Mrs Medlock and Dr Craven looked at each other in a troubled way, but there was evidently nothing to be done.

'He does look rather better, sir,' ventured Mrs Medlock. 'But'—thinking the matter over—'he looked better this morning before she came into the room.'

'She came into the room last night. She stayed with me a long time. She sang a Hindustani song to me and it made me go to sleep,' said Colin. 'I was better when I wakened up. I wanted my breakfast. I want my tea now. Tell nurse, Medlock.'

Dr Craven did not stay very long. He talked to the nurse for a few minutes when she came into the room and said a few words of warning to Colin. He must not talk too much; he must not forget that he was ill; he must not forget that he was very easily tired. Mary thought that there seemed to be a number of uncomfortable things he was not to forget.

Colin looked fretful and kept his strange black-lashed eyes fixed on Dr Craven's face.

'I want to forget it,' he said at last. 'She makes me forget it. That is why I want her.'

Dr Craven did not look happy when he left the room. He gave a puzzled glance at the little girl sitting on the large stool. She had become a stiff, silent child again as soon as he entered and he could not see what the attraction was. The boy actually did look brighter, however—and he sighed rather heavily as he went down the corridor.

'They are always wanting me to eat things when I don't want to,' said Colin, as the nurse brought in the tea and put it on the table by the sofa. 'Now, if you'll eat I will. Those muffins look so nice and hot. Tell me about Rajahs.'

Chapter XV

Nest Building

AFTER another week of rain the high arch of blue sky appeared again and the sun which poured down was quite hot. Though there had been no chance to see either the secret garden or Dickon, Mistress Mary had enjoyed herself very much. The week had not seemed long. She had spent hours of every day with Colin in his room, talking about Rajahs or gardens or Dickon and the cottage on the moor. They had looked at the splendid books and pictures and sometimes Mary had read things to Colin, and sometimes he had read a little to her. When he was amused and interested she thought he scarcely looked like an invalid at all, except that his face was so colourless and he was always on the sofa.

'You are a sly young one to listen and get out of your bed to go following things up like you did that night,' Mrs Medlock said once. 'But there's no saying it's not been a sort of blessing to the lot of us. He's not had a tantrum or a whining fit since you made friends. The nurse was just going to give up

the case because she was so sick of him, but she says she doesn't mind staying now you've gone on duty with her,' laughing a little.

In her talks with Colin, Mary had tried to be very cautious about the secret garden. There were certain things she wanted to find out from him, but she felt that she must find them out without asking him direct questions. In the first place, as she began to like to be with him, she wanted to discover whether he was the kind of boy you could tell a secret to. He was not in the least like Dickon, but he was evidently so pleased with the idea of a garden no one knew anything about that she thought perhaps he could be trusted. But she had not known him long enough to be sure. The second thing she wanted to find out was this: If he could be trusted—if he really could—wouldn't it be possible to take him to the garden without having any one find it out? The grand doctor had said that he must have fresh air and Colin had said that he would not mind fresh air in a secret garden. Perhaps if he had a great deal of fresh air and knew Dickon and the robin and saw things growing he might not think so much about dying. Mary had seen herself in the glass sometimes lately when she had realized that she looked quite a different creature from the child she had seen when she arrived from India. This child looked nicer. Even Martha had seen a change in her.

'Th' air from th' moor has done thee good already,' she had said. 'Tha'rt not nigh so yeller and tha'rt not nigh so scrawny. Even tha' hair doesn't slamp down on tha' head so flat. It's got some life in it so as it sticks out a bit.'

'It's like me,' said Mary. 'It's growing stronger and fatter. I'm sure there's more of it.'

'It looks it, for sure,' said Martha, ruffling it up a little round her face. 'Tha'rt not half so ugly when it's that way an' there's a bit o' red in tha' cheeks.'

If gardens and fresh air had been good for her perhaps they would be good for Colin. But then, if he hated people to look at him, perhaps he would not like to see Dickon.

'Why does it make you angry when you are looked at?' she inquired one day.

'I always hated it,' he answered, 'even when I was very little. Then when they took me to the seaside and I used to lie in my carriage everybody used to stare and ladies would stop and talk to my nurse and then they would begin to whisper and I knew then they were saying I shouldn't live to grow up. Then

ten-year-old creatures—instead of a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy who believed that he was going to die.

They enjoyed themselves so much that they forgot the pictures and they forgot about the time. They had been laughing quite loudly over Ben Weatherstaff and his robin and Colin was actually sitting up as if he had forgotten about his weak back when he suddenly remembered something.

'Do you know there is one thing we have never once thought of,' he said. 'We are cousins.'

It seemed so queer that they had talked so much and never remembered this simple thing that they laughed more than ever, because they had got into the humor to laugh at anything. And in the midst of the fun the door opened and in walked Dr Craven and Mrs Medlock.

Dr Craven started in actual alarm and Mrs Medlock almost fell back because he had accidentally bumped against her.

'Good Lord!' exclaimed poor Mrs Medlock, with her eyes almost starting out of her head. 'Good Lord!'

'What is this?' said Dr Craven, coming forward. 'What does it mean?'

Then Mary was reminded of the boy Rajah again. Colin answered as if neither the doctor's alarm nor Mrs Medlock's terror were of the slightest consequence. He was as little disturbed or frightened as if an elderly cat and dog had walked into the room.

'This is my cousin, Mary Lennox,' he said. 'I asked her to come and talk to me. I like her. She must come and talk to me whenever I send for her.'

Dr Craven turned reproachfully to Mrs Medlock.

'Oh, sir,' she panted. 'I don't know how it's happened. There's not a servant on the place that'd dare to talk—they all have their orders.'

'Nobody told her anything,' said Colin, 'she heard me crying and found me herself. I am glad she came. Don't be silly, Medlock.'

Mary saw that Dr Craven did not look pleased, but it was quite plain that he dare not oppose his patient. He sat down by Colin and felt his pulse.

'I am afraid there has been too much excitement. Excitement is not good for you, my boy,' he said.

'I should be excited if she kept away,' answered Colin, his eyes beginning to look dangerously sparkling. 'I am better. She makes me better. The nurse must bring up her tea with mine. We will have tea together.'

And then he lay back on his cushion and was still, as if he were thinking. And there was quite a long silence. Perhaps they were both of them thinking strange things children do not usually think of.

'I like the grand doctor from London, because he made them take the iron thing off,' said Mary at last. 'Did he say you were going to die?'

'No.'

'What did he say?'

'He didn't whisper,' Colin answered. 'Perhaps he knew I hated whispering. I heard him say one thing quite aloud. He said, 'The lad might live if he would make up his mind to it. Put him in the humor.' It sounded as if he was in a temper.'

'I'll tell you who would put you in the humor, perhaps,' said Mary reflecting. She felt as if she would like this thing to be settled one way or the other. 'I believe Dickon would. He's always talking about live things. He never talks about dead things or things that are ill. He's always looking up in the sky to watch birds flying—or looking down at the earth to see something growing. He has such round blue eyes and they are so wide open with looking about. And he laughs such a big laugh with his wide mouth—and his cheeks are as red—as red as cherries.'

She pulled her stool nearer to the sofa and her expression quite changed at the remembrance of the wide curving mouth and wide open eyes.

'See here,' she said. 'Don't let us talk about dying; I don't like it. Let us talk about living. Let us talk and talk about Dickon. And then we will look at your pictures.'

It was the best thing she could have said. To talk about Dickon meant to talk about the moor and about the cottage and the fourteen people who lived in it on sixteen shillings a week—and the children who got fat on the moor grass like the wild ponies. And about Dickon's mother—and the skipping-rope—and the moor with the sun on it—and about pale green points sticking up out of the black sod. And it was all so alive that Mary talked more than she had ever talked before—and Colin both talked and listened as he had never done either before. And they both began to laugh over nothings as children will when they are happy together. And they laughed so that in the end they were making as much noise as if they had been two ordinary healthy natural

sometimes the ladies would pat my cheeks and say 'Poor child!' Once when a lady did that I screamed out loud and bit her hand. She was so frightened she ran away.'

'She thought you had gone mad like a dog,' said Mary, not at all admiringly.

'I don't care what she thought,' said Colin, frowning.

'I wonder why you didn't scream and bite me when I came into your room?' said Mary. Then she began to smile slowly.

'I thought you were a ghost or a dream,' he said. 'You can't bite a ghost or a dream, and if you scream they don't care.'

'Would you hate it if—if a boy looked at you?' Mary asked uncertainly.

He lay back on his cushion and paused thoughtfully.

'There's one boy,' he said quite slowly, as if he were thinking over every word, 'there's one boy I believe I shouldn't mind. It's that boy who knows where the foxes live—Dickon.'

'I'm sure you wouldn't mind him,' said Mary.

'The birds don't and other animals,' he said, still thinking it over, 'perhaps that's why I shouldn't. He's a sort of animal charmer and I am a boy animal.'

Then he laughed and she laughed too; in fact it ended in their both laughing a great deal and finding the idea of a boy animal hiding in his hole very funny indeed.

What Mary felt afterward was that she need not fear about Dickon.

On that first morning when the sky was blue again Mary wakened very early. The sun was pouring in slanting rays through the blinds and there was something so joyous in the sight of it that she jumped out of bed and ran to the window. She drew up the blinds and opened the window itself and a great waft of fresh, scented air blew in upon her. The moor was blue and the whole world looked as if something Magic had happened to it. There were tender little fluting sounds here and there and everywhere, as if scores of birds were beginning to tune up for a concert. Mary put her hand out of the window and held it in the sun.

'It's warm—warm!' she said. 'It will make the green points push up and up and up, and it will make the bulbs and roots work and struggle with all their might under the earth.'

She kneeled down and leaned out of the window as far as she could, breathing big breaths and sniffing the air until she laughed because she remembered

what Dickon's mother had said about the end of his nose quivering like a rabbit's.

'It must be very early,' she said. 'The little clouds are all pink and I've never seen the sky look like this. No one is up. I don't even hear the stable boys.'

A sudden thought made her scramble to her feet.

'I can't wait! I am going to see the garden!'

She had learned to dress herself by this time and she put on her clothes in five minutes. She knew a small side door which she could unbolt herself and she flew down-stairs in her stocking feet and put on her shoes in the hall. She unchained and unbolted and unlocked and when the door was open she sprang across the step with one bound, and there she was standing on the grass, which seemed to have turned green, and with the sun pouring down on her and warm sweet wafts about her and the fluting and twittering and singing coming from every bush and tree. She clasped her hands for pure joy and looked up in the sky and it was so blue and pink and pearly and white and flooded with springtime light that she felt as if she must flute and sing aloud herself and knew that thrushes and robins and skylarks could not possibly help it. She ran around the shrubs and paths toward the secret garden.

'It is all different already,' she said. 'The grass is greener and things are sticking up everywhere and things are uncurling and green buds of leaves are showing. This afternoon I am sure Dickon will come.'

The long warm rain had done strange things to the herbaceous beds which bordered the walk by the lower wall. There were things sprouting and pushing out from the roots of clumps of plants and there were actually here and there glimpses of royal purple and yellow unfurling among the stems of crocuses. Six months before Mistress Mary would not have seen how the world was waking up, but now she missed nothing.

When she had reached the place where the door hid itself under the ivy, she was startled by a curious loud sound. It was the caw—caw of a crow and it came from the top of the wall, and when she looked up, there sat a big glossy-plumaged blue-black bird, looking down at her very wisely indeed. She had never seen a crow so close before and he made her a little nervous, but the next moment he spread his wings and flapped away across the garden. She hoped he was not going to stay inside and she pushed the door open wondering if he would. When she got fairly into the garden she saw that he probably

and making holes and burrows and chippering or singing or squeaking to each other. They are so busy and having such fun under the earth or in the trees or heather. It's their world.'

'How do you know all that?' said Colin, turning on his elbow to look at her.

'I have never been there once, really,' said Mary suddenly remembering. 'I only drove over it in the dark. I thought it was hideous. Martha told me about it first and then Dickon. When Dickon talks about it you feel as if you saw things and heard them and as if you were standing in the heather with the sun shining and the gorse smelling like honey—and all full of bees and butterflies.'

'You never see anything if you are ill,' said Colin restlessly. He looked like a person listening to a new sound in the distance and wondering what it was.

'You can't if you stay in a room,' said Mary.

'I couldn't go on the moor,' he said in a resentful tone.

Mary was silent for a minute and then she said something bold.

'You might—sometime.'

He moved as if he were startled.

'Go on the moor! How could I? I am going to die.'

'How do you know?' said Mary unsympathetically. She didn't like the way he had of talking about dying. She did not feel very sympathetic. She felt rather as if he almost boasted about it.

'Oh, I've heard it ever since I remember,' he answered crossly. 'They are always whispering about it and thinking I don't notice. They wish I would, too.'

Mistress Mary felt quite contrary. She pinched her lips together.

'If they wished I would,' she said, 'I wouldn't. Who wishes you would?'

'The servants—and of course Dr Craven because he would get Misselthwaite and be rich instead of poor. He daren't say so, but he always looks cheerful when I am worse. When I had typhoid fever his face got quite fat. I think my father wishes it, too.'

'I don't believe he does,' said Mary quite obstinately.

That made Colin turn and look at her again.

'Don't you?' he said.

'I shall make you tell me about Rajahs presently,' he said, 'but first tell me what the second thing was.'

'I was thinking,' said Mary, 'how different you are from Dickon.'

'Who is Dickon?' he said. 'What a queer name!'

She might as well tell him, she thought. She could talk about Dickon without mentioning the secret garden. She had liked to hear Martha talk about him. Besides, she longed to talk about him. It would seem to bring him nearer.

'He is Martha's brother. He is twelve years old,' she explained. 'He is not like any one else in the world. He can charm foxes and squirrels and birds just as the natives in India charm snakes. He plays a very soft tune on a pipe and they come and listen.'

There were some big books on a table at his side and he dragged one suddenly toward him.

'There is a picture of a snake-charmer in this,' he exclaimed. 'Come and look at it.'

The book was a beautiful one with superb coloured illustrations and he turned to one of them.

'Can he do that?' he asked eagerly.

'He played on his pipe and they listened,' Mary explained. 'But he doesn't call it Magic. He says it's because he lives on the moor so much and he knows their ways. He says he feels sometimes as if he was a bird or a rabbit himself, he likes them so. I think he asked the robin questions. It seemed as if they talked to each other in soft chirps.'

Colin lay back on his cushion and his eyes grew larger and larger and the spots on his cheeks burned.

'Tell me some more about him,' he said.

'He knows all about eggs and nests,' Mary went on. ' And he knows where foxes and badgers and otters live. He keeps them secret so that other boys won't find their holes and frighten them. He knows about everything that grows or lives on the moor.'

'Does he like the moor?' said Colin. 'How can he when it's such a great, bare, dreary place?'

'It's the most beautiful place,' protested Mary. 'Thousands of lovely things grow on it and there are thousands of little creatures all busy building nests

did intend to stay because he had alighted on a dwarf apple-tree, and under the apple-tree was lying a little reddish animal with a bushy tail, and both of them were watching the stooping body and rust-red head of Dickon, who was kneeling on the grass working hard.

Mary flew across the grass to him.

'Oh, Dickon! Dickon!' she cried out. 'How could you get here so early! How could you! The sun has only just got up!'

He got up himself, laughing and glowing, and tousled; his eyes like a bit of the sky.

'Eh!' he said. 'I was up long before him. How could I have stayed abed! Th' world's all fair begun again this mornin', it has. An' it's workin' an' hummin' an' scratchin' an' pipin' an' nest-buildin' an' breathin' out scents, till you've got to be out on it 'stead o' lyin' on your back. When th' sun did jump up, th' moor went mad for joy, an' I was in the midst of th' heather, an' I run like mad myself, shoutin' an' singin'. An' I come straight here. I couldn't have stayed away. Why, th' garden was lyin' here waitin'!'

Mary put her hands on her chest, panting, as if she had been running herself.

'Oh, Dickon! Dickon!' she said. 'I'm so happy I can scarcely breathe!'

Seeing him talking to a stranger, the little bushy-tailed animal rose from its place under the tree and came to him, and the rook, cawing once, flew down from its branch and settled quietly on his shoulder.

'This is th' little fox cub,' he said, rubbing the little reddish animal's head. 'It's named Captain. An' this here's Soot. Soot he flew across th' moor with me an' Captain he run same as if th' hounds had been after him. They both felt same as I did.'

Neither of the creatures looked as if he were the least afraid of Mary. When Dickon began to walk about, Soot stayed on his shoulder and Captain trotted quietly close to his side.

'See here!' said Dickon. 'See how these has pushed up, an' these an' these! An' Eh! look at these here!'

He threw himself upon his knees and Mary went down beside him. They had come upon a whole clump of crocuses burst into purple and orange and gold. Mary bent her face down and kissed and kissed them.

'You never kiss a person in that way,' she said when she lifted her head. 'Flowers are so different.'

He looked puzzled but smiled.

'Eh!' he said, 'I've kissed mother many a time that way when I come in from th' moor after a day's roamin' an' she stood there at th' door in th' sun, lookin' so glad an' comfortable.'

They ran from one part of the garden to another and found so many wonders that they were obliged to remind themselves that they must whisper or speak low. He showed her swelling leaf-buds on rose branches which had seemed dead. He showed her ten thousand new green points pushing through the mould. They put their eager young noses close to the earth and sniffed its warmed springtime breathing; they dug and pulled and laughed low with rapture until Mistress Mary's hair was as tumbled as Dickon's and her cheeks were almost as poppy red as his.

There was every joy on earth in the secret garden that morning, and in the midst of them came a delight more delightful than all, because it was more wonderful. Swiftly something flew across the wall and darted through the trees to a close grown corner, a little flare of red-breasted bird with something hanging from its beak. Dickon stood quite still and put his hand on Mary almost as if they had suddenly found themselves laughing in a church.

'We munnot stir,' he whispered in broad Yorkshire. 'We munnot scarce breathe. I knowed he was mate-huntin' when I seed him last. It's Ben Weatherstaff's robin. He's buildin' his nest. He'll stay here if us don't flight him.'

They settled down softly upon the grass and sat there without moving.

'Us mustn't seem as if us was watchin' him too close,' said Dickon. 'He'd be out with us for good if he got th' notion us was interferin' now. He'll be a good bit different till all this is over. He's settin' up housekeepin'. He'll be shyer an' readier to take things ill. He's got no time for visitin' an' gossipin'. Us must keep still a bit an' try to look as if us was grass an' trees an' bushes. Then when he's got used to seein' us I'll chirp a bit an' he'll know us'll not be in his way.'

Mistress Mary was not at all sure that she knew, as Dickon seemed to, how to try to look like grass and trees and bushes. But he had said the queer thing as if it were the simplest and most natural thing in the world, and she felt it must be quite easy to him, and indeed she watched him for a few minutes carefully, wondering if it was possible for him to quietly turn green and put out branches and leaves. But he only sat wonderfully still, and when he spoke

made it look glowing and comfortable even in spite of the gray sky and falling rain. Colin looked rather like a picture himself. He was wrapped in a velvet dressing-gown and sat against a big brocaded cushion. He had a red spot on each cheek.

'Come in,' he said. 'I've been thinking about you all morning.'

'I've been thinking about you, too,' answered Mary. 'You don't know how frightened Martha is. She says Mrs Medlock will think she told me about you and then she will be sent away.'

He frowned.

'Go and tell her to come here,' he said. 'She is in the next room.'

Mary went and brought her back. Poor Martha was shaking in her shoes. Colin was still frowning.

'Have you to do what I please or have you not?' he demanded.

'I have to do what you please, sir,' Martha faltered, turning quite red.

'Has Medlock to do what I please?'

'Everybody has, sir,' said Martha.

'Well, then, if I order you to bring Miss Mary to me, how can Medlock send you away if she finds it out?'

'Please don't let her, sir,' pleaded Martha.

'I'll send her away if she dares to say a word about such a thing,' said Master Craven grandly. 'She wouldn't like that, I can tell you.'

'Thank you, sir,' bobbing a curtsy, 'I want to do my duty, sir.'

'What I want is your duty,' said Colin more grandly still. 'I'll take care of you. Now go away.'

When the door closed behind Martha, Colin found Mistress Mary gazing at him as if he had set her wondering.

'Why do you look at me like that?' he asked her. 'What are you thinking about?'

'I am thinking about two things.'

'What are they? Sit down and tell me.'

'This is the first one,' said Mary, seating herself on the big stool. 'Once in India I saw a boy who was a Rajah. He had rubies and emeralds and diamonds stuck all over him. He spoke to his people just as you spoke to Martha. Everybody had to do everything he told them—in a minute. I think they would have been killed if they hadn't.'

as she was herself. She didn't know what'd happen but he just stared at her an' says, 'You give me some water an' stop talkin'."

'Do you think he will die?' asked Mary.

'Mother says there's no reason why any child should live that gets no fresh air an' doesn't do nothin' but lie on his back an' read picture-books an' take medicine. He's weak and hates th' trouble o' bein' taken out o' doors, an' he gets cold so easy he says it makes him ill.'

Mary sat and looked at the fire.

'I wonder,' she said slowly, 'if it would not do him good to go out into a garden and watch things growing. It did me good.'

'One of th' worst fits he ever had,' said Martha, 'was one time they took him out where the roses is by the fountain. He'd been readin' in a paper about people gettin' somethin' he called 'rose cold' an' he began to sneeze an' said he'd got it an' then a new gardener as didn't know th' rules passed by an' looked at him curious. He threw himself into a passion an' he said he'd looked at him because he was going to be a hunchback. He cried himself into a fever an' was ill all night.'

'If he ever gets angry at me, I'll never go and see him again,' said Mary.

'He'll have thee if he wants thee,' said Martha. 'Tha' may as well know that at th' start.'

Very soon afterward a bell rang and she rolled up her knitting.

'I dare say th' nurse wants me to stay with him a bit,' she said. 'I hope he's in a good temper.'

She was out of the room about ten minutes and then she came back with a puzzled expression.

'Well, tha' has bewitched him,' she said. 'He's up on his sofa with his picture-books. He's told the nurse to stay away until six o'clock. I'm to wait in the next room. Th' minute she was gone he called me to him an' says, 'I want Mary Lennox to come and talk to me, and remember you're not to tell any one.' You'd better go as quick as you can.'

Mary was quite willing to go quickly. She did not want to see Colin as much as she wanted to see Dickon, but she wanted to see him very much.

There was a bright fire on the hearth when she entered his room, and in the daylight she saw it was a very beautiful room indeed. There were rich colours in the rugs and hangings and pictures and books on the walls which

dropped his voice to such a softness that it was curious that she could hear him, but she could.

'It's part o' th' springtime, this nest-buildin' is,' he said. 'I warrant it's been goin' on in th' same way every year since th' world was begun. They've got their way o' thinkin' and doin' things an' a body had better not meddle. You can lose a friend in springtime easier than any other season if you're too curious.'

'If we talk about him I can't help looking at him,' Mary said as softly as possible. 'We must talk of something else. There is something I want to tell you.'

'He'll like it better if us talks o' somethin' else,' said Dickon. 'What is it tha's got to tell me?'

'Well—do you know about Colin?' she whispered.

He turned his head to look at her.

'What does tha' know about him?' he asked.

'I've seen him. I have been to talk to him every day this week. He wants me to come. He says I'm making him forget about being ill and dying,' answered Mary.

Dickon looked actually relieved as soon as the surprise died away from his round face.

'I am glad o' that,' he exclaimed. 'I'm right down glad. It makes me easier. I knowed I must say nothin' about him an' I don't like havin' to hide things.'

'Don't you like hiding the garden?' said Mary.

'I'll never tell about it,' he answered. 'But I says to mother, 'Mother,' I says, 'I got a secret to keep. It's not a bad 'un, tha' knows that. It's no worse than hidin' where a bird's nest is. Tha' doesn't mind it, does tha'?"

Mary always wanted to hear about mother.

'What did she say?' she asked, not at all afraid to hear.

Dickon grinned sweet-temperedly.

'It was just like her, what she said,' he answered. 'She give my head a bit of a rub an' laughed an' she says, 'Eh, lad, tha' can have all th' secrets tha' likes. I've knowed thee twelve year'."

'How did you know about Colin?' asked Mary.

'Everybody as knowed about Mester Craven knowed there was a little lad as was like to be a cripple, an' they knowed Mester Craven didn't like him to

be talked about. Folks is sorry for Mester Craven because Mrs Craven was such a pretty young lady an' they was so fond of each other. Mrs Medlock stops in our cottage whenever she goes to Thwaite an' she doesn't mind talkin' to mother before us children, because she knows us has been brought up to be trusty. How did tha' find out about him? Martha was in fine trouble th' last time she came home. She said tha'd heard him frettin' an' tha' was askin' questions an' she didn't know what to say.'

Mary told him her story about the midnight wuthering of the wind which had wakened her and about the faint far-off sounds of the complaining voice which had led her down the dark corridors with her candle and had ended with her opening of the door of the dimly lighted room with the carven four-posted bed in the corner. When she described the small ivory-white face and the strange black-rimmed eyes Dickon shook his head.

'Them's just like his mother's eyes, only hers was always laughin', they say,' he said. 'They say as Mr Craven can't bear to see him when he's awake an' it's because his eyes is so like his mother's an' yet looks so different in his miserable bit of a face.'

'Do you think he wants him to die?' whispered Mary.

'No, but he wishes he'd never been born. Mother she says that's th' worst thing on earth for a child. Them as is not wanted scarce ever thrives. Mester Craven he'd buy anythin' as money could buy for th' poor lad but 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.

'I think he almost liked me,' Mary answered.

'Then tha' must have bewitched him!' decided Martha, drawing a long breath.

'Do you mean Magic?' inquired Mary. 'I've heard about Magic in India, but I can't make it. I just went into his room and I was so surprised to see him I stood and stared. And then he turned round and stared at me. And he thought I was a ghost or a dream and I thought perhaps he was. And it was so queer being there alone together in the middle of the night and not knowing about each other. And we began to ask each other questions. And when I asked him if I must go away he said I must not.'

'Th' world's comin' to a end!' gasped Martha.

'What is the matter with him?' asked Mary.

'Nobody knows for sure and certain,' said Martha. 'Mr Craven went off his head like when he was born. Th' doctors thought he'd have to be put in a 'sylum. It was because Mrs Craven died like I told you. He wouldn't set eyes on th' baby. He just raved and said it'd be another hunchback like him and it'd better die.'

'Is Colin a hunchback?' Mary asked. 'He didn't look like one.'

'He isn't yet,' said Martha. 'But he began all wrong. Mother said that there was enough trouble and raging in th' house to set any child wrong. They was afraid his back was weak an' they've always been takin' care of it—keepin' him lyin' down and not lettin' him walk. Once they made him wear a brace but he fretted so he was downright ill. Then a big doctor came to see him an' made them take it off. He talked to th' other doctor quite rough—in a polite way. He said there'd been too much medicine and too much lettin' him have his own way.'

'I think he's a very spoiled boy,' said Mary.

'He's th' worst young nowt as ever was!' said Martha. 'I won't say as he hasn't been ill a good bit. He's had coughs an' colds that's nearly killed him two or three times. Once he had rheumatic fever an' once he had typhoid. Eh! Mrs Medlock did get a fright then. He'd been out of his head an' she was talkin' to th' nurse, thinkin' he didn't know nothin', an' she said, 'He'll die this time sure enough, an' best thing for him an' for everybody.' An' she looked at him an' there he was with his big eyes open, starin' at her as sensible