

# The Secret Garden

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# Chapter 1

## *There's No One Left*

WHEN Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour<sup>1</sup> expression. Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another. Her father had held a position under the English Government and had always been busy and ill himself, and

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<sup>1</sup>**sour** n. unpleasant or unfriendly

her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse<sup>2</sup> herself with gay people. She had not wanted a little girl at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an Ayah<sup>3</sup>, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Mem Sahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible. So when she was a sickly, fretful<sup>4</sup>, ugly little baby she was kept out of the way, and when she became a sickly, fretful, toddling<sup>5</sup> thing she was kept out of the way also. She never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants, and as they always obeyed her and gave her her own way in everything, because the Mem Sahib would be angry if she was disturbed by her crying, by the time she was six years old she was tyrannical<sup>6</sup> and selfish a little pig as ever lived. The young English governess who came to teach her to read and write disliked her so much that she gave up her place in three months, and when other governess came to try to fill it they always went away in a shorter time than the first one. So if Mary had not chosen to really want to know how to read books she would

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<sup>2</sup>**amuse** v. to make someone laugh or smile

<sup>3</sup>**Ayah** n. a domestic servant

<sup>4</sup>**fretful** adj. upset and worried

<sup>5</sup>**toddle** v. (*of a young child*) to walk with short, unsteady steps

<sup>6</sup>**tyrannical** adj. using power over people in a way that is cruel and unfair

never have learned her letters at all.

One frightfully hot morning, when she was about nine years old, she awakened feeling very cross, and she became crosser still when she saw that the servant who stood by her bedside was not her Ayah.

“Why did you come?” she said to the strange woman. “I will not let you stay. Send my Ayah to me.”

The woman looked frightened, but she only stammered<sup>7</sup> that the Ayah could not come and when Mary threw herself into a passion and beat and kicked her, she looked only more frightened and repeated that it was not possible for the Ayah to come to Missie Sahib.

There was something mysterious in the air that morning. Nothing was done in its regular order and several of the native servants seemed missing, while those whom Mary saw slunk<sup>8</sup> or hurried about with ashy and scared faces. But no one would tell her anything and her Ayah did not come. She was actually left alone as the morning went on, and at last she wandered out into the garden and began to play by herself under a tree near the veranda<sup>9</sup>. She pretended that she was making a flower-bed,

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<sup>7</sup>**stammer** v. to speak with many pauses and repetitions because you have a speech problem or because you are very nervous, frightened, etc.

<sup>8</sup>**slink** v. (**pt./pp.** slunk) to move in a way that does not attract attention especially because you are embarrassed, afraid, or doing something wrong

<sup>9</sup>**veranda** n. a long, open structure on the outside of a building

and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus<sup>10</sup> blossoms<sup>11</sup> into little heaps of earth, all the time growing more and more angry and muttering<sup>12</sup> to herself the things she would say and the names she would call Saidie when she returned.

“Pig! Pig! Daughter of Pigs!” she said, because to a native a pig is the worst insult<sup>13</sup> of all.

She was grinding<sup>14</sup> her teeth and saying this over and over again when she heard her mother come out on the veranda with some one. She was with a fair young man and they stood talking together in low strange voices. Mary knew the fair young man who looked like a boy. She had heard that he was a very young officer who had just come from England. The child stared at him, but she stared most at her mother. She always did this when she had a chance to see her, because the Mem Sahib—Mary used to call her that oftener than anything else—was such a tall, slim<sup>15</sup>, pretty person and wore such lovely clothes. Her hair was like curly silk and she had a delicate<sup>16</sup> little

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that has a roof

<sup>10</sup>**hibiscus** n. a type of shrub that has large colorful flowers

<sup>11</sup>**blossom** n. a flower especially of a fruit tree

<sup>12</sup>**mutter** v. to complain in a quiet or indirect way

<sup>13</sup>**insult** n. a rude or offensive act or statement

<sup>14</sup>**grind** v. to cause (things) to rub against each other in a forceful way that produces a harsh noise

<sup>15</sup>**slim** adj. thin in an attractive way

<sup>16</sup>**delicate** adj. attractive because of being soft, gentle, light, etc.

nose which seemed to be disdaining<sup>17</sup> things, and she had large laughing eyes. All her clothes were thin and floating, and Mary said they were “full of lace”. They looked fuller of lace than ever this morning, but her eyes were not laughing at all. They were large and scared and lifted imploringly<sup>18</sup> to the fair boy officer’s face.

“Is it so very bad? Oh, is it?” Mary heard her say.

“Awfully,” the young man answered in a trembling<sup>19</sup> voice. “Awfully, Mrs. Lennox. You ought to have gone to the hills two weeks ago.”

The Mem Sahib wrung<sup>20</sup> her hands.

“Oh, I know I ought!” she cried. “I only stayed to go to that silly dinner party. What a fool I was!”

At that very moment such a loud sound of wailing<sup>21</sup> broke out from the servants’ quarters that she clutched<sup>22</sup> the young man’s arm, and Mary stood shivering<sup>23</sup> from head to foot. The wailing grew wilder and wilder.

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<sup>17</sup>**disdain** v. to strongly dislike or disapprove of (someone or something)

<sup>18</sup>**implore** v. (**adj.** imploring, **adv.** imploringly) to make a very serious or emotional request to (someone)

<sup>19</sup>**tremble** v. to shake slightly because you are afraid, nervous, excited, etc.

<sup>20</sup>**wring** v. (**pt./pp.** wrung) to get (something) out of someone or something with a lot of effort

<sup>21</sup>**wail** v. to make a loud, long cry of sadness or pain

<sup>22</sup>**clutch** v. to hold onto (someone or something) tightly with your hand

<sup>23</sup>**shiver** v. to shake slightly because you are cold, afraid, etc.

“What is it? What is it?” Mrs. Lennox gasped<sup>24</sup>.

“Some one has died,” answered the boy officer. “You did not say it had broken out among your servants.”

“I did not know!” the Mem Sahib cried. “Come with me! Come with me!” and she turned and ran into the house.

After that, appalling<sup>25</sup> things happened, and the mysteriousness of the morning was explained to Mary. The cholera<sup>26</sup> had broken out in its most fatal form and people were dying like flies. The Ayah had been taken ill in the night, and it was because she had just died that the servants had wailed in the huts<sup>27</sup>. Before the next day three other servants were dead and others had run away in terror. There was panic on every side, and dying people in all the bungalows<sup>28</sup>.

During the confusion and bewilderment<sup>29</sup> of the second day Mary hid herself in the nursery<sup>30</sup> and was forgotten by everyone. Nobody thought of her, nobody

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<sup>24</sup>**gasp** v. to breathe in suddenly and loudly with your mouth open because of surprise, shock, or pain

<sup>25</sup>**appall** v. to cause (someone) to feel fear, shock, or disgust

<sup>26</sup>**cholera** n. a serious disease that causes severe vomiting and diarrhea and that often results in death

<sup>27</sup>**hut** n. a small and simple house or building

<sup>28</sup>**bungalow** n. a house that is all on one level

<sup>29</sup>**bewilder** v. (**n.** bewilderment) to confuse (someone) very much

<sup>30</sup>**nursery** n. a room where children sleep, play, and sometimes taught

wanted her, and strange things happened of which she knew nothing. Mary alternately cried and slept through the hours. She only knew that people were ill and that she heard mysterious and frightening sounds. Once she crept<sup>31</sup> into the dining-room and found it empty, though a partly finished meal was on the table and chairs and plates looked as if they had been hastily pushed back when the diners rose suddenly for some reason. The child ate some fruit and biscuits, and being thirsty she drank a glass of wine which stood nearly filled. It was sweet, and she did not know how strong it was. Very soon it made her intensely<sup>32</sup> drowsy<sup>33</sup>, and she went back to her nursery and shut herself in again, frightened by cries she heard in the huts and by the hurrying sound of feet. The wine made her so sleepy that she could scarcely<sup>34</sup> keep her eyes open and she lay down on her bed and knew nothing more for a long time.

Many things happened during the hours in which she slept so heavily, but she was not disturbed by the wails and the sound of things being carried in and out of the bungalow.

When she awakened she lay and stared at the wall. The house was perfectly still. She had never known it

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<sup>31</sup>**creep** v. (**pt./pp.** crept) to move slowly with the body close to the ground

<sup>32</sup>**intense** adj. (**adv.** intensely) very great in degree

<sup>33</sup>**drowsy** adj. tired and ready to fall asleep

<sup>34</sup>**scarcely** adv. almost not at all



to be so silent before. She heard neither voices nor footsteps, and wondered if everybody had got well of the cholera and all the trouble was over. She wondered also who would take care of her now her Ayah was dead. There would be a new Ayah, and perhaps she would know some new stories. Mary had been rather tired of the old ones. She did not cry because her nurse had died. She was not an affectionate<sup>35</sup> child and had never cared much for anyone. The noise and hurrying about and wailing over the cholera had frightened her, and she had been angry because no one seemed to remember that she was alive. Everyone was too panic-stricken to think of a little girl no one was fond<sup>36</sup> of. When people had the cholera it seemed that they remembered nothing but themselves. But if everyone had got well again, surely some one would remember and come to look for her.

But no one came, and as she lay waiting the house seemed to grow more and more silent. She heard something rustling<sup>37</sup> on the matting<sup>38</sup> and when she looked down she saw a little snake gliding<sup>39</sup> along and watching her with eyes like jewels. She was not frightened, because he was a harmless little thing who would not hurt

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<sup>35</sup>**affectionate** adj. feeling or showing love and affection

<sup>36</sup>**fond** adj. feeling or showing love of friendship

<sup>37</sup>**rustle** v. to make a soft, light sound because parts of something are touching or rubbing against each other

<sup>38</sup>**matting** n. rough cloth used especially as floor covering

<sup>39</sup>**glide** v. to move in a smooth way

her and he seemed in a hurry to get out of the room. He slipped<sup>40</sup> under the door as she watched him.

“How queer<sup>41</sup> and quiet it is,” she said. “It sounds as if there were no one in the bungalow but me and the snake.”

Almost the next minute she heard footsteps in the compound, and then on the veranda. They were men’s footsteps, and the men entered the bungalow and talked in low voices. No one went to meet or speak to them and they seemed to open doors and look into rooms.

“What desolation<sup>42</sup>!” she heard one voice say. “That pretty, pretty woman! I suppose the child, too. I heard there was a child, though no one ever saw her.”

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<sup>40</sup>**slip** v. to move into or out of a place without being noticed

<sup>41</sup>**queer** adj. odd or unusual

<sup>42</sup>**desolation** n. extreme sadness caused by loss or loneliness