

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 Gov-

¹**sour** n. unpleasant or unfriendly

ernment and had always been busy and ill himself, and 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

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

than the first one. So if Mary had not chosen to really want to know how to read books she would 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 stammered⁷ 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 slunk⁸ 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

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

⁸**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

the garden and began to play by herself under a tree near the veranda⁹. She pretended that she was making a flower-bed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus¹⁰ blossoms¹¹ into little heaps of earth, all the time growing more and more angry and muttering¹² 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 insult¹³ of all.

She was grinding¹⁴ 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

⁹**veranda** n. a long, open structure on the outside of a building that has a roof

¹⁰**hibiscus** n. a type of shrub that has large colorful flowers

¹¹**blossom** n. a flower especially of a fruit tree

¹²**mutter** v. to complain in a quiet or indirect way

¹³**insult** n. a rude or offensive act or statement

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

anything else—was such a tall, slim¹⁵, pretty person and wore such lovely clothes. Her hair was like curly silk and she had a delicate¹⁶ little nose which seemed to be disdaining¹⁷ 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 imploringly¹⁸ 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 trembling¹⁹ voice. “Awfully, Mrs. Lennox. You ought to have gone to the hills two weeks ago.”

The Mem Sahib wrung²⁰ 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 wail-

¹⁵**slim** adj. thin in an attractive way

¹⁶**delicate** adj. attractive because of being soft, gentle, light, etc.

¹⁷**disdain** v. to strongly dislike or disapprove of (someone or something)

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

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

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

ing²¹ broke out from the servants' quarters that she clutched²² the young man's arm, and Mary stood shivering²³ from head to foot. The wailing grew wilder and wilder.

"What is it? What is it?" Mrs. Lennox gasped²⁴.

"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, appalling²⁵ things happened, and the mysteriousness of the morning was explained to Mary. The cholera²⁶ 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 huts²⁷. Before the next day three other servants were dead and others had run away in terror. There was panic on every side, and

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

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

²³**shiver** v. to shake slightly because you are cold, afraid, etc.

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

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

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

²⁷**hut** n. a small and simple house or building

dying people in all the bungalows²⁸.

During the confusion and bewilderment²⁹ of the second day Mary hid herself in the nursery³⁰ and was forgotten by everyone. Nobody thought of her, nobody 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 crept³¹ 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 intensely³² drowsy³³, 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

²⁸**bungalow** n. a house that is all on one level

²⁹**bewilder** v. (**n.** bewilderment) to confuse (someone) very much

³⁰**nursery** n. a room where children sleep, play, and sometimes taught

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

³²**intense** adj. (**adv.** intensely) very great in degree

³³**drowsy** adj. tired and ready to fall asleep

that she could scarcely³⁴ 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 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 affectionate³⁵ 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 fond³⁶ of. When people had the cholera it seemed that they remembered nothing but themselves. But if everyone had got well

³⁴**scarcely** adv. almost not at all

³⁵**affectionate** adj. feeling or showing love and affection

³⁶**fond** adj. feeling or showing love of friendship

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 rustling³⁷ on the matting³⁸ and when she looked down she saw a little snake gliding³⁹ along and watching her with eyes like jewels. She was not frightened, because he was a harmless little thing who would not hurt her and he seemed in a hurry to get out of the room. He slipped⁴⁰ under the door as she watched him.

“How queer⁴¹ 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 desolation⁴²!” 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.”

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

³⁸**matting** n. rough cloth used especially as floor covering

³⁹**glide** v. to move in a smooth way

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

⁴¹**queer** adj. odd or unusual

⁴²**desolation** n. extreme sadness caused by loss or loneliness

Mary was standing in the middle of the nursery when they opened the door a few minutes later. She looked an ugly, cross little thing and was frowning⁴³ because she was beginning to be hungry and feel disgracefully neglected⁴⁴. The first man who came in was a large officer she had once seen talking to her father. He looked tired and troubled, but when he saw her he was so startled⁴⁵ that he almost jumped back.

“Barney!” he cried out. “There is child here! A child alone! In a place like this! Mercy on us, who is she!”

“I am Mary Lennox,” the little girl said, drawing herself up stiffly⁴⁶. She thought the man was very rude to call her father’s bungalow “A place like this!” “I fell asleep when everyone had the cholera and I have only just wakened up. Why does nobody come?”

“It is the child no one ever saw!” exclaimed the man, turning to his companions. “She has actually been forgotten!”

“Why was I forgotten?” Mary said, stamping her foot. “Why does nobody come?”

⁴³**frown** v. to make a frown in anger, concentration, etc.

⁴⁴**neglect** v. to fail to take care of or to give attention to (someone or something)

⁴⁵**startle** v. to surprise or frighten (someone) suddenly and usually not seriously

⁴⁶**stiff** adj. (**adv.** stiffly) difficult to bend or move

The young man whose name was Barney looked at her very sadly. Mary even thought she saw him wink his eyes as if to wink tears away.

“Poor little kid!” he said. “There is nobody left to come.”

It was in that strange and sudden way that Mary found out that she had neither father nor mother left; that they had died and been carried away in the night, and that the few native servants who had not died also had left the house as quickly as they could get out of it, none of them even remembering that there was a Missie Sahib. That was why the place was so quiet. It was true that there was no one in the bungalow but herself and the little rustling snake.

Chapter 2

Mistress Mary Quite Contrary

MARY had liked to look at her mother from a distance and she had thought her very pretty, but as she knew very little of her she could scarcely have been expected to love her or to miss her very much when she was gone. She did not miss her at all, in fact, and as she was a self-absorbed¹ child she gave her entire thought to herself, as she had always done. If she had

¹**self-absorbed** adj. only caring about and interested in yourself

been older she would no doubt have been very anxious² at being left alone in the world, but she was very young, and as she had always been taken care of, she supposed she always would be. What she thought was that she would like to know if she was going to nice people, who would be polite to her and give her her own way as her Ayah and the other native servants had done.

She knew that she was not going to stay at the English clergyman's³ house where she was taken at first. She did not want to stay. The English clergyman was poor and he had five children nearly all the same age and they wore shabby⁴ clothes and were always quarrelling⁵ and snatching⁶ toys from each other. Mary hated their untidy bungalow and was disagreeable to them that after the first day or two nobody would play with her. By the second day they had given her a nickname which made her furious⁷.

It was Basil who thought of it first. Basil was a little

²**anxious** adj. afraid or nervous especially about what may happen

³**clergyman** n. a man who is a member of the clergy especially in a Christian church

⁴**shabby** adj. in poor condition especially because of age or use

⁵**quarrel** v. to argue about or disagree with something

⁶**snatch** v. to take (something) quickly or eagerly

⁷**furious** adj. very angry

boy with impudent⁸ blue eyes and a turned-up nose, and Mary hated him. She was playing by herself under a tree, just as she had been playing the day the cholera broke out. She was making heaps of earth and paths for a garden and Basil came and stood near to watch her. Presently he got rather interested and suddenly made a suggestion.

“Why don’t you put a heap of stones there and pretend it is a rockery⁹?” he said. “There in the middle,” and he leaned¹⁰ over her to point.

“Go away!” cried Mary. “I don’t want boys. Go away!”

For a moment Basil looked angry, and then he began to tease¹¹. He was always teasing his sisters. He danced round and round her and made faces and sang and laughed.

*“Mistress Mary, quite contrary¹²,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells, and cockle¹³ shells,*

⁸**impudent** adj. failing to show proper respect and courtesy

⁹**rockery** n. (*Brit*) rock garden

¹⁰**lean** v. to bend or move from a straight position

¹¹**tease** v. to laugh at and criticize (someone) in a way that is either friendly and playful or cruel and unkind

¹²**contrary** adj. unwilling to obey or behave well

¹³**cockle** n. a type of shellfish with a shell that has two parts and is shaped like a heart

And marigolds¹⁴ all in a row.”

He sang it until the other children heard and laughed, too; and the crosser Mary got, the more they sang “Mistress Mary, quite contrary”; and after that as long as she stayed with them they called her “Mistress Mary Quite Contrary” when they spoke of her to each other, and often when they spoke to her.

“You are going to be sent home,” Basil said to her, “at the end of the week. And we’re glad of it.”

“I am glad of it, too,” answered Mary. “Where is home?”

“She doesn’t know where home is!” said Basil, with seven-year-old scorn¹⁵. “It’s England, of course. Our grandmama lives there and our sister Mabel was sent to her last year. You are not going to your grandmama. You have none. You are going to your uncle. His name is Mr. Archibald Craven.”

“I don’t know anything about him,” snapped¹⁶ Mary.

“I know you don’t,” Basil answered. “You don’t know anything. Girls never do. I heard father and mother talking about him. He lives in a great, big,

¹⁴**marigold** n. a plant that is grown for its bright yellow or orange flowers

¹⁵**scorn** n. a feeling that someone or something is not worthy of any respect or approval

¹⁶**snap** v. to speak using short, angry sentences or phrases

desolate¹⁷ old house in the country and no one goes near him. He's so cross he won't let them, and they wouldn't come if he would let them. He's hunchback¹⁸, and he's horrid¹⁹."

"I don't believe you," said Mary; and she turned her back and stuck her fingers in her ears, because she would not listen any more.

But she thought over it a great deal afterward; and when Mrs. Crawford told her that night that she was going to sail away to England in a few days and go to her uncle, Mr. Archibald Craven, who lived at Miselthwaite Manor, she looked so stony and stubbornly²⁰ uninterested that they did not know what to think about her. They tried to be kind to her, but she only turned her face away when Mrs. Crawford attempted to kiss her, and held herself stiffly when Mr. Crawford patted her shoulder.

"She is such a plain child," Mrs. Crawford said pityingly, afterward. "And her mother was such a pretty creature. She had a very pretty manner, too, and Mary has the most unattractive ways I ever saw in a child.

¹⁷**desolate** adj. lacking the people, plants, animals, etc., that make people feel welcome in a place

¹⁸**hunchback** n. a back in which the spine is curved in an abnormal way

¹⁹**horrid** adj. very unpleasant

²⁰**stubborn** adj. (**adv.** stubbornly) refusing to change your ideas or to stop doing something

The children call her ‘Mistress Mary Ouite Contrary’, and though it’s naughty²¹ of them, one can’t help understanding it.”

“Perhaps if her mother had carried her pretty face and her pretty manners oftener into the nursery Mary might have learned some pretty ways too. It is very sad, now the poor beautiful thing is gone, to remember that many people never knew that she had a child at all.”

“I believe she scarcely ever looked at her,” sighed Mrs. Crawford. “When Ayah was dead there was no one to give a thought to the little thing. Think of the servants running away and leaving her all alone in that deserted bungalow. Colonel McGrew said he nearly jumped out of his skin when he opened the door and found her standing by herself in the middle of the room.”

Mary made the long voyage to England under the care of an officer’s wife, who was taking her children to leave them in a boarding-school. She was very much absorbed in her own little boy and girl, and was rather glad to hand the child over to the woman Mr. Archibald Craven sent to meet her, in London. The woman was his housekeeper at Misselthwaite Manor, and her name

²¹**naughty** adj. behaving badly—used especially to describe a child who does not behave properly or obey a parent, teacher, etc.

was Mrs. Medlock. She was a stout²² woman, with very red cheeks and sharp black eyes. She wore a very purple bonnet²³ with purple velvet²⁴ flowers which stuck up and trembled when she moved her head. Mary did not like her at all, but as she very seldom²⁵ liked people there was nothing remarkable in that; besides which it was very evident Mrs. Medlock did not think much of her.

“My word! she’s a plain little piece of goods!” she said. “And we’d heard that her mother was a beauty. She hasn’t handed much of it down, has she, ma’am?”

“Perhaps she will improve as she grows older,” the officer’s wife said good-naturedly. “If she were not so sallow²⁶ and had a nicer expression... her features are rather good. Children alter so much.”

“She’ll have to alter a good deal,” answered Mrs. Medlock. “And there’s nothing likely to improve children at Misselthwaite—if you ask me!”

They thought Mary was not listening because she was standing a little apart from them at the window of

²²**stout** adj. having a large body that is wide with fat or muscles

²³**bonnet** n. a hat that ties under the chin

²⁴**velvet** n. a soft type of cloth that has short raised fibers on one side

²⁵**seldom** adv. almost never

²⁶**sallow** adj. slightly yellow in a way that does not look healthy

the private hotel they had gone to. She was watching the passing buses and cabs and people, but she heard quite well and was made very curious about her uncle and the place he lived in. What sort of a place was it, and what would he be like? What was a hunchback? She had never seen one. Perhaps there were none in India.

Since she had been living in other people's houses and had had no Ayah, she had begun to feel lonely and to think queer thoughts which were new to her. She had begun to wonder why she had never seemed to belong to anyone even when her father and mother had been alive. Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but she had never seemed to really be anyone's little girl. She had had servants, and food and clothes, but no one had taken any notice of her. She did not know that this was because she was a disagreeable child; but then, of course, she did not know she was disagreeable. She often thought that other people were, but she did not know that she was so herself.