

The Secret Garden

(USA) *Frances Hodgson Burnett*

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 sour¹ 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

¹**sour** n. unpleasant or unfriendly

her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse² 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 Ayah³, 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, fretful⁴, ugly little baby she was kept out of the way, and when she became a sickly, fretful, toddling⁵ 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 tyrannical⁶ 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

²**amuse** v. to make someone laugh or smile

³**Ayah** n. a domestic servant

⁴**fretful** adj. upset and worried

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

⁶**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.”