

Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Secret Garden



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Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Secret Garden

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Frances Hodgson Burnett

Frances Hodgson Burnett was born in Manchester, England, on 24 November 1849. As a child Frances loved books and reading. After her father died in 1854, her family had serious economic problems.

When she was sixteen years old, she and her family moved near Knoxville, Tennessee, in the United States. There Frances began writing stories for magazines to earn money for her family. In 1873 she married Swan Burnett, a medical doctor. They went to live in Paris for two years, where their two sons were born.

When they returned to the United States, they bought a home in Washington D.C. Frances began to write novels and in 1886 she published *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. This story was a big success and she became a popular writer of children's fiction. This novel even started a fashion in velvet suits¹ for small boys!

In the 1890s she returned to England and bought a beautiful home with a large garden. She enjoyed a very active social life. In 1905 she published *The Little Princess*, another famous book, and in 1909 she

1. **velvet suit** : jacket and trousers made of a soft smooth material.

wrote her most famous novel, *The Secret Garden*. This very popular story inspired two films, one in 1949 and the other in 1993.

A few years later, she went back to the United States and lived on Long Island, New York. She died on 29 October 1924.

1 Comprehension Check • Choose the correct answer.

1. Frances Hodgson Burnett's family had serious *health / economic* problems.
2. Frances began writing stories in *Manchester / Knoxville*.
3. Her husband was a *writer / medical doctor*.
4. Her two sons were born in *Washington D.C. / Paris*.
5. Her first successful novel was *The Little Princess / Little Lord Fauntleroy*.
6. She wrote *The Secret Garden* in *England / the United States*.

Great Maytham Hall

Frances Hodgson Burnett lived at Great Maytham Hall from 1898 to 1907. Here she discovered an old garden with a tall wall all around it. When she opened the door of the garden, she was quite surprised: the garden was untidy and weeds were growing

▶ **A typically British garden** at Great Maytham Hall, in Kent, south-east England.

On the left there is a wall and many plants and flowers. There is also a path for walking and a flat area of grass.





A fountain in the Walled Gardens of Cannington, Somerset, UK.

everywhere. She decided to clean it and make it beautiful. She planted sweet-smelling flowers, and put a table and chair in it. She loved the garden and wrote a number of books there.

There are many walled² gardens in Great Britain, with walls usually made of stone. A stone wall protects a garden because it keeps animals and strong, cold winds out. Since stones become

warm in the sun, they increase the temperature inside the garden. Most plants, flowers, vegetables and fruit trees need a warm temperature to grow well. People still grow vegetables and fruit for their family in walled gardens.

The walled gardens of Cannington in Somerset are a famous tourist attraction that you can visit at any time of the year.

2 Comprehension Check • Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)?
Correct the false ones.

1. Frances Hodgson Burnett was born at Great Maytham Hall.
2. Frances Hodgson Burnett planted flowers in the walled garden.
3. Most garden walls in Great Britain are made of stones.
4. People only grow sweet-smelling flowers in walled gardens.

T	F
☐	☐
☐	☐
☐	☐
☐	☐

2. walled : with a tall wall around it.

The Characters



From top to bottom (left to right): Colin, Mary, Dickon, Martha, Ben Weatherstaff, Mr Craven, Mrs Medlock

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Match the words with their definition. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. ☐ spoilt
 2. ☐ to have a bad temper
 3. ☐ crooked
 4. ☐ moor
 5. ☐ buried
 6. ☐ day off
 7. ☐ weeds
 8. ☐ seeds
 9. ☐ gloomy
 10. ☐ tantrum
 11. ☐ nanny
 12. ☐ housekeeper
-
- a** put in the ground and covered with earth
 - b** dark and sad
 - c** to get angry quickly
 - d** her job is to clean and cook in someone else's house
 - e** person who gets everything he/she wants or asks for
 - f** wild plants that people don't want in gardens
 - g** what you plant in the ground that makes new plants grow
 - h** not straight, deformed
 - i** a sudden explosion of anger
 - j** her job is to take care of a family's children
 - k** a day in the week when a person doesn't work
 - l** a large, open area of wild land

2 Match the words with their picture.

skipping rope crow ivy fox lamb robin cottage
squirrel wheelchair ghost garden tools worm



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



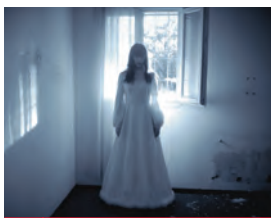
8



9



10



11



12



CHAPTER 1

Misselthwaite Manor

Mary Lennox was ten years old and she lived in India with her parents. Her father was always busy with his work and her mother was always busy with parties and friends. They didn't have time for Mary, so an Indian nanny looked after her.



track 02

The nanny allowed Mary to do anything she wanted because she didn't want Mary to cry. So Mary became a spoilt, unpleasant girl with a bad temper. She was often ill and had a thin, sad face.

One hot morning Mary woke up and heard strange cries and shouts outside her door. But no one came to see her, so she went back to sleep.

Later, when Mary woke up again, the house was silent. Suddenly her door opened and two Englishmen came in.

‘Why has everyone forgotten me?’ she asked angrily. ‘Where’s my nanny? Where’s everyone?’

‘Poor little girl,’ said one of the men. ‘There’s nobody here.’

That’s how Mary discovered that her mother, her father and the servants were dead, because of a terrible disease. That was why the house was so silent. Now Mary Lennox was completely alone, so she was sent to England to live with her uncle, Mr Craven. He lived in a big house in Yorkshire called Misselthwaite Manor.

Mrs Medlock, her uncle’s housekeeper, met Mary in London. As soon as Mary saw her, she didn’t like Mrs Medlock. But this was nothing new because Mary didn’t like anyone.

Mrs Medlock didn’t like Mary, either. She thought that the little girl was bad-tempered and rude – and she was right. During the long train journey to Yorkshire, Mrs Medlock told Mary about the house where she was going to live. It seemed very large and dark, and it was near the moor.

‘There’s nothing for you to do there, and your uncle isn’t interested in you,’ said Mrs Medlock. ‘He’s got a crooked back. He was an unpleasant young man until he got married. His wife was very pretty and he loved her very much. When she died, he became even stranger.’

‘Oh, did she die?’ asked Mary.





‘Yes, and now he doesn’t like anyone. He’s away most of the time, so you must look after yourself.’

It was raining and dark when they got off the train. They travelled to the house in a carriage. When they got there, Mrs Medlock said, ‘This is where you’re going to live. This room and the one next to it is where you must stay. You mustn’t go into the other parts of the house. Don’t forget that.’ Mary felt very sad and lonely.

When Mary woke up the next morning, a young housemaid came into her room. Her name was Martha and she talked to Mary while she worked.

Mary didn’t understand servants who were friendly. In India she spoke to servants only to give them orders. She never said ‘please’ or ‘thank you’. At first Mary didn’t listen to Martha, but then she began to like the sound of her friendly voice.

‘You should see all my little brothers and sisters in our little cottage on the moor,’ said Martha. ‘There are twelve of us and my father doesn’t earn much money. It’s hard for my mother to feed them all. The fresh air on the moor makes them strong and healthy. Dickon is twelve and he’s always out on the moor. He loves animals.’



‘Go and look at the gardens,’ Martha said. ‘There’s not much growing now but they’re lovely in the summer.’ She stopped for a moment and then said quietly, ‘One of the gardens is locked up.’ It was locked up ten years ago.’

‘Why?’ asked Mary.

‘Mr Craven locked it up after his wife died and he buried the key. It was her garden.’

There were many gardens at Misselthwaite Manor. Since it was winter, there were no flowers and no leaves on the trees. Mary thought that the gardens looked empty and ugly.

One day she saw an old man in the gardens. He had an unfriendly face and wasn’t pleased to see her. He was Ben Weatherstaff, the gardener.

‘Can I go through that garden door?’ asked Mary.

‘If you like,’ he replied, ‘but there’s nothing to see.’

Mary hoped to find the door to the locked garden. Then she noticed one wall that was covered in ivy, but it seemed to have no door in it. She could see tall trees behind it. A robin on a high branch

1. **locked up** : closed with a key.

CHAPTER 1

started to sing and she stopped to listen. His happy song brought a small smile to her sad face.

The old man continued working. Mary looked at him and said, 'There's a garden over there without a door.'

'What garden?' he asked angrily.

'On the other side of the wall,' she answered. 'I saw a robin in the trees over there.'

The old man stopped working, and to Mary's surprise he smiled. He looked different when he smiled. Then a wonderful thing happened – the robin flew down.

'Here he is,' the old man laughed. 'He's a nice little bird, isn't he? He's the only friend I've got.'

'I've never had any friends,' said Mary sadly.

'Neither have I,' said Ben. 'You and I are the same. We're not good-looking and we're unpleasant.'

It was the first time that Mary ever thought about her angry face and bad temper, and she felt embarrassed. But the robin's happy song made her look at an apple tree, where he was sitting now. Ben laughed.

'Why did the robin sing?' asked Mary.

'He wants to be your friend,' replied Ben. 'He likes you.'





CHAPTER 1

‘Me?’ said Mary, who was surprised. She went to the apple tree and looked up.

‘Do you want to be my friend?’ she said gently to the robin, as if she was speaking to a boy or a girl.

‘Well, well, well...’ said Ben quietly. ‘You said that like a real child instead of an old woman. You said it almost like Dickon when he talks to the animals on the moor.’

Then the robin flew over the wall.

‘There must be a door to that garden,’ Mary said.

‘There’s no door that you can find,’ Ben said angrily, ‘and in any case, it’s none of your business!’²

He walked away.

2. It’s none of your business : it doesn’t concern you.

THINK!

Mary is a *spoilt, unpleasant* girl with a *bad temper*. Her nanny allowed her to do anything she wanted to do. When Mary meets Ben Weatherstaff, another unpleasant person, she tells him, ‘I’ve never had any friends.’ And Ben answers, ‘Neither have I.’

Why do you think spoilt, unpleasant people don’t have any friends? What can these people do to improve and make friends? Why are friends important?



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