickon's fox cub and the rook and about what the springtime had been doing. She felt sure he would like to hear. So it was not very pleasant when she opened the door of her room, to see Martha standing waiting for her with a doleful face.

'What is the matter?' she asked. 'What did Colin say when you told him I couldn't come?'

'Eh!' said Martha, 'I wish tha'd gone. He was nigh goin' into one o' his tantrums. There's been a nice to do all afternoon to keep him quiet. He would watch the clock all th' time.'

the door. She slapped it open with her hand and ran across the room to the four-posted bed.

'You stop!' she almost shouted. 'You stop! I hate you! Everybody hates you! I wish everybody would run out of the house and let you scream yourself to death! You will scream yourself to death in a minute, and I wish you would!'

A nice sympathetic child could neither have thought nor said such things, but it just happened that the shock of hearing them was the best possible thing for this hysterical boy whom no one had ever dared to restrain or contradict.

He had been lying on his face beating his pillow with his hands and he actually almost jumped around, he turned so quickly at the sound of the furious little voice. His face looked dreadful, white and red and swollen, and he was gasping and choking; but savage little Mary did not care an atom.

'If you scream another scream,' she said, 'I'll scream too—and I can scream louder than you can and I'll frighten you, I'll frighten you!'

He actually had stopped screaming because she had startled him so. The scream which had been coming almost choked him. The tears were streaming down his face and he shook all over.

'I can't stop!' he gasped and sobbed. 'I can't—I can't!'

'You can!' shouted Mary. 'Half that ails you is hysterics and temper—just hysterics—hysterics—hysterics!' and she stamped each time she said it.

'I felt the lump—I felt it,' choked out Colin. 'I knew I should. I shall have a hunch on my back and then I shall die,' and he began to writhe again and turned on his face and sobbed and wailed but he didn't scream.

'You didn't feel a lump!' contradicted Mary fiercely. 'If you did it was only a hysterical lump. Hysterics makes lumps. There's nothing the matter with your horrid back—nothing but hysterics! Turn over and let me look at it!'

She liked the word 'hysterics' and felt somehow as if it had an effect on him. He was probably like herself and had never heard it before.

'Nurse,' she commanded, 'come here and show me his back this minute!'

The nurse, Mrs Medlock and Martha had been standing huddled together near the door staring at her, their mouths half open. All three had

gasped with fright more than once. The nurse came forward as if she were half afraid. Colin was heaving with great breathless sobs.

'Perhaps he—he won't let me,' she hesitated in a low voice.

Colin heard her, however, and he gasped out between two sobs:

'Sh—show her! She—she'll see then!'

It was a poor thin back to look at when it was bared. Every rib could be counted and every joint of the spine, though Mistress Mary did not count them as she bent over and examined them with a solemn savage little face. She looked so sour and old-fashioned that the nurse turned her head aside to hide the twitching of her mouth. There was just a minute's silence, for even Colin tried to hold his breath while Mary looked up and down his spine, and down and up, as intently as if she had been the great doctor from London.

'There's not a single lump there!' she said at last. 'There's not a lump as big as a pin—except backbone lumps, and you can only feel them because you're thin. I've got backbone lumps myself, and they used to stick out as much as yours do, until I began to get fatter, and I am not fat enough yet to hide them. There's not a lump as big as a pin! If you ever say there is again, I shall laugh!'

No one but Colin himself knew what effect those crossly spoken childish words had on him. If he had ever had any one to talk to about his secret terrors—if he had ever dared to let himself ask questions—if he had had childish companions and had not lain on his back in the huge closed house, breathing an atmosphere heavy with the fears of people who were most of them ignorant and tired of him, he would have found out that most of his fright and illness was created by himself. But he had lain and thought of himself and his aches and weariness for hours and days and months and years. And now that an angry unsympathetic little girl insisted obstinately that he was not as ill as he thought he was he actually felt as if she might be speaking the truth.

'I didn't know,' ventured the nurse, 'that he thought he had a lump on his spine. His back is weak because he won't try to sit up. I could have told him there was no lump there.'

Colin gulped and turned his face a little to look at her.

'C-could you?' he said pathetically.

'Yes, sir.'

Chapter XVI

'I Won't!' said Mary

THEY found a great deal to do that morning and Mary was late in returning to the house and was also in such a hurry to get back to her work that she quite forgot Colin until the last moment.

'Tell Colin that I can't come and see him yet,' she said to Martha. 'I'm very busy in the garden.'

Martha looked rather frightened.

'Eh! Miss Mary,' she said, 'it may put him all out of humor when I tell him that.'

But Mary was not as afraid of him as other people were and she was not a self-sacrificing person.

'I can't stay,' she answered. 'Dickon's waiting for me;' and she ran away.

The afternoon was even lovelier and busier than the morning had been. Already nearly all the weeds were cleared out of the garden and most of the roses and trees had been pruned or dug about. Dickon had brought a spade of his own and he had taught Mary to use all her tools, so that by this time it was plain that though the lovely wild place was not likely to

grow, an' he'd be another. Two lads an' a little lass just lookin' on at th' springtime. I warrant it'd be better than doctor's stuff.'

'He's been lying in his room so long and he's always been so afraid of his back that it has made him queer,' said Mary. 'He knows a good many things out of books but he doesn't know anything else. He says he has been too ill to notice things and he hates going out of doors and hates gardens and gardeners. But he likes to hear about this garden because it is a secret. I daren't tell him much but he said he wanted to see it.'

'Us'll have him out here sometime for sure,' said Dickon. 'I could push his carriage well enough. Has tha' noticed how th' robin an' his mate has been workin' while we've been sittin' here? Look at him perched on that branch wonderin' where it'd be best to put that twig he's got in his beak.'

He made one of his low whistling calls and the robin turned his head and looked at him inquiringly, still holding his twig. Dickon spoke to him as Ben Weatherstaff did, but Dickon's tone was one of friendly advice.

'Wheres'ever tha' puts it,' he said, 'it'll be all right. Tha' knew how to build tha' nest before tha' came out o' th' egg. Get on with thee, lad. Tha'st got no time to lose.'

'Oh, I do like to hear you talk to him!' Mary said, laughing delightedly. 'Ben Weatherstaff scolds him and makes fun of him, and he hops about and looks as if he understood every word, and I know he likes it. Ben Weatherstaff says he is so conceited he would rather have stones thrown at him than not be noticed.'

Dickon laughed too and went on talking.

'Tha' knows us won't trouble thee,' he said to the robin. 'Us is near bein' wild things ourselves. Us is nest-buildin' too, bless thee. Look out tha' doesn't tell on us.'

And though the robin did not answer, because his beak was occupied, Mary knew that when he flew away with his twig to his own corner of the garden the darkness of his dew-bright eye meant that he would not tell their secret for the world.

'There!' said Mary, and she gulped too.

Colin turned on his face again and but for his long-drawn broken breaths, which were the dying down of his storm of sobbing, he lay still for a minute, though great tears streamed down his face and wet the pillow. Actually the tears meant that a curious great relief had come to him. Presently he turned and looked at the nurse again and strangely enough he was not like a Rajah at all as he spoke to her.

'Do you think—I could—live to grow up?' he said.

The nurse was neither clever nor soft-hearted but she could repeat some of the London doctor's words.

'You probably will if you will do what you are told to do and not give way to your temper, and stay out a great deal in the fresh air.'

Colin's tantrum had passed and he was weak and worn out with crying and this perhaps made him feel gentle. He put out his hand a little toward Mary, and I am glad to say that, her own tantrum having passed, she was softened too and met him half-way with her hand, so that it was a sort of making up.

'I'll—I'll go out with you, Mary,' he said. 'I shan't hate fresh air if we can find—' He remembered just in time to stop himself from saying 'if we can find the secret garden' and he ended, 'I shall like to go out with you if Dickon will come and push my chair. I do so want to see Dickon and the fox and the crow.'

The nurse remade the tumbled bed and shook and straightened the pillows. Then she made Colin a cup of beef tea and gave a cup to Mary, who really was very glad to get it after her excitement. Mrs Medlock and Martha gladly slipped away, and after everything was neat and calm and in order the nurse looked as if she would very gladly slip away also. She was a healthy young woman who resented being robbed of her sleep and she yawned quite openly as she looked at Mary, who had pushed her big footstool close to the four-posted bed and was holding Colin's hand.

'You must go back and get your sleep out,' she said. 'He'll drop off after a while—if he's not too upset. Then I'll lie down myself in the next room.'

'Would you like me to sing you that song I learned from my Ayah?' Mary whispered to Colin.

His hand pulled hers gently and he turned his tired eyes on her appealingly.

'Oh, yes!' he answered. 'It's such a soft song. I shall go to sleep in a minute.'

'I will put him to sleep,' Mary said to the yawning nurse. 'You can go if you like.'

'Well,' said the nurse, with an attempt at reluctance. 'If he doesn't go to sleep in half an hour you must call me.'

'Very well,' answered Mary.

The nurse was out of the room in a minute and as soon as she was gone Colin pulled Mary's hand again.

'I almost told,' he said; 'but I stopped myself in time. I won't talk and I'll go to sleep, but you said you had a whole lot of nice things to tell me. Have you—do you think you have found out anything at all about the way into the secret garden?'

Mary looked at his poor little tired face and swollen eyes and her heart relented.

'Ye-es,' she answered, 'I think I have. And if you will go to sleep I will tell you to-morrow.'

His hand quite trembled.

'Oh, Mary!' he said. 'Oh, Mary! If I could get into it I think I should live to grow up! Do you suppose that instead of singing the Ayah song—you could just tell me softly as you did that first day what you imagine it looks like inside? I am sure it will make me go to sleep.'

'Yes,' answered Mary. 'Shut your eyes.'

He closed his eyes and lay quite still and she held his hand and began to speak very slowly and in a very low voice.

'I think it has been left alone so long—that it has grown all into a lovely tangle. I think the roses have climbed and climbed and climbed until they hang from the branches and walls and creep over the ground—almost like a strange gray mist. Some of them have died but many—are alive and when the summer comes there will be curtains and fountains of roses. I think the ground is full of daffodils and snowdrops and lilies and iris working their way out of the dark. Now the spring has begun—perhaps—perhaps—'

he'd like to forget as he's on earth. For one thing, he's afraid he'll look at him some day and find he's growed hunchback.'

'Colin's so afraid of it himself that he won't sit up,' said Mary. 'He says he's always thinking that if he should feel a lump coming he should go crazy and scream himself to death.'

'Eh! he oughtn't to lie there thinkin' things like that,' said Dickon. 'No lad could get well as thought them sort o' things.'

The fox was lying on the grass close by him looking up to ask for a pat now and then, and Dickon bent down and rubbed his neck softly and thought a few minutes in silence. Presently he lifted his head and looked round the garden.

'When first we got in here,' he said, 'it seemed like everything was gray. Look round now and tell me if tha' doesn't see a difference.'

Mary looked and caught her breath a little.

'Why!' she cried, 'the gray wall is changing. It is as if a green mist were creeping over it. It's almost like a green gauze veil.'

'Aye,' said Dickon. 'An' it'll be greener and greener till th' gray's all gone. Can tha' guess what I was thinkin'?'

'I know it was something nice,' said Mary eagerly. 'I believe it was something about Colin.'

'I was thinkin' that if he was out here he wouldn't be watchin' for lumps to grow on his back; he'd be watchin' for buds to break on th' rose-bushes, an' he'd likely be healthier,' explained Dickon. 'I was wonderin' if us could ever get him in th' humor to come out here an' lie under th' trees in his carriage.'

'I've been wondering that myself. I've thought of it almost every time I've talked to him,' said Mary. 'I've wondered if he could keep a secret and I've wondered if we could bring him here without any one seeing us. I thought perhaps you could push his carriage. The doctor said he must have fresh air and if he wants us to take him out no one dare disobey him. He won't go out for other people and perhaps they will be glad if he will go out with us. He could order the gardeners to keep away so they wouldn't find out.'

Dickon was thinking very hard as he scratched Captain's back.

'It'd be good for him, I'll warrant,' he said. 'Us'd not be thinkin' he'd better never been born. Us'd be just two children watchin' a garden