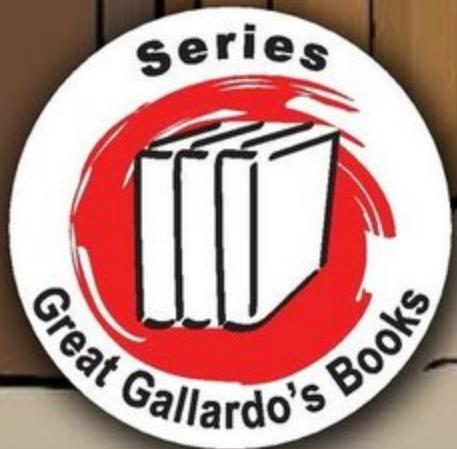


LEVELED BOOK • W

Miguel in the Secret Garden



Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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www.readinga-z.com



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Groaning About Gardening

Roses. Oregano. Raspberries. Miguel Ventura was exhausted. The weeds. The thorns. The smells. Working in the family garden was not how he planned to spend his summer.

"We need your help," his dad said, "to grow food for the shop." Miguel and his little sister, Teresa, often lent a hand at the Ventura family sandwich shop.

"Gardens,"
Miguel's dad glanced up, "can be magic."

"Yeah, right."

"The Earth has healing powers." His dad cut a bouquet of yellow roses. "The peace would do you some good."

"I don't want peace," Miguel said. "I want adventure and danger!"

Dad rolled his eyes.

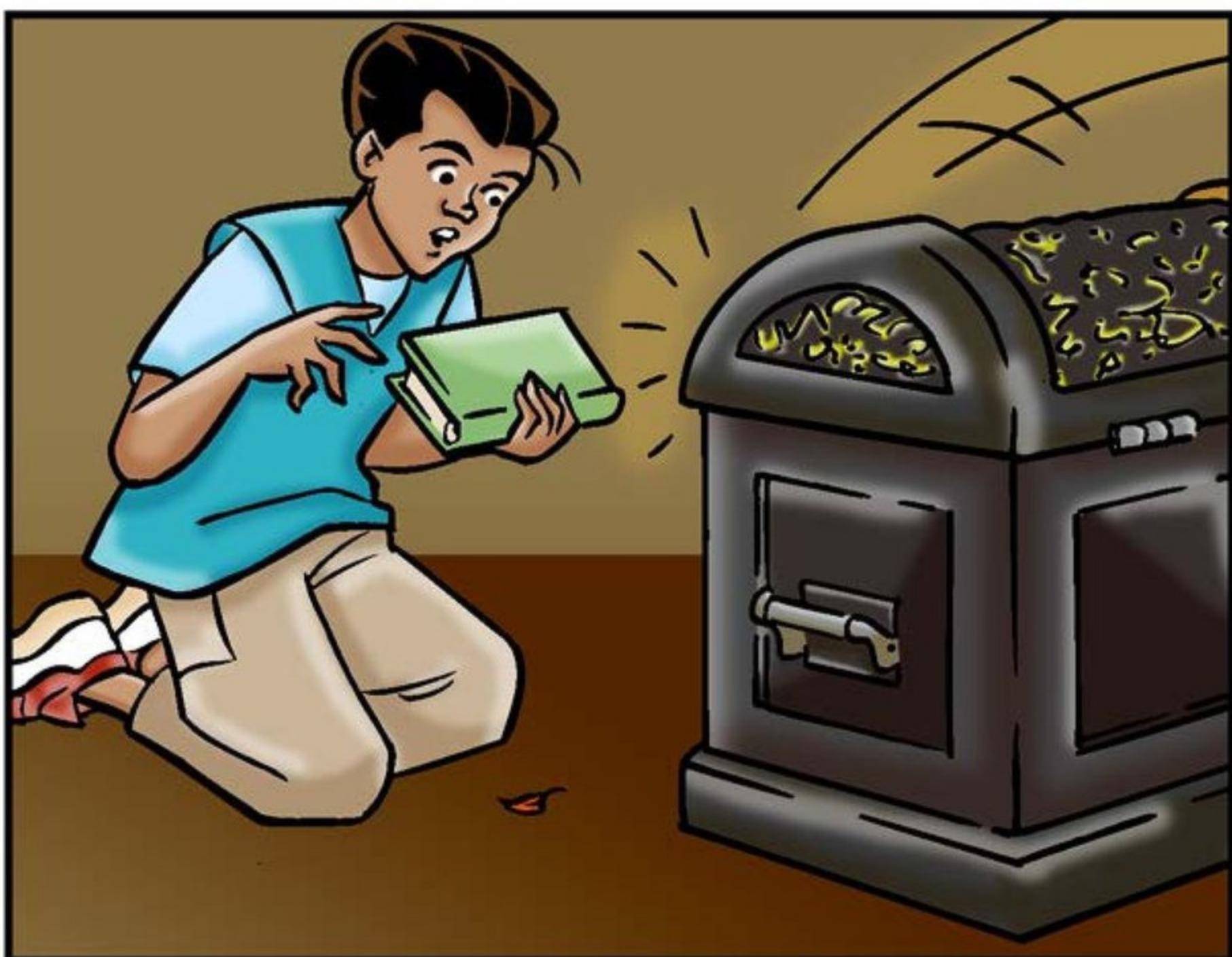




Miguel took a break in the coolness of the shop. Mom and Teresa were baking bread, so he sneaked away to the loft. He was in **desperate** need of The Great Gallardo's books. A while back, Miguel had discovered a chest full of magic books that belonged to his great-grandfather George, a magician called The Great Gallardo. Miguel went into these stories as an actual character. He'd become Huckleberry Finn from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and the Scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz*. Every time Miguel entered a story, he usually had to solve a big problem. Sometimes it was pretty dangerous. And danger was what Miguel needed.

Up at the loft, a red feather rested near the rusty lock of the chest. When Miguel first chose one of The Great Gallardo's books, he usually found a strange object from the story. Miguel spent hours trying to figure out how he became a real, live character in a book. Was it a spell? An enchantment? The Great Gallardo's magic could be risky. Maybe it was a curse.

A colorful book sat atop all the others. He picked it up. *The Secret Garden*. It was a good book he remembered from the beginning of the year, but it wasn't dangerous enough. Miguel tried to choose another. But the lid had closed. The chest was locked!



Once a book had magically been chosen for him, there was no going back, so he opened to page 181. “The robin flew from his swinging spray of ivy . . .” The words scrambled on the page. “. . . trill on of the and he loud, opened top his an sang beak a wall lovely.”

Dizziness swept over Miguel like a wave. He closed his eyes, and a gust of wind swept him up, lifting him high above until he felt weightless—like air. Was he flying?





Bird Talk

Miguel *was* flying! He soared miles and miles above green pasture. With each gust of wind, the air flowed under him, lifting him higher. He rocketed through the air, flapping hard . . .
FLAPPING?

Miguel tried to extend his arms but found that he had wings and feathers instead. “I’m the robin!” he said as he began to flap his wings.

Never in any Great Gallardo book had Miguel become an animal. He pointed his beak and dove downward. The ground rushed up at him as though he were fast-forwarding a movie on a screen. With wings spread wide, the wind brushed against him, but the feathers **insulated** him from the cold. Being a bird was incredible!

A big gust of wind rushed through the oak trees and lifted trailing sprays of untrimmed ivy. During the gust, Miguel noticed a wall between the vines. Could this be the secret garden in the book?

Swooping down with the next gust of wind, he saw things in patches, almost as though he were looking at a map, one grid at a time. Details popped out as though they were **three-dimensional**. Miguel zeroed in on a section of the brick wall. He fluttered around and around the ivy, until one more big rush of wind lifted up a thick patch, revealing a round doorknob. It was the entrance to the secret garden!

A small wave of excitement fluttered through his feathers, but his first **instinct** about this story soon returned. This was not going to be the exciting adventure he hoped for. He regretted having climbed into the loft.



A whistling sound drew him down and around the garden, where he found a man tending the roses. “That has to be Ben, one of the groundskeepers!”

Miguel fluttered above his head.

“You’re at it again, today, robin,” Ben said. “Mary is over there!”

Miguel rose on an **updraft** and cruised above the trees again. He caught sight of a young girl searching in the orchard as though she’d lost something. Miguel let a current of air gently lower him to a branch of ivy. “Follow me, Mary!” he squawked at her. “There’s something I must show you.”



Mary stared at him and cocked her head.

He quickly remembered that robins didn't speak English; his words were only chirps and cheeps. He tried again, but no matter what he said, it came out something like *cheerily, cheer up, cheer up.*

How could he get Mary to understand him? He hopped up and down, flapped his wings, and bobbed his head.

"What a strange bird," Mary said.

Miguel shook his head back and forth. He stood on one foot. To get her attention, Miguel belted out the best bird-song he could muster. But as hard as he tried, the song came out sounding like the whispery words *hisselly-hisselly*.

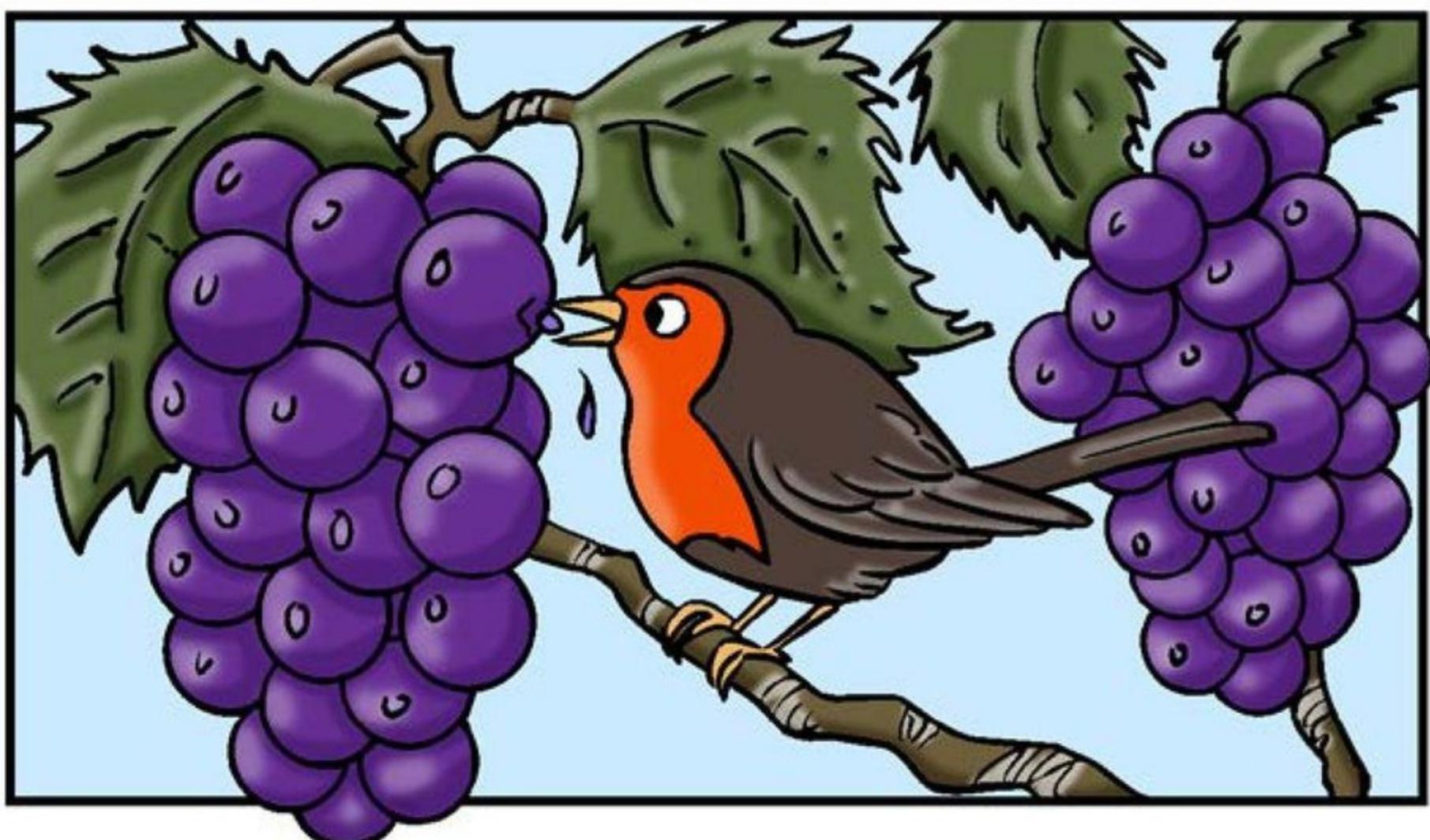
Mary smiled. "Thank you for the song, dear robin, but I'm trying to find a lost garden that was my aunt's favorite place." She skipped away down the path, leaving a most sorrowful bird behind.

This was going to be tougher than he thought. Miguel's frustration was building. How could he talk to her if she didn't speak his language?

A Snack for a Fox

After a little nap in the oaks, Miguel awoke to the grumblings of his stomach. He fluttered down onto a rock. A tiny school of fish headed downstream in a creek. *Too fishy for lunch.* A squiggly earthworm squirmed in the mud below him. *Too mushy for a snack.* Miguel sighed. If he didn't find something to eat soon, he'd have no energy to help Mary find the secret garden.

He flew up and away when he noticed a large patch of land lined with rows and rows of vining plants. As he landed in the field, a sweet scent wafted through the air. It was a vineyard full of plump purple grapes—*just right for lunch!* He pecked and pecked away at the fruit, which restored a bit of his body's energy with each morsel he ate.





Amid the feast, Miguel heard a strange sound. It was soft like a flute, but lighter, almost like trees blowing in the breeze. A boy with rosy cheeks walked up to him, flute in hand. "Hello, fair robin." Several squirrels and a small rabbit peeked out of pockets on his worn jacket. A little red fox followed at his heels. This must be Mary's friend Dickon; he had a knack for talking with animals. Surely he could help Miguel.

"I need to find Mary," Miguel chirped.

"Slow down—I don't speak robin very well," Dickon chuckled as he sat down on a stump. The fox hopped up to his lap.

"I need to find a girl named Mary." Miguel tried to speak clearly, but he knew that each word was merely bird chatter. "Mary. Mary. MARY!" His words **spewed** out like a bird alarm, *tuktuk, tuktuk, tuktuk!*

Robin talk was **indecipherable!** Miguel stared at Dickon, willing him to understand his request. But instead, the dark eyes of the fox stared back. Miguel froze, quickly realizing that he was the perfect size for a tasty treat.

"Tell me again, robin," Dickon said.

But before Miguel could utter one little chirp, the fox's eyes narrowed and its ears stood erect. Miguel's heart raced. He had to get out of there—NOW! With a **swivel** of his head, Miguel lifted his wings.

The fox lunged.

"Stop!" cried Dickon.

Miguel glanced back. He flapped his wings but found it difficult to fly in a panic.

He ran forward, but every time he tried to lift off, the fox sped closer.





For a moment, his wings seemed useless, so he hid in a hollow log. A narrow snout shoved its way in. Miguel screeched. Fluttering out the other side, he waddled forward, flapping his wings.

His feet floated off the ground. He flapped.
Pump. Pump. Pump.

Just as he began to fly, the fox swatted him down.

A pain shot through his body. He hit the ground with a *thud*.

He tried to stand, but his wings felt heavy, as though he wore an iron blanket. The eyes of the fox burned into his. Miguel's eyes fluttered. Then all went dark.

Broken Wing

Miguel awoke to warmth—a cozy feeling that reminded him of being tucked away in his bed at home on a rainy night. He blinked his robin eyes, and soon things became clear. Miguel sat inside a box filled with shredded cloth. He was still alive!

“Don’t fret, dear robin.” Dickon stroked his wings. “You’re safe.”

Dickon’s house had a fire burning in the hearth, and herbs and dried fruit hung from hooks along the wall. And best of all, there was no fox!

“I do apologize for the impoliteness of my fox,” Dickon said. “Sometimes, nature gets the best of him.”



Miguel's right wing ached, a constant jabbing pain as though he'd broken his arm. How would he ever take Mary to the garden door if he couldn't even fly?

"I must get Mary to the garden!" Miguel chirped, lifting one wing.

"It's broken," Dickon said. "But I will care for you."

Could Dickon understand him? "I must get to the garden!" he chirped.

Before Dickon could respond, a knock came from the small wooden door. Miguel took in a deep breath as it creaked open.

Mary!

Miguel chirped and hollered and sang a chorus of robin song. He hopped up as best he could with a broken wing and bobbed his head.

"I think he has a message for you!" Dickon ushered Mary over to the robin.

"That strange bird again," she said. "He behaved that way yesterday."

"The door to the garden!" Miguel chattered. "I know where it is!" With all the strength he could find, he hopped out of the box and onto the table.



Ever so carefully, Miguel jumped down to a chair, then onto the floor. Pain flashed through his wing. He waddled over to the door, standing there, staring forward.

"I think he wants to show us something," Mary said.

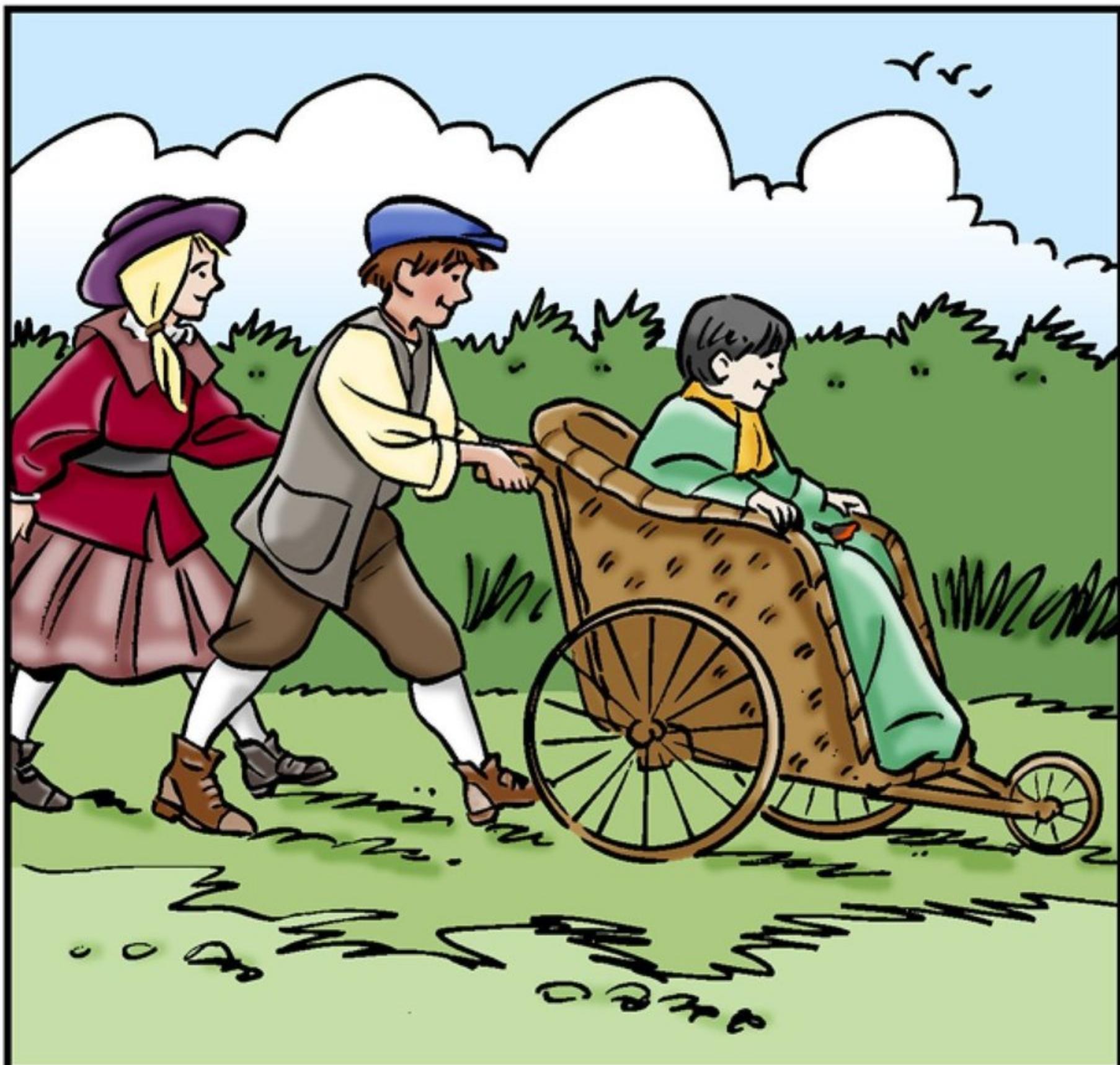
"But he can't fly." Dickon scooped him up.

"No, but I've got the perfect idea," Miguel said. "Follow me!"

Tucked away in Dickon's pocket, Miguel led them out of the small house and up the path toward the manor. Like a game of hot and cold, he chirped and whistled to keep them moving in the right direction. Inside the house, they walked down endless dark **mahogany** hallways lined with doors. Finally, Miguel took them to the final door. This was the room of Colin—the boy who most needed the secret garden's healing powers.

Miguel hopped out of Dickon's pocket and urged Dickon to open the door. From the bed, Colin stirred and sat up. Miguel climbed up into Colin's wheelchair and sang a **celebratory** song. Miguel knew the three would quickly become friends.





Growing Magic

The next day, with Colin in his wheelchair and the robin nestled in his lap, Miguel used his song to lead his friends through the pasture and down the pathway to the oaks and ivy surrounding the secret garden.

Despite his broken wing, Miguel managed to flutter onto the piece of ivy near the doorknob.

"The door to the secret garden!" Mary pulled out a key, stuck it in the lock, and turned it. *Click.*

As they walked in, Miguel felt a tingle of energy surge through his body.

Colin gasped. Mary ran in circles. Dickon laughed with joy. They had found the long sought-after garden!



However, the once-beautiful garden now had vines covering everything, and most of the other plants seemed dry and lifeless. But Miguel knew the trio could bring it back to life. Miguel knew that because of his help, the poppies, roses, and hollyhock would soon be in full bloom. Mary would be entertaining Colin and Dickon, and Colin would need his wheelchair less and less. Maybe Miguel's dad was right about gardens. They *are* places of healing.



Miguel lifted off the ground, encircling the garden a few times. He looked down on the three smiling kids and then shot through the clouds. Before he knew it, he was home in the quiet loft. A lavender rose lay on top of the chest.

Back outside, Miguel's dad was still pruning the roses. He held a bouquet full of colors, all except lavender. For the first time, Miguel found he enjoyed the sweet scent of roses.

His dad looked up. "Back from your break?"

Miguel nodded. He grabbed a shovel, slipped on his gloves, and put on a cap.

"This is for you," he said, handing his dad the lavender rose. "Thanks."

"For what?"

"For this." He waved his arms around the garden and then started working.



Glossary

celebratory	used to celebrate, or show happiness about a positive event (p. 19)
desperate	urgent or extreme (p. 5)
indecipherable	difficult or impossible to understand (p. 14)
instinct	impulse or reaction (p. 9)
insulated	protected; prevented heat loss (p. 8)
mahogany	a type of wood with a rich reddish-brown color (p. 19)
muster	summon; bring forth (p. 11)
spewed	poured (p. 14)
swivel	turn, as in a circle (p. 14)
three-dimensional	having height, width, and depth (p. 9)
updraft	an air current that moves upward (p. 10)

Note: The Great Gallardo's Books is a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros. Travel with Miguel Ventura as he experiences a classic adventure inspired by Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

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