Then Mary told him about Basil and his brothers and sisters in India and of how she had hated them and of their calling her 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary.'

'They used to dance round and sing at me. They sang—

> Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
> How does your garden grow?
> With silver bells, and cockle shells,
> And marigolds all in a row.

I just remembered it and it made me wonder if there were really flowers like silver bells.'

She frowned a little and gave her trowel a rather spiteful dig into the earth.

'I wasn't as contrary as they were.'

But Dickon laughed.

'Eh!' he said, and as he crumbled the rich black soil she saw he was sniffing up the scent of it, 'there doesn't seem to be no need for no one to be contrary when there's flowers an' such like, an' such lots o' friendly wild things runnin' about makin' homes for themselves, or buildin' nests an' singin' an' whistlin', does there?'

Mary, kneeling by him holding the seeds, looked at him and stopped frowning.

'Dickon,' she said. 'You are as nice as Martha said you were. I like you, and you make the fifth person. I never thought I should like five people.'

Dickon sat up on his heels as Martha did when she was polishing the grate. He did look funny and delightful, Mary thought, with his round blue eyes and red cheeks and happy looking turned-up nose.

'Only five folk as tha' likes?' he said. 'Who is th' other four?'

'Your mother and Martha,' Mary checked them off on her fingers, 'and the robin and Ben Weatherstaff.'

Dickon laughed so that he was obliged to stifle the sound by putting his arm over his mouth.

'I know tha' thinks I'm a queer lad,' he said, 'but I think tha' art th' queerest little lass I ever saw.'

Then Mary did a strange thing. She leaned forward and asked him a question she had never dreamed of asking any one before. And she tried to ask it in Yorkshire because that was his language, and in India a native was always pleased if you knew his speech.

'Does tha' like me?' she said.

'Eh!' he answered heartily, 'that I does. I likes thee wonderful, an' so does th' robin, I do believe!'

'That's two, then,' said Mary. 'That's two for me.'

And then they began to work harder than ever and more joyfully. Mary was startled and sorry when she heard the big clock in the courtyard strike the hour of her midday dinner.

'I shall have to go,' she said mournfully. 'And you will have to go too, won't you?'

Dickon grinned.

'My dinner's easy to carry about with me,' he said. 'Mother always lets me put a bit o' somethin' in my pocket.'

He picked up his coat from the grass and brought out of a pocket a lumpy little bundle tied up in a quiet clean, coarse, blue and white handkerchief. It held two thick pieces of bread with a slice of something laid between them.

'It's oftenest naught but bread,' he said, 'but I've got a fine slice o' fat bacon with it to-day.'

Mary thought it looked a queer dinner, but he seemed ready to enjoy it.

'Run on an' get thy victuals,' he said. 'I'll be done with mine first. I'll get some more work done before I start back home.'

He sat down with his back against a tree.

'I'll call th' robin up,' he said, 'and give him th' rind o' th' bacon to peck at. They likes a bit o' fat wonderful.'

Mary could scarcely bear to leave him. Suddenly it seemed as if he might be a sort of wood fairy who might be gone when she came into the garden again. He seemed too good to be true. She went slowly half-way to the door in the wall and then she stopped and went back.

'Whatever happens, you—you never would tell?' she said.

His poppy-coloured cheeks were distended with his first big bite of bread and bacon, but he managed to smile encouragingly.

'If tha' was a missel thrush an' showed me where thy nest was, does tha' think I'd tell any one? Not me,' he said. 'Tha' art as safe as a missel thrush.'

And she was quite sure she was.

'I'll tell thee what tha'll do,' said Dickon, with his happy grin. 'Tha'll get fat an' tha'll get as hungry as a young fox an' tha'll learn how to talk to th' robin same as I do. Eh! we'll have a lot o' fun.'

He began to walk about, looking up in the trees and at the walls and bushes with a thoughtful expression.

'I wouldn't want to make it look like a gardener's garden, all clipped an' spick an' span, would you?' he said. 'It's nicer like this with things runnin' wild, an' swingin' an' catchin' hold of each other.'

'Don't let us make it tidy,' said Mary anxiously. 'It wouldn't seem like a secret garden if it was tidy.'

Dickon stood rubbing his rusty-red head with a rather puzzled look.

'It's a secret garden sure enough,' he said, 'but seems like some one besides th' robin must have been in it since it was shut up ten year' ago.'

'But the door was locked and the key was buried,' said Mary. 'No one could get in.'

'That's true,' he answered. 'It's a queer place. Seems to me as if there'd been a bit o' prunin' done here an' there, later than ten year' ago.'

'But how could it have been done?' said Mary.

He was examining a branch of a standard rose and he shook his head.

'Aye! how could it!' he murmured. 'With th' door locked an' th' key buried.'

Mistress Mary always felt that however many years she lived she should never forget that first morning when her garden began to grow. Of course, it did seem to begin to grow for her that morning. When Dickon began to clear places to plant seeds, she remembered what Basil had sung at her when he wanted to tease her.

'Are there any flowers that look like bells?' she inquired.

'Lilies o' th' valley does,' he answered, digging away with the trowel, 'an' there's Canterbury bells, an' campanulas.'

'Let us plant some,' said Mary.

'There's lilies o' th' valley here already; I saw 'em. They'll have growed too close an' we'll have to separate 'em, but there's plenty. Th' other ones takes two years to bloom from seed, but I can bring you some bits o' plants from our cottage garden. Why does tha' want 'em?'

an' these here is narcissuses,' turning to another patch, 'an' here's daffy-downdillys. Eh! they will be a sight.'

He ran from one clearing to another.

'Tha' has done a lot o' work for such a little wench,' he said, looking her over.

'I'm growing fatter,' said Mary, 'and I'm growing stronger. I used always to be tired. When I dig I'm not tired at all. I like to smell the earth when it's turned up.'

'It's rare good for thee,' he said, nodding his head wisely. 'There's naught as nice as th' smell o' good clean earth, except th' smell o' fresh growin' things when th' rain falls on 'em. I get out on th' moor many a day when it's rainin' an' I lie under a bush an' listen to th' soft swish o' drops on th' heather an' I just sniff an' sniff. My nose end fair quivers like a rabbit's, mother says.'

'Do you never catch cold?' inquired Mary, gazing at him wonderingly. She had never seen such a funny boy, or such a nice one.

'Not me,' he said, grinning. 'I never ketched cold since I was born. I wasn't brought up nesh enough. I've chased about th' moor in all weathers same as th' rabbits does. Mother says I've sniffed up too much fresh air for twelve year' to ever get to sniffin' with cold. I'm as tough as a white-thorn knobstick.'

He was working all the time he was talking and Mary was following him and helping him with her fork or the trowel.

'There's a lot of work to do here!' he said once, looking about quite exultantly.

'Will you come again and help me to do it?' Mary begged. 'I'm sure I can help, too. I can dig and pull up weeds, and do whatever you tell me. Oh! do come, Dickon!'

'I'll come every day if tha' wants me, rain or shine,' he answered stoutly. 'It's th' best fun I ever had in my life—shut in here an' wakenin' up a garden.'

'If you will come,' said Mary, 'if you will help me to make it alive I'll—I don't know what I'll do,' she ended helplessly. What could you do for a boy like that?

Chapter 12

'Might I Have a Bit of Earth?'

MARY ran so fast that she was rather out of breath when she reached her room. Her hair was ruffled on her forehead and her cheeks were bright pink. Her dinner was waiting on the table, and Martha was waiting near it.

'Tha's a bit late,' she said. 'Where has tha' been?'

'I've seen Dickon!' said Mary. 'I've seen Dickon!'

'I knew he'd come,' said Martha exultantly. 'How does tha' like him?'

'I think—I think he's beautiful!' said Mary in a determined voice.

Martha looked rather taken aback but she looked pleased, too.

'Well,' she said, 'he's th' best lad as ever was born, but us never thought he was handsome. His nose turns up too much.'

'I like it to turn up,' said Mary.

'An' his eyes is so round,' said Martha, a trifle doubtful. 'Though they're a nice colour.'

'I like them round,' said Mary. 'And they are exactly the colour of the sky over the moor.'

Martha beamed with satisfaction.

'Mother says he made 'em that colour with always lookin' up at th' birds an' th' clouds. But he has got a big mouth, hasn't he, now?'

'I love his big mouth,' said Mary obstinately. 'I wish mine were just like it.'

Martha chuckled delightedly.

'It'd look rare an' funny in thy bit of a face,' she said. 'But I knowed it would be that way when tha' saw him. How did tha' like th' seeds an' th' garden tools?'

'How did you know he brought them?' asked Mary.

'Eh! I never thought of him not bringin' 'em. He'd be sure to bring 'em if they was in Yorkshire. He's such a trusty lad.'

Mary was afraid that she might begin to ask difficult questions, but she did not. She was very much interested in the seeds and gardening tools, and there was only one moment when Mary was frightened. This was when she began to ask where the flowers were to be planted.

'Who did tha' ask about it?' she inquired.

'I haven't asked anybody yet,' said Mary, hesitating.

'Well, I wouldn't ask th' head gardener. He's too grand, Mr Roach is.'

'I've never seen him,' said Mary. 'I've only seen under-gardeners and Ben Weatherstaff.'

'If I was you, I'd ask Ben Weatherstaff,' advised Martha. 'He's not half as bad as he looks, for all he's so crabbed. Mr Craven lets him do what he likes because he was here when Mrs Craven was alive, an' he used to make her laugh. She liked him. Perhaps he'd find you a corner somewhere out o' the way.'

'If it was out of the way and no one wanted it, no one could mind my having it, could they?' Mary said anxiously.

'There wouldn't be no reason,' answered Martha. 'You wouldn't do no harm.'

Mary ate her dinner as quickly as she could and when she rose from the table she was going to run to her room to put on her hat again, but Martha stopped her.

'I've got somethin' to tell you,' she said. 'I thought I'd let you eat your dinner first. Mr Craven came back this mornin' and I think he wants to see you.'

He knelt and with his knife cut the lifeless-looking branch through, not far above the earth.

'There!' he said exultantly. 'I told thee so. There's green in that wood yet. Look at it.'

Mary was down on her knees before he spoke, gazing with all her might.

'When it looks a bit greenish an' juicy like that, it's wick,' he explained. 'When th' inside is dry an' breaks easy, like this here piece I've cut off, it's done for. There's a big root here as all this live wood sprung out of, an' if th' old wood's cut off an' it's dug round, an' took care of there'll be—' he stopped and lifted his face to look up at the climbing and hanging sprays above him—'there'll be a fountain o' roses here this summer.'

They went from bush to bush and from tree to tree. He was very strong and clever with his knife and knew how to cut the dry and dead wood away, and could tell when an unpromising bough or twig had still green life in it. In the course of half an hour Mary thought she could tell too, and when he cut through a lifeless-looking branch she would cry out joyfully under her breath when she caught sight of the least shade of moist green. The spade, and hoe, and fork were very useful. He showed her how to use the fork while he dug about roots with the spade and stirred the earth and let the air in.

They were working industriously round one of the biggest standard roses when he caught sight of something which made him utter an exclamation of surprise.

'Why!' he cried, pointing to the grass a few feet away. 'Who did that there?'

It was one of Mary's own little clearings round the pale green points.

'I did it,' said Mary.

'Why, I thought tha' didn't know nothin' about gardenin',' he exclaimed.

'I don't,' she answered, 'but they were so little, and the grass was so thick and strong, and they looked as if they had no room to breathe. So I made a place for them. I don't even know what they are.'

Dickon went and knelt down by them, smiling his wide smile.

'Tha' was right,' he said. 'A gardener couldn't have told thee better. They'll grow now like Jack's bean-stalk. They're crocuses an' snowdrops,

Dickon nodded.

'Martha told me there was one as no one ever went inside,' he answered. 'Us used to wonder what it was like.'

He stopped and looked round at the lovely gray tangle about him, and his round eyes looked queerly happy.

'Eh! the nests as'll be here come springtime,' he said. 'It'd be th' safest nestin' place in England. No one never comin' near an' tangles o' trees an' roses to build in. I wonder all th' birds on th' moor don't build here.'

Mistress Mary put her hand on his arm again without knowing it.

'Will there be roses?' she whispered. 'Can you tell? I thought perhaps they were all dead.'

'Eh! No! Not them—not all of 'em!' he answered. 'Look here!'

He stepped over to the nearest tree—an old, old one with gray lichen all over its bark, but upholding a curtain of tangled sprays and branches. He took a thick knife out of his pocket and opened one of its blades.

'There's lots o' dead wood as ought to be cut out,' he said. 'An' there's a lot o' old wood, but it made some new last year. This here's a new bit,' and he touched a shoot which looked brownish green instead of hard, dry gray.

Mary touched it herself in an eager, reverent way.

'That one?' she said. 'Is that one quite alive—quite?'

Dickon curved his wide smiling mouth.

'It's as wick as you or me,' he said; and Mary remembered that Martha had told her that 'wick' meant 'alive' or 'lively.'

'I'm glad it's wick!' she cried out in her whisper. 'I want them all to be wick. Let us go round the garden and count how many wick ones there are.'

She quite panted with eagerness, and Dickon was as eager as she was. They went from tree to tree and from bush to bush. Dickon carried his knife in his hand and showed her things which she thought wonderful.

'They've run wild,' he said, 'but th' strongest ones has fair thrived on it. The delicatest ones has died out, but th' others has growed an' growed, an' spread an' spread, till they's a wonder. See here!' and he pulled down a thick gray, dry-looking branch. 'A body might think this was dead wood, but I don't believe it is—down to th' root. I'll cut it low down an' see.'

Mary turned quite pale.

'Oh!' she said. 'Why! Why! He didn't want to see me when I came. I heard Pitcher say he didn't.'

'Well,' explained Martha, 'Mrs Medlock says it's because o' mother. She was walkin' to Thwaite village an' she met him. She'd never spoke to him before, but Mrs Craven had been to our cottage two or three times. He'd forgot, but mother hadn't an' she made bold to stop him. I don't know what she said to him about you but she said somethin' as put him in th' mind to see you before he goes away again, to-morrow.'

'Oh!' cried Mary, 'is he going away to-morrow? I am so glad!'

'He's goin' for a long time. He mayn't come back till autumn or winter. He's goin' to travel in foreign places. He's always doin' it.'

'Oh! I'm so glad—so glad!' said Mary thankfully.

If he did not come back until winter, or even autumn, there would be time to watch the secret garden come alive. Even if he found out then and took it away from her she would have had that much at least.

'When do you think he will want to see—'

She did not finish the sentence, because the door opened, and Mrs Medlock walked in. She had on her best black dress and cap, and her collar was fastened with a large brooch with a picture of a man's face on it. It was a coloured photograph of Mr Medlock who had died years ago, and she always wore it when she was dressed up. She looked nervous and excited.

'Your hair's rough,' she said quickly. 'Go and brush it. Martha, help her to slip on her best dress. Mr Craven sent me to bring her to him in his study.'

All the pink left Mary's cheeks. Her heart began to thump and she felt herself changing into a stiff, plain, silent child again. She did not even answer Mrs Medlock, but turned and walked into her bedroom, followed by Martha. She said nothing while her dress was changed, and her hair brushed, and after she was quite tidy she followed Mrs Medlock down the corridors, in silence. What was there for her to say? She was obliged to go and see Mr Craven and he would not like her, and she would not like him. She knew what he would think of her.

She was taken to a part of the house she had not been into before. At last Mrs Medlock knocked at a door, and when some one said, 'Come in,'

they entered the room together. A man was sitting in an armchair before the fire, and Mrs Medlock spoke to him.

'This is Miss Mary, sir,' she said.

'You can go and leave her here. I will ring for you when I want you to take her away,' said Mr Craven.

When she went out and closed the door, Mary could only stand waiting, a plain little thing, twisting her thin hands together. She could see that the man in the chair was not so much a hunchback as a man with high, rather crooked shoulders, and he had black hair streaked with white. He turned his head over his high shoulders and spoke to her.

'Come here!' he said.

Mary went to him.

He was not ugly. His face would have been handsome if it had not been so miserable. He looked as if the sight of her worried and fretted him and as if he did not know what in the world to do with her.

'Are you well?' he asked.

'Yes,' answered Mary.

'Do they take good care of you?'

'Yes.'

He rubbed his forehead fretfully as he looked her over.

'You are very thin,' he said.

'I am getting fatter,' Mary answered in what she knew was her stiffest way.

What an unhappy face he had! His black eyes seemed as if they scarcely saw her, as if they were seeing something else, and he could hardly keep his thoughts upon her.

'I forgot you,' he said. 'How could I remember you? I intended to send you a governess or a nurse, or some one of that sort, but I forgot.'

'Please,' began Mary. 'Please—' and then the lump in her throat choked her.

'What do you want to say?' he inquired.

'I am—I am too big for a nurse,' said Mary. 'And please—please don't make me have a governess yet.'

He rubbed his forehead again and stared at her.

'That was what the Sowerby woman said,' he muttered absent-mindedly.

Then Mary gathered a scrap of courage.

Chapter 11

The Nest of the Missel Thrush

For two or three minutes he stood looking round him, while Mary watched him, and then he began to walk about softly, even more lightly than Mary had walked the first time she had found herself inside the four walls. His eyes seemed to be taking in everything—the gray trees with the gray creepers climbing over them and hanging from their branches, the tangle on the walls and among the grass, the evergreen alcoves with the stone seats and tall flower urns standing in them.

'I never thought I'd see this place,' he said at last, in a whisper.

'Did you know about it?' asked Mary.

She had spoken aloud and he made a sign to her.

'We must talk low,' he said, 'or some one'll hear us an' wonder what's to do in here.'

'Oh! I forgot!' said Mary, feeling frightened and putting her hand quickly against her mouth. 'Did you know about the garden?' she asked again when she had recovered herself.

'Eh-h-h!' he said, drawing his exclamation out slowly, and the way he did it meant both wonder and sympathy.

'I've nothing to do,' said Mary. 'Nothing belongs to me. I found it myself and I got into it myself. I was only just like the robin, and they wouldn't take it from the robin.'

'Where is it?' asked Dickon in a dropped voice.

Mistress Mary got up from the log at once. She knew she felt contrary again, and obstinate, and she did not care at all. She was imperious and Indian, and at the same time hot and sorrowful.

'Come with me and I'll show you,' she said.

She led him round the laurel path and to the walk where the ivy grew so thickly. Dickon followed her with a queer, almost pitying, look on his face. He felt as if he were being led to look at some strange bird's nest and must move softly. When she stepped to the wall and lifted the hanging ivy he started. There was a door and Mary pushed it slowly open and they passed in together, and then Mary stood and waved her hand round defiantly.

'It's this,' she said. 'It's a secret garden, and I'm the only one in the world who wants it to be alive.'

Dickon looked round and round about it, and round and round again.

'Eh!' he almost whispered, 'it is a queer, pretty place! It's like as if a body was in a dream.'

'Is she—is she Martha's mother?' she stammered.

'Yes, I think so,' he replied.

'She knows about children,' said Mary. 'She has twelve. She knows.'

He seemed to rouse himself.

'What do you want to do?'

'I want to play out of doors,' Mary answered, hoping that her voice did not tremble. 'I never liked it in India. It makes me hungry here, and I am getting fatter.'

He was watching her.

'Mrs Sowerby said it would do you good. Perhaps it will,' he said. 'She thought you had better get stronger before you had a governess.'

'It makes me feel strong when I play and the wind comes over the moor,' argued Mary.

'Where do you play?' he asked next.

'Everywhere,' gasped Mary. 'Martha's mother sent me a skipping-rope. I skip and run—and I look about to see if things are beginning to stick up out of the earth. I don't do any harm.'

'Don't look so frightened,' he said in a worried voice. 'You could not do any harm, a child like you! You may do what you like.'

Mary put her hand up to her throat because she was afraid he might see the excited lump which she felt jump into it. She came a step nearer to him.

'May I?' she said tremulously.

Her anxious little face seemed to worry him more than ever.

'Don't look so frightened,' he exclaimed. 'Of course you may. I am your guardian, though I am a poor one for any child. I cannot give you time or attention. I am too ill, and wretched and distracted; but I wish you to be happy and comfortable. I don't know anything about children, but Mrs Medlock is to see that you have all you need. I sent for you to-day because Mrs Sowerby said I ought to see you. Her daughter had talked about you. She thought you needed fresh air and freedom and running about.'

'She knows all about children,' Mary said again in spite of herself.

'She ought to,' said Mr Craven. 'I thought her rather bold to stop me on the moor, but she said—Mrs Craven had been kind to her.' It seemed hard for him to speak his dead wife's name. 'She is a respectable woman.

Now I have seen you I think she said sensible things. Play out of doors as much as you like. It's a big place and you may go where you like and amuse yourself as you like. Is there anything you want?' as if a sudden thought had struck him. 'Do you want toys, books, dolls?'

'Might I,' quavered Mary, 'might I have a bit of earth?'

In her eagerness she did not realize how queer the words would sound and that they were not the ones she had meant to say. Mr Craven looked quite startled.

'Earth!' he repeated. 'What do you mean?'

'To plant seeds in—to make things grow—to see them come alive,' Mary faltered.

He gazed at her a moment and then passed his hand quickly over his eyes.

'Do you—care about gardens so much,' he said slowly.

'I didn't know about them in India,' said Mary. 'I was always ill and tired and it was too hot. I sometimes made little beds in the sand and stuck flowers in them. But here it is different.'

Mr Craven got up and began to walk slowly across the room.

'A bit of earth,' he said to himself, and Mary thought that somehow she must have reminded him of something. When he stopped and spoke to her his dark eyes looked almost soft and kind.

'You can have as much earth as you want,' he said. 'You remind me of some one else who loved the earth and things that grow. When you see a bit of earth you want,' with something like a smile, 'take it, child, and make it come alive.'

'May I take it from anywhere—if it's not wanted?'

'Anywhere,' he answered. 'There! You must go now, I am tired.' He touched the bell to call Mrs Medlock. 'Good-by. I shall be away all summer.'

Mrs Medlock came so quickly that Mary thought she must have been waiting in the corridor.

'Mrs Medlock,' Mr Craven said to her, 'now I have seen the child I understand what Mrs Sowerby meant. She must be less delicate before she begins lessons. Give her simple, healthy food. Let her run wild in the garden. Don't look after her too much. She needs liberty and fresh air

p'raps I'm a bird, or a fox, or a rabbit, or a squirrel, or even a beetle, an' I don't know it.'

He laughed and came back to the log and began to talk about the flower seeds again. He told her what they looked like when they were flowers; he told her how to plant them, and watch them, and feed and water them.

'See here,' he said suddenly, turning round to look at her. 'I'll plant them for thee myself. Where is tha' garden?'

Mary's thin hands clutched each other as they lay on her lap. She did not know what to say, so for a whole minute she said nothing. She had never thought of this. She felt miserable. And she felt as if she went red and then pale.

'Tha's got a bit o' garden, hasn't tha'?' Dickon said.

It was true that she had turned red and then pale. Dickon saw her do it, and as she still said nothing, he began to be puzzled.

'Wouldn't they give thee a bit?' he asked. 'Hasn't tha' got any yet?'

She held her hands even tighter and turned her eyes toward him.

'I don't know anything about boys,' she said slowly. 'Could you keep a secret, if I told you one? It's a great secret. I don't know what I should do if any one found it out. I believe I should die!' She said the last sentence quite fiercely.

Dickon looked more puzzled than ever and even rubbed his hand over his rough head again, but he answered quite good-humoredly.

'I'm keepin' secrets all th' time,' he said. 'If I couldn't keep secrets from th' other lads, secrets about foxes' cubs, an' birds' nests, an' wild things' holes, there'd be naught safe on th' moor. Aye, I can keep secrets.'

Mistress Mary did not mean to put out her hand and clutch his sleeve but she did it.

'I've stolen a garden,' she said very fast. 'It isn't mine. It isn't anybody's. Nobody wants it, nobody cares for it, nobody ever goes into it. Perhaps everything is dead in it already; I don't know.'

She began to feel hot and as contrary as she had ever felt in her life.

'I don't care, I don't care! Nobody has any right to take it from me when I care about it and they don't. They're letting it die, all shut in by itself,' she ended passionately, and she threw her arms over her face and burst out crying—poor little Mistress Mary.

Dickon's curious blue eyes grew rounder and rounder.