manservant had arranged his rugs and cushions the Rajah waved his hand to him and to the nurse.

'You have my permission to go,' he said, and they both disappeared quickly and it must be confessed giggled when they were safely inside the house.

Dickon began to push the wheeled chair slowly and steadily. Mistress Mary walked beside it and Colin leaned back and lifted his face to the sky. The arch of it looked very high and the small snowy clouds seemed like white birds floating on outspread wings below its crystal blueness. The wind swept in soft big breaths down from the moor and was strange with a wild clear scented sweetness. Colin kept lifting his thin chest to draw it in, and his big eyes looked as if it were they which were listening—listening, instead of his ears.

'There are so many sounds of singing and humming and calling out,' he said. 'What is that scent the puffs of wind bring?'

'It's gorse on th' moor that's openin' out,' answered Dickon. 'Eh! th' bees are at it wonderful to-day.'

Not a human creature was to be caught sight of in the paths they took. In fact every gardener or gardener's lad had been witched away. But they wound in and out among the shrubbery and out and round the fountain beds, following their carefully planned route for the mere mysterious pleasure of it. But when at last they turned into the Long Walk by the ivied walls the excited sense of an approaching thrill made them, for some curious reason they could not have explained, begin to speak in whispers.

'This is it,' breathed Mary. 'This is where I used to walk up and down and wonder and wonder.'

'Is it?' cried Colin, and his eyes began to search the ivy with eager curiousness. 'But I can see nothing,' he whispered. 'There is no door.'

'That's what I thought,' said Mary.

Then there was a lovely breathless silence and the chair wheeled on.

'That is the garden where Ben Weatherstaff works,' said Mary.

'Is it?' said Colin.

A few yards more and Mary whispered again.

'This is where the robin flew over the wall,' she said.

'Is it?' cried Colin. 'Oh! I wish he'd come again!'





'And that,' said Mary with solemn delight, pointing under a big lilac bush, 'is where he perched on the little heap of earth and showed me the key.'

Then Colin sat up.

'Where? Where? There?' he cried, and his eyes were as big as the wolf's in Red Riding-Hood, when Red Riding-Hood felt called upon to remark on them. Dickon stood still and the wheeled chair stopped.

'And this,' said Mary, stepping on to the bed close to the ivy, 'is where I went to talk to him when he chirped at me from the top of the wall. And this is the ivy the wind blew back,' and she took hold of the hanging green curtain.

'Oh! is it—is it!' gasped Colin.

'And here is the handle, and here is the door. Dickon push him in—push him in quickly!'

And Dickon did it with one strong, steady, splendid push.

But Colin had actually dropped back against his cushions, even though he gasped with delight, and he had covered his eyes with his hands and held them there shutting out everything until they were inside and the chair stopped as if by magic and the door was closed. Not till then did he take them away and look round and round and round as Dickon and Mary had done. And over walls and earth and trees and swinging sprays and tendrils the fair green veil of tender little leaves had crept, and in the grass under the trees and the gray urns in the alcoves and here and there everywhere were touches or splashes of gold and purple and white and the trees were showing pink and snow above his head and there were fluttering of wings and faint sweet pipes and humming and scents and scents. And the sun fell warm upon his face like a hand with a lovely touch. And in wonder Mary and Dickon stood and stared at him. He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of colour had actually crept all over him—ivory face and neck and hands and all.

'I shall get well! I shall get well!' he cried out. 'Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!'

'The springtime,' he said. 'I was thinking that I've really never seen it before. I scarcely ever went out and when I did go I never looked at it. I didn't even think about it.'

'I never saw it in India because there wasn't any,' said Mary.

Shut in and morbid as his life had been, Colin had more imagination than she had and at least he had spent a good deal of time looking at wonderful books and pictures.

'That morning when you ran in and said 'It's come! It's come!' you made me feel quite queer. It sounded as if things were coming with a great procession and big bursts and wafts of music. I've a picture like it in one of my books—crowds of lovely people and children with garlands and branches with blossoms on them, every one laughing and dancing and crowding and playing on pipes. That was why I said, 'Perhaps we shall hear golden trumpets' and told you to throw open the window.'

'How funny!' said Mary. 'That's really just what it feels like. And if all the flowers and leaves and green things and birds and wild creatures danced past at once, what a crowd it would be! I'm sure they'd dance and sing and flute and that would be the wafts of music.'

They both laughed but it was not because the idea was laughable but because they both so liked it.

A little later the nurse made Colin ready. She noticed that instead of lying like a log while his clothes were put on he sat up and made some efforts to help himself, and he talked and laughed with Mary all the time.

'This is one of his good days, sir,' she said to Dr Craven, who dropped in to inspect him. 'He's in such good spirits that it makes him stronger.'

'I'll call in again later in the afternoon, after he has come in,' said Dr Craven. 'I must see how the going out agrees with him. I wish,' in a very low voice, 'that he would let you go with him.'

'I'd rather give up the case this moment, sir, than even stay here while it's suggested,' answered the nurse with sudden firmness.

'I hadn't really decided to suggest it,' said the doctor, with his slight nervousness. 'We'll try the experiment. Dickon's a lad I'd trust with a new-born child.'

The strongest footman in the house carried Colin down-stairs and put him in his wheeled chair near which Dickon waited outside. After the

'Very good, sir,' replied Mr Roach, much relieved to hear that the oaks might remain and that the orchards were safe.

'Mary,' said Colin, turning to her, 'what is that thing you say in India when you have finished talking and want people to go?'

'You say, "You have my permission to go,"' answered Mary.

The Rajah waved his hand.

'You have my permission to go, Roach,' he said. 'But, remember, this is very important.'

'Caw—Caw!' remarked the crow hoarsely but not impolitely.

'Very good, sir. Thank you, sir,' said Mr Roach, and Mrs Medlock took him out of the room.

Outside in the corridor, being a rather good-natured man, he smiled until he almost laughed.

'My word!' he said, 'he's got a fine lordly way with him, hasn't he? You'd think he was a whole Royal Family rolled into one—Prince Consort and all.'

'Eh!' protested Mrs Medlock, 'we've had to let him trample all over every one of us ever since he had feet and he thinks that's what folks was born for.'

'Perhaps he'll grow out of it, if he lives,' suggested Mr Roach.

'Well, there's one thing pretty sure,' said Mrs Medlock. 'If he does live and that Indian child stays here I'll warrant she teaches him that the whole orange does not belong to him, as Susan Sowerby says. And he'll be likely to find out the size of his own quarter.'

Inside the room Colin was leaning back on his cushions.

'It's all safe now,' he said. 'And this afternoon I shall see it—this afternoon I shall be in it!'

Dickon went back to the garden with his creatures and Mary stayed with Colin. She did not think he looked tired but he was very quiet before their lunch came and he was quiet while they were eating it. She wondered why and asked him about it.

'What big eyes you've got, Colin,' she said. 'When you are thinking they get as big as saucers. What are you thinking about now?'

'I can't help thinking about what it will look like,' he answered.

'The garden?' asked Mary.



# Chapter 21

# Ben Weatherstaff

One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. One knows it sometimes when one gets up at the tender solemn dawn-time and goes out and stands alone and throws one's head far back and looks up and up and watches the pale sky slowly changing and flushing and marvelous unknown things happening until the East almost makes one cry out and one's heart stands still at the strange unchanging majesty of the rising of the sun—which has been happening every morning for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. One knows it then for a moment or so. And one knows it sometimes when one stands by oneself in a wood at sunset and the mysterious deep gold stillness slanting through and under the branches seems to be saying slowly again and again something one cannot quite hear, however much one tries. Then sometimes the immense quiet of the dark blue at night with millions of stars waiting and watching makes one sure; and sometimes a sound of far-off music makes it true; and sometimes a look in some one's eyes.

And it was like that with Colin when he first saw and heard and felt the Springtime inside the four high walls of a hidden garden. That afternoon the whole world seemed to devote itself to being perfect and radiantly beautiful and kind to one boy. Perhaps out of pure heavenly goodness the spring came and crowded everything it possibly could into that one place. More than once Dickon paused in what he was doing and stood still with a sort of growing wonder in his eyes, shaking his head softly.

'Eh! it is graidely,' he said. 'I'm twelve goin' on thirteen an' there's a lot o' afternoons in thirteen years, but seems to me like I never seed one as graidely as this 'ere.'

'Aye, it is a graidely one,' said Mary, and she sighed for mere joy. 'I'll warrant it's th' graidelest one as ever was in this world.'

'Does tha' think,' said Colin with dreamy carefulness, 'as happen it was made loike this 'ere all o' purpose for me?'

'My word!' cried Mary admiringly, 'that there is a bit o' good Yorkshire. Tha'rt shapin' first-rate—that tha' art.'

And delight reigned.

They drew the chair under the plum-tree, which was snow-white with blossoms and musical with bees. It was like a king's canopy, a fairy king's. There were flowering cherry-trees near and apple-trees whose buds were pink and white, and here and there one had burst open wide. Between the blossoming branches of the canopy bits of blue sky looked down like wonderful eyes.

Mary and Dickon worked a little here and there and Colin watched them. They brought him things to look at—buds which were opening, buds which were tight closed, bits of twig whose leaves were just showing green, the feather of a woodpecker which had dropped on the grass, the empty shell of some bird early hatched. Dickon pushed the chair slowly round and round the garden, stopping every other moment to let him look at wonders springing out of the earth or trailing down from trees. It was like being taken in state round the country of a magic king and queen and shown all the mysterious riches it contained.

'I wonder if we shall see the robin?' said Colin.

'Tha'll see him often enow after a bit,' answered Dickon. 'When th' eggs hatches out th' little chap he'll be kep' so busy it'll make his head swim. Tha'll see him flyin' backward an' for'ard carryin' worms nigh as





'Let's hope they're changing for the better, Mrs Medlock,' he answered.

'They couldn't well change for the worse,' she continued; 'and queer as it all is there's them as finds their duties made a lot easier to stand up under. Don't you be surprised, Mr Roach, if you find yourself in the middle of a menagerie and Martha Sowerby's Dickon more at home than you or me could ever be.'

There really was a sort of Magic about Dickon, as Mary always privately believed. When Mr Roach heard his name he smiled quite leniently.

'He'd be at home in Buckingham Palace or at the bottom of a coal mine,' he said. 'And yet it's not impudence, either. He's just fine, is that lad.'

It was perhaps well he had been prepared or he might have been startled. When the bedroom door was opened a large crow, which seemed quite at home perched on the high back of a carven chair, announced the entrance of a visitor by saying 'Caw—Caw' quite loudly. In spite of Mrs Medlock's warning, Mr Roach only just escaped being sufficiently undignified to jump backward.

The young Rajah was neither in bed nor on his sofa. He was sitting in an armchair and a young lamb was standing by him shaking its tail in feeding-lamb fashion as Dickon knelt giving it milk from its bottle. A squirrel was perched on Dickon's bent back attentively nibbling a nut. The little girl from India was sitting on a big footstool looking on.

'Here is Mr Roach, Master Colin,' said Mrs Medlock.

The young Rajah turned and looked his servitor over—at least that was what the head gardener felt happened.

'Oh, you are Roach, are you?' he said. 'I sent for you to give you some very important orders.'

'Very good, sir,' answered Roach, wondering if he was to receive instructions to fell all the oaks in the park or to transform the orchards into water-gardens.

'I am going out in my chair this afternoon,' said Colin. 'If the fresh air agrees with me I may go out every day. When I go, none of the gardeners are to be anywhere near the Long Walk by the garden walls. No one is to be there. I shall go out about two o'clock and every one must keep away until I send word that they may go back to their work.'

The most absorbing thing, however, was the preparations to be made before Colin could be transported with sufficient secrecy to the garden. No one must see the chair-carriage and Dickon and Mary after they turned a certain corner of the shrubbery and entered upon the walk outside the ivied walls. As each day passed, Colin had become more and more fixed in his feeling that the mystery surrounding the garden was one of its greatest charms. Nothing must spoil that. No one must ever suspect that they had a secret. People must think that he was simply going out with Mary and Dickon because he liked them and did not object to their looking at him. They had long and quite delightful talks about their route. They would go up this path and down that one and cross the other and go round among the fountain flower-beds as if they were looking at the 'bedding-out plants' the head gardener, Mr Roach, had been having arranged. That would seem such a rational thing to do that no one would think it at all mysterious. They would turn into the shrubbery walks and lose themselves until they came to the long walls. It was almost as serious and elaborately thought out as the plans of march made by great generals in time of war.

Rumors of the new and curious things which were occurring in the invalid's apartments had of course filtered through the servants' hall into the stable yards and out among the gardeners, but notwithstanding this, Mr Roach was startled one day when he received orders from Master Colin's room to the effect that he must report himself in the apartment no outsider had ever seen, as the invalid himself desired to speak to him.

'Well, well,' he said to himself as he hurriedly changed his coat, 'what's to do now? His Royal Highness that wasn't to be looked at calling up a man he's never set eyes on.'

Mr Roach was not without curiosity. He had never caught even a glimpse of the boy and had heard a dozen exaggerated stories about his uncanny looks and ways and his insane tempers. The thing he had heard oftenest was that he might die at any moment and there had been numerous fanciful descriptions of a humped back and helpless limbs, given by people who had never seen him.

'Things are changing in this house, Mr Roach,' said Mrs Medlock, as she led him up the back staircase to the corridor on to which opened the hitherto mysterious chamber.





big as himsel' an' that much noise goin' on in th' nest when he gets there as fair flusters him so as he scarce knows which big mouth to drop th' first piece in. An' gapin' beaks an' squawks on every side. Mother says as when she sees th' work a robin has to keep them gapin' beaks filled, she feels like she was a lady with nothin' to do. She says she's seen th' little chaps when it seemed like th' sweat must be droppin' off 'em, though folk can't see it.'

This made them giggle so delightedly that they were obliged to cover their mouths with their hands, remembering that they must not be heard. Colin had been instructed as to the law of whispers and low voices several days before. He liked the mysteriousness of it and did his best, but in the midst of excited enjoyment it is rather difficult never to laugh above a whisper.

Every moment of the afternoon was full of new things and every hour the sunshine grew more golden. The wheeled chair had been drawn back under the canopy and Dickon had sat down on the grass and had just drawn out his pipe when Colin saw something he had not had time to notice before.

'That's a very old tree over there, isn't it?' he said.

Dickon looked across the grass at the tree and Mary looked and there was a brief moment of stillness.

'Yes,' answered Dickon, after it, and his low voice had a very gentle sound.

Mary gazed at the tree and thought.

'The branches are quite gray and there's not a single leaf anywhere,' Colin went on. 'It's quite dead, isn't it?'

'Aye,' admitted Dickon. 'But them roses as has climbed all over it will near hide every bit o' th' dead wood when they're full o' leaves an' flowers. It won't look dead then. It'll be th' prettiest of all.'

Mary still gazed at the tree and thought.

'It looks as if a big branch had been broken off,' said Colin. 'I wonder how it was done.'

'It's been done many a year,' answered Dickon. 'Eh!' with a sudden relieved start and laying his hand on Colin. 'Look at that robin! There he is! He's been foragin' for his mate.'

Colin was almost too late but he just caught sight of him, the flash of red-breasted bird with something in his beak. He darted through the

greenness and into the close-grown corner and was out of sight. Colin leaned back on his cushion again, laughing a little.

'He's taking her tea to her. Perhaps it's five o'clock. I think I'd like some tea myself.'

And so they were safe.

'It was Magic which sent the robin,' said Mary secretly to Dickon afterward. 'I know it was Magic.' For both she and Dickon had been afraid Colin might ask something about the tree whose branch had broken off ten years ago and they had talked it over together and Dickon had stood and rubbed his head in a troubled way.

'We mun look as if it wasn't no different from th' other trees,' he had said. 'We couldn't never tell him how it broke, poor lad. If he says anything about it we mun—we mun try to look cheerful.'

'Aye, that we mun,' had answered Mary.

But she had not felt as if she looked cheerful when she gazed at the tree. She wondered and wondered in those few moments if there was any reality in that other thing Dickon had said. He had gone on rubbing his rust-red hair in a puzzled way, but a nice comforted look had begun to grow in his blue eyes.

'Mrs Craven was a very lovely young lady,' he had gone on rather hesitatingly. 'An' mother she thinks maybe she's about Misselthwaite many a time lookin' after Mester Colin, same as all mothers do when they're took out o' th' world. They have to come back, tha' sees. Happen she's been in the garden an' happen it was her set us to work, an' told us to bring him here.'

Mary had thought he meant something about Magic. She was a great believer in Magic. Secretly she quite believed that Dickon worked Magic, of course good Magic, on everything near him and that was why people liked him so much and wild creatures knew he was their friend. She wondered, indeed, if it were not possible that his gift had brought the robin just at the right moment when Colin asked that dangerous question. She felt that his Magic was working all the afternoon and making Colin look like an entirely different boy. It did not seem possible that he could be the crazy creature who had screamed and beaten and bitten his pillow. Even his ivory whiteness seemed to change. The faint glow of colour which had shown on his face and neck and hands when he first got inside



# Chapter 20

# 'I Shall Live Forever—And Ever—And Ever!'

But they were obliged to wait more than a week because first there came some very windy days and then Colin was threatened with a cold, which two things happening one after the other would no doubt have thrown him into a rage but that there was so much careful and mysterious planning to do and almost every day Dickon came in, if only for a few minutes, to talk about what was happening on the moor and in the lanes and hedges and on the borders of streams. The things he had to tell about otters' and badgers' and water-rats' houses, not to mention birds' nests and field-mice and their burrows, were enough to make you almost tremble with excitement when you heard all the intimate details from an animal charmer and realized with what thrilling eagerness and anxiety the whole busy underworld was working.

'They're same as us,' said Dickon, 'only they have to build their homes every year. An' it keeps 'em so busy they fair scuffle to get 'em done.'

'Aye, that tha' mun,' said Mary quite seriously. 'An tha' munnot lose no time about it.'





the garden really never quite died away. He looked as if he were made of flesh instead of ivory or wax.

They saw the robin carry food to his mate two or three times, and it was so suggestive of afternoon tea that Colin felt they must have some.

'Go and make one of the men servants bring some in a basket to the rhododendron walk,' he said. 'And then you and Dickon can bring it here.'

It was an agreeable idea, easily carried out, and when the white cloth was spread upon the grass, with hot tea and buttered toast and crumpets, a delightfully hungry meal was eaten, and several birds on domestic errands paused to inquire what was going on and were led into investigating crumbs with great activity. Nut and Shell whisked up trees with pieces of cake and Soot took the entire half of a buttered crumpet into a corner and pecked at and examined and turned it over and made hoarse remarks about it until he decided to swallow it all joyfully in one gulp.

The afternoon was dragging toward its mellow hour. The sun was deepening the gold of its lances, the bees were going home and the birds were flying past less often. Dickon and Mary were sitting on the grass, the tea-basket was re-packed ready to be taken back to the house, and Colin was lying against his cushions with his heavy locks pushed back from his forehead and his face looking quite a natural colour.

'I don't want this afternoon to go,' he said; 'but I shall come back to-morrow, and the day after, and the day after, and the day after.'

'You'll get plenty of fresh air, won't you?' said Mary.

'I'm going to get nothing else,' he answered. 'I've seen the spring now and I'm going to see the summer. I'm going to see everything grow here. I'm going to grow here myself.'

'That tha' will,' said Dickon. 'Us'll have thee walkin' about here an' diggin' same as other folk afore long.'

Colin flushed tremendously.

'Walk!' he said. 'Dig! Shall I?'

Dickon's glance at him was delicately cautious. Neither he nor Mary had ever asked if anything was the matter with his legs.

'For sure tha' will,' he said stoutly. 'Tha'—tha's got legs o' thine own, same as other folks!'

Mary was rather frightened until she heard Colin's answer.

'Nothing really ails them,' he said, 'but they are so thin and weak. They shake so that I'm afraid to try to stand on them.'

Both Mary and Dickon drew a relieved breath.

'When tha' stops bein' afraid tha'lt stand on 'em,' Dickon said with renewed cheer. 'An' tha'lt stop bein' afraid in a bit.'

'I shall?' said Colin, and he lay still as if he were wondering about things.

They were really very quiet for a little while. The sun was dropping lower. It was that hour when everything stills itself, and they really had had a busy and exciting afternoon. Colin looked as if he were resting luxuriously. Even the creatures had ceased moving about and had drawn together and were resting near them. Soot had perched on a low branch and drawn up one leg and dropped the gray film drowsily over his eyes. Mary privately thought he looked as if he might snore in a minute.

In the midst of this stillness it was rather startling when Colin half lifted his head and exclaimed in a loud suddenly alarmed whisper:

'Who is that man?'

Dickon and Mary scrambled to their feet.

'Man!' they both cried in low quick voices.

Colin pointed to the high wall.

'Look!' he whispered excitedly. 'Just look!'

Mary and Dickon wheeled about and looked. There was Ben Weatherstaff's indignant face glaring at them over the wall from the top of a ladder! He actually shook his fist at Mary.

'If I wasn't a bachelder, an' tha' was a wench o' mine,' he cried, 'I'd give thee a hidin'!'

He mounted another step threateningly as if it were his energetic intention to jump down and deal with her; but as she came toward him he evidently thought better of it and stood on the top step of his ladder shaking his fist down at her.

'I never thowt much o' thee!' he harangued. 'I couldna' abide thee th' first time I set eyes on thee. A scrawny buttermilk-faced young besom, allus askin' questions an' pokin' tha' nose where it wasna' wanted. I never knowed how tha' got so thick wi' me. If it hadna' been for th' robin—Drat him—'





'Come on, little 'un,' he said, turning the small woolly white head with a gentle brown hand. 'This is what tha's after. Tha'll get more out o' this than tha' will out o' silk velvet coats. There now,' and he pushed the rubber tip of the bottle into the nuzzling mouth and the lamb began to suck it with ravenous ecstasy.

After that there was no wondering what to say. By the time the lamb fell asleep questions poured forth and Dickon answered them all. He told them how he had found the lamb just as the sun was rising three mornings ago. He had been standing on the moor listening to a skylark and watching him swing higher and higher into the sky until he was only a speck in the heights of blue.

'I'd almost lost him but for his song an' I was wonderin' how a chap could hear it when it seemed as if he'd get out o' th' world in a minute—an' just then I heard somethin' else far off among th' gorse bushes. It was a weak bleatin' an' I knowed it was a new lamb as was hungry an' I knowed it wouldn't be hungry if it hadn't lost its mother somehow, so I set off searchin'. Eh! I did have a look for it. I went in an' out among th' gorse bushes an' round an' round an' I always seemed to take th' wrong turnin'. But at last I seed a bit o' white by a rock on top o' th' moor an' I climbed up an' found th' little 'un half dead wi' cold an' clemmin'.'

While he talked, Soot flew solemnly in and out of the open window and cawed remarks about the scenery while Nut and Shell made excursions into the big trees outside and ran up and down trunks and explored branches. Captain curled up near Dickon, who sat on the hearth-rug from preference.

They looked at the pictures in the gardening books and Dickon knew all the flowers by their country names and knew exactly which ones were already growing in the secret garden.

'I couldna' say that there name,' he said, pointing to one under which was written 'Aquilegia,' 'but us calls that a columbine, an' that there one it's a snapdragon and they both grow wild in hedges, but these is garden ones an' they're bigger an' grander. There's some big clumps o' columbine in th' garden. They'll look like a bed o' blue an' white butterflies flutterin' when they're out.'

'I'm going to see them,' cried Colin. 'I am going to see them!'