

# The Secret Garden



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

Burnett was born in 1849 to a wealthy merchant father; she was the third of five children. Her father died when she was only four years old, and her mother moved the family to the U.S. to settle in Tennessee. As a young woman, Burnett began publishing stories in magazines to help support the family. She married Dr. Swan Burnett in 1872. They lived in Paris for two years while he finished his medical schooling, and Burnett gave birth to her two sons there. The couple moved back and forth across the Atlantic several times. While her husband worked on getting his medical practice started in Washington, D.C., Burnett published her first novel, *That Lass o' Lowrie's*, to positive reviews in 1877. In the 1880s she became interested in Christian Science, Spiritualism, and Theosophy, which influenced her later works and especially, *The Secret Garden*. Burnett and her husband divorced in 1898. The two agreed to live separately for two years so that Burnett could list abandonment as a legal reason for divorce, though this earned Burnett scorn in the papers. She lived in England at a manor house that inspired Misselthwaite Manor (and very briefly remarried) until 1907, when she returned to the New York area, continued to write, and lived lavishly until her death in 1924.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Burnett's interest in Christian Science plays a major role throughout *The Secret Garden*. Christian Science, which was developed in the mid-nineteenth century alongside the American Spiritualism movement, states that illness isn't actually real or physiological; it's something that takes place in the mind and can be cured through prayer. This is why Colin can get well when he decides to do so, and his conception of Magic positions it as a God-like entity. Also present in the novel are indicators of England's colonial rule over India and specifically, the racist views about India and Indian people. Mary's family was likely one of the many wealthy English families that colonized the country and, in the decades before World War I, maintained order in light of the frequent uprisings staged by rebel revolutionary groups. This sense of British superiority over India can be seen in the way that the novel implicates India itself for Mary's sickness, while the fresh moor air of England is the most prominent cure.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Burnett was a prolific writer throughout her life; *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* are her most famous works today, while the novel that brought on her fame in her lifetime, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, hasn't maintained its initial popularity. Her interest in Christian Science can be seen in her 1906 novella, *The Dawn of a To-Morrow*, an interest that her contemporary Mark Twain shared and wrote about in his aptly titled book *Christian Science*. Rudyard Kipling's mostly contemporaneous children's works also express a similar view on England's colonial relationship to India as Burnett implies in *The Secret Garden*. As a writer in the Golden Age of children's literature, *The Secret Garden* joins classic children's novels such as *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *Peter and Wendy* by J.M. Barrie, L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, and [Little Women](#) by Louisa May Alcott. The 2013 novel by Ellen Potter, *The Humming Room*, is inspired by *The Secret Garden*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Secret Garden*
- **When Written:** 1909-1910
- **Where Written:** Manchester, England
- **When Published:** 1911
- **Literary Period:** Victorian; "Golden Age" of Children's Literature
- **Genre:** Children's fiction
- **Setting:** India; Misselthwaite Manor, England
- **Climax:** Mr. Craven sees his son walking and laughing in the secret garden.
- **Antagonist:** Neglect and negative thoughts
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Growing Fame.** *The Secret Garden* wasn't well known or celebrated in the decades following its publication; it isn't noted in Burnett's obituary at all. However, thanks to the growing field of scholarly study of children's literature, as well as the novel's entry into the public domain between 1987 and 1995, *The Secret Garden* is now regularly rated among the most popular children's novels and is one of the best known of all Burnett's works.

**Adaptations.** The first adaptation of *The Secret Garden* was made in 1919, but the film is believed to be lost. Since then, the novel has been adapted many times for a variety of media including film, television, theater, and a multimedia series presented partially on YouTube. It has featured performances

by Dame Maggie Smith and Colin Firth and been adapted by both Jack Thorne (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*) and Caroline Thompson (*Edward Scissorhands*).



## PLOT SUMMARY

Ten-year-old Mary Lennox is a sour and selfish girl. She's born in Colonial India, and Mary's mother never wanted a baby, so she immediately passes Mary off to an Ayah. The servants keep Mary away from her parents and give her everything she wants. This all changes when, one day, a servant who's not Mary's Ayah greets her in the morning. As Mary plays outside and makes a **pretend garden**, she hears her mother talking with a young officer about "it" affecting the servants too. The next day, Mary learns that cholera has infected her home. Everyone forgets about Mary. She spends two days shut into her room until finally, two officers discover her and are distraught—Mary's parents are dead and the officers weren't sure whether or not Mary existed. After living briefly with an English clergyman, Mary is sent to England, where she is passed off to Mrs. Medlock, the housekeeper for Mary's uncle, Mr. Craven. Mary tries to act aloof, but she's intrigued by Mrs. Medlock's stories of the house, Misselthwaite Manor, as well as her story of Mrs. Craven's death. Her death turned Mr. Craven into the miserable hunchback he is today, and Mary finds this sad.

The next morning, Mary wakes up to find a maid, Martha, starting a fire in the grate. Mary is enraged when Martha admits that she thought Mary was going to be a black Indian. Mary feels even worse when she learns that she's going to have to learn how to dress herself. Martha shoos her outside and mentions that there's a garden that's been locked since Mrs. Craven's death ten years ago. Mary walks around the grounds. She curtly talks with a gruff old gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, and explores the kitchen gardens. Mary notices a robin in a tree and thinks that the tree seems to be inside a garden with no door. She returns to Ben and asks him about it. He introduces her to the robin, who's a friend of his, and Mary admits she's lonely. Over the next few days, Mary wanders the gardens, visits with the robin, and thinks about the locked garden. One evening, Mary asks Martha about the locked garden. Martha shares that it belonged to Mr. Craven and his wife. Mrs. Craven used to sit on a tree covered in **roses**, but the branch broke and she died. Mary suddenly hears someone crying, but Martha says that it's just the scullery maid complaining of a toothache.

It's raining the next day, so Mary explores the house. She hears the crying again, but Mrs. Medlock catches Mary before she can investigate. One morning, Mary and Martha discuss that Mary would like to see the moor and Martha's family's cottage. Martha talks about her brother, Dickon, who makes friends with animals. Martha promises that while she's at home later, she'll ask her mother, Mrs. Sowerby, if Mary might visit. Lonely,

Mary wanders through the grounds and finds Ben. He tells her that spring is coming and shows her the budding plants. The robin joins them and Mary asking Ben if roses are growing in the garden where the robin lives, but he refuses to answer.

As he hops away, Mary discovers a key ring half-buried in the dirt and pockets it. The next day, Mary returns to where she found the key, and this time she notices a locked door. The key is a perfect fit, and Mary slips inside, suddenly finding herself in a garden brimming with dead-looking roses. At dinner later, Mary wishes she had gardening tools. Together, Martha and Mary draft a letter to Dickon and enclose money so that he can purchase tools and seeds for Mary to start her own garden, which she decides to call the **secret garden**.

One day, Ben talks to Mary about roses he used to care for a young woman and tells Mary how to tell if roses are alive. Mary skips away and finds Dickon sitting in the woods. She reveals her secret garden to Dickon, who promises to keep the secret, and they weed and prune for several hours. After lunch, Mr. Craven summons Mary for the first time. Mary thinks that he'd be handsome if he didn't look so miserable. She tells him that she doesn't want a governess and just wants earth in which to plant a garden.

In the middle of the night, Mary hears screaming and crying and goes to investigate. She finds a room that contains an ill-looking boy who introduces himself as Colin Craven, Mr. Craven's son. Mr. Craven apparently hates Colin and everyone believes that Colin is going to die or develop a hunchback. Colin forbids everyone from looking at him or talking about him. Only one doctor, the London doctor, has ever said that Colin has a chance. Mary realizes that Colin is very spoiled. When Colin hears that there's a locked garden, he says that he's going to make servants take him there. Mary convinces him that it'd be better if they could play there in secret. He shows Mary a portrait of his mother, which he keeps covered, and then invites Mary to visit him again.

In the morning, Mary tells Martha that she found Colin, but explains that it needs to be kept a secret that the children know about each other. Martha is shocked that Colin seems to like Mary and says that some people say that Colin is fine, just spoiled, and won't flourish indoors. A bit later, Colin summons Mary. They talk about Dickon and the moor, and Mary encourages Colin to think only of living things. The children are laughing when Mrs. Medlock and Dr. Craven walk in. Dr. Craven reminds Colin to remember that he's ill, but Colin says he wants to forget. The children spend the next rainy week together, and Mary tries to ascertain if Colin is trustworthy enough to tell him about the secret garden. Colin decides that he wouldn't mind meeting Dickon.

The next sunny morning, Mary runs outside early and finds Dickon working in the secret garden, accompanied by Captain the fox and Soot the crow. He points out that they need to be careful, as the robin is building a nest and they don't want to

scare him. Over the next two days, Martha seems afraid that Colin will be upset by Mary's absence, but Mary doesn't care. Finally, Martha sends Mary to Colin, as he's throwing a tantrum and is inconsolable. Colin threatens to ban Dickon from the manor and Mary declares she's never visiting Colin again. Mary accuses Colin of making people feel bad and insists he's not going to die. Later, Mary wonders if Colin spent all day being afraid. That night, Mary wakes up and hears Colin screaming. The nurse bursts into her room and asks her to calm Colin down. Mary starts to get angry, storms into Colin's room, and screams back at him. She demands to see Colin's back and deems it normal. This is comforting for Colin and the nurse repeats what the London doctor said: Colin is fine, just weak and spoiled, and he needs fresh air. Colin calms down and says he'd like to meet Dickon. The next morning, Mary meets Dickon in the garden and explains the situation with Colin. She later tells Colin about Dickon's creatures and Colin apologizes for his bad behavior. At this, Mary confides in him that she found the secret garden. When Dr. Craven arrives later, he's shocked to see Colin looking well and gives the children permission to take Colin outside.

The next day, Dickon brings his creatures into Colin's room. A week later, Dickon and Mary take Colin outside in his wheelchair and into the secret garden. Immediately enlivened, Colin declares that he's going to get better and live forever. They discuss that Colin will stand when he's not afraid to. A bit later, the children see Ben looking over the wall at them, furious. He's shocked to see Colin, however, and Colin is enraged when Ben calls Colin a "poor cripple." Colin stands in retaliation and commands Ben to enter the garden. He explains that this is his garden now and it must stay a secret. Ben admits that Mrs. Craven made him promise to care for her roses before her death. He then fetches Colin a rose to plant, and Colin decides that his newfound health is Magic.

Over the next few months, Mary confronts Colin about his bad attitude and they decide that the Magic in the garden is real. After a while, Colin summons Dickon, Mary, and Ben so that he can speak about the power of Magic, on which he's going to conduct a scientific experiment. He believes that the Magic is making him well and will help him live. They sit in a circle and Colin repeats a phrase about everything being Magic. Then, he walks around the garden and says that his recovery will remain a secret until he can tell Mr. Craven himself. Gradually, Dickon shares this all with his mother. When she learns that Colin is concerned that his appetite will spoil the secret, she starts sending bread and milk with Dickon. Dickon learns some strength training exercises from the local wrestler Bob Hawthorn, and the children incorporate these into their routine. The adults are perplexed, as Colin looks better but still acts ill. After a while, Colin decides to stop covering up his mother's portrait, as he believes that she was Magic.

In the fall, Colin suddenly realizes he's well and wants to thank

the Magic. Ben suggests they sing the Doxology and Dickon leads them in it. A few minutes later, Mrs. Sowerby enters the garden. She assures Colin that Mr. Craven will like him and tells Mary she's pretty too. She's never heard of Magic, but suggests that it's all the same "Big Good Thing." They eat a picnic and before they leave, Mrs. Sowerby tells Colin that his mother's spirit is in the garden.

At the same time as all of this is happening, Mr. Craven is traveling Europe, gloomy and angry as usual. On the same day that Colin first declares he's going to live forever, Mr. Craven starts to notice how beautiful the natural world is. He begins to experience more happiness and one night, he dreams about his wife in the secret garden. The next morning, he receives a letter from Mrs. Sowerby asking him to return home. Mr. Craven thinks of Colin often as he travels and wonders if it's too late to fix things. When he arrives back at the manor, Mrs. Medlock tells him about Colin's strange state and says that Colin is out on the grounds. Mr. Craven wanders around and thinks he hears children in the secret garden. Suddenly, Mary and Colin burst out of the door and right into Mr. Craven's arms. They tell him all about the garden, Magic, and Colin's miraculous recovery. Mr. Craven is thrilled and the household staff are shocked when they see Mr. Craven and Colin walking back to the house, laughing.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Mary Lennox** – The novel's ten-year-old protagonist. Mary's mother didn't want her, and Mary's father was busy, so Mary spent the first ten years of her life in Colonial India in the care of an Ayah. She became an ugly and unpleasant child because she always got her way and was never shown genuine love or affection. When cholera sweeps through her family's home, killing nearly everyone, Mary doesn't care much for their plight and only thinks of herself. She's discovered by chance when officers search the house and after being shunted around among several families, she's sent to live with her uncle, Mr. Craven. During this time, Mary comes to believe that she hates all people and would rather sit by herself. The servants at Misselthwaite manor find Mary extremely unpleasant, though the fresh moor air does make Mary curious for the first time in her life. She begins to learn to be self-sufficient when her maid, Martha, teaches her to dress herself, and Mary starts to make friends when Martha sends her out into the garden every day that the weather is nice. Her first friend is the robin, though she soon comes to count the gardener Ben Weatherstaff and Martha as friends. While exploring the grounds, Mary becomes interested in gardening, especially after she learns that there's a **secret garden** that's locked up. The day after she finds the key and gets into the garden, she meets Mr. Craven for the first time and he agrees that she can have some earth to cultivate.

She takes this as permission to work in the secret garden. Mary's circle grows gradually to include Dickon and his creatures, Colin, and Mrs. Sowerby. Her friendship with Colin brings about a number of positive changes, as her selfish nature means that she's able to shame Colin into being nice without fear. As she, Colin, and Dickon work in the secret garden, Mary participates fully in Colin's spiritual system of Magic and grows stronger, more alive, and according to Mrs. Medlock, starts to look pretty. The garden transforms Mary into a whole, kind person who's ready to move forward into adulthood.

**Colin Craven** – The young master of Misselthwaite Manor. Mary meets him after hearing crying from somewhere in the manor house several times. Ten years ago, around the time of Colin's birth, his mother, Mrs. Craven, died after falling out of a tree in the secret garden. In his grief, Mr. Craven, Colin's father, resented Colin for living and so passed him off to hired help. He believed that Colin was deformed, which contributes to Colin's belief in the present that he's going to develop a hunchback and die before making it to adulthood. Because everyone believes that Colin is going to die, he's extremely spoiled and does nothing for himself. He throws long-winded tantrums to deal with his grief, pain, and loneliness, which always require a doctor's visit the next day. Until meeting Mary, Colin seems to take pride in his impending doom. He refuses to listen to the London doctor, who prescribed time outside. After a fight in which Mary insists there's nothing wrong with Colin, Colin realizes that she's right. He allows Mary and Dickon to take him outside to the **secret garden** where, within an hour, he digs in the dirt, stands, and walks. Colin deems this the work of Magic and goes on to devise a spiritual program comprised of chanting, physical exercises, and speeches about the power of Magic. He desperately wants to make his father proud of him and to become "a real boy," one who is going "to live forever and ever." As he improves, he also stops resenting his mother for dying and abandoning him and decides to think that her portrait in his bedroom is smiling at him, not taunting him. Colin keeps his improvement a secret from the household so that he can surprise Mr. Craven upon his return, and the plan works. Mr. Craven cries with joy upon seeing his son happy, whole, and very much alive.

**Dickon** – Dickon is Martha's twelve-year-old brother. He spends most of his time out on the moor, enjoying the fresh air and befriending animals, especially abandoned baby animals that he then tames. Martha begins talking to Mary about Dickon long before Mary meets him, and she becomes entranced by the idea of him as he's so different from her. She finally meets Dickon when he comes to bring her the gardening tools and seeds that she asked for. She initially describes him as somewhat unattractive, with ruddy cheeks, an upturned nose, and red hair. However, as she gets to know Dickon better and comes to admire his way with animals, she finds these physical qualities attractive. Indeed, Martha and Mrs. Sowerby discuss

that Dickon's upturned nose is like a rabbit's—constantly sniffing and wiggling to smell the moor—and after spending more time with him, both Mary and Colin begin to do the same thing. Dickon is a good, strong, and trustworthy boy who's a fixture among the locals, which is why Dr. Craven agrees to let Dickon push Colin's wheelchair out in the garden. In the garden, he acts as Colin's guardian and offers him his arm as they walk laps. He participates fully as Colin comes up with his spiritual system of Magic and shows Mary and Colin how to properly garden and care for plants. In the robin's narration, he mentions that Dickon speaks the robin language, thereby confirming Dickon's intimate relationship with the natural world. While Dickon is friends with the robin, he also often brings along other tame animals, including Captain, a fox; Soot, a crow; and Nut and Shell, two squirrels.

**Ben Weatherstaff** – The elderly and cantankerous gardener at Misselthwaite Manor. Mary meets him on her first day outside, and the two initially don't like each other much. Despite this, Ben Weatherstaff introduces Mary to his friend the robin. Ben Weatherstaff has no qualms about hurting Mary's feelings or telling her to go away, which helps Mary to learn how to earn someone's friendship and attention. She eventually resorts to sneaking up on him, and the two decide they like each other. He introduces Mary to the basic tenets of gardening and later, it's revealed that he's been pruning the **roses** in the **secret garden** for the last ten years, though his rheumatics (arthritis) has kept him from scaling the wall for the last two years. On the first day that Colin spends time in the garden, Ben Weatherstaff catches the children in the garden and is initially angry with them for the intrusion. However, Colin uses his power as the master of the manor to make Ben Weatherstaff come into the garden, pledge to keep the children's presence in the garden a secret, and promise to help them restore the garden to its former glory. Ben Weatherstaff is an instrumental figure in Colin's recovery, as sharing the various rumors circulating about Colin's poor health (that he has crooked legs, is mentally disabled, and actually has a hunchback) makes Colin angry enough to stand and prove Ben Weatherstaff wrong. Though he's open about not being able to stay awake through a conventional church service, he participates fully in Colin's prayer circles and even suggests that they sing the Doxology. His introduction to Magic helps cure his rheumatics.

**Susan Sowerby / Mother** – Susan Sowerby is Martha and Dickon's mother. Because Martha refers to her only as "mother" when she speaks about her to Mary, Mary also uses "mother" to talk about Mrs. Sowerby until she meets her months later. Martha admires her mother, as she's an exceptional baker and a loving parent to her twelve children. This admiration is shared; both Mrs. Medlock and Colin's nurse discuss how skilled Mrs. Sowerby is at raising children. They specifically latch onto her insistence that a girl like Mary should be allowed to run outside and develop independently, rather

than be put in the care of a nurse or governess. She even writes to Mr. Craven saying just this, and he takes her advice seriously. In her conversations with Dickon, Mrs. Sowerby shows herself to be kind, curious, and respectful of the private world that Dickon inhabits. She takes a keen interest in Colin and Mary's development and begins sending along baked goods and fresh milk. This allows Colin and Mary to pretend they're not hungry for their meals at the manor, thereby throwing their caregivers off the scent of Colin's dramatically improving health. Eventually, Colin and Mary invite Mrs. Sowerby to the **secret garden**, where she shows them how a mother would care for them by hugging them, listening with interest to what they have to say, and feeding them nourishing foods. She's taken with Colin's understanding of Magic and she agrees that regardless of what a person calls it, it represents a belief in the divine and is therefore good. Following this, she writes to Mr. Craven and encourages him to come home.

**Martha** – Martha is a young maid at Misselthwaite Manor who is put in charge of caring for Mary when she arrives, though she's not technically a nurse or lady's maid. A local, Martha speaks in broad Yorkshire, and through her speech patterns and her love of telling stories, she introduces Mary to aspects of her new home. As the oldest of twelve children, Martha has had lots of practice caring for young children, but Mary's inability to dress herself and other moments of learned helplessness present special problems for Martha. She dedicates herself to teaching Mary how to be more self-sufficient and is successful in this endeavor. Martha is extremely kind and adores her mother, Mrs. Sowerby. She gets one day off per month, which she spends at her family's cottage, helping her mother bake and clean and care for her siblings. She and Mary form a more friendly relationship as Mary learns to do things for herself, and so Martha begins to tell Mary all about her family and life on the moor, and specifically, about her little brother Dickon. Though she initially tries to keep Colin's existence a secret, per Mr. Craven's request, when Colin and Mary finally do meet, Colin instructs Martha to facilitate Mary's visits. Martha is also the first to let slip that there's a secret locked garden somewhere on the grounds, piquing Mary's interest.

**Mr. Archibald Craven** – Colin's father and the owner of Misselthwaite Manor. Rumor has it that he has a hunchback, though when Mary meets him, she observes that he's actually a handsome man whose only faults are slightly crooked shoulders and an angry, brooding expression. She learns later that Mr. Craven used to be full of life and in love with his wife, Mrs. Craven, but following her untimely death, he had her favorite garden locked up and refused to see the infant Colin, as he resented Colin for living. He spends the next ten years only looking in on Colin while Colin is asleep, though he spends most of his time traveling out of the country. Mr. Craven also forces his servants to not speak of Colin or the **secret garden**

in an attempt to not have to remember his wife's death. Inexplicably, on the day that Colin stands in the secret garden and proclaims that he's going to live forever, Mr. Craven also begins to come alive. As Colin improves over the next several months, Mr. Craven follows a similar trajectory and finally decides to return home after receiving a letter from Mrs. Sowerby. There, he cries with joy when he discovers that Colin is walking and lively like any other boy, and he is happy to see that the secret garden, his wife's pride and joy, is once again growing and alive. The novel suggests that this is the work of Magic.

**Mrs. Craven** – Colin's mother; she died about the time of his birth after a tree branch in the **secret garden** broke, and she fell. She and Mr. Craven were madly in love, and the garden was their sanctuary. There, Mrs. Craven was a skilled gardener and carefully tended her **roses**. On her deathbed, she asked Ben Weatherstaff to care for the roses in her absence. After her death, Mr. Craven was consumed with grief, and to try to bury the memory of his wife, he locked her garden and buried the key. Similarly, though Colin has a portrait of her in his bedroom, he keeps it covered with a curtain most of the time, wanting to keep his beautiful mother's smile only for himself. As Colin and Mary grow and develop and connect with the garden, they learn to see it as a place of life and nurturing, not a place of death as Mr. Craven sees it. Susan Sowerby even remarks at one point that Mrs. Craven's spirit must be in the garden. When Colin finally shares his recovery with Mr. Craven, Mr. Craven cries with happiness to see his wife's pride and joy returned to its former glory. As Colin recovers, he also removes the curtain from Mrs. Craven's portrait and decides to think of it as smiling down on him.

**The Robin** – A young male robin that was born in a tree in the **secret garden**, but as a fledgling was unable to make it back to the nest. At that time, he befriended Ben Weatherstaff, and when Mary meets the robin, he seems almost tame. He sings for Ben Weatherstaff, Mary, and Dickon, and once, stands on the end of Ben Weatherstaff's gardening tool. A few days later, the robin shows Mary where the key and the door to the secret garden are, and he accompanies the children inside. Ben Weatherstaff and the children watch the robin transform from a young, boisterous, and flamboyant creature looking for a mate to a mature, protective, and harried father. He and his mate build a nest in the corner of the garden, and they allow the children to get relatively close. When the robin narrates a chapter, he notes that Dickon speaks robin language and remarks on how long it takes for human children to grow up as he watches Colin walk laps around the garden.

**Dr. Craven** – Mr. Craven's cousin and the doctor who, for the last several years, has been caring for Colin. He dismisses the London doctor's opinion that Colin is fine but needs fresh air in massive quantities; instead, Dr. Craven encourages Colin to stay in bed. While he never treats Colin poorly as far as the

reader can tell, Dr. Craven does stand to inherit Misselthwaite if Colin dies and so has reason to not want Colin to become well. He's as perplexed as anyone else when Colin begins to improve, and Colin is only marginally successful at hiding his improvement from the doctor.

**Mrs. Medlock** – A formidable woman who works for Mr. Craven. She performs a number of duties, but according to Martha, spends most of the time drinking tea in her sitting room. She dislikes Mary and children in general, so though she's supposed to check in on Mary daily, she often stretches it out and only sees Mary every other day for a minute or two. Like the other servants she tries to keep Colin's existence a secret from Mary, and she scolds Mary when she catches her wandering around the manor.

**Mary's Mother** – Mary's mother was a beautiful woman who wanted to spend all of her time attending parties and conversing with other beautiful, happy people. She didn't want to have a child, and so when Mary was born, she passed Mary off to an Ayah and continued on with her fun-filled lifestyle. Despite the neglect she showed Mary, Mary loved catching sight of her mother, who was always dressed beautifully. She dies when cholera sweeps through the house.

**The London Doctor** – A doctor that saw Colin several years ago and prescribed nothing but fresh air, recognizing that there was nothing wrong with Colin. Because this wasn't what Colin wanted to hear at the time, he never took the London doctor's diagnosis seriously and only begins to consider it when Mary and the nurse tell Colin that as far as they can tell, there's nothing wrong with him.

**Mary's Ayah** – Mary's Indian nursemaid. Mary thinks little of Ayah when she's in the woman's care and often slaps her when she's upset or angry. However, as Mary begins to grow and develop at Misselthwaite, she gains some degree of empathy for Ayah and even sings some of the woman's lullabies to Colin. Ayah is the first to die of cholera when it sweeps through Mary's parents' household.

**Colin's Nurse** – Colin's nurse. She doesn't like her job or Colin; she often leaves him in the care of Mrs. Medlock or Martha. When she learns of Colin and Mary's budding friendship, she capitalizes on Mary's selfishness to give Colin a taste of his own medicine. She finds the children's ensuing argument funny and seems to warm to Colin after this.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Basil** – A little boy whose family Mary stays with between her home in India and Misselthwaite Manor. He teases her by singing the nursery rhyme "Mistress Mary, quite contrary" to her and getting all of his siblings to sing it as well.

**Mr. Roach** – The head gardener at Misselthwaite. When he sees Colin for the first time, he thinks that Colin has a perfectly grand air—though he also has to try to hide his laughter, given

that Colin is humorously full of himself.

**Bob Haworth** – A local Yorkshire champion wrestler who shows Dickon some simple strength training exercises; Dickon then passes the exercises on to Mary and Colin.

**Mary's Father** – An official in the English government in India. Like Mary, he's often ill, sour, and yellow. He dies when cholera sweeps through the house.

**Mr. Pitcher** – Mr. Craven's personal servant. He travels with Mr. Craven throughout Europe.

**Mrs. Crawford** – Basil's mother. She cares for Mary for a short time after officers rescue Mary from her parents' home.

**Captain** – A fox that Dickon found abandoned as a cub, rescued, and tamed. He follows Dickon everywhere.

**Soot** – A tame raven. He rides on Dickon's shoulder.

**Nut and Shell** – Two squirrels that Dickon tamed; they often travel in Dickon's pockets or on his shoulder.

## TERMS

**Doxology** – A doxology is a short hymn praising God. While it's usually added to the end of other hymns, **Ben Weatherstaff** suggests that **Colin** use a classic Protestant doxology as a standalone hymn as Colin develops his system of Magic.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### HEALING, GROWTH, AND NATURE

*The Secret Garden* tells the story of ten-year-olds Mary, an ugly and spoiled girl from India, and Colin, a sickly and spoiled hypochondriac. When Mary's parents and their servants die suddenly of cholera, Mary is shipped to live with her uncle Mr. Archibald Craven at Misselthwaite Manor in Yorkshire, England, where she lives for an entire month before discovering Colin's existence. During Mary's time at the manor, her days spent outside in the gardens begins to put color in her cheeks, make her hungry for the first time, and encourage her to think about others outside herself. The healing effects of nature are even more pronounced in Colin who, for the entirety of his life, has been led to believe that he's either going to be a hunchback or die before he reaches adulthood. The drastic transformations of both children represent a worldview that situates the natural world as something even more powerful and capable than human

doctors of healing people, both mentally and physically.

The Mary whom the reader meets at the beginning of the novel is a sickly, insensitive, and cruel individual, living in Colonial India. While some of this behavior has to do with the way Mary's parents treat her, the novel is also explicit in linking Mary's poor state to India's climate, specifically its heat, and the fact that Mary never has the opportunity there to spend time in nature. As Mary makes her way to England, adults around her describe her as sallow, unpleasant, and far too thin—all qualities she's developed thanks to the way that India made her feel.

Because of how poorly Mary feels, the cold moor air at Misselthwaite and the moor itself have an immediate effect on her: in the carriage from the train station to the manor, Mary begins to feel curious and ask questions for the first time in her short life. Right away, nature begins to mentally invigorate Mary.

Besides inciting her curiosity, nature also begins to heal Mary physically. Because there are supposedly no other children at Misselthwaite, definitely no nurses or governesses, and no indoor activities for Mary to do, her maid, Martha, tells Mary that she'll have to spend her time outside in the gardens amusing herself. While Mary is initially reticent to do so, the fresh air makes Mary feel good, continues to awaken her curiosity, and gives her such a sense of purpose that she's happy to spend her time outside within a week of being forced out. Colin's transformation is even more dramatic: there's little indication that Colin has ever stood on his own feet but yet, after an hour in the garden, he's walking, digging in the dirt, and feeling healthier than ever—all thanks to, as Martha's twelve-year-old brother Dickon and the narrator say often, the cool and invigorating air coming off the moor. This is even more indicative of the power of nature, given that years' worth of nurses and doctors haven't even been able to get Colin to move himself from bed to sofa on his own.

Mary isn't alone when she first begins to understand and appreciate the healing effects of nature; she's helped along in major ways by the old gardener Ben Weatherstaff, the robin, and later, Dickon. While the robin is an obvious part of the natural world, Ben Weatherstaff and Dickon are described as individuals who bridge the gap between the human-constructed world and the wild natural one. Ben Weatherstaff introduces Mary first to the robin and then to basic tenets of gardening, while Dickon is described as an "animal charmer" and guides Mary towards becoming more observant of the natural world and, in some cases, shows her how act as to become a fixture in nature or in the garden by modeling slow and deliberate movements, proper eye contact, and a sense of ease in nature. Through these mediators, Mary—and later, Colin—are able to use what they see to learn how to interact with nature and, in turn, both children become kinder, healthier, and more confident in their own self worth. By continuing to center the children's transformation around their interactions

with the **secret garden**, the individuals who bridge the gap between humans and nature, and the natural world more broadly, the novel makes the case that a person looks outdoors with interest and learns to interact with nature, doing so will heal a person's body and mind.



## THE POWER OF THOUGHT

When Mary and Colin first begin spending time together, Mary makes an important discovery: as far as she can tell, there's nothing wrong with Colin aside from his nasty temper and selfish attitude. She and Colin begin to suspect that he believes he's going to die or develop a hunchback simply because he's been told so by the adults around him for his entire life. Consequentially, when Colin takes control of his inner monologue and decides to think only that he's going to heal and live forever, he effectively makes this happen. In this way, *The Secret Garden* presents a world in which a person's successes or failures can be traced to the quality and content of their thoughts, and suggests that once someone focuses on thinking good thoughts, healing and positive change will abound.

When Mary first meets Colin, she learns that he believes that he's not going to live to adulthood and, more horrifyingly for him, that he believe he's suddenly going to start developing a hunch in his back. This is because, at the time of his birth, Colin supposedly appeared sickly and deformed. However, the novel implies that this likely was a matter of opinion, not fact, and specifically, one borne out of grief. Colin's mother, Mrs. Craven, died around the time of his birth when she fell out of a tree in the **secret garden**. Because Mr. Craven was so in love with his wife, and because Colin so perfectly resembles his mother, Mr. Craven resented Colin, even as an infant, for living at all when Mrs. Craven died. In light of this intense grief and resentment, it's very possible that there never was anything the matter with Colin; his various maladies could've easily been brought on by the unhappy thoughts of his father. However, the fact that Colin's apparent illness and frailty takes on such a powerful role in his life speaks to the power of thought and belief, as it suggests that hearing this sort of thing all the time leads a person to internalize it and believe it's true—which in turn manifests as physical ailments in Colin, given that he's constantly ill and thinks of himself as a sick person.

During Mary and Colin's first fight, in which he throws a tantrum because he believes he's going to die and develop a hunchback, Mary demands to inspect Colin's back. Her inspection reveals that there's absolutely nothing wrong with his back and she even threatens to laugh at him if he says there is ever again. Following this, the narrator reveals that Colin's illness is all in his head—the narrator notes that had Colin had friends or thought to ask questions, "he would have found out that most of his fright and illness was created by himself." Tellingly, once Colin makes up his mind to believe Mary that he

isn't ill or at risk of dying, his health suddenly begins to improve. This reinforces the power of both positive and negative thoughts, as the negative thoughts were powerful enough to bring on Colin's tantrums and scare him into misery, while his positive thoughts give him the strength and the tenacity to exercise, go outside, and eventually, develop his belief in what he, Mary, and Dickon refer to as "Magic."

In a basic sense, Magic allows Colin to name his belief in the power of positive thinking and as a result, enables him to put together a program that transforms positive thinking into a series of rituals and specific actions and in turn, makes it easier to follow. This begins when Colin leads Mary, Dickon, and Ben Weatherstaff in a prayer circle of sorts, where they chant over and over again about the power of the natural world and of positive thinking. Later, the system of Magic expands to include basic strength training exercises that, when combined with Colin's newfound enthusiasm for positive thought, helps him grow stronger and more confident. As the weeks pass, part of the ritual comes to include Colin's regular speeches about the power of Magic and what good it's doing for him, suggesting that while the belief in Magic is something that starts in a private, secluded space, it's something that eventually will (and in the end, does) transcend the boundaries of the secret garden and help others.

Importantly, the transformation that Mr. Craven undergoes in the final chapter of the novel suggests that Magic and positive thought can influence others without their having to think the positive thoughts themselves. This final chapter tells of Mrs. Craven's experiences abroad during the time that Colin is first developing his understanding of Magic at home. While traveling, Mr. Craven suddenly awakes to the beauty surrounding him, and as Colin grows stronger, Mr. Craven grows more introspective and more positive himself. The dramatic transformations that Colin, Mary, and Mr. Craven make as a result of Magic, and the implied restoration of happiness and health to all residents at Misselthwaite, suggests that positive thought has the power to right wrongs even on a larger scale than the individual. Taken together, all of this presents a world in which thoughts reign supreme and in which individuals can effect real change in their worlds if they learn to control and channel those thoughts.



### CHILDREARING AND FRIENDSHIP

Part of the reason that both Colin and Mary are in such poor states when the reader meets them is because none of their living parents actually wanted them. The officers that rescue the forgotten Mary out of her parents' home after devastating a cholera outbreak note that they didn't even know that Mary's mother had a child, while following the death of Mrs. Craven, Mr. Craven couldn't bear to look at his son and therefore removed himself from Colin's life altogether. While the novel squarely blames the

parents and the people the parents put in charge of their children for Colin and Mary's poor health and attitudes, it also makes the case that an essential cure for the children's ills is friendship with people their own age, rather than installing other adult authority figures who, the novel suggests, would be unable to empathize with the children and meet them where they are.

Both Mary and Colin have been raised almost exclusively by hired help, not by their parents. While the novel doesn't vilify hired help across the board (Martha, Mary's maid at Misselthwaite, is a huge contributor in many ways to Mary and Colin's friendship, as well as to Mary's discovery of the power of nature), it does suggest that certain types of people who are hired to raise children can actually have lasting ill effects on them. Because of Mary and Colin's statuses as well-to-do young people, the people who raise them, such as Mary's Ayah and Colin's nurse, have little power to punish or reprimand their charges. Instead, when Mary and Colin get angry, there's nothing stopping them from slapping their caregivers and forcing those women to let the children have their way. While it's easy to see this as a consequence of spoiling the children or simply not allowing the adults to do their jobs, the ways in which the children begin to change their habits when they meet each other suggests that the true issue is that both Mary and Colin are lonely and crave either attention from their birth parents or friendship with a peer. Within the world of the novel, an adult hired in the capacity of a nurse or a governess isn't capable of giving Mary or Colin what they actually need: love, empathy, and an equally strong selfish nature to act as a mirror and encourage better behavior.

On the night of Colin's final tantrum, Mary learns that Colin is so caught up in his own self-importance and misery that he can spin the whole household into a terrified flurry by crying, screaming, and throwing a massive fit. Furthermore, because Mr. Craven doesn't concern himself with his son's antics, and because the caregivers must do as Colin says, this behavior is allowed to continue. While Colin's screams scare Mary as they do the rest of the household, her own selfishness gives her the courage to bluntly confront Colin, tell him he's being silly and self-involved, and shame him into calming down. Notably, as Mary and Colin's friendship grows, the fact that they were both raised to think only of themselves allows them to check the other when they behave selfishly. As with their fight, Mary is able to confront Colin at several points exactly because it never occurs to her to consider Colin's feelings, and Mary is also able to observe that when she does behave kindly to others, they in turn treat her better. On the other hand, when Mary makes friends with the robin, Ben Weatherstaff, and Dickon and his creatures, she's able to befriend them in part because she recognizes her own lower status in relation to them. Ben Weatherstaff, as a cantankerous adult, has no qualms about hurting Mary's feelings, while the robin and Dickon both show



Mary through their actions that if she wants to be around them, she has to behave in ways that make them comfortable.

It's only after Colin and Mary have put these checks and balances on each other and through doing so, learn to think about people other than themselves that they're able to accept parental guidance or, in Colin's case, decide he wants it at all. They test this through their relationship with Susan Sowerby, Martha and Dickon's mother. Mary is entranced by the idea of Mrs. Sowerby from the minute that Martha starts talking about her (and for much of the novel, even mimics Martha by referring to Mrs. Sowerby just as "mother"). After Mary and Colin become more and more empathetic and curious about Mrs. Sowerby's life, Mrs. Sowerby comes to visit them in the secret garden and, through her embraces, kind manner, and genuine interest, shows them what a kind and loving parent figure is like. This process culminates in Colin coming to terms with the death of his own mother and his desire to make his father proud. The empathy he develops over the months he spends in the **secret garden** allows him to think of the portrait of his mother in his bedroom as smiling down on him, while wanting to make Mr. Craven proud to have a son guides Colin's every choice and action. Importantly, Mrs. Sowerby is also responsible for Mary's ability to run free around Misselthwaite—she's in regular contact with Mr. Craven's household staff and advocates for Mary to be allowed outside for another few years before receiving a governess.

While there's no chance for Mary to ever have a positive relationship with her late parents, the novel's ending—in which Mr. Craven and Colin affirm their relationship and their affection for each other, while Mary and Colin have become kind, thoughtful and empathetic individuals through their experiences with each other and working in the secret garden—leaves the children in a place in which they finally have the emotional skills to grow up and move forward into adulthood.



## SECRETS AND INDEPENDENCE

*The Secret Garden* is organized around a number of secrets. Mary's very existence is a secret from most of her parents' friends; Colin experiences some of

the same while also insisting that visual evidence of his illness should be kept secret from the Misselthwaite staff; and the biggest draw of the **secret garden** for Mary is that it's a secret. By exploring how secrets function in both positive and negative ways throughout the novel, *The Secret Garden* suggests that secrets do have their place—but that place is among children and even then, only when children use secrets to develop a sense of independence. Adults' secret keeping, on the other hand, will only ever bring suffering and loneliness, often at a child's expense.

Every instance in which adult characters in the novel keep

secrets is described as either objectively bad or, in the case of a few (most notably that Ben Weatherstaff has been secretly tending to the secret garden for the last ten years), unhelpful in the long run. Specifically, the novel goes to great lengths to show how when adults keep secrets, children suffer. The narrator notes that Mary's mother never truly wanted a child, which is why Mary is kept away and separate from the rest of the household. Though it's worth noting that this is likely what saved Mary's life when cholera swept through her family's home—her seclusion meant she wasn't exposed to the disease—her seclusion also put her at risk of being missed entirely and left on her own longer than she already was, with potentially disastrous results. Similarly, the particulars of the death of Mrs. Craven trap both Mr. Craven and Colin in miserable situations. Because Mr. Craven blamed the tree branch that broke for his wife's deadly fall, he had the garden locked up, hid the key, and forbids anyone from mentioning the garden, his wife, and his son. He spends his time alone, brooding, while keeping Colin a secret from children his own age leaves Colin dangerously and damagingly isolated. In both cases, the novel makes the case that when adults keep secrets, especially ones that they never intend to expose, those secrets are damaging to them as well as everyone around them. Especially for Mr. Craven, it's also telling that keeping the garden a secret is ultimately ineffective—both in terms of easing his grief and in terms of the secret remaining a secret—as it suggests that aside from being damaging, keeping secrets like this isn't something that's capable of even accomplishing a desired result.

For the children, however, the secrets that they keep are magical things that allow them to connect with the natural world, with each other, and most importantly, help them develop a sense of independence. Mary spends only a few days in the secret garden by herself before she meets Dickon and discovers that she desperately wants to let him in on the secret. Then, after meeting Colin, she undergoes a similar shift as she decides to tell him about the secret garden and eventually, that she knows where the door and the key are. Sharing the secret garden with each other allows the children to develop their relationships with each other in a place where they can truly be themselves, away from the anxious and watchful eyes of the adults who believe that Colin is going to die. In this way, their secret allows them both the venue and the glue to strengthen their commitments to each other, to the garden, and eventually, to sharing the secret with others.

As Colin's health begins to improve, he vows to improve enough to impress Mr. Craven and make him proud—but he also believes that his recovery needs to be undertaken in secret, where his doctors and nurse can't see the progress and spoil the surprise for Mr. Craven. Because of this, Colin and Mary decide to pretend that Colin isn't improving and, at times, they pretend he's actually getting worse. They insist on

wheeling Colin into the garden in his wheelchair and at several points they vow to not eat all of their meals as to throw their caregivers off the trail. Rather than this being a restrictive and damaging experience for them, playing pretend allows them to share when they're ready and only after they've brought the secret garden back to its former glory and turned Colin into "a real boy." And to their credit, this ruse works surprisingly well—Dr. Craven is perplexed by Colin's strange road to recovery, while Mr. Craven is thrilled to see his son healthy and strong. Mr. Craven is also pleased to discover that the garden is once again a beautiful and well-maintained space and this allows him to focus on the fact that the garden is responsible for Colin's health, not just for his wife's death.

Because of the ways in which the secrets that lead to the novel's happy ending differ from those that created the novel's conflicts in the first place, *The Secret Garden* suggests that there's a limit to how effective secrets can be: it implies that there must be a set end to the secret's life, or no good will come of it. However, the numerous good things that come from Colin's secret recovery process make it clear that keeping secrets can be an effective way for children to take control of their lives, practice being independent, and learn how to be good and trustworthy friends.

world with the skills and habits the garden taught them.



## ROSES

The roses in the secret garden function as symbols for Mary, Colin, and specifically, the understanding that the children, like the roses, need nurturing to grow. Just like Mary and Colin, the roses have been neglected (save for Ben Weatherstaff's intermittent secret pruning) for ten years and yet, they still have the capacity to flourish. Initially, Mary wonders whether the roses are dead or are secretly alive, just as adults wonder whether she'll ever look pleasant or healthy. As Mary and Dickon begin to prune the roses and discover all the live parts of the plants, Mary simultaneously discovers life and health within herself. Specifically, the rose that Colin plants mirrors his decision to effectively plant himself in the garden, accept Mary and Dickon's friendship, and allow himself to grow and bloom as a result, just like the roses do under the children's care.



## MARY'S PRETEND GARDEN

The few times that the reader sees Mary playing while still in India, Mary is pretending to garden by pushing cut flowers into the ground as though she were planting them. This pretend garden symbolizes several things. First, it's understood that this garden, like Mary, won't grow; the flowers will die soon after being plucked and put in the soil without water, just as Mary cannot think, grow, or feel creative in India's hot climate. In this way, the garden comes to represent how stifling and inappropriate India is for a child like Mary. On the other hand, the fact that Mary is engaging in this kind of play foreshadows her interest in the **secret garden** once she arrives in England. With this, the play garden also comes to represent the potential for growth and curiosity, as well as the interest in the natural world, that the novel suggests exists within all children.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE SECRET GARDEN

The secret garden, a walled garden at Misselthwaite that ten years ago was Mrs. Craven's pride and joy, symbolizes the late Mrs. Craven herself, though it grows into a symbol of Mary's growth over the course of the novel. The garden is something that intrigues Mary from the first time she hears about it. She learns that Mr. Craven locked the garden and buried the key after his wife's death, as it was a painful reminder of her and the love they shared. As Mary begins to learn and grow through her engagement with the garden, it also becomes a symbol for Mary and Mary's growth, as she discovers kindness and compassion within herself as the garden blooms in the spring. Especially once Colin begins spending time in the garden, it begins to more broadly represent mothering, nurturing, and growth. In the garden, Mary and Colin learn to be happy, thoughtful, and caring people—all things that the novel suggests they would've learned from their mothers, had their mothers been present. Their exit from the garden and into Mr. Craven's arms then suggests that the children have outgrown their intense and youthful need for such a mothering presence and, at the end of the novel, are ready to enter the wider and more masculine





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *The Secret Garden* published in 2010.

### Chapter 4 Quotes

●● Mary had never possessed an animal pet of her own and had always thought she should like no one. So she began to feel a slight interest in Dickon, and as she had never before been interested in any one but herself, it was the dawning of a healthy sentiment.

**Related Characters:** Dickon, Martha, Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 36



### Explanation and Analysis

During Mary's first morning at Misselthwaite, Martha tells her about her brother Dickon, who makes friends with animals on the moor, including a moor pony. This is an intriguing idea for Mary, and it's one of the first moments in which she begins to think of other people outside of herself. This has to do in part with the way that Martha treats her: because Martha isn't a fully trained lady's maid, she treats Mary more like she would one of her sisters, not her mistress. This means that Martha speaks more freely than she might otherwise and is harsher with Mary, which forces Mary to develop self-awareness and consider how disagreeable she really is. Notably, the fact that Mary's first spark of interest about somebody else comes from an instance of hearing about pets. As her first friend will be the robin, this foreshadows meeting him later in the course of her day and reinforces that animals can be friends with people and are just as valuable as friends.

●● "A bird with a red breast was sitting on one of them and he sang."

To her surprise the surly old weather-beaten face actually changed its expression. A slow smile spread over it and the gardener looked quite different. It made her think that it was curious how much nicer a person looked when he smiled. She had not thought of it before.

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), The Robin, Ben Weatherstaff

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 44

### Explanation and Analysis

As Mary explores the grounds of Misselthwaite Manor on her first day, she meets Ben Weatherstaff and tells the curmudgeonly old gardener about seeing a singing robin. Hearing Mary talk about the robin brightens Ben's face, and for the first time, Mary realizes that smiles make people look nice. The fact that Mary is having this revelation outside in the garden and in relation to the robin illustrates two of the novel's main points. First, it reinforces that friendship, as she'll go on to form with the robin and with

Ben, is one of the best ways for children learn how to move through the world, as it then creates a mirror in which the children can learn to look at themselves and examine their own behavior. Second, it's important that all of this takes place outside in nature. This reminds the reader that within the world of the novel, the natural world is healing and rejuvenating and it's because of this that Mary is able to make these leaps that she wasn't able to in India.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

●● But the big breaths of rough fresh air blown over the heather filled her lungs with something which was good for her whole thin body and whipped some red color into her cheeks and brightened her dull eyes when she did not know anything about it.

But after a few days spent almost entirely out of doors she wakened one morning knowing what it was to be hungry, and when she sat down to her breakfast she did not glance disdainfully at her porridge and push it away, but took up her spoon and began to eat it and went on eating it until her bowl was empty.

**Related Characters:** Martha, Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains how the fresh air from the moor was able to make Mary hungry for breakfast after only a few days. The novel positions being hungry as a sign of health; Mary is unhealthy in India and her unwillingness to eat much there is a symptom of that. Notably, the novel attributes her poor health in India to India's climate. In England, on the other hand, the novel suggests that the environment and specifically, the outdoors and the moor are elements that can actively make a person healthier, whether they know it or realize it. This all suggests that while *The Secret Garden* makes the case that nature is overwhelmingly a force for good, there are certain kinds of nature—in other words, English kinds of nature—that are far superior to other natural places and healing can only take place in these particular places.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ "I wonder," staring at her reflectively, "what Dickon would think of thee?"


"He wouldn't like me," said Mary in her stiff, cold little way. "No one does."

Martha looked reflective again.

"How does tha' like thysel'?" she inquired, really quite as if she were curious to know.

"Not at all—really," she answered. "But I never thought of that before."

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox , Martha (speaker), Dickon

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 75

### Explanation and Analysis

One morning, as Martha and Mary discuss Mrs. Sowerby and Dickon and the fact that Mary is starting to like people, Mary admits that nobody likes her, and that she doesn't exactly blame them for that—she doesn't like herself either. This exchange truly situates Martha as someone who bridges the gap between friend and caregiver. Before this point, Mary has never had a friendly relationship with someone who cared for her: she slapped her Ayah when she was angry and never liked any of the women or adults who cared for her between India and Misselthwaite. Because Martha isn't a properly trained lady's maid, however, she feels comfortable engaging with Mary like this and modeling for her how a person can be both a friend and a caregiver—and that it's possible to like others, no matter how they relate to a person.

☞ She walked away, slowly thinking. She had begun to like the garden just as she had begun to like the robin and Dickon and Martha's mother. She was beginning to like Martha, too. This seemed a good many people to like—when you were not used to liking.

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), Ben Weatherstaff , Martha, The Robin , Susan Sowerby / Mother, Dickon

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 78

### Explanation and Analysis

After a brief conversation with Ben Weatherstaff about the secret garden, Mary takes stock of all the people she's starting to like. The novel attributes Mary's transformation to learning to like people to the time she spends in nature, even at this point when she hasn't yet discovered the secret garden. This also shows how her time in nature gradually begins to give her happy things to think about, especially other people, which in turn makes Mary happier and healthier. Taken together, this all shows that Mary's engagement with the garden and the growing number of good thoughts that she's thinking about are the main drivers in her transformation process, and it shows that she's well on her way to becoming a more pleasant individual.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ "Martha," she said, "they were your wages. It was your twopence really. Thank you." She said it stiffly because she was not used to thanking people or noticing that they did things for her. "Thank you," she said, and held out her hand because she did not know what else to do.

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), Martha

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 87

### Explanation and Analysis

When Martha gifts Mary a jump rope, courtesy of Mrs. Sowerby, Mary awkwardly thanks Martha for her kindness—the first time she's ever done so. Because this moment takes place only a few weeks into Mary's time at Misselthwaite, it illustrates the extreme power of all the good things that Mary is experiencing at the Manor. Her time in nature is making her more introspective, while her conversations with Martha about Dickon and Mrs. Sowerby are beginning to make Mary more curious about people other than herself. Specifically, the fact that Martha is simultaneously a maid, authority figure, and a friend to Mary helps Mary make this leap and treat her so kindly.



This is also the first time that an adult does something truly kind for Mary, which begins to show her how an adult authority figure can be. She never had this opportunity with her own parents, as they didn't care for her and her mother actively didn't want her, but the love and care that Mrs. Sowerby shows to Mary throughout the novel helps Mary see that she can trust adults to take care of her and think



kindly about her.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ All that troubled her was her wish that she knew whether all the roses were dead, or if perhaps some of them had lived and might put out leaves and buds as the weather got warmer. She did not want it to be a quite dead garden. If it were a quite alive garden, how wonderful it would be, and what thousands of roses would grow on every side!

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 95

### Explanation and Analysis

As Mary takes her first turn around the secret garden, she wonders if all the rose vines and cane that she sees everywhere are alive or dead. Her musings about whether or not the roses might bloom and develop as spring progresses mirrors her and Colin's transformations over the course of the novel, as at this point, both of them appear to be "quite dead," just like the roses. However, as both children and roses receive care, love, friendship, and spend time outside, they all begin to grow and flourish. The fact that Mary wants the roses to grow shows that on some level, she also wants to grow herself. With this, the novel reminds the reader that though Mary has been neglected for ten years up to this point, just like the roses, she's still alive and well somewhere deep inside herself—she just needs the love and care to bloom.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ "Do you like roses?" she said.


Ben Weatherstaff rooted up a weed and threw it aside before he answered.

"Well, yes, I do. I was learned that by a young lady I was gardener to. She had a lot in a place she was fond of, an' she loved 'em like they was children—or robins. I've seen her bend over an' kiss 'em." He dragged out another weed and scowled at it. "That were as much as ten year' ago."

**Related Characters:** Ben Weatherstaff, Mary Lennox

(speaker), Mrs. Craven

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 111

### Explanation and Analysis

One afternoon, as Mary pesters Ben Weatherstaff about roses in the secret garden, Ben admits that he used to work for Mrs. Craven and she taught him to like roses. The way that Ben describes how Mrs. Craven interacted with her roses reinforces the symbolism of roses as children. The time period he's speaking about is before Colin's birth, when the roses would've been the only "child" that Mrs. Craven had. She also seemed to understand that roses and children both required love and careful tending and specifically, physical affection. Though this physical affection manifests as kissing here, it also includes the ways that Dickon and Mary go on to prune the roses in the secret garden, and also points to the way in which physical contact helps Mary and Colin develop their friendship and learn to trust each other later on.

When Ben refuses to use Mrs. Craven's name and refuses to say that the secret garden used to be hers, he's following Mr. Craven's directions—but he's also not being successful in keeping anything a secret from Mary. While she may or may not pick up on Mrs. Craven's identity, she definitely does know that Ben is talking about the secret garden. This reinforces the futility of adult secret keeping and suggests that children are more insightful than Mr. Craven and other adults give them credit for.

☞ "Could you keep a secret, if I told you one? It's a great secret. I don't know what I should do if any one found it out. I believe I should die!" She said the last sentence quite fiercely.

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), Dickon

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 120

### Explanation and Analysis

When Mary and Dickon meet for the first time, Dickon offers to plant some of the seeds he brought for Mary. This


leads Mary to passionately tell him about the secret garden, after confirming that Dickon is trustworthy. What's most important in Mary's speech is her emotional tenor and her passion; for her, keeping the secret garden a secret is more important than anything else. This speaks both to the power of the garden, which is exciting for Mary and is helping her come alive, as well as the power of secrets to give a child like Mary purpose, independence, and something to call her own. Most importantly, by sharing this secret with Dickon, Mary is able to form a real, trusting friendship with him, and that friendship is yet another factor that contributes to her process of coming alive, as well as the garden's flourishing.


## Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ Then Mary did a strange thing. She learned forward and asked him a question she had never dreamed of asking any one before. And she tried to ask it in Yorkshire because that was his language, and in India a native was always pleased if you knew his speech.

"Does tha' like me?" she said.

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), Dickon

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 132



### Explanation and Analysis

On the first day that Mary and Dickon dig together in the secret garden, Mary decides to ask Dickon if he likes her. The way that the narrator frames Mary's choice to speak in broad Yorkshire (by suggesting that it's similar to speaking to Indian natives in their language) suggests that Mary is beginning to humanize the Indian people who raised her—especially since she told Martha not that long ago that Indians weren't people. This speaks to the positive effects of Mary's friendship with Dickon, as now that she's discovered that she can like a person, it's allowing her to be empathetic towards others. Her desire to know if Dickon likes her in the first place also points to how immense Mary's transformation is, even at this early stage. While before she cared little if anyone liked her and believed outright that nobody would, now, it's extremely important to her to earn Dickon's affection. This shows that Mary is beginning to find her place in the social structure at Misselthwaite and that she's learning to be a reflective and caring friend.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☞ "Oh, what a queer house this is!" Mary said. "What a queer house! Everything is a kind of secret. Rooms are locked up and gardens are locked up—and you! Have you been locked up?"

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), Colin Craven

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 153

### Explanation and Analysis

After discovering Colin one night, Mary decides that Misselthwaite Manor as a whole is strange ("queer") because there are so many secrets. Notice that, while Mary has her own secrets—namely, the secret garden—she finds the secrets surrounding the rest of the house especially strange. This points to the divide between adult secrets and childhood secrets and the differing effects that each have on people. Mary recognizes that because of all the secrets that Mr. Craven is attempting to keep, he's effectively depriving her of a friend in Colin, and vice versa. This allows her to see that not only are Mr. Craven's secrets ineffective, seeing as she's figured many of them out by this point, they're also damaging.

☞ "Do you think you won't live?" she asked, partly because she was curious and partly in hope of making him forget the garden.

"I don't suppose I shall," he answered as indifferently as he had spoken before. "Ever since I remember anything I have heard people say I shan't. At first they thought I was too little to understand and now they think I don't hear. But I do."

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven, Mary Lennox (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 157

### Explanation and Analysis

As Mary and Colin talk during their first meeting, Mary tries to distract Colin from the topic of the secret garden by asking him about his health and his prospects. Everything about what Colin says, from his tone to the content, is indicative of the power of hearing over and over again that he's going to die. After ten years of hearing this, it's no longer interesting for him and it's not something he can question—it's simply a fact of life, and he believes that it's

true. With this, the novel is able to illustrate what evil can be done by repeating something over and over again until it becomes a reality. This sets up Colin's main transformation as being one of thought, in which he discovers that positive thoughts have the power to heal him, while it's little more than these negative thoughts that keep him from getting well.


☞ "Oh, don't you see how much nicer it would be if it was a secret?"

He dropped back on his pillow and lay there with an odd expression on his face.

"I never had a secret," he said, "except that one about not living to grow up. They don't know I know that, so it is a sort of secret. But I like this kind better."

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven, Mary Lennox (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 160


### Explanation and Analysis

When Colin suggests that he'll make servants open up the secret garden and take him there, Mary encourages him not to and insists that it'd be more satisfying if they kept the garden a secret. Colin decides that he likes it and it's a good secret. Notice that in Colin's assessment, he divides secrets into good and bad ones. The fact that he's going to die is, importantly, a secret that Colin is complicit in keeping, but it's not one that he made—instead, it's one that the novel suggests was created by Colin's father out of grief. Again, this suggests that secrets kept by adults are fundamentally unhelpful and further, that they do little but harm children. The secret garden, on the other hand, is constructed as something positive that allows Colin and Mary get to know each other and bond over keeping a secret together. For Colin especially then, the secret garden allows him to experience more independence than he ever has before, something that in later weeks will help him to recover and transform into a "real boy."

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☞ And they both began to laugh over nothings as children will when they are happy together. And they laughed so that in the end they were making as much noise as if they had been two ordinary healthy natural ten-year-old creatures—instead of a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy who believed that he was going to die.

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven, Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 177

### Explanation and Analysis

When Mary visits Colin during the day for the first time, they talk about all sorts of things and eventually start to look like normal children instead of the strange people the narrator insists they are at this point. The way that laughter and companionship change Colin and Mary speaks to the power of friendship with a peer and suggests that this kind of transformation is something that only friendship can do. This is reinforced by the fact that Colin and Mary are unable or unwilling to behave this way with any of the adults or authority figures in their lives; they've never known that it's possible to feel this way with anyone and fellow children make it seem safer to try such a thing.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ "He's been lying in his room so long and he's always been so afraid of his back that it has made him queer," said Mary. "He knows a good many things out of books but he doesn't know anything else. He says he has been to ill to notice things and he hates going out of doors and hates gardens and gardeners. But he likes to hear about this garden because it is a secret."

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox (speaker), Colin Craven, Dickon

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 196

### Explanation and Analysis

One beautiful morning, Mary joins Dickon early in the garden and tells him all about meeting Colin and how strange Colin is, thanks to his belief that he's going to develop a hunchback and die young. The simple fact that

Mary feels comfortable enough to share this with Dickon speaks to the strength of their friendship and how far Mary has already come—sharing such a thing with anybody, or even caring about someone like Colin, would've been unthinkable not that long ago for her. It's also important to note that Mary is well aware of the power of secrets to engage Colin. She understands that the secret allows him ownership over something in a way that has been denied to him for his entire life. Because of the way that the secret makes Colin feel more in control, Colin even begins to change his thinking about other things he thought he didn't like. Taken together, this all reinforces the novel's insistence that friendships between children, and the innocent secrets that they keep amongst themselves, are some of the most powerful tools to help children mature and become functioning people in their own rights.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ Mary's lips pinched themselves together. She was no more used to considering other people than Colin was and she saw no reason why an ill-tempered boy should interfere with the thing she liked best. She knew nothing about the pitifulness of people who had been ill and nervous and who did not know that they could control their tempers and need not make other people ill and nervous, too.

**Related Characters:** Martha, Colin Craven, Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 201

### Explanation and Analysis

After Mary spends a few blissful days outside, Martha grows concerned that Colin is going to be upset that Mary has been outside instead of visiting with him. Mary, being selfish, doesn't see why Colin should keep her from the garden. This begins to show how Mary and Colin, because of their very similar upbringings, will be able to function as a mirror for each other and in doing so, check each other's behavior. It's especially telling that Mary can recognize that Colin is spoiled in the first place, as it suggests that she's already learning how to look at people other than herself and assess their personalities and habits. However, she hasn't yet learned to then turn this back on herself and realize that she's also spoiled. This reminds the reader that while Mary has already changed for the better, she still has a long way to go in her development.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ [...] If he had had childish companions and had not lain on his back in the huge closed house, breathing an atmosphere heavy with the fears of people who were most of them ignorant and tired of him, he would have found out that most of his fright and illness was created by himself. But he had lain and thought of himself and his aches and weariness for hours and days and months and years. And now that an angry unsympathetic little girl insisted obstinately that he was not as ill as he thought he was he actually felt as if she might be speaking the truth.

**Related Characters:** Colin's Nurse, Mary Lennox, Colin Craven

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 213

### Explanation and Analysis

At the climax of Mary and Colin's fight during Colin's tantrum, Mary tells him that there's nothing wrong with his back, and Colin starts to believe that she's right.

Importantly, the narrator suggests that one of the biggest reasons why Colin believed he was ill in the first place was because he was left alone and didn't have any companions to do what Mary does here and bluntly tell him he's being silly. This points both to the damaging effects of isolation and what happens when adults keep secrets, as it's because of Mr. Craven's desire to keep Colin's existence a secret that Colin doesn't have any friends. This places the blame for Colin's hypochondria squarely on his father's shoulders.

Further, the narrator takes great care to describe how Colin has spent his entire life dwelling on how ill he is, and that constant cycle of negativity is one of the main reasons why he's so ill and weak. With this, the narrator again reminds the reader that Colin's thoughts are powerful and can make things true if he thinks them enough. In other words, though there's actually nothing wrong with Colin, because he believes that he's sick, he feels that way and on some level, it becomes true for him.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

☝☝ The scene which Dr. Craven beheld when he entered his patient's room was indeed rather astonishing to him. As Mrs. Medlock opened the door he heard laughing and chattering. Colin was on his sofa in his dressing-gown and he was sitting up quite straight looking at a picture in one of the garden books and talking to the plain child who at that moment could scarcely be called plain at all because her face was so glowing with enjoyment.



**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox, Colin Craven, Mrs. Medlock, Dr. Craven

**Related Themes:**   



**Page Number:** 237

### Explanation and Analysis

When Dr. Craven visits Colin the day after Colin's tantrum, he's shocked to see that Colin is up and looks well—Colin is usually pale, refuses to sit up, and is in a dreadfully sour mood. Though Dr. Craven doesn't make the connection in a clear way, the reader has by now been led to believe that Colin looks so well both because he's now friends with Mary. In the same vein, Mary looks so well and pretty because she's now friends with Colin, which reminds the reader that developing friendships like this benefits everyone involved. Further, the fact that they're looking at a gardening book reinforces the power of nature to heal and improve a person, while also keeping the existence of the secret garden and Mary and Colin's interest in it more of a secret from Dr. Craven. The gardening book is a way for Mary to gradually immerse Colin in nature, by first bringing it to him before he ventures out into the garden. Significantly, the gardening book was a gift to Mary from Mr. Craven, so this passage also suggests that Mary is functioning as a link between the estranged father and son, using nature to bridge the gap between them.

☞ "I don't want to remember," interrupted the Rajah, appearing again. "When I lie by myself and remember I begin to have pains everywhere and I think of things that make me scream because I hate them so. If there was a doctor anywhere who could make you forget you were ill instead of remembering it I would have him brought here."

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven (speaker), Dr. Craven, Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 232

### Explanation and Analysis



As Dr. Craven reminds Colin that he needs to remember that he's ill and not overextend himself, Colin imperiously informs the doctor that thinking about his illness makes him feel even sicker. The fact that Colin can make this connection shows that he now understands the power of his thoughts to actually change things in the world and

within his own body. He recognizes that by thinking about his illness he feels sicker, while when he thinks about things other than his illness, he feels better. This begins to render Dr. Craven somewhat unnecessary; what neither Dr. Craven nor Colin realize at this moment is that Dr. Craven's place will soon be taken by the secret garden specifically and nature as a whole. However, at this point, Colin simply recognizes that doctors can't heal people by reminding them that they're sick; if he wants to improve, he must find something happy to think about, as physical transformation begins in his own mind.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ "You'll get plenty of fresh air, won't you?" said Mary. "I'm going to get nothing else," he answered. "I've seen the spring now and I'm going to see the summer. I'm going to see everything grow here. I'm going to grow here myself."

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven, Mary Lennox (speaker), Dickon

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 263

### Explanation and Analysis

After a few invigorating hours in the secret garden, Colin declares that he's going to live to see the seasons pass and watch things grow. Given that this is such a dramatic transformation for him in such a short period of time, this passage speaks primarily to nature's power to heal people emotionally and physically. Mere hours outside, surrounded by new growth and the fresh moor air, have done more for Colin than constant visits from doctors over the course of his entire life. Importantly, Colin now has a goal to work toward, imbuing his life with a purpose he previously lacked. While before he simply accepted that he was probably going to die, a belief that, within the logic of the novel, won't help Colin at all, he can now name specifically what he wants: to see the summer and to grow. This is a positive thought and gives him something to cling to and direct his thoughts around, thereby fundamentally shifting his thinking to be more positive and focused on nature.



## Chapter 23 Quotes


☞ "I shall stop being queer," he said, "if I go every day to the garden. There is Magic in there—good Magic, you know, Mary. I am sure there is."

"So am I," said Mary.

"Even if it isn't real Magic," Colin said, "we can pretend it is. *Something* is there—*something!*"

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox , Colin Craven (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 281-282

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Mary calls Colin out for being rude and entitled, he's fairly unconcerned about it but declares that he'll stop being that way by spending time in the secret garden and drawing on the Magic that's there. What's particularly important here is Colin's lack of concern about whether or not Magic is real. This suggests that the specifics of what a person believes are less important, and that what counts instead is that a person believes in something at all. This is reinforced in the coming chapters, as both Colin and Mrs. Sowerby decide that Magic can be seen as the same idea as organized religion, and that it's not necessary to engage in organized religion to reap the benefits of belief. While the novel is explicit about highlighting Magic's religious overtones, it also simply suggests that there's good to come from believing wholly in something and dedicating one's life to it, whether that be nature, Magic, religion, or a combination of all three.

☞ And this was not half of the Magic. The fact that he had really once stood on his feet had set Colin thinking tremendously and when Mary told him of the spell she had worked he was excited and approved of it greatly. He talked of it constantly.

"Of course there must be lots of Magic in the world," he said wisely one day, "but people don't know what it is like or how to make it. Perhaps the beginning is just to say nice things are going to happen until you make them happen. I am going to try and experiment."

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven (speaker), Ben Weatherstaff , Dickon, Mary Lennox

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 284

**Explanation and Analysis**

After discovering that when he stood for the first time Mary was muttering, "you can do it!" over and over under her breath, Colin deems this a spell and begins to think about how Magic functions in the world. It's especially telling that Colin decides that Magic can happen everywhere, no matter if a person knows what it is or not, just by thinking or saying nice things. This places the power to create change firmly in the hands of individuals and suggests that people have the power to change their fates and even affect other people through positive thought; they don't have to go through a higher power or ask others for help. The philosophy Colin outlines in this passage is immediately put into practice; in the final chapter of the novel, Mr. Craven inexplicably finds himself feeling better, albeit in short-lived spurts, amidst the heavy grief he's been carrying around for ten years. The narrator reveals that those spurts of energy and joy perfectly corresponded with Colin's own moments of growth—like standing up for the first time, emboldened by Mary's chants of "you can do it!"—highlighting how Magic can link individuals.

☞ Colin flushed triumphantly. He had made himself believe that he was going to get well, which was really more than half the battle, if he had been aware of it. And the thought which stimulated him more than any other was this imagining what his father would look like when he saw that he had a son who was as straight and strong as other fathers' sons.

**Related Characters:** Colin Craven (speaker), Mary Lennox , Mr. Archibald Craven

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 294

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Colin's first prayer circle and lap around the garden, he declares that his improving health must be kept a secret so he has the opportunity to reveal it himself, and Mary declares that Mr. Craven will be proud. Colin has already spent several weeks in the garden at this point, during which time he's gotten stronger and more pleasant. This shift to wanting his father to see how well he is speaks to how far Colin has come, and it alludes to what the next step is for Colin's development. Because the secret garden acts

as an incubator of sorts, allowing the children to grow and develop privately within it, it takes on maternal qualities. This is especially true when people note that Mrs. Craven's spirit is in the garden; it thus becomes the place where Colin can connect to a mothering figure. However, this shift to deciding that he'd like to make Mr. Craven proud shows that Colin understands that his next step is to move outside the safety of the garden into the more masculine world. With this, Colin takes another step in the direction of maturity and adulthood.

## Chapter 26 Quotes



☝☝ "You are just what I—what I wanted," he said. "I wish you were my mother—as well as Dickon's!"

All at once Susan Sowerby bent down and drew him with her warm arms close against the bosom under the blue cloak—as if he had been Dickon's brother. The quick mist swept over her eyes.

"Eh! Dear lad!" she said. "Thy own mother's in this 'ere very garden, I do believe. She couldna' keep out of it. Thy father mun come back to thee—he mun!"

**Related Characters:** Susan Sowerby / Mother, Colin Craven (speaker), Mary Lennox, Dickon

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 336

### Explanation and Analysis

As Mrs. Sowerby bids Mary and Colin goodbye, Colin wishes that she were his mother, which touches Mrs. Sowerby. As this is the first time that Mary and Colin have met Mrs. Sowerby after months of hearing about her and building her up in their minds, this moment is the one in which they finally express their desire for a loving and comforting parent figure in their lives. They're able to do this because, after spending time in the secret garden with each other and with Dickon, they've both developed a degree of independence—now, what they want is someone kind and caring to point them in the direction of adulthood. Mrs. Sowerby's insistence that Mrs. Craven's spirit is in the garden shows Colin that the garden is a place where he can


find this sense of maternal care, even if his mother isn't here in the flesh. Instead of getting care from her, Colin and Mary have received care from the natural world that she loved so much, and it's done a lot of the same things that a mother would have. They now know how to care for others and treat each other and plants with empathy.

Importantly, when Mrs. Sowerby declares that Mr. Craven has to come back, it shows that she understands that given Colin's transformation, Mr. Craven will now be able to engage with his son in a healthy and meaningful way. In other words, thanks to Colin's time spent with his mother's spirit in the garden, he's now the kind of boy who Mr. Craven can be proud of.

## Chapter 27 Quotes

☝☝ To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body. If you let it stay there after it has got in you may never get over it as long as you live.

**Related Characters:** Mary Lennox, Colin Craven

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 338

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator steps back from the narrative to explain the power of thoughts to change someone's life, for better or for worse. Here, they insist that bad thoughts are just as dangerous and can do just as much damage as infectious diseases like scarlet fever. With this, the novel shows just how important it is for a person to be in control of their thoughts and, whenever possible, to think about good and happy things. Within the logic of the novel, this is the only way for a person to be happy and fulfilled.

Further, by comparing bad thoughts to something like scarlet fever, the novel also implies that positive thoughts can be just as healing—or even more so—than doctors. This is supported by the way that Colin throughout the novel gets better because of his engagement with the garden and with Magic, not with doctors. In this world, doctors remind patients that they're sick, thereby stunting healing and in some cases, making it worse. The cure, the novel suggests, is to think of wellness.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

At the time that Mary is sent to live with her uncle, Mr. Archibald Craven, everyone agrees that she's a sour, thin, and disagreeable child. Because she was born in India, she's constantly sick and has a yellow complexion. Mary's father suffers the same ailments, while Mary's mother is beautiful, likes going to parties, and never wanted a baby. Mary's mother gave newborn Mary to an Ayah, and for the next ten years, Mary is kept out of the way of the rest of the house and given her way in everything. By the age of six, she's a selfish terror, and governesses leave their posts after only a few weeks.

When Mary is nine, she wakes up one morning and is angry when she sees that the servant waiting to help her isn't her Ayah. The woman looks frightened and only tells Mary that her Ayah can't come. Throughout the day, Mary notices that all the servants seem scared or missing. She's left alone for the morning and tries to amuse herself by making a **pretend garden**, though she also mutters about the names she's going to call her Ayah. As Mary is absorbed in this, Mary's mother comes onto the verandah with a young officer. Mary's mother seems scared and upset. The officer tells her that she should've left weeks ago, and when a wail rises from the servants' quarters, the officer is horrified to learn that "it" has broken out among the servants.

Mary soon learns that cholera broke out, and the wailing meant that her Ayah died. Servants start dying one after the other, and those that don't die flee. On the second day of the outbreak, Mary hides herself in her room to cry and sleep. Everyone forgets about her. One evening she creeps out to find a partially finished meal on the table. She eats some fruit and drinks a full glass of wine, which makes her sleepy. She sleeps for hours. When she wakes up, the house is entirely silent. She wonders if she'll get a new Ayah and if the new one will know different stories, though she doesn't mourn her dead Ayah.

*Notice that the narrator attributes Mary's nastiness and poor health first to India and then to the way in which she's raised. This suggests that Mary will need to get out of India (which was then a British colony) if she's ever going to be a reasonable or nice child. By also blaming Mary's parents' neglect and the Ayah's requirement to give Mary her way, the novel also suggests that hired help like this can't properly raise a child.*



*Though Mary is spoiled, nobody tells her what's going on because she's a child, and in everyone else's mind, she's therefore unimportant and undeserving of information. The fact that Mary never thinks to ask either speaks to the fact that she doesn't trust the adults around her and doesn't know that they can help her learn these things. The pretend garden that Mary creates shows that she does have the potential to be interested in nature and growing things, but that she can't fully embrace this interest in India.*



*As far as Mary is concerned, her Ayah existed only to serve her and tell her stories; therefore, her death isn't especially meaningful. All that Mary cares about is that she has someone to bend to her wishes and keep her amused, which shows that even though Mary doesn't like or trust the adults around her, she still actively relies on them to keep her happy and comfortable.*



After a number of hours, Mary hears a rustling and sees a small snake slithering through her room and out under the door. The next moment, she hears men enter the house, talking about how they suppose the child—who they're not sure even exists—died too. They open the nursery door a minute later and see Mary, looking hungry and neglected. She demands to know why nobody is taking care of her, but the men only exclaim that everyone forgot her and tell her that there's nobody left to come. Mary learns that both her parents died and the living servants left, totally forgetting about her.

*While it's possible that Mary's seclusion is the reason that she's alive, it's also important to note that it could've killed her too if these officers hadn't come to check. This passage implies that parents need to cherish their children in such a way as to make sure that they'll be cared for if things go sideways, which Mary's parents clearly didn't do, emphasizing that she was an unwanted child.*



## CHAPTER 2

Because Mary is self-absorbed and because Mary's mother never showed her love or affection, Mary doesn't miss her parents much. She simply assumes that people will take care of her and let her have her way, just as her Ayah did. First, she goes to an English clergyman's house. He has five children who are about Mary's age. They infuriate her, especially Basil. One afternoon, as Mary creates another **pretend garden**, Basil tries to make suggestions about landscaping elements. Mary shouts at him, but Basil just chants a nursery rhyme at her about "Mistress Mary, quite contrary" and a garden of flowers. The other children join in and eventually start to call her Mistress Mary Quite Contrary.

*Mary's lack of grief speaks to the power of ignoring a child: in this case, Mary doesn't even consider grieving for her parents. Furthermore, her isolation throughout her life means that she doesn't know how to interact with other children. There's little indication that Basil is actually being mean to Mary; Mary just isn't used to interacting with someone else her own age.*



One day, Basil tells Mary that she's going to be sent home to England to live with her uncle, Mr. Archibald Craven. He tells her that Mr. Craven is a hunchback and a horrible person. Mary considers this, and when Mrs. Crawford and the other adults tell her that she's going, she shocks them with her disinterest. The adults discuss what a pity it is that Mary is so plain and unattractive and attribute this to the neglect that Mary's mother showed her daughter.

*When the adults attribute Mary's unpleasant appearance to her life of neglect, it shows that when people don't receive love, they wither and never learn how to show it themselves. This passage also points to the way that people in the Victorian era commonly made moral judgments based on a person's outward appearance.*



Mary travels to England with an officer's wife and her two children. The officer's wife gladly hands Mary over to Mrs. Medlock, the stout housekeeper at Mr. Craven's Misselthwaite Manor. Mary dislikes Mrs. Medlock immediately and the feeling is mutual, especially when Mrs. Medlock says that there's no hope of Mary's appearance improving at Misselthwaite. Mary hears this and wonders what Misselthwaite and her uncle are like.

*The focus on Mary's appearance points to the fact that at this point, there's little else for people to observe about her: she's unpleasant and unattractive, nothing more. This implies that as Mary's mental and emotional states improve later, her appearance will do much the same thing.*



Since being orphaned, Mary has started thinking strange thoughts and wondering why she doesn't belong to anyone, when other children seem to belong to their parents. The narrator notes that nobody has cared much for Mary because she is so disagreeable, but Mary doesn't know this. Mary does, however, find Mrs. Medlock very disagreeable, and as they walk to the train station, she tries to look prim and proper and as though she doesn't belong to Mrs. Medlock. On the train, Mrs. Medlock looks at Mary, who looks limp and spoiled. She eventually starts to talk to Mary about Misselthwaite Manor. The manor is 600 years old with about 100 rooms, though most are locked. There's a big park and gardens around it, but nothing else. Mary tries not to look interested, but it sounds very different from India.

Mary insists that she doesn't care and that it doesn't matter whether she cares or not, which Mrs. Medlock agrees with. Mrs. Medlock says that Mr. Craven has a crooked back and wasn't happy until he married. This piques Mary's interest and seeing this, Mrs. Medlock continues. She says that Mrs. Craven was beautiful, but she died. At this, Mary cries out in shock and pity and thinks of one of her fairytale stories about a hunchback and a princess. Mrs. Medlock says that now, Mr. Craven shuts himself away and won't see anyone. She thinks that Mrs. Craven must have been like Mary's own mother, and that her existence would've made the manor pretty. Finally, Mrs. Medlock tells Mary that she'll have to play outside by herself but isn't to wander around the house. Mary falls asleep.

### CHAPTER 3

When Mary wakes up, she eats some of the lunch that Mrs. Medlock purchased and watches the rain stream down the windows. She falls asleep again and wakes when Mrs. Medlock shakes her at their destination. Mrs. Medlock makes small talk with the stationmaster in what Mary learns is "broad Yorkshire," the local dialect, and then leads Mary to the carriage. Mary looks out the window, hoping to see this new place. She suddenly asks what a moor is. Mrs. Medlock tells Mary to look out the window soon, as they have to drive across Missel Moore. Once out of the village, Mary can only see some low bushes in the darkness, which Mrs. Medlock says is the moor. She says it's wild land where heather grows and ponies and sheep live. Mary says it sounds like the sea, which Mrs. Medlock explains is the wind through the bushes.

*Mary's musings show that she's gradually becoming aware of the fact that she was neglected, which she thinks of as not belonging to anyone. This illustrates how unmoored and alone Mary is, which situates her as needing a friend, a parent, or both. Now that Mary is in England, even if she's not "home" yet, she's beginning to become more curious. This reinforces how ill suited India is to raising children, according to the narrator, and suggests that even being in the "correct" country can begin to help a child improve. Written in 1911, The Secret Garden is steeped in British imperialism, and Mary hails from what was then a British colony.*



*In hearing about Mr. Craven, Mary learns of a person who seems just as cold and miserable as she is. When she finds it in herself to be curious about him and what happened to Mrs. Craven, it suggests that children like Mary can begin to improve their outlook and think more about other people when they experience situations that mirror their own. This paves the way for the strides that Mary makes later with Colin, whom she also mirrors.*



*Again, the fact that Mary is starting to ask questions and offer her own assessment about the moor shows that even after less than 24 hours in England, England is already changing her for the better. The sense of anxiety that Mary seems to feel about the moor, especially when she compares it to the sea, reminds the reader that Mary isn't yet used to the natural world and its sounds. While it later will become the thing that gives her life, at this point, it's something scary that threatens to upend everything she knows about her world.*



Mary decides she doesn't like the moor as the drive goes on and on. Finally, the carriage goes through gates and then up a long driveway. She sees one corner room with the lights on, but everything else is dark. Once inside the huge entrance hall, Mary feels small and lost. Mr. Pitcher tells Mrs. Medlock to take Mary straight to her room, as Mr. Craven is going to London in the morning and isn't to be disturbed. At this, Mrs. Medlock leads Mary upstairs and into a room with a fire and supper set out. She tells Mary to stay in this room and the adjoining one.

*The lack of life and lights on at Misselthwaite creates a sense of foreboding, while Mr. Craven's unwillingness to welcome Mary in person suggests that like Mary's birth parents, he's not going to be an involved figure in Mary's life. All of this suggests to Mary that life here is going to be just as lonely as her life in India was, even though it's different.*



## CHAPTER 4

Mary wakes up in the morning when she hears a young maid attending to the fire. She looks around and sees that her walls are covered in gloomy tapestries depicting people and animals in a forest. Out the window, Mary can see what looks like an endless purple sea. She points out the window and asks what it is. With a smile, the maid, Martha, says that it's the moor and asks Mary if she likes it. Mary declares that she hates it, to which Martha replies that she loves it: it's alive and smells sweet. This puzzles Mary, as servants in India never spoke to her as though she were an equal. Mary often slapped her Ayah, but she wonders if Martha might slap back. Mary tells her she's a strange servant.

*When Mary observes that the tapestries in her room are gloomy, it mirrors the fact that she's not interested in nature yet. People in the woods hold little interest for her. This is also why Mary decides she doesn't like the moor, as it represents something wildly different than what she's used to. The fact that Martha replies so happily and readily shows Mary that Misselthwaite isn't going to be at all like India; here, servants have agency and can therefore bridge the gap between caregivers and friends.*



Martha laughs and says if Mrs. Craven were alive, she wouldn't even be a servant—she's too "common" and speaks such broad Yorkshire (the local dialect). However, the strangeness of the house means that Mrs. Medlock was willing to hire her. When Mary asks if Martha is going to wait on her, Martha says curtly that she's Mrs. Medlock's servant, though she's going to help Mary a bit. Indignantly, Mary asks who's going to dress her. This shocks Martha and in broad Yorkshire that Mary can't understand, she incredulously asks if Mary can't dress herself. When Mary learns what Martha asked, she explains that her Ayah dressed her.

*The way that Martha justifies her employment at Misselthwaite suggests that the manor itself is a place where strange things can happen. Notably, it links the strangeness of the house to Mrs. Craven's death, which suggests that more than anything, the house is still reeling from grief. Learning that Mary has enjoyed little agency thus far begins to show why she's so spoiled and nasty; she has no independence and therefore, no personal identity.*



Martha says that it's time Mary learned and notes that Mother spoke often about "grand people's children" turning out to be fools because of this sort of thing. Mary feels close to the breaking point as she says that things are different in India, but Martha surprisingly agrees and says that India is different because there are black people there. She admits that she thought Mary was going to be black too. Mary is offended and insults Martha, but Martha insists that there's nothing wrong with black people, as they're so religious, but says she was disappointed that Mary is white. Humiliated, Mary screams that native Indians aren't people and throws herself onto her pillows to cry.

*This entire exchange is deeply racist and illustrates the time and place in which the novel is set. For Mary, her life as a spoiled child has taught her that pretty much anyone aside from herself isn't fully human, which also makes her feel justified in blowing up at Martha. In addition, her scathing proclamation that Indian people aren't people shows that she internalized British colonialist attitudes while in India, which likely compounded her own haughtiness. In contrast, Martha believes that the most important indicator of personhood is whether someone believes in a higher power.*



This frightens Martha, so she comforts Mary and begs her to stop crying. Despite herself, Mary finds Martha's Yorkshire accent soothing and calms down. Then, Martha tells Mary to get up so they can get her dressed. Though Mary is initially surprised to see that Mr. Craven ordered new clothes for her, she's glad they're not black. Martha gently coaches Mary through putting on her clothes and shoes. Mary privately wonders at Martha's manner, while the narrator notes that Martha behaves this way because she's an "untrained Yorkshire rustic" and not a real lady's maid.

Martha talks the entire time. Mary tries not to listen at first, as to express her displeasure, but soon finds herself interested in what Martha says about her eleven siblings, her parents' poverty, and her brother Dickon, who tamed a moor pony. This intrigues Mary, as she's always wanted a pet. When Mary is dressed, she goes into the next room and refuses to eat her breakfast, insisting imperiously that she doesn't know what it feels like to be hungry. Martha is aghast, but refuses to take the porridge to her siblings. Mary has some tea and toast to appease her.

Then, Martha tells Mary to go outside and play. Mary doesn't want to go out, but decides she'll have to when she sees that there's nothing to do inside. She asks Martha who will go with her and is perplexed when Martha says she'll have to go alone. Martha talks about Dickon, who plays alone on the moor for hours and befriends animals. This makes Mary want to go outside, as she'd like to see the birds. Martha bundles Mary up, points her out the door, and says that there's one garden that's been locked up for ten years since Mrs. Craven died. She says there's a buried key somewhere.

Mary walks off into the grounds, thinking of the garden and whether there's anything still alive in it. She walks past flowerbeds with nothing in them and comes upon a long wall covered in ivy. She finds a door in the wall and walks through several walled vegetable gardens. Mary thinks that the gardens are ugly and wonders if they'll be prettier in spring. An old man (Ben Weatherstaff) walks into the garden and seems surprised and unhappy to see Mary. He explains that these are the kitchen gardens, and Mary walks off without a word to explore them.

*When Mary is able to find something good out of this whole ordeal (that the clothes aren't black), it shows that Mary does have the capacity to be delighted by new things. The fact that Mary doesn't berate Martha in this instance reveals her burgeoning respect for Martha, which is one of the first steps in Mary's journey to realize that she has to respect everyone—long gone are the days of slapping her Ayah.*



*Mary's desire to have a pet indicates that she does want to have a connection with something; she's just not ready to go there yet with people. This suggests that animals—and by extension, the natural world—are a stepping-stone of sorts as people like Mary learn how to interact with others and behave kindly.*



*Again, Mary's interest in Dickon, animals, and birds specifically shows that as she develops into a more pleasant person, the first step is going to be making friends with creatures from the natural world. This indicates that nature in general is less scary or intimidating for someone like Mary than people are, since she has no practice in getting along with others after such an isolated upbringing.*



*The way that Mary treats Ben Weatherstaff reminds the reader that Mary doesn't yet view hired help as people worthy of politeness and respect; they're fixtures bound to do her bidding. The bare gardens mirror Mary's own emptiness at this point; like the garden beds, Mary will go on to bloom and grow with the spring.*





Mary finds a closed door to another garden but it opens into an orchard, not the **secret garden**. She does notice that the wall seems to continue as though it's enclosing another garden, possibly with trees in it. As Mary studies the trees, a robin starts singing. It makes her feel happy, and she hopes she'll see it again. She continues to think about the secret garden and wonders why Mr. Craven buried the key and why, if he loved Mrs. Craven, he locked the garden. Mary thinks that even if she meets Mr. Craven, she'll never be able to ask him about it because she doesn't like people and people never like her. She suddenly wonders if the robin was in a tree in the secret garden.

Mary walks back to Ben Weatherstaff and coldly informs him that she's been through the gardens. He seems surly when she mentions a garden with no door and tells him about the robin. However, at the mention of the robin, Ben starts to smile, and Mary thinks it makes him look nice. He whistles, and the robin appears almost instantly. Ben teases the robin and tells Mary that the robin comes when called, as the bird got stuck on the wrong side of the wall as a fledgling and befriended Ben.

Looking at the robin, Mary says that she's lonely. This has never occurred to her before, and the narrator notes that this is why she feels so angry. She asks Ben Weatherstaff's name and he says that he's lonely too; the robin is his only friend. Ben declares that he and Mary are a lot alike: both are cross, unattractive, and have bad tempers. Mary has never heard someone speak the truth like this before, and she begins to wonder if she's unattractive and bad-tempered. Suddenly, the robin flies into a tree and starts to sing. Ben Weatherstaff explains that the robin wants to be friends with Mary and hopefully, Mary steps towards the tree and asks the robin if he'd be friends with her. Ben is surprised at how pleasant her voice is and says it sounds almost like how Dickon speaks to his animals.

The robin flies over the wall again, and Mary cries out. Ben Weatherstaff explains that he lives there among the **roses**. Mary asks if there are actually roses in the garden, and Ben mumbles that there were ten years ago. When Mary asks where the door is, Ben Weatherstaff tells her that there's no door now and that she shouldn't go looking for it. He marches off.

*Again, it's telling that after only a day in England, Mary is already beginning to ask difficult questions about other people and express curiosity in someone other than herself. Especially because her curiosity has mostly to do with the secret garden, it shows that the natural world is more compelling for her at this point than the people themselves. When she expresses interest in the robin, it confirms that her first friend of sorts will be one tied to the natural world.*



*When Mary notices how Ben's smile transforms his face, it again shows how other people can act as a mirror for her—she doesn't smile at this point, so it's a big deal for her to suspect that smiling helps a person look nicer. Ben's relationship with the robin shows that people can be friends with animals and offers Mary something to aspire to.*



*By pinning Mary's anger and unhappiness on being lonely, the novel suggests that it's essential for a person to be a part of some community (whether that be composed of humans or animals) in order to be a reasonable member of society. When Mary takes Ben's assessment to heart and asks the robin to be friends with her, it shows that she's learning how to take others seriously and consider what they have to say. The fact that her voice becomes pleasant when she speaks to the robin again speaks to the power of friendship to make a person beautiful, and hints that there is perhaps a more tender side of Mary that is hidden beneath a hardened, angry shell.*



*Notice that Ben becomes curt and angry when the topic of the secret garden comes up. This indicates that keeping it a secret is something that harms him and, in this case, keeps him from connecting any further with Mary.*



## CHAPTER 5

Mary's first few days are all the same. She gets up, eats breakfast, and then goes outside. The narrator notes that Mary doesn't realize that this is actually the best thing for her, as the moor air puts color in her cheeks and is invigorating. After a few days of this routine, Mary wakes up and knows that she's truly hungry. Martha insists that this is because of the moor and encourages Mary to play. Mary notices that Ben Weatherstaff seems to avoid her, and she spends most of her time walking outside the gardens, where ivy covers the walls and everything seems neglected.

As Mary studies the bushy ivy, she hears the robin singing. She greets the robin, and in reply, the robin chirps and hops around. Laughing, Mary runs after the robin and tries to whistle. The robin settles in a tree, which Mary realizes is in the garden without a door. She runs back to the kitchen gardens and into the orchard and decides that the tree the robin is in is indeed the same one she saw him in on her first day at the manor. She makes another lap around the gardens and thinks it's strange that she can't find the door. Mary realizes that though Ben Weatherstaff said there's no door, there must be one since Mr. Craven buried the key.

Mary stays outside all day and, for the first time, feels glad she came to Misselthwaite Manor. The narrator explains that the fresh moor wind is blowing "cobwebs" out of her brain and waking her up. By the end of the day, Mary is pleasantly tired. After supper, she asks Martha why Mr. Craven hates the garden. Martha is happy to sit with Mary and talk. She instructs Mary to listen to the wind "wutherin'" and finally starts her story. She reminds Mary that Mr. Craven has ordered that nobody speak about the garden. Martha says that Mrs. Craven made the garden, and she and her husband were the only ones allowed in to tend to it. Because she was so small, Mrs. Craven often sat on a tree with **roses** growing on it, but one day, the branch broke and she died.

Mary sits silently and notices that she's feeling sorry for someone for the first time. Then, as the wind blows, she hears a strange cry from somewhere within the house. Mary tries to point it out to Martha, but Martha insists that the house makes strange sounds. Suddenly, the wind gusts through the house and blows open their door, making the sound easier to hear. Martha shuts the door and insists that if it was anything, it was the scullery maid crying about a toothache. Mary doesn't believe her.

*When both Martha and the narrator insist that Mary's improving complexion and overall health is the work of the fresh moor air, it again suggests that not only is nature the best thing for a child, specifically English nature is best—this claim of English superiority bears the stamp of the time period, as British imperialism (and all the ethnocentric attitudes that accompanied it) was nearing its peak. Mary's draw to the neglected part of the gardens mirrors now neglected she feels; she's drawn to a place that reminds her of herself.*



*Playing this game with the robin, laughing, and then becoming very curious again shows that having a friendship with any being, animal or human, can have a profound effect on a person. Notice how the fact that the garden is supposed to be private and a secret makes it all the more interesting for Mary. This begins to show that for children, secrets are like joyful games, as Mary delights in unthreading the mystery of the secret garden.*



*Again, per the novel's logic, Mary is improving because she's in England and is getting to spend time outside; simply spending time outdoors in India wouldn't have had nearly the same effect (recall that her sickness as a child was actually attributed to the fact that she was born in India). When Mary asks Martha to talk to her, it shows that she's beginning to think of Martha as a friend she can connect with rather than hired help who exists purely to cater to her. This shows Mary beginning to think of others outside of herself and appreciate them for the things they have to offer—especially when those offerings include information on a compelling secret.*



*Feeling sorry for Mr. and Mrs. Craven further indicates that Mary is beginning to think of others outside of herself and is therefore becoming a better person and friend. On another note, Martha's hasty excuses about where the crying sounds are coming from suggests that she's lying, while Mary's skepticism in the face of Martha's flimsy explanation suggests that more secrets abound at the manor than just the one regarding the secret garden.*



## CHAPTER 6

One morning, Mary wakes up to gray, cloudy skies and knows she can't go outside. She asks Martha what her family does on days like this, and Martha explains that some kids play in the cowshed, while Dickon goes outside rain or shine. She says that he's rescued half-drowned foxes and crows on days like this. Mary listens intently. She's very interested in Martha's home life and family, especially Mother and Dickon.

Mary insists that she has nothing to do, as she can't sew or knit. Martha suggests she read and says that it'd be wonderful if Mrs. Medlock would let Mary into the library, but Mary has a better idea. She's not afraid of Mrs. Medlock, as Mrs. Medlock only looks in every day or two, and so she decides to explore the house after Martha leaves. Mary wanders into a long corridor and looks at all the pictures. Most of them are portraits, though some are landscapes. She notices a portrait of a little girl who looks a lot like her, and she wonders where the girl is now.

Mary tries a handle on the second floor and it turns. She finds herself in a bedroom with furniture that looks a lot like what Mary had in India, with another portrait of the stiff little girl over the fireplace. Mary opens several other doors and in one room, she finds a cabinet filled with a hundred little ivory elephants. She plays with the elephants for a while and then, she hears rustling. In a sofa cushion, Mary finds a mother mouse and six baby mice.

Eventually, Mary gets tired and decides to return to her room. She loses her way several times and finds herself at the end of a corridor next to a tapestry. She hears the crying sound again and in her anxiety, she puts her hand on the tapestry. She discovers that it's covering an entrance to a hallway that, at this moment, contains Mrs. Medlock. Mrs. Medlock is upset to see Mary, tells Mary that she didn't hear crying, and drags Mary back to her own room. Mary sits in front of the fire and angrily tells herself that she *did* hear someone crying.

*Martha's family, which appears tight-knit and loving, represents something entirely foreign to Mary. Because of Mary's isolated and emotionally distant upbringing, it was a practically secret that people lived like Martha's family does, which makes hearing about them all the more fun and compelling for her.*



*Remember that Mr. Craven is Mary's uncle; this makes it less surprising that some of the portraits resemble Mary. The fact that she can pick this out, however, shows that Mary is becoming more familiar with herself and can now recognize parts of herself in others, highlighting her developing sense of empathy. This newfound sensitivity can be attributed to the lessons she learned watching Ben Weatherstaff smile and making friends with the robin.*



*Finding the elephants and the mice shows Mary that she has the capacity to be like Dickon if she sets her mind to exploring. It also shows her that the natural world can make its way indoors, which helps her come to terms with how drab Misselthwaite Manor is on the inside going forward.*



*When Mrs. Medlock insists that Mary didn't hear anything, it makes it clear to Mary that the staff are in fact keeping some sort of secret about the source of the crying—previously, Martha attributed the crying to the strange sounds the old home makes, while Mrs. Medlock crisply declares that there was no sound whatsoever. Again though, Mary sees this as an exciting challenge, which illustrates again how children view secrets differently than adults do.*



## CHAPTER 7

Several days later, Mary wakes up and is greeted by a brilliant blue sky that's brighter than any she saw in India. Martha cheerfully explains that the weather fluctuates this time of year with spring on the way. She says this in broad Yorkshire, and Mary curiously asks Martha to repeat herself. Mary remembers how the natives spoke different dialects in India, so Martha's dialect isn't necessarily surprising for her. Slowly, Martha explains what she meant and goes on to describe what the moor looks like when it's in full bloom. Mary asks if she'll ever be able to get onto the moor, and Martha points out that Mary is so weak she wouldn't be able to walk the five miles to get there.

Wistfully, Mary says she'd like to see Martha's cottage. Martha thinks that Mary doesn't look so sour now and says that she'll ask Mother if Mary might visit sometime while she's at home today. Mary says that she likes Martha's mother, even though she's never met her. She says that she also likes Dickon and Martha wonders out loud if Dickon would like Mary. Coldly, Mary says that he wouldn't like her because nobody does. Martha asks Mary how she likes herself. This isn't something Mary has ever thought of before. She says she doesn't really like herself.

Mary feels lonely knowing that Martha is gone. She heads outside, runs around the fountain ten times, and then finds Ben Weatherstaff. He's in a better mood and remarks that he can smell spring coming. Mary can smell it too, and Ben tells her that under the ground, things are starting to grow. He encourages her to watch for the seedlings coming up.

The robin comes to visit, and when he cocks his head at Mary, Mary asks Ben Weatherstaff if the robin remembers her. Indignantly, Ben says that the robin is nosy and wants to know all about her. Mary continues her questioning and asks if flowers and **roses** are growing in the garden where the robin lives. Gruffly, Ben says that the robin is the only one who knows, as nobody's been in there for ten years. Mary walks away, thinking that she was born ten years ago. She also thinks that she likes the garden, just like she likes the robin, Dickon, Martha, and Mother.

*When Mary remembers the different dialects from India, it suggests that she was possibly more observant while there than the novel has given her credit for thus far. It indicates that she did, to some extent, think of the native Indians as being different people with different customs. However, in her mind, they still all existed to serve her. She also previously declared to Martha that Indian people aren't really people—a common colonial attitude rife with racism. Now that Mary is starting to feel better and be more curious, she's becoming interested in the moor. This speaks to the power of the fresh English air to heal her and banish her bad thoughts. The English sky is depicted as even more beautiful than the one in India, which is yet another expression of English superiority.*



*The fact that Mary is now willing to express that she likes Martha's mother shows first that she's becoming more comfortable with Martha, as this is a new and scary thing for her to realize. Then, the simple act of liking a mother figure shows that this is exactly what Mary desires, whether she consciously knows it or not.*



*The change in Ben's attitude now that it's obvious spring is coming shows that spring is an invigorating time of year for everyone and everything, human and plant life alike. By encouraging her to look for seedlings, he asks Mary to notice things that mirror her own growth and development.*



*Mary's realization that both she and the garden have been effectively locked up for ten years helps her identify with it and inadvertently point her towards looking for things that will help her grow. When she wonders specifically if the roses are growing, the fact that roses are symbols for children shows that Mary is, on some level, curious if she's growing and changing as well.*



As Mary walks along the wall covered in ivy, she hears the robin in a bare flowerbed. He clearly followed her, and she happily "converses" with him. The robin lets her get very close and then hops under shrubs in the back of the garden bed. There, Mary notices a hole and sees a brass ring that is half-buried in the dirt. As the robin flies away, she pulls a key ring out from the earth and wonders if it's the key to the garden.

*Finding a key ring because of a "conversation" with the robin shows Mary that when she befriends other beings, good things will happen to her and she'll learn new things. This impresses upon her the power of friendship and of the natural world to draw Mary into it.*



## CHAPTER 8

Mary stares at the key for a while, thinking that if she could find the door, she could see what's inside. She's curious about what it looks like after being neglected for ten years and thinks that she could go inside, shut the door, and play alone. Life at Misselthwaite has made her imaginative and curious for the first time; it was too hot in India for her to think about anything. Mary puts the key in her pocket and walks up and down the wall. She finds it frustrating to be so close to the **secret garden** but unable to get in, and decides to carry the key with her everywhere from now on, so if she ever finds the door, she'll be ready.

*Again, Mary's curiosity about the state of the garden mirrors her latent curiosity about how alive she is on the inside. The fact that the narrator notes that she's already becoming imaginative and curious offers hope that the garden is alive enough to be of interest, and that both will continue to grow and develop. Keeping the key also allows Mary to feel as though she has her own secret, which in turn helps her feel independent.*



Martha returns the next day with stories of her day out. She and Mother washed and mended clothes and baked good things to eat. The children all liked hearing about Mary, and Mary tells Martha that she'll tell her more about life in India so that next time she goes home, she'll have more to tell them. Mary asks if Dickon and Mother liked hearing about her. Dickon apparently was intrigued like the rest, but Mother seemed sad that Mary was alone with no one to cheer her up. Very seriously, Mary tells Martha that her talking *does* cheer her up.

*When Mary admits that Martha cheers her up, it shows that Mary now recognizes that Martha is a person who can bridge the gap between adult caregiver and same-age friend. This in turn helps Mary learn how to accept the authority of other adults going forward, while it also gives her practice in how to converse in a meaningful and polite way with someone.*



Martha leaves and returns with a present for Mary, courtesy of Mother: a jump rope. Having never seen one, Mary wants to know what it's for. Incredulously, Martha picks up the rope and starts to skip in the middle of the room. Mary is transfixed, and when Martha stops, Mary feels excited. Martha hands over the rope and assures Mary that if she practices, she'll get better. She also says that Mother believes a jump rope is the best thing for Mary.

*Feeling gleeful and excited about the jump rope makes it clear how far Mary has already come—while she was a languid child in India and wasn't interested in the outdoors only a few weeks ago, now physical activity is something that intrigues and excites her. Jumping rope also allows her to be outside, where she can breathe the fresh air and continue to grow, which may be why Martha's mother believes a jump rope will be so beneficial for Mary*



As Mary heads outside, she stiffly thanks Martha for the jump rope and holds out her hand. Martha shakes it, laughs, and says that if Mary were one of her sisters, she'd kiss her in thanks. In an even stiffer voice, Mary asks if Martha wants a kiss, but Martha just laughs and shoos Mary out.

*Thanking Martha and offering, albeit uncomfortably, to kiss her, indicates that Mary is beginning to recognize that other people have a choice in whether or not to do nice things for her—people aren't just going to cater to Mary by default. Though Mary's words of thanks are stiff, this moment shows her developing sincere gratitude and humility.*



Mary wanders through the gardens, skipping and counting. She skips to Ben Weatherstaff and he comments that the skipping is putting red in her cheeks. Mary is thrilled. Ben encourages her to keep skipping and notes that the robin will certainly follow her again today. Mary skips off to her favorite path along the ivy wall. As she skips, she feels the key in her pocket and with a laugh, asks the robin to show her where the door is. He just sings at her.

*Ben's comment about the red in Mary's cheeks suggests that nature has a healing effect on her. As Mary has only just started skipping rope and already looks heartier and healthier, this passage also indicates that nature works quickly to help someone feel better.*



The narrator explains that Mary will go on to believe that what happens next is the work of Magic, which she first heard about in her Ayah's stories. A gust of wind blows the ivy where the robin is sitting, and as it moves, Mary catches the vines, having seen a doorknob underneath it. She starts to pull the ivy aside and reveals a door with a lock. Fishing out her key, Mary finds that it fits perfectly in the lock. Mary checks that nobody is watching before she turns the key, pushes the door open, and slips quietly into the **secret garden**.

*The robin's place in this discovery shows Mary that the natural world and animal friends will do as she asks if she treats them kindly and with respect. She asked the robin to help her in what's described as a kind and pleasant voice, which then helps Mary to learn that engaging with someone pleasantly will get her further than short, abrasive commands.*



## CHAPTER 9

The walls of the garden and the trees in it are all covered in trailing **roses**, and the forgotten rosebushes look almost like trees. Mary doesn't know if anything is dead or alive, as everything is brown and still. Mary remarks at how still everything is and notices that even the robin, sitting in a tree, is silent. She quietly walks around the garden following the robin and wishes that she knew if the garden is alive.

*The silence of the garden seems to mirror the silence of Mary's inner monologue when she was in India. This implies that the garden will mimic Mary as it blooms in the spring and comes into its own. Her desire to know if the garden is dead or alive speaks to the growing curiosity she's feeling about herself and the natural world around her.*



Mary picks up her jump rope and decides to skip around the whole garden. At an alcove, she notices pale green points sticking out of the dirt and remembers what Ben Weatherstaff said about crocuses, snowdrops, and daffodils starting to poke up. She grows increasingly excited as she walks slowly around the garden, noticing other plant starts all around. In some places the grass seems to be choking the shoots, so Mary finds a piece of wood and clears some of the grass from around them. She grows warmer and happier. The robin is thrilled that someone is caring for his garden.

*Clearing the choking grass away from the shoots mirrors the way in which, in coming to Misselthwaite, Mary has been freed from both the stifling Indian climate as well as the caregivers that, by spoiling her, stunted her growth. Her excitement at seeing signs of life in the garden also shows that Mary is continuing to come alive; she's still in the early stages and will continue to blossom.*



Mary realizes that she's late for dinner, so she runs back to the manor and eats the biggest dinner she's ever eaten. Martha is delighted and remarks that Mother will be pleased at the effect of the jump rope. As she eats, Mary asks Martha what the onion-like roots are. Martha explains that they're bulbs and lists some flowers that come from bulbs. She also mentions that Dickon grows bulbs and can make anything grow by whispering to it. Anxiously, Mary asks if bulbs can live without human help, and Martha says that they're very self-sufficient.

*The way that Martha describes the bulbs as being self-sufficient situates them as a foil for the roses, which require human care and tending to truly flourish. Then, noting that Dickon whispers to plants to make them grow helps Mary understand that she needs to be friends with flowers and the natural world, just as she needs to be with people.*



Settling herself by the fire, Mary says that she wishes she had a spade. Carefully, as to keep the **secret garden** a secret, she tells Martha that Misselthwaite Manor is lonely, so she wants to be like Ben Weatherstaff and grow a little garden. This delights Martha and she says that Mother actually had the same idea. Martha says that there's a shop in Thwaite village that sells gardening tools and seeds, and Mary remembers that she has a weekly allowance. Eagerly, Martha asks Mary if she can write: if Mary writes to Dickon and sends money, she can ask him to purchase tools and seeds on her behalf. Martha runs off to fetch her writing supplies. This takes a while, as Martha gets sidetracked, but the two eventually manage to draft a satisfactory letter.

Martha explains that Dickon will bring the purchases to Misselthwaite himself, which again excites Mary—she finds his love of animals intriguing and wants to meet him. Martha also says that Mother plans to ask Mrs. Medlock if Mary could come to the cottage sometime. Mary feels as though everything exciting is happening all at once. Martha stays with Mary for most of the afternoon. As she leaves to fetch Mary's tea, Mary asks if the scullery maid still has a toothache, as she heard the crying again. Restlessly, Martha insists that Mary heard nothing and runs off.

## CHAPTER 10

Mary decides to call her garden the **secret garden**. She loves it, especially since she's read about secret gardens in some of her books. She now enjoys the wind and being outside, and she can skip to 100 with her jump rope. Day after day, Mary works in the garden, clearing grass from around the bulbs. She also takes to sneaking up on Ben Weatherstaff. Ben doesn't object to Mary as much anymore, though he does grumble that she's like the robin in that she approaches silently and without warning. One morning, when Mary has been at Misselthwaite about a month, Ben remarks that Mary is getting fatter and less yellow.

Ben Weatherstaff and Mary greet the robin, who preens and sings for Ben. Ben teases the robin for acting so flirtatious, but the robin hops closer and closer until finally, it lands on the handle of Ben's spade. Ben looks shocked and then extremely touched. After the robin flies off, Ben looks at his spade as though it's full of Magic. He starts to smile, and Mary feels less afraid of talking to him. She asks him what he'd plant in a flower garden, and he answers that he'd plant **roses** like a young woman he used to garden for did. That woman would kiss the roses like they were children. Gruffly, he says that she's in heaven now, and her roses were left alone.

*Mary's interest in actively cultivating a garden shows that she's already grown enough to develop an interest in helping other things grow. This suggests that healing processes, like the one Mary is undergoing, don't just take place only on an individual level; she needs Martha and Ben's help to grow and heal, and now she feels compelled to pour out her newfound energy into returning the favor and helping other things grow.*



*It's telling that all these things that excite Mary have to do with meeting other people. Mary increasingly understands that she's not the center of the universe, and if she allows herself to befriend others and show interest in them, her world can be richer and more fulfilling. Her question about the scullery maid reinforces this, as it shows that she truly cares about someone else—though perhaps she knows that the explanation of the scullery maid's toothache is just a coverup for a more intriguing secret.*



*Deciding to refer to the garden as a secret reinforces the role of secrets in Mary's development. Keeping her work in the garden a secret is partially borne of necessity, since no one is allowed to go in the garden or even speak of it. However, Mary's secret connection to the garden also gives her a sense of ownership and privacy over her development, as she can learn to be interested in others and care for things without other people watching her and being nosy. Her progress is evident in the fact that Ben no longer hates seeing her; this suggests that aside from looking better, she's also more pleasant to be around.*



*The woman that Ben is referring to is clearly the late Mrs. Craven, and her roses are presumably the ones lying dormant in the secret garden. The fact that she kissed the roses like children reinforces that the roses are symbols for children. Ben's tender connection to Mrs. Craven's roses suggests that he's a trustworthy person for Mary and will be willing to help her grow, just as he helped the roses long ago.*



Excitedly, Mary asks if **roses** die when they're left alone. Ben Weatherstaff says that some died and tells Mary what to look for to gauge whether roses are dead or alive. Suddenly, he asks her why she's so interested. She stammers that she wants to have a garden of her own as she has nothing else to do and nobody to play with. Ben agrees with her and seems to feel sorry for her. Mary stays with him for another ten minutes asking questions about roses and if he visits the roses the young woman left. He says he does, but his rheumatics make it difficult for him. He suddenly gets angry, tells her to stop asking questions, and sends her away.

Mary skips away and thinks that she likes Ben Weatherstaff. She skips around the outside of one of the gardens, and when she gets to a gate that opens into a park, she goes through to investigate a strange whistling sound. She comes upon a boy, sitting under a tree and playing a pipe, surrounded by squirrels, a pheasant, and two rabbits. When he sees Mary, he quietly tells her to hold still. He slowly stands and when he's upright, the animals calmly disperse. He introduces himself as Dickon and says that one has to move slowly and gently around wild animals. Mary shyly asks if he brought the gardening tools and the seeds, and he suggests they sit down and look at them.

Mary wishes she could talk like Dickon, as he sounds like he likes her. She notices that he smells fresh too and in a moment, she forgets to feel shy. They look at the seed packets until Dickon hears the robin singing. He happily says that the robin is saying he's friends with Mary and will tell him all about her. He slowly rises and whistles at the robin, who returns the whistle. Dickon explains to Mary with a smile that he understands animals and they all understand him.

Dickon offers to plant the seeds for Mary. Mary is silent for a moment, turns red and then pale, and feels miserable. She slowly asks Dickon if he can keep a secret. Though he's puzzled, he says that he keeps secrets all the time. With a great deal of emotion, Mary says that she's stolen a garden that nobody wants and bursts into tears. Dickon asks her where the garden is and she leads him there at once. He feels as though he's being led to a bird's nest and needs to move quietly. Mary leads him through the door.

*The revelation that Ben has seen the roses in the secret garden at some point over the last ten years—even though the garden is off limits—offers an indication that just as the roses haven't been left entirely to their own devices, Mary hasn't either. This encourages the reader to look to figures like Martha, who is essentially performing a similar kind of care for Mary as Ben seems to have done for the roses, as someone who can bridge the gap between neglect and care.*



*Note that it never seems to occur to Mary to be rude or demanding of Dickon. She seems to understand that if she wants to have a relationship with him, she needs to play by his rules. This reinforces more broadly how Mary is learning to interact with the natural world as a whole. It's not something that she can shape to her will entirely; she has to let things progress at their own pace and help them along wherever she can.*



*Dickon's ability to speak to the robin situates him as a mediator between Mary and the natural world. This suggests that he'll be able to show her more concretely how to properly care for natural things and how to be a part of the natural world, not a stranger to it.*



*Mary's rush of emotion here speaks to the gravity of her secret in her mind—she thinks it'd be an absolute tragedy if Dickon didn't respect how important the garden is for her. This reinforces that the role of secrets for children like Mary is to help them develop independence. On the other hand, sharing the secret with Dickon helps her develop a friendship with him and learn to trust him.*





## CHAPTER 11

Dickon looks around and then starts to walk around the garden. He eventually says that he never thought he'd see this place and reminds Mary that they need to speak quietly so nobody will hear them. Dickon remarks that this will be the safest nesting place very soon, and Mary asks if the **roses** are dead. He steps to a tree hung with roses and points to a shoot that's brown instead of gray. She and Dickon go from tree to tree, discovering which roses are alive and cutting away dead material. Dickon shows Mary how to use the gardening tools and is overjoyed when he sees that Mary already cleared weeds away from some of the bulbs. He compliments her work and Mary points out that she's getting stronger as she digs.

Dickon says that this garden is the best thing for Mary and notes that the smell of the earth is the most wonderful smell—he spends days on the moor, just sniffing like a rabbit, and never catches cold. A few minutes later, Mary asks Dickon if he'll return and help her with the garden. Dickon is thrilled and promises to come every day. He looks around again and remarks that it looks like someone has been in the garden recently to prune, though he and Mary can't figure out how they got in.

Mary remembers the rhyme that Basil sang at her to tease her. She asks Dickon about flowers that look like bells and recites "Mistress Mary" to him. Frowning, she says that Basil and his siblings were more "contrary" than she was. Dickon laughs and says there's no need to be "contrary" when one is in a garden, and Mary tells Dickon that he's the fifth person she likes. She asks Dickon if he likes her, attempting a Yorkshire accent. He says that both he and the robin do. A while later, the clock strikes for dinner. Dickon pulls out bread and bacon, and Mary feels nervous that he'll be gone when she returns. She asks him if he promises not to tell anyone about the **secret garden**, and he assures her that he'll guard her secret like he guards missel thrush nests.

## CHAPTER 12

Mary races back to her room and excitedly tells Martha that she's been with Dickon and thinks he's beautiful. Martha is confused and says that she's never thought of Dickon as handsome, but Mary assures her that she loves his face. They discuss gardening and then Martha asks if Mary has a place to plant her flowers. She says that Mary shouldn't ask the head gardener, Mr. Roach, and should ask Ben Weatherstaff instead. She also assures Mary that if Mary finds someplace out of the way, nobody will care if she plants things there.

*By referring to nesting, Dickon begins to shift the garden from symbolizing Mary and Mary's development as a whole to symbolizing a large, safe, nest of sorts. In this way, the novel situates the secret garden as the safe place where Mary and Dickon can develop their friendship, come to respect and revere nature, and move towards adulthood. When Dickon compliments Mary's weeding, it implies that she already has an innate sense of how to care for a garden—something she demonstrated with her pretend gardens in India.*



*The someone who pruned the roses is presumably Ben Weatherstaff, which shows the reader that though the children don't yet realize it, there are a number of people that are helping them to grow and develop from the sidelines. This reminds the reader that parents aren't the only ones capable of guiding children to adulthood.*



*Again, by placing Basil and his siblings opposite the garden, the novel suggests that Mary has more good things to learn from nature than she does from other people. This is changing, however, through her relationship with Dickon and her invitation for him to help her restore the garden to its former glory. When she attempts broad Yorkshire—out of admiration, not ridicule—it shows that she now understands that other people are worthy of respect and of things that make them happy, such as hearing their own language spoken to them.*



*Martha's assurance that choosing an out-of-the-way spot won't bother anyone is all Mary needs to feel like she has permission to work in the secret garden. It suggests that anything outside the cultivated realm of the manor is beyond piquing anyone's attention, which at this point, the secret garden is—and, it should be noted, Mary is as well.*



As Mary grabs her hat to go back outside, Martha says that Mr. Craven is back and wants to see her. Mary turns white as Martha explains that Mother spoke to Mr. Craven in town and suggested he see Mary before he goes away again. Mary is relieved to learn that this next trip is supposed to last until fall or winter, which leaves her ample time to "watch the **secret garden** come alive."

Mrs. Medlock enters and tells Mary to put on her best dress and brush her hair. Martha helps her and then Mary silently follows Mrs. Medlock. Mrs. Medlock leaves Mary with Mr. Craven, who's sitting in an armchair in front of a fire. Mary notices that Mr. Craven isn't a hunchback; his shoulders are just a bit crooked. When he finally calls her to approach, she thinks that he'd be handsome if he didn't look so miserable and worried. He asks if she's well and then apologizes for forgetting to engage a governess.

Mary chokes a little bit on her words, but Mr. Craven encourages her to speak. She says that she doesn't want a governess, and Mr. Craven muses that Mrs. Sowerby, Martha's mother, said that Mary doesn't need one yet. Mary insists that Mrs. Sowerby knows about children, and boldly says that she wants to play outside so she can get stronger. She talks about her jump rope and assures Mr. Craven that she's not doing anything wrong. He seems put off by the anxiety in her face and to calm her, says that Mrs. Sowerby stopped him on the moor, said that Mrs. Craven had been a kind woman, and told him that Mary should be allowed to play outside.

Mr. Craven tells Mary she can go where she likes and asks if she'd like any dolls or toys. Mary asks for some earth to plant a garden, which seems to shock Mr. Craven. She goes on and says that she used to make **pretend gardens** in India. Mr. Craven paces, tells Mary that she can have as much earth as she wants, and then calls Mrs. Medlock to take Mary away. He tells Mrs. Medlock to feed Mary and let her run outside, and that Mary can visit Mrs. Sowerby. Mrs. Medlock is pleased that this all means she'll be required to do little for Mary, and she's also pleased that she'll get to see Mrs. Sowerby, as the two went to school together.

As soon as Mary is back in her room, she excitedly tells Martha all the good news and that Mr. Craven is nice, just miserable. She races back to the garden and discovers that Dickon is gone. However, she finds a paper stuck to a tree with a picture of a bird's nest and a note from Dickon saying that he will come back.

*Mary's fear at meeting Mr. Craven speaks to her distrust of authority figures like him, given that her parents in India never made her feel safe or secure or indeed like she mattered at all. Her desire to be alone during his next trip reinforces her fear and distrust.*



*Realizing that Mr. Craven could be a very handsome man if it weren't for his expression again shows Mary the consequences of being either angry or pleasant: it can fundamentally influence how inviting a person looks. The lack of a hunchback also disproves the rumors she previously heard about Mr. Craven, which reminds Mary that she shouldn't believe everything she hears.*



*What Mr. Craven has to say about Mrs. Sowerby situates her as an expert on childrearing. It's telling then that what Mrs. Sowerby believes it most important is independent play outside, as she knows that this will help Mary develop a sense of independence and curiosity, grow strong, and learn to think of others aside from herself. Bringing up Mrs. Craven on the moor also suggests that for Mr. Craven, reminders of his late wife are still very powerful, and that he's still grieving.*



*Mrs. Medlock's assessment of all of this suggests that she's much like Mary's parents in her desire to actively not care for children. However, the novel implies that because Mrs. Medlock doesn't want to care for children in England, she doesn't do as much damage, as Mary can run outside and heal without adult supervision here in a way that she couldn't in India.*



*The drawing of the nest shows Mary that Dickon understands that this is a sacred place for her where she's going to grow, develop, and eventually, be ready to leave the nest.*



## CHAPTER 13

Later, Mary shows the note to Martha. Martha explains that the nest is a missel thrush nest, and Mary understands that he's promising to keep her secret. Late that night, Mary wakes up to the sound of a storm. She feels as though she hates the rain and thinks it sounds like a person crying. After about an hour of listening, she hears what she believes is actual crying. She slips out of her room and follows the sound. It gets louder as Mary gets to the corridor with the tapestry covering a doorway. Mary pushes open the next door and finds herself in a richly furnished bedroom. There's a crying boy in the bed, and Mary wonders if she's in a dream.

The boy looks ill, but as though he's crying because he's upset and not because he's in pain. When he notices her, he asks if she's a ghost and introduces himself as Colin Craven. The children realize that they're related; Mr. Craven is Colin's father. Colin asks Mary to come closer so he can confirm that she's not a ghost, and he grabs onto her robe. They discuss that neither of them knew the other existed, and Colin admits that he wants to be a secret because he's ill and he doesn't want anyone to see him. He explains that the servants are forbidden to talk about him, and he's going to either die or become a hunchback.

Mary remarks that everything in this house is a secret and asks if Mr. Craven comes to see him. Angrily, Colin says that his father hates him because Mrs. Craven died. Mary says that he hates the garden for the same reason, but she doesn't tell Colin what the garden actually is. Colin goes on to say that he's been here most of his life. He wore a brace for a while, but then a London doctor said the brace was useless and prescribed fresh air. Colin, however, hates fresh air.

Mary asks Colin if he wants her to go away, since he doesn't like people looking at him. He asks her to sit down and tell him about herself. They talk about India and Misselthwaite, and Colin shows her his beautiful books. Colin says that everyone must please him, as nobody believes he's going to grow up. He asks Mary's age, and Mary says that they're both ten—she knows this because he was born at the same time that Mr. Craven locked the garden door and buried the key. This interests Colin, but Mary evades his questions about the garden. He insists that he can make the servants tell him all about it, and Mary realizes that Colin is very spoiled. She finds it strange, even though she used to be just as spoiled.

*By going out independently, Mary shows that she thinks little of Mrs. Medlock's attempts at guardianship and instead, understands that she needs to figure things out for herself. When this independence leads her to discover the actual cause of the crying sounds—a boy about her age—it suggests that only when a child starts to develop some degree of independence can they take routes that can begin to lead them to other people.*



*When Colin admits that he wants to be a secret, it shows that children can keep secrets with negative consequences just as easily as adults can. Further, the fact that Colin can forbid the servants to speak about him indicates that, like Mary was in India, he's very spoiled and can shape the world within the manor to suit his whims and desires. This suggests that going forward, this will be one of things that he reevaluates, like Mary is doing.*



*Mary recognizes that all the secrets at Misselthwaite don't do the people who live here any good: the secrecy surrounding Colin and his illness clearly aren't helping Colin or Mr. Craven, and further, the secret garden is no longer a secret since Mary found it.*



*When Mary tries to not tell Colin about the secret garden, it shows that at this point, the garden seems too fragile to share with anyone else. Dickon is trustworthy because of his intimate connection to nature, but Colin represents the exact opposite: entitled, indoor control of a dangerous and masculine variety. The fact that Mary finds Colin's spoiled nature strange speaks to how far she's come since arriving at Misselthwaite, when being so spoiled was just how things were for her.*



Mary asks if Colin thinks he's going to die. He indifferently says that he's heard people saying he won't live for his entire life. His doctor now is Mr. Craven's cousin, who stands to inherit Misselthwaite if Colin dies. When Mary asks if Colin wants to live, he says he doesn't, but he doesn't want to die either. He returns the conversation to the garden and says that he wants to see it and will make the servants take him into it. Mary is afraid that this will ruin everything, so she begs him to not do it, as that will make it so the garden isn't a secret anymore. The mention of a secret intrigues Colin, and Mary tells him that it would be wonderful if they could find the door, sneak in, and play secretly.

Colin wants to know if the garden is dead, and Mary explains that the bulbs will live, but the **roses** are questionable. She tells him that spring is coming and tells him again how wonderful it would be if they could find the way into the **secret garden**, watch things grow, says that it'd be nicer if it could be a secret. Colin says this secret is more fun than the secret that he's not going to live. Mary suggests that they could find someone to push Colin's wheelchair. Colin dreamily says he likes this idea. Mary keeps talking to him about what the garden *might* look like.

Colin points to a pink curtain on the wall and when Colin asks her to, Mary pulls it. It pulls the curtain aside to reveal a painting of a laughing girl whose eyes look just like Colin's. Colin says that this is Mrs. Craven, and if she'd lived, he wouldn't be ill and Mr. Craven wouldn't hate him. Mary closes the curtain and asks why he has the curtain in the first place. Colin explains that the portrait smiles too much, and he wants to keep his mother for himself.

Mary asks what Mrs. Medlock will think if she finds out that she's here. Colin says that he's going to tell Mrs. Medlock to make Mary come talk to him every day. After a moment, Colin decides that he's going to keep Mary a secret too. He explains that Martha is caring for him now while his nurse is away, and she'll tell Mary when to visit. Mary asks if she should leave now and offers to sing one of her Ayah's songs for Colin. She takes his hand, pats it, and sings a song in Hindustani. She leaves when he falls asleep.

*Colin's assessment of why he's going to die—he's heard people saying it all his life—shows how powerful it is to hear something over and over again, especially something negative. Note that he doesn't list a diagnosis or anything concrete to cure; he just knows he's sickly because he's been told that he is. This suggests that these negative thoughts and sayings are just as dangerous as physical illness. Mary's attempts to draw Colin towards the secret element of the secret garden—without yet divulging what she knows—shows that she understands how compelling secrets are for children who have little independence.*



*Colin's interest in what's dead or alive in the garden mimics Mary's earlier curiosity about the exact same thing. This suggests that just like Mary, Colin is in some ways lifeless on the inside because of neglect and because he hasn't been outside much. His continued interest in the fact that the garden is a secret shows that he's realizing that having this secret will allow him to be independent and not rely on others for something.*



*By pinning his illness and Mr. Craven's bad attitude on Mrs. Craven's death, Colin confirms that Misselthwaite Manor is still grieving her loss. This suggests that the growth that's to come will allow everyone to finally recover from her death and, in doing so, be able to properly honor her memory.*



*By singing one of her Ayah's songs for Colin, Mary again shows that not everything that happened to her in India was bad; she just didn't know how to use any of it. Now that she's feeling more whole and alive, she can pay some of what she learned forward and share it with others, as she does here. This moment also emphasizes how Colin and Mary have both grown up without involved parental figures, instead on hired help. While it's usually parents who sing to their children at bedtime, here Mary functions as a caregiver of sorts for Colin, singing a song she learned from her own caregiver.*



## CHAPTER 14

It's still raining in the morning, so Mary stays inside. Martha comes to sit with her in the afternoon and notices immediately that there's something bothering Mary. Mary admits outright that she found Colin. At this, Martha looks terrified and says that she'll lose her job, but Mary assures her that Colin was happy to see her. Martha is convinced that Mrs. Medlock will be upset at the very least, but Mary firmly says that Colin wants to keep it a secret just between them for a while and reminds Martha that she and Mrs. Medlock are to do what Colin says. She also mentions that Colin seems to like her.

Martha insists that Mary bewitched Colin, and Mary asks if Martha is talking about Magic. She then asks what's wrong with Colin. Martha explains that Mr. Craven was so upset after Mrs. Craven died, he wouldn't see baby Colin and insisted that the weak baby would certainly die or be a hunchback. She says that Colin isn't a hunchback yet, but they're afraid his back is weak. Martha mentions the London doctor, who insisted that Colin was fine but spoiled. Mary agrees with this assessment, and Martha talks about how nasty he can be and how ill he's been. She says that Mother believes a child kept indoors like Colin can't possibly live.

Mary muses that it might do Colin good to get outside to see things growing, but Martha says that they took him outside once to see **roses** and it was a disaster: he yelled at a gardener and cried himself sick. Mary remarks that if Colin gets angry with her, she won't go see him again, but Martha says that Colin always gets his way. Martha runs off when she hears a bell but returns a few minutes later to take Mary to Colin.

Colin is settled among cushions when Mary arrives. Mary mentions Martha's fear of being dismissed, so Colin summons Martha. He curtly reminds Martha that she must do what he says, and he promises to send Mrs. Medlock away if she gets upset with Martha. Martha curtsies and leaves, and Colin notices Mary looking at him in awe. She tells him that she once saw a young Rajah in India who spoke to people like Colin just spoke to Martha, and then she says that Colin is very different from Dickon. Mary tells Colin about Dickon's way with animals and how he loves the moor. Colin thinks that the moor is dreary and Mary says that she used to think so too, but hearing Dickon and Martha talk about it made her like it.

*Martha's fear tells the reader that Misselthwaite Manor operates on the understanding that secrets are to be kept at all costs, to the detriment of the health of people like Martha. This shows that everyone, including the staff, suffer from this kind of secret keeping. Mary's willingness to confide in Martha, on the other hand, shows that she now believes fully in Martha's trustworthiness.*



*Notice that although Martha says that baby Colin was weak, they only believed that he was truly ill because Mr. Craven insisted it was true. This speaks to the power of these negative thoughts, as Mr. Craven has essentially led his household into a ten-year ruse to support his belief that his son will die. The fact that this all happened because Mrs. Craven died reinforces that this is something that stems from grief, which suggests that they can heal from it.*



*Colin's earlier tantrum about the roses indicates that at that point, he wasn't ready to begin growing like the roses. Mary's unwillingness to see Colin if he's going to be mean to her suggests that because of her own haughty and selfish nature, Mary is uniquely positioned to give Colin a taste of his own medicine.*



*The way that Mary compares Colin to the Rajah she saw in India isn't a flattering comparison, especially given the way that the novel portrays India as a place where people cannot properly grow and develop. This suggests that in some sense, Colin has been stuck in a dreary existence that resembles Mary's isolated life in India. Introducing Colin to the idea of someone like Dickon has the effect of showing Colin that not everyone is like him, and yet, they can still be interesting.*



Colin laments that he never sees anything because he's sick, and Mary points out that he never leaves the room. They discuss him going outside, but Colin insists that he can't because he's going to die. Mary is unsympathetic and says that she doesn't want Colin to die. Colin insists that everyone, especially Dr. Craven and the servants, want him to die. Mary asks what the London doctor said. Colin says that the doctor insisted that if Colin wanted to live, he would. Mary suggests that meeting Dickon, who speaks only about living things, might put Colin in the mood to live. She encourages Colin to speak only about living things.

Mary and Colin spend hours talking about Dickon, the moor, and Mrs. Sowerby's twelve children. They giggle like normal children, and after a while, Colin notes that they're cousins. This makes them laugh even more and as they do, Dr. Craven and Mrs. Medlock walk in. The adults look shocked, but Colin calmly introduces Mary to them and says that he likes talking to her. Dr. Craven checks Colin's pulse and declares him too excited, and Colin threatens to get even more excited if they send Mary away. He asks that Mary have tea with him, which makes the adults exchange a worried look. Mrs. Medlock offers that Colin does look better than he did earlier.

After the adults confer in the hallway, Dr. Craven reminds Colin to not forget that he's ill and easily tired. Colin tells him that he wants to forget those things, and Mary helps him do so. Dr. Craven sighs as he leaves, though he admits to himself that Colin looks brighter.

## CHAPTER 15

Mary spends the next week with Colin, as it's still too rainy to go outside. They look at books and talk, and Mrs. Medlock even tells Mary that her presence has been good for the staff—the nurse has agreed to stay on. Mary is still careful to not reveal to Colin that she's already found the **secret garden**, as she wants to make sure he can keep secrets first. She also wants to find out if Colin could ever be taken into the secret garden without anyone finding out. She wonders if it would make him stop thinking about dying, especially since Mary now notices that she looks very different now than when she arrived from India. Martha insists that this is the work of the moor air.

*Mary's pep talk begins to shift Colin's thinking towards something more positive. Especially when Mary learns that the London doctor said much the same thing, it shows the reader that there's actually nothing wrong with Colin except for his negative thoughts. Notably, Mary is able to have this no-nonsense conversation with Colin because her own selfishness makes her unsympathetic to him; she wants him to be happy because now, she likes being happy.*



*Though there's no indication that Dr. Craven is a truly evil character, suggesting that Colin should spend all of his time alone and not speak to Mary is a way for Dr. Craven to keep Colin from getting any better. Readers should also remember that Dr. Craven is next in line after Colin to inherit the manor, which may be why he's so eager for Colin to waste away. On another note, when Mary and Colin have so much fun talking about the moor and Dickon specifically, it suggests that talking about nature can have almost as much of a healing effect as actually being out on it.*



*Colin's insistence that he wants to forget his illness suggests that he's turning the corner and recognizes that if he stops thinking the negative thoughts, they'll stop having any power to dictate the state of his health.*



*Mary's curiosity as to whether being in the secret garden would help Colin just like it's helping her indicates that she's become more like Martha and recognizes the healing properties of nature and the moor air. When she guards the secret so carefully from Colin, it does speak to her selfish nature, as she doesn't want to share her secret place if he's just going to ruin it for her.*



Mary does worry that Colin's dislike of people looking at him will mean that he won't want to meet Dickon, so she asks Colin one day why he gets angry when people look at him. Colin explains that as a little child, people used to stare at him and whisper. Once, he bit a lady when she patted his cheek. This doesn't impress Mary, but she presses on and asks if Colin would mind Dickon seeing him. Colin supposes he wouldn't, since Dickon is an "animal charmer" and he himself is a "boy animal."

Mary wakes up very early on the next sunny morning. She throws open her window and admires the moor. As she does, she notices that it's warm outside. She dresses herself and races out into the grounds. Everything seems green and Mary notices new things growing in the flowerbeds. At the door to the **secret garden**, Mary sees a crow on the wall. Inside the garden she finds Dickon working, and he says that he woke up early and ran all the way here. He introduces Mary to his fox, Captain, and his crow, Soot.

Dickon shows Mary some blooming crocuses and she kisses them. They run all around the garden admiring the growing things. Soon, the robin flies into the garden with something in his beak. Dickon quiets Mary and tells her that they have to be careful; the robin is building a nest and they don't want to scare him. They sit quietly and Dickon explains that they have to show the robin they mean no harm and then, he'll accept them. Mary does as Dickon says and tries to look like grass or a tree.

To distract themselves from looking at the robin, Mary tells Dickon about Colin. Dickon looks surprised and then relieved that he doesn't have to pretend he doesn't know about Colin. Dickon says that everyone feels sorry for Colin. Mary talks about finding Colin in the night and asks Dickon if he thinks Colin truly wants to die. Dickon suggests that Colin just wishes he'd never been born, mostly because of Mr. Craven's neglect.

Mary says that Colin spends his time waiting for a lump to grow on his back, which Dickon insists is an awful way to live. He points out how green the garden is and then suggests that if Colin were in the garden, he wouldn't have time to think about lumps because he'd be too busy watching things grow. Mary agrees and wonders if Colin could keep a secret and if he'd even want to come. Dickon reasons that if the three of them were out in the garden, nobody would be thinking bad things about Colin, and it would help. Mary points out that Colin says he hates the outdoors, but he likes to hear about the garden because it's a secret.

*By referring to himself as a "boy animal," Colin shows through his language that he's already becoming a part of the natural world, even though he hasn't yet been out in it. This offers some hope that he's going to prove himself trustworthy and then be ready to let the secret garden help him once Mary shares it with him.*



*When it's so sunny and things have grown following the rain, the novel reminds the reader that even the rainy days spent indoors have a purpose: it gives the plants the nourishment they need to grow, and it gives Mary the opportunity to make another friend and decide whether to bring Colin in on the secret.*



*Kissing the crocuses suggests that Mary has a lot in common with Mrs. Craven, whether Mary is mimicking the woman's behavior on purpose or not. It indicates that she recognizes that these flowers are living things that need care and affection, just like she does. By guiding Mary through looking like a part of the garden, Dickon is able to help Mary connect even more deeply with nature.*



*Dickon's assessment of how Colin might feel again implicates neglectful parents in damaging children. He implies that if Mr. Craven hadn't neglected Colin and fixated so much on Colin's impending death, Colin might be healthy and energetic.*



*Again, Mary recognizes that while the outdoors aren't necessary a huge draw for Colin at this point, having a secret is. This suggests that while Colin isn't yet fully on board with how exciting gardening can be, he still craves the independence that the secret garden represents. Dickon's assessment of how the garden would help suggests that despite Colin's tepid interest in the outdoors, it's still something that's going to heal him regardless.*



Dickon agrees that he could push Colin's wheelchair and then points to the robin. He whistles and the robin turns towards him. Dickon reassures the robin, and it makes Mary laugh. Mary knows that the robin will keep their secret when she catches its eye.

*By noting that the robin is in on the secret, the novel situates him as one of the group of friends. This allows him to become even more human in Mary's eyes.*



## CHAPTER 16

Mary returns to the house late for dinner and asks Martha to tell Colin that she's too busy in the garden to visit. Martha looks afraid, but Mary isn't scared. She runs back out after dinner, and she and Dickon spend the afternoon working. Soot and Captain busy themselves, and the robin continues to build his nest. They rest after a while and Dickon comments that Mary is getting stronger and looking better. Proudly, Mary says that she's getting fatter and her hair is getting thicker. They agree to return the next day and Mary runs back to the house, excited to tell Colin about Dickon's animals.

*The fact that the robin is building his nest while all of this is going on suggests that the secret garden itself is continuing to become more of a nest as time goes on. Now, it's preparing to house Colin in addition to Mary and Dickon. The growth that Mary is experiencing points to the ways in which the garden and its offerings are nourishing her, making her feel happier and more fulfilled, and giving her a sense of purpose.*



Martha is waiting in Mary's room and says that Colin has been throwing a tantrum all afternoon. Mary isn't used to thinking about other people, and doesn't see why she should pander to Colin when she wants to spend all of her time in the garden. She doesn't know that it's pitiful when people who feel bad make others feel bad—which is exactly what she did in India—and feels annoyed with Colin for doing this. When she gets to Colin's room, she marches up to him and asks him why he stayed in bed all day. He insists he hurts and asks why Mary never came. She explains that she was in the garden with Dickon.

*The way that the narrator describes Mary's displeasure with Colin reinforces that the children can act as mirrors for each other to check their behavior. Though Mary doesn't quite realize that she's behaved in a similarly awful way before, she does recognize now that acting like this is mean and rude. Because of her selfishness, she's able to make this clear to Colin.*



Colin says that he's going to ban Dickon from the manor if Mary chooses him over Colin, which makes Mary very angry. She threatens to never come again and the two begin arguing about which of them is the most selfish. Mary defends Dickon, whom Colin refers to as a "common cottage boy." Eventually, Mary gains the upper hand and Colin starts to feel sorry for himself and cry. He laments that he's going to die and develop a lump on his back. Mary irritably says that this isn't true, which Colin finds simultaneously upsetting and pleasing. Mary insists that Colin says those things to make people feel bad and acts proud of it. Colin angrily tells Mary to leave, and Mary walks out, just as angry as Colin.

*When the two children argue about who's the most selfish between them, it indicates that Colin recognizes that Mary is selfish—something that, in time, will help him regulate his own selfish behavior. Mary's insistence that there's nothing wrong with Colin except for his attitude brings the idea of positive thinking to the forefront, as it suggests that Colin is creating his own illness by dwelling on it. His pleasure at being told he's wrong suggests that he doesn't actually want to feel this way.*





In the hallway, Mary finds the nurse laughing into her handkerchief. She explains that having someone else spoiled to stand up to him is the best thing that could've happened to Colin and says that hysterics and his temper are half of his problem. This doesn't cheer Mary up. She returns to her room feeling disappointed that she didn't get to share the wonders of her day with Colin. She vows to not tell him about the **secret garden** and thinks he deserves to feel miserable.

Mary finds Martha in her room with a box of gifts from Mr. Craven. The box contains games, a writing set, and several beautifully illustrated books about gardens. Mary feels happy and decides to write Mr. Craven a letter of thanks. She thinks that if she and Colin were friends, they'd play the games and look at the books, and he wouldn't be so frightened and sad. The narrator notes that most of Colin's tantrums stem from the fact that he's terrified of developing a hunchback, something that only Mary is aware of. She wonders if he was upset today because he spent all day afraid, and she decides to go see him again.

## CHAPTER 17

Mary spends all of the next day in the garden and vows to see Colin the next day. However, she wakes in the middle of the night to a terrifying sound. She hears people walking around and knows that this must be Colin throwing a tantrum. Mary covers her ears, but it does little to block out Colin's screams. The screams start to make her angry and soon, she feels as upset as she thinks he sounds. Suddenly, the nurse bursts in, pale and scared-looking, and begs Mary to come and try to calm him down. The nurse is thrilled to see that Mary isn't afraid and encourages her to scold Colin.

Mary feels angrier and angrier the closer she gets to Colin's room. She bursts in and shouts that everyone hates him and will let him scream himself to death. Nobody has ever said this to Colin and it surprises him. Mary threatens to scream if he screams. Through his sobs, Colin says he can't stop screaming, to which Mary replies that this is all just hysterics. Colin insists he can feel the lump and he'll die, but Mary insists that this isn't true and asks for the nurse to come and show her Colin's back. Colin wants Mary to look so that she'll sympathize with him.

*The nurse's assessment of Colin's predicament reinforces Mary's assessment: the fact that Colin thinks he's sick is what is making him sick. However, her choice to shut him out reinforces that she's still at a beginning stage of her own development, and will continue to develop empathy and caring as she spends more time in the garden.*



*Just as when Mary thanked Martha for the jump rope, choosing to use her new things first to write a thank-you letter shows that Mary is expanding her understanding of people around her and now accepts the power of acknowledging kindness. When she wonders if Colin's fear is what sets off his tantrums, it also helps her realize that she has the ability to be kind to others—in this case, by visiting Colin again.*



*It's both humorous and telling that the nurse believes that the only way to calm Colin down is by asking a child to do it: this suggests that Colin is beyond the reach of rational adult authority figures, while also suggesting that someone like Mary, who can act like a mirror for his bad behavior, will be far more effective in making him see how ridiculous he's being.*



*Colin's response to Mary's shouts reinforces that because Mary is spoiled and wants her way, just like Colin, she can make him see how silly his tantrum is for a boy his age. However, it's important that Colin believes he can feel the lump starting, as it suggests that his negative and fearful thoughts are powerful enough to create phantom sensations that to him, are very real. Modern readers will know that such deep-rooted anxiety can, in fact, manifest itself in physical symptoms, so it's possible that Colin truly believes he can feel the lump forming.*



The nurse pulls up Colin's shirt to expose his thin back. She tries not to laugh at the sour and serious look on Mary's face as Mary carefully inspects Colin's back. After a minute, Mary exclaims that there are no errant lumps and threatens to laugh at him if he says he has lumps again. The narrator notes that if Colin had ever thought to ask questions, or had ever lived somewhere where people weren't afraid of him, he'd know that all his maladies were the work of his scared mind. He begins to wonder if Mary is right.

The nurse says that she had no idea that Colin thought he had a lump on his back, and says that his back is just weak because he refuses to sit up. This shocks Colin, and he cries in secret relief for a minute. Then, he asks the nurse if he could live. The nurse, remembering the London doctor's words, says that if Colin goes outside and doesn't act so horrible, he might. Colin reaches out a hand towards Mary and she takes it. He says he'd like to go outside and meet Dickon and his creatures. The nurse makes Colin's bed, gives the children tea, and then tells Mary to go to sleep. Mary offers to sing Colin her Ayah's song and sends the nurse to bed.

Once they're alone, Colin asks if Mary found the garden. Mary says that she has, but she'll tell him everything tomorrow. Colin says that if he can get into the **secret garden**, he's sure he'll grow up. He asks her to softly tell him what the garden might look like to help him fall asleep and Mary complies. She talks about **roses**, the spring, and crocuses.

## CHAPTER 18

The next morning, Mary sleeps late and then listens to Martha as she eats breakfast. Martha says that Colin is quiet, but feverish and worn out from his tantrum. He wants to see Mary, and Martha compliments Mary on how she handled Colin last night. She's astonished that Colin actually said "please" when he asked her to fetch Mary for him this morning. Mary decides to go see Colin before heading out to the garden. She tells Colin that she has something to tell him about the garden later and then runs outside.

In the garden, Dickon introduces Mary to two squirrels, Nut and Shell, who ride in his pockets. Mary tells Dickon about Colin. Dickon seems to feel sorry for Colin and says they have to get him outside soon. Mary responds in broad Yorkshire and explains that Colin would like to meet Dickon, so Dickon should visit Colin's room tomorrow and then, soon, they can all go out in the garden. She's proud of her Yorkshire and Dickon is also pleased. He suggests she use the dialect with Colin to make him laugh.

*When the narrator offers their assessment of Colin's situation, it's made very clear that the fear and secrecy surrounding his condition—whatever he thought it actually was—is what made it into something meaningful. Mary's ability to tell him without fail that there's no lump gives him something to cling to, which helps him feel better and in control.*



*The nurse's ability to reinforce Mary's diagnosis shows that once the veil of secrecy is lifted, many more people can become reliable figures in Colin's life. By bringing up the London doctor's diagnosis, the novel suggests that that doctor was correct, but that Colin just didn't want to hear it at the time when he saw that doctor. This indicates that Colin needed to be ready to heal; it wasn't something that another person could make him do.*



*Colin's assertion that he'll live if he can get into the secret garden again reinforces the power of secrets among children, as this secret allows him to transfer his attention onto something just as powerful: friendship and nature.*



*The drastic change in Colin's manners illustrate the effectiveness of seeing oneself in a mirror, even if that mirror is another child: by witnessing Mary's own selfishness, Colin is willing to evaluate how he treats the staff. By deigning to see Colin quickly before heading outside, Mary shows that she also learned something last night too: the power of making Colin feel seen and heard.*



*The novel overwhelmingly positions broad Yorkshire as something that's linked to the natural world of England and the specific region that Mary and Colin are in; it's something that helps them connect to the land and to the poor people who live there and speak it.*



A bit later, Mary heads inside. When Colin asks what she smells like, she tells him in broad Yorkshire about sitting with Dickon and the animals in the sunshine. It does make Colin laugh, and Mary joins him. Mrs. Medlock stops herself from entering and is astonished by the laughter she hears inside. Mary goes on to tell Colin everything about Dickon, his creatures, and his pony. Gravely, Mary says that Dickon is friends with everything. Colin says that he hates people, but he wants to be friends with things. He admits he likes Mary, and Mary says that she, Colin, and Ben Weatherstaff are all alike.

Colin touches Mary and apologizes for threatening to send Dickon away. He says he wouldn't mind it if Dickon looked at him. Colin sees Mary's face and knows that she's going to say something exciting. Mary stands and anxiously asks if she can trust Colin. When he says she can, Mary says that Dickon is going to visit and that she found the door to the **secret garden**. Colin nearly sobs. Mary tells him all about it and admits that when she told him what the garden might be like, she'd already been in—but she wasn't sure if she could trust him.

## CHAPTER 19

As usual, Dr. Craven calls on Colin the day after the tantrum. He usually finds Colin white and ready to set off into hysterics again, but Mrs. Medlock assures him that Colin is different today, thanks to the "plain sour-faced child" who gave Colin a taste of his own medicine the night before. Dr. Craven is astonished to see Colin and Mary giggling and looking at a book. They stop as soon as they see the doctor. Colin grandly says that he's better and wants to go outside, which startles Dr. Craven. He also insists that the nurse won't go; Mary will accompany him instead. This all concerns Dr. Craven as he does stand to inherit Misselthwaite if Colin dies, but he has no interest in actively sabotaging Colin.

When Dr. Craven hears that Dickon is the one who will push Colin's wheelchair, he visibly relaxes. He laughs at Mary when she speaks to him in Yorkshire, and she replies coldly that she's learning Yorkshire like she would French. When Dr. Craven asks Colin if he took his medicine, Colin admits he didn't. However, as Dr. Craven starts to remind Colin of the things he needs to remember, Colin says he wants to forget the things that make him want to scream, as forgetting makes him feel better. Dr. Craven leaves soon after and speaks briefly with Mrs. Medlock about how Mrs. Sowerby has said that it's good for Colin and Mary to know each other. They discuss that Mrs. Sowerby believes that children teach each other that a single person doesn't own the whole world.

*Colin's ability to admit that he wants to befriend things (though not yet people) shows that now that he believes he's not on his deathbed, he's ready to start building a community. Through doing so, he'll gain even more people and animals to act as mirrors and help him check his behavior. When Mrs. Medlock chooses to leave the children alone, it suggests her recognition that this friendship is the best thing for Colin right now.*



*Mary's confession reinforces the importance of secrets within the logic of the novel. Sharing the existence of the secret garden's door with Colin, and the fact that she'd already been in, allows her to help Colin feel as though he's a valuable person in his own right, while it shows both of them the power of being honest.*



*Notice that though Dr. Craven isn't entirely sure he wants Colin to recover, his thoughts aren't so negative as to wish Colin ill. This suggests that Dr. Craven is already somewhat versed in the power of positive thinking, or at least understands the power of not wishing someone ill. When Dr. Craven is surprised to see Colin and Mary enjoying themselves together, it indicates that he's never considered before how good it might be for Colin to have a friend.*



*Mary's unwillingness to politely engage with the doctor suggests that she doesn't trust him yet to actually have Colin's best interests at heart, especially after hearing the doctor remind Colin to remember how ill he is. The adults' conference in the hallway again situates Mrs. Sowerby as an expert on child development, as she knows the best way to guide children towards independence and adulthood. Specifically, they show that Mrs. Sowerby believes in the ability of children to act as mirrors for each other, just as Mary and Colin are doing.*



Colin sleeps all through the night and wakes refreshed in the morning. Mary arrives minutes later, smelling of the outdoors and with the news that spring has truly arrived. Colin laughs and asks Mary to open the window so they can hear "golden trumpets." Mary throws open the window and instructs Colin to lie down and breathe deeply. She says that Dickon thinks that doing so will make him live forever, which intrigues Colin. Mary tells him about all the live things outside, especially the newborn lamb that Dickon saved three days ago. The nurse enters, confirms that Colin actually wants the window open, and goes away to order two breakfasts.

When Colin and Mary receive their breakfast, Colin imperiously tells his nurse that Dickon and his creatures are going to visit and are to be brought right to him by Martha. The nurse is uncertain about the animals, but Colin says that Dickon is an animal charmer and the animals won't bite. As they eat, Mary says that Colin will start to get fatter if he keeps eating his breakfast.

About ten minutes later, Colin and Mary hear Dickon's animals in the hallway. Martha shows Dickon in, accompanied by Soot, Captain, Nut, Shell, and the lamb. Colin stares in wonder but cannot speak. Dickon silently approaches and puts the lamb on Colin's lap. The lamb starts to nuzzle into Colin's robe, and Dickon explains that the lamb is hungry. He pulls out a bottle to feed it and as the lamb eats and falls asleep, tells Colin all about finding the lamb on the moor. The children all look at the gardening books, and Dickon points out which flowers are already growing in the garden. Colin vows to go outside and see the flowers.

## CHAPTER 20

The next week is rainy and Colin catches a cold, but he remains in good spirits. Dickon visits daily to talk about what's happening on the moor and to tell Colin and Mary about all the animals building nests and burrows. Most exciting to talk about are the plans the children make to transport Colin secretly into the garden. As the days pass, Colin becomes certain that the garden must remain a secret and that people must think that he's just going out with Dickon and Mary for fun. They devise a path to take and one day, Colin summons Mr. Roach to his room. Mr. Roach has never seen Colin, so he's curious to lay eyes on the boy. Mrs. Medlock tells the gardener that things are changing for the better and warns him that he'll probably see Dickon in Colin's room.

*Colin's good night of sleep can be attributed to his excitement at getting to go outside; now that he's thinking good thoughts and is thinking kindly about nature, he naturally feels better. The mention of "golden trumpets" suggests that the natural world is just as wondrous as the kind of paradise that exists within in the pages of the Bible, which reinforces the almost Edenic role that the secret garden is playing for the children.*



*Now that Mary has seen what an effect eating has had on her, she's ready to share that knowledge and possibility with Colin. This reminds the reader that one of the core tenets of the novel is that once a person learns valuable lessons from nature or from someone else, they must pass it on.*



*Just as Mary's first real friend was the robin, Colin's first interaction with the outdoors comes in the form of these wild creatures. This suggests that animals like this are an easy entry into the outside world for someone like Mary or Colin who's never experienced either the joys of the natural world or a sense of camaraderie with another living being before. Specifically, when the lamb leads Colin to address Dickon, it shows that he's taking the same route as Mary to making friends with Dickon.*



*The fact that the children take such delight in planning Colin's excursion into the secret garden—and specifically, keeping it a secret—reminds the reader that for Colin and Mary, the secret is at least half of the fun. It allows them to practice being independent in a place where there's little risk of getting hurt or things going wrong (as Colin isn't actually ill). When Mrs. Medlock says that things are changing in a good way, it shows that though she's not as plugged into the natural world as the children, she still benefits from their positive thoughts and engagement with nature.*



Upon entering, Mr. Roach is a bit surprised to see Dickon and a variety of animals sitting with Colin and Mary. Colin looks Mr. Roach over haughtily and tells him that he's going to go out in his chair. He says that the gardeners need to leave the area until he gives the word that they can return to work. Mr. Roach is relieved that Colin isn't asking him to cut down trees and almost laughs when he leaves the room. He and Mrs. Medlock laugh that if Colin lives and if Mary stays, he'll learn that the world isn't his alone.

Dickon returns to the garden, while Mary stays with Colin. During lunch, she notices that his eyes are especially big and asks him what he's thinking about. He admits that he's thinking about spring for the first time, and on the morning that Mary announced spring's arrival, he imagined a procession with music. Mary says that it feels like a celebration outside.

Later, the nurse gets Colin ready. Dr. Craven tells the nurse that he wishes she could go with him, but the nurse refuses to spoil Colin's good mood by insisting on going. A footman carries Colin downstairs, arranges him in his wheelchair, and Dickon begins to push the chair outside. Colin looks at the sky and breathes in deep breaths of air.

They wind along through the garden and when they approach the path by the ivy wall, they all start to whisper. Mary points out landmarks along the way—where the robin showed her the key and where Ben Weatherstaff works—and then, she steps into the bed, opens the door, and Dickon pushes the chair into the **secret garden**. Colin gasps happily and looks at all the growing things. Dickon and Mary watch Colin's face, which starts to take on some color, and Colin shouts that he's going to get well and live forever.

## CHAPTER 21

Dickon is struck by how beautiful Colin looks in the garden, and Mary and Colin speak in broad Yorkshire. They sit under the plum tree, and Colin watches Dickon and Mary work. They bring him things to look at, and Dickon pushes the wheelchair around. Dickon explains that they'll see the robin soon, when the eggs have hatched. They giggle and try to muffle the sound.

Later, Colin points out a very old tree. Mary notes that it looks dead, though it's covered with **roses**. Colin notices a broken branch, but Dickon turns his attention to the robin, who has something in his beak for his mate. Later, Mary tells Dickon privately that Magic sent the robin so they wouldn't have to talk about the tree that killed Mrs. Craven. Dickon tells Mary that according to Mother, Mrs. Craven's spirit is in the garden drawing the children to her.

*Mr. Roach's conversation with Mrs. Medlock mirrors the one that Mrs. Medlock had with the doctor, which suggests that most of the adults at Misselthwaite understand the power that children have to shape each other's behavior. This suggests that they all knew these steps that they could take to improve Mary and Colin before the children found each other; they just chose not to take them.*



*By ascribing a human event like a procession to a natural one like the coming of spring, Colin tries to merge what he knows from his books with what he's learning about the outdoors.*



*This time, when the nurse insists upon following Colin's orders, she's doing it for the good of her charge. Again, this shows that Colin's transformation is helping other people be better and kinder too.*



*Just as with Mary, Colin gets color in his cheeks on his first day outside—this reinforces that the natural world begins healing a person immediately. When Colin declares that he's going to live forever, it speaks even more to the healing power of nature, as this optimistic thought has never crossed Colin's mind before.*



*For the children, having to laugh quietly to maintain the secret only adds to the appeal of the secret garden. The fact that they're laughing speaks to how the garden is changing them and helping them become more normal and happy about life.*



*Dickon's assessment of Mrs. Craven's spirit being in the garden reinforces that the garden is a space where the children are going to receive the kind of mothering they never had, just as they would if they were actual birds in a nest like the robin's.*



Colin, Mary, and Dickon watch the robin for a few minutes and then, Colin tells Mary to go ask one of the servants for tea. The servants oblige and the children enjoy their meal on a white cloth. As it begins to look like evening, Colin declares that he'll come back, see the summer, and grow in the garden along with the plants. Dickon remarks that soon, Colin will be digging and walking. Colin admits that there's nothing wrong with his legs; they're just weak. Dickon says that when Colin decides he's not afraid to stand, he'll stand.

A while later, Colin points and anxiously asks who the man is. Dickon and Mary turn around and see Ben Weatherstaff glaring at them over the wall. He threatens to hit Mary, but Mary insists that the robin showed her into the garden. This offends Ben even more. Colin asks Dickon to wheel him over in front of Ben and the sight of Colin makes Ben's jaw drop. When Colin asks if Ben knows who he is, Ben incredulously says that he does: he's the "poor cripple." Colin and Mary both shout that Colin isn't crippled and explain that there's nothing wrong with Colin's back or legs. Learning that people think he has crooked legs makes Colin so angry that he calls Dickon to him and stands up. Mary whispers, "he can do it" over and over under her breath.

Colin and Dickon both say that Colin is just fine, which makes Ben Weatherstaff burst into tears. Colin says that he's Ben's master and commands Ben to come inside **the secret garden** so they can speak. Ben climbs down.

## CHAPTER 22

Colin sends Mary to meet Ben Weatherstaff at the door and then asks Dickon to help him to a tree so he can lean on it. They discuss that Colin isn't afraid anymore, and Colin asks Dickon if he's performing Magic. Dickon replies that Colin is the one making Magic, and it's the same kind of Magic that makes things grow. A minute after Colin reaches the tree, Ben comes through the door and wonders irritably what Mary is muttering, but she won't say. She's still saying "you can do it" for Colin to try to make Magic.

*What Dickon says about how Colin will start to walk again speaks to the power of positive thinking, as he suggests that fear is the only thing holding Colin back, and that once Colin can transition to thinking only good thoughts, everything will become easy. Colin's willingness to admit that there's nothing wrong with his legs shows that he can now evaluate his past behavior with clearer eyes; while he once indulged in the idea that he was terribly ill and forced everyone to feed him that narrative, Colin now recognizes that he's capable of getting stronger.*



*By channeling his anger into something productive—standing up for the first time—Colin shows that he's beginning to grasp the power of positive thinking. Mary's whispering helps channel that positive thinking, something that Colin will later insist is a spell. All of the rumors that Ben mentions shows that at least some of what ails Colin is the rumors, which make it so nobody else (aside from Mary and now Dickon) can act as a mirror and tell him he's fine.*



*Ben's tears suggest that he actually cares for the children more than he's angry with them, which primes him to become a guardian for them.*



*By insisting that the Magic that's helping Colin is the same kind that makes plants grow, Dickon credits the natural world with Colin's breakthrough. This again centers his recovery around his engagement with the natural world and suggests that positive thinking is only half the battle: one still needs to accept nature.*



Colin commands Ben Weatherstaff to look at him and notice that he's not a hunchback or physically impaired. Ben says that Colin isn't mentally impaired either, as some people believe. Colin says sharply that he's not going to die, and Ben agrees. He asks Colin to sit and then give him his orders. Ben describes the kind of work he does and says that this was Mrs. Craven's garden. Colin says that it's his garden now and orders Ben to keep the garden a secret and come when Colin asks for him. Smiling, Ben says he hasn't been inside the garden in two years, but he used to climb over the wall occasionally to prune the roses. He shares that Mrs. Craven made him promise to take care of her **roses** and notes that caring for them with his rheumatics will be easier now that he can use the door.

*By revealing some of these secrets to the children, Ben acts as a link to the past and to Mrs. Craven. Keep in mind that Colin probably hasn't heard much about his mother aside from the fact that she died; this means that through the things that Ben says about her, Colin will be able to gain a better understanding of who his mother was and in doing so, will be able to come to terms with her death. By claiming the garden as his own, Colin chooses to follow in his mother's footsteps and dedicate himself to nature and happiness.*



Colin grabs Mary's abandoned trowel and starts to scratch at the ground. Dickon, Mary, and Ben Weatherstaff watch with interest and after a minute, Colin remarks in broad Yorkshire that he's walking and digging on his first day in the garden. Ben laughs and offers to get Colin a **rose** so he can plant something. Very soon, they settle the potted rose in the ground and water it. Colin asks Dickon to help him stand so he can watch the sunset, which he says is part of the Magic. Colin laughs as the sun goes down.

*Planting this rose becomes a way for Colin to symbolically plant himself in the garden and align himself with his mother. This reinforces the garden's role as a motherly nest of sorts, as it'll be the safe, secluded place where Colin and Mary can grow, play, and develop with the help of parental figures like Ben and Mrs. Craven's spirit.*



## CHAPTER 23

Dr. Craven is relieved when Mary, Colin, and Dickon return. When Colin announces that he's going out in the morning *and* in the afternoon tomorrow, Dr. Craven insists that he shouldn't. Colin, however, holds firm. Having been at Misselthwaite for a while, Mary now understands that the manners she arrived with were horrid. She recognizes that Colin's manners are much like hers once were, and so after Dr. Craven leaves, she says that she feels sorry for Dr. Craven for having to put up with Colin's rudeness for the last ten years. Colin seems unperturbed to learn that he's rude, even when Mary says that Dr. Craven would be justified in slapping Colin.

*Mary's newfound ability to recognize Colin's terrible manners for what they are (and, by extension, gain a clearer picture of her earlier behavior) speaks to the superiority of the way she lives at Misselthwaite in comparison to how she lived in India. She now recognizes that even though he's already in England, Colin behaves as though he's in India and owns everything. With this, Mary is again able to act as a mirror and show Colin the error of his ways.*



When Colin reminds Mary that nobody would dare slap him, she points out that nobody wanted to upset him because he was so ill. She continues that being so spoiled has made him strange. Being called strange is something that seems to disturb Colin, though Mary assures him that both she and Ben Weatherstaff are strange, but less so since discovering the garden. Colin vows to not be so strange and to do so, he'll go daily to the garden where there's Magic. They decide that even if the Magic isn't real, they'll pretend it is.

*By deciding that the garden and Magic are the things that are going to help him be less strange, Colin is essentially recognizing the power of being in nature and thinking positive thoughts (which is essentially all Magic is). When they decide to pretend that the Magic is real, it suggests that the power of it lies in the individual, not in an actual higher power.*



In the following months the Magic seems real as Dickon, Mary, Colin, and Ben Weatherstaff watch the garden come to life. Flowers bloom, and Ben tells the children about the flowers that Mrs. Craven liked. The **roses** develop buds that eventually turn into hundreds of blossoms. Colin decides that he can see things growing and blooming and enjoys watching the wildlife. When Colin learns that Mary "worked a spell" when he stood the first time, he's excited. He reasons that to start using Magic, one must say that nice things are going to happen until they happen.

The next morning, Colin summons Ben Weatherstaff and tells him that he wants him to stand with Dickon and Mary and listen to him speak about important things. Colin declares that he's going to grow up to be a scientist, but he's starting now with an experiment. He says that he's going to experiment with Magic and says that Dickon has Magic because he's an animal charmer. Colin continues that the garden used to look dead, but now things are alive, and this must be the work of Magic. He says that Magic made him happy for the first time, made him stand, and made him believe he's going to grow to adulthood. He mentions Mary's spell and says that every morning, he's going to say that the Magic is in him and is making him well. He asks the others to do the same.

Colin insists that if they repeat this often enough, it'll become second nature. Mary notes that holy people in India did much the same thing, and Ben Weatherstaff says he's heard of that happening too—a local woman called her husband a drunk so many times, he beat her and then got drunk. Colin thinks for a moment and then says that the woman used the wrong kind of Magic, and it made her husband violent. Ben calls Colin clever for this insight.

Dickon looks curious and delighted and tells Colin that he thinks the experiment will work. He suggests they begin immediately, so Colin arranges everyone under a tree. Ben feels as though he's in a "prayer-meeting," but for once, he doesn't resent being there. Dickon's creatures settle themselves nearby. Colin asks everyone to sway and when Ben insists that his rheumatics won't let him, Colin insists that the Magic will cure the rheumatics. Colin begins to chant that the sunshine, the growing plants, and being alive are all Magic. He asks the Magic to help and everyone feels as though they're in a trance. After many repetitions, Colin announces that he's going to walk around the garden. This jerks Ben out of his nap.

*The spell that Colin refers to was Mary's muttering of "you can do it" over and over again while Colin was attempting to stand up, which is positive thinking at its most basic. This suggests that the person in question doesn't need to be the one doing the positive thinking to be affected by it, which will become important later. It implies that positive thinking has implications beyond an individual or indeed, beyond the garden.*



*Colin's practice speech cements the novel's assertion that the things the children learn in the garden aren't things that they can or should keep to themselves. Rather, just as Colin frames this as being a speech on his scientific experiment, one that in the future he might give to a panel of other scientists, it suggests that the whole point of making these gains is to share them. Then, by suggesting that he perform a chant every morning, it indicates that a good way to continue to think positively is to make it part of a routine.*



*By tying the idea of Magic to Indian faith traditions and to local problems, the novel takes a universalist stance and suggests that Magic is not something that can be attributed to a single faith. While Colin's assessment of the roots of domestic violence is problematic, it nonetheless shows him experimenting with what he believes and trying to make it fit in a way that makes sense.*



*Ben's sense of being in church reinforces the religious overtones of this chanting circle, but his lack of resentment suggests that this system of Magic and positive thinking is more palatable than organized religion. When Colin insists that Magic will cure Ben's arthritis, it shows how deeply he believes in Magic to cure things that are truly physical ailments and not something that takes place in one's head, as Colin's illness did. Notably, the novel never says one way or another if this works for Ben, suggesting there may be limits on what Magic can do, but leaving room for hope, too.*





Mary, Dickon, and Colin lead the way, with Ben Weatherstaff and the creatures following. They move slowly around the garden and after a while, Colin walks unassisted. He continues to say that the Magic is in him and is making him strong. When they return to the tree, Colin declares that he's made his first scientific discovery—but says that Dr. Craven and the household aren't to know about it. He doesn't want people whispering and doesn't want Mr. Craven to find out until Colin can walk up to him and tell him he's well. The narrator notes that Colin has now made up his mind to get well, which is more than half the battle. Ben suggests that Colin will be a boxing champion by the end of the week, which Colin finds disrespectful. Privately, Ben is thrilled that Colin is strong enough to reprimand him.

*By shifting his thinking to have a specific goal and a specific end date (telling Mr. Craven and his time of return, respectively), the novel reminds the reader that effective secrets are one that have end dates. Unlike keeping Colin's existence a secret or the secret garden locked up, which were supposed to continue indefinitely and also weren't effective, Colin's secret is construed as positive. It allows him to feel independent and in control of his future, while wanting his father's affection shows that he's becoming ready to leave the proverbial nest.*



## CHAPTER 24

Whenever Dickon isn't working in the **secret garden**, he's working in his own garden at home. After supper some nights, Mrs. Sowerby goes outside to speak with her son and admire his flowers and vegetables. In time, he tells her about Colin, Mary, and the secret garden. Mrs. Sowerby laughs when she hears that Colin is trying to keep this all a secret and so pretends to be ill. Dickon explains that the footman still carries Colin to his wheelchair as Colin tries to look helpless. Dickon notes that both children are gaining weight and Colin is getting scared that his appetite is going to give away the secret.

*When Dickon lets his mother in on this secret, it shows the reader that there are parents out there who are trustworthy and care deeply for the welfare of their children and of others. Mrs. Sowerby's delight at hearing about Colin and Mary's antics suggests that she sees this as normal and healthy for their development, which indicates that she believes childish secrets like the garden are healthy and normal.*



Mrs. Sowerby laughs again at this and says that in the mornings, she'll send Dickon with a pail of milk and fresh bread so Colin and Mary can keep their secret. She's right when she suggests that Colin and Mary find the whole thing highly entertaining. They get annoyed when the nurse and Dr. Craven ask too many questions, and one morning, Colin suggests that his appetite is bad and a symptom of bloat. Dr. Craven isn't convinced and says that Colin looks very alive, but Colin refuses to allow the doctor to tell Mr. Craven the good news.

*By offering to send extra food, Mrs. Sowerby shows that she supports childish secret keeping in a major way. Especially in terms of Colin, this suggests that she understands Colin's desire to share the good news with his father himself and in doing so, invite his father into the fold and let him be a reasonable parent.*



One evening, Colin miserably tells Mary that he'll have to have a tantrum at some point, especially if the adults keep talking about writing to Mr. Craven. He tries to eat less, but the breakfast is always so wonderful that he and Mary can't resist eating all of it. The first morning that Dickon brings bread and milk, Colin is beside himself with joy and declares that there's Magic in Mrs. Sowerby. As Mrs. Sowerby continues to send food, Mary and Colin realize that they're two more mouths to feed and so start sending money home with Dickon to help her out. Dickon also builds a little stone oven in the woods, which allows them to roast eggs and potatoes.

*Just as when Mary thanked Martha for the jump rope and Mr. Craven for the gifts, the fact that she and Colin understand that feeding them might be a significant strain on Mrs. Sowerby's pinched resources shows that they're developing empathy through their friendships with each other and are now more aware of other people's needs. Specifically, the stories they hear from Dickon about his family help them conceptualize what life might be like for them and recognize the importance of contributing financially, which is fairly profound for two ten-year-old children.*



Every morning, Colin leads everyone in his Magic ceremony, walks around the garden, and tries new experiments. One morning, Dickon returns from a few days away and explains he ran into Bob Haworth, a champion wrestler, and Bob shared some basic strength training exercises with him. Dickon shows the exercises to Colin, and both Colin and Mary perform them. The exercises soon become part of the day's routine. Thanks to Mrs. Sowerby's offerings and the oven in the woods, Colin and Mary start sending their meals back, much to the confusion of the nurse, Mrs. Medlock, and Dr. Craven.

When Dr. Craven sees Colin after a two-week break, he notices that Colin looks well and perfectly normal. Colin answers that his earlier ravenous appetite was abnormal. At this, Mary starts to violently hack and choke. She later laughs with Colin about almost spoiling the secret by laughing. Meanwhile, Mrs. Medlock and the doctor wonder if there's some way for the children to get extra food. They discuss how well and happy they both look, and Dr. Craven says that they should be allowed to laugh.

## CHAPTER 25

The **secret garden** blooms, and soon the robin's mate lays eggs. Everyone in the garden seems to know how precious they are, though at first, the robin anxiously monitors Colin and Mary. Dickon speaks robin so he's nothing to worry about, but the robin is wary of the slow way that Colin walks—it's suspiciously catlike. The robin finally decides that Colin is safe when he remembers how, as a fledgling, his parents made him take short flights and decides that Colin is probably just learning to fly.

The robin watches Colin eventually start to move like Dickon and Mary, which is comforting, but all of them perform strange movements and actions every day. Because Dickon does these things too the robin concludes that they're not dangerous and settles in to keep watch over his eggs.

When it rains, Colin has to stay inside and pretend to be ill on his sofa. One rainy morning, Colin complains that he's so full of Magic that he can't stay still, and he and Mary discuss how horrified everyone would be to see him stand. They note that they can't keep this up for too much longer and hope that Mr. Craven will come home soon. Then, Mary tells Colin about her rainy day poking around the house, where she discovered the many rooms that nobody goes into. Colin thinks that it sounds like a **secret garden** and suggests that they go play in the rest of the house.

*The strength training exercises give Mary and Colin yet another way to exercise their bodies and engage with nature, as it helps them get stronger so that they can better engage with the natural world. The confusion of the adults points to the success of Mary and Colin's ruse at this point, especially given that, presumably, both children are looking healthier and have some color in their cheeks.*



*Notice that in most cases, the novel links laughter with times when the children have to struggle to keep the secret. This continues to illustrate how positive the secret is for Colin and Mary, as it makes them laugh—something that even Dr. Craven understands is a good thing.*



*By offering this chapter from the robin's perspective, the novel shows through its form how Colin, Mary, and now, the reader and the robin are learning to think of others outside of themselves. When the robin decides that Colin is learning to fly, it shows that just like the children, he has to learn compassion and empathy too.*



*The strange movements presumably refer to Bob Haworth's strength training exercises, which suggests that this is one part of the Magic that isn't rooted entirely in the natural world.*



*Again, learning about all the secrets within the house sparks curiosity in Colin, just as the secret garden made him curious about the outdoors. This curiosity about the house, however, suggests that Colin is growing, developing, and is getting ready to break free of the garden's constraints. The house is his father's realm, and the curiosity about it indicates that he's getting ready to join Mr. Craven.*



Colin rings for his nurse and tells her that he wants help getting up the stairs, but then he wants to be left alone with Mary so they can look at the house. Colin and Mary run up and down the hallways, do Bob Haworth's exercises, and look at the portraits. Colin muses that the portraits are all his family members and points out one that looks like Mary. They play with the ivory elephants and discover that the mouse family has grown up and moved out. They eat all of their lunch, which pleases the cook.

That afternoon, Mary notices a change in Colin's room but doesn't say anything until he brings it up. He says that he's taken the curtain off of Mrs. Craven's portrait because it doesn't make him angry anymore. He explains that two nights ago, he woke up in the middle of the night and felt full of Magic, and the Magic made him pull away the curtain. Now, he likes looking at her and thinks she was a "sort of Magic person." Mary remarks that Colin looks like an incarnation of his mother, and he slowly says that if he were his mother, Mr. Craven would like him. He admits that now, he'd like to tell his father about the Magic and cheer him up.

## CHAPTER 26

Sometimes in the mornings, after incantations, Colin gives Magic lectures to practice for when he's an adult and must speak about his "great scientific discoveries." As Colin speaks, Ben Weatherstaff watches him critically and notices how healthy Colin is starting to look. When he comments on Colin's appearance one morning, Colin insists that his experiment is succeeding and Magic is working. The children weed and Colin declares that Magic is most effective when a person moves their body.

A bit later, Colin stands upright and shouts for Mary and Dickon to look at him. He says that he suddenly realized he's well. He announces that he's going to live forever and make Magic, and says he wants to recite something joyful and thankful. Ben Weatherstaff grunts that Colin might consider singing the Doxology. Colin has never heard of it before as he's never been to church, but Dickon instructs Colin and Ben to take off their caps and stand up. Then, he sings the Doxology, which praises God. When Dickon finishes, Ben watches Colin closely. Colin deems the Doxology just the right thing and wonders if Magic and God are the same thing. Everyone sings the Doxology again and Ben tears up: suddenly, the Doxology has meaning for him.

*When Colin can point out portraits that look like Mary, it indicates that he too is learning to think of people other than himself and recognize things about people. This suggests that now, he's a better friend to Mary as he better understands and sees who she is.*



*By deciding that Mrs. Craven was full of Magic, Colin chooses to come to peace with his mother's death. When Mary sees how much Colin looks like his mother, it shows that she too is developing the ability to recognize familiar things all over. This in turn allows her to connect with Colin, as evidenced by the fact that he chooses to share this very personal shift in his thinking with her in the first place.*



*The assertion that Colin will continue to give these lectures as an adult reminds the reader that the whole purpose of learning what Colin and Mary are learning about nature and Magic is first to heal oneself, and then to pass it on so others can also heal. This again suggests that the power of positive thought comes from how a person applies it to others.*



*The Doxology links Magic directly to religion, as it's a classic Christian hymn. However, because Colin has never been to church, the Doxology is simply a way for him to give thanks and understand that positive thinking transcends faith traditions. In the case of Ben Weatherstaff, hearing the Doxology in this pastoral setting rather than in the pews allows him to find meaning in his own faith, which appears to have been wavering. This suggests that the garden has the capacity to teach Ben things, too.*



Looking startled, Colin looks across the garden. A woman lets herself in through the garden door and Dickon explains that it's his mother, Mrs. Sowerby. All three children run to her and Colin shyly tells her that he's wanted to see her from the minute he learned of her existence. Mrs. Sowerby seems overtaken by emotion and explains that this is because Colin looks so much like Mrs. Craven. Colin asks if this will make Mr. Craven like him, and Mrs. Sowerby assures him it will.

Ben Weatherstaff approaches and points out Colin's strong legs to Mrs. Sowerby. Mrs. Sowerby then turns to Mary and says that with how well she's looking, she'll look as pretty as Mary's mother and will be "like a blush **rose**" when she grows up. Mary is pleased to hear this, as she always thought her mother was beautiful. Mrs. Sowerby then tours the garden and admires the plants. Both Colin and Mary feel warm and understood and choose to tell her about Magic. Mrs. Sowerby agrees that she believes, though she's never known Magic by that name. She suggests that "th' Big Good Thing" is all the same, and people can call it what they like.

Colin says that he feels joyful, and Mrs. Sowerby says that the Magic listened to the Doxology. Then, she pulls out a basket with a feast inside. They laugh and talk and Mrs. Sowerby laughs especially hard when she hears how difficult it is for Mary and Colin to pretend that Colin is still ill. Mrs. Sowerby assures them that Mr. Craven will come home soon. They talk about visiting Mrs. Sowerby's cottage and finally, they all prepare to leave the garden. Before Colin sits in his wheelchair, he stands in front of Mrs. Sowerby and tells her that he wishes she were his mother. Mrs. Sowerby pulls Colin into an embrace and assures him that Mrs. Craven is here, in the garden.

## CHAPTER 27

Stepping back from the narrative, the narrator explains that people are discovering things all the time. In the last century alone, people discovered that thoughts are "as powerful as electric batteries" and that bad thoughts can be as damaging as scarlet fever. The narrator insists that while Mary was filled with bad thoughts, she was ugly and yellow. As she learned about the robin and Dickon, she got better. Colin experienced the same thing; he was never going to get well while he focused on lumps and his fears, but once he got into the garden, good thoughts took over.

*Colin's outright admission that he's wanted to meet Mrs. Sowerby reminds the reader that what Colin (and Mary, for that matter) craves now that he's found friendship is a parent figure. Though Mrs. Sowerby isn't Colin's parent, she can still play a parental role by speaking to Colin in an affirming way.*



*While the reader knows little about Mary's mother, Mrs. Sowerby's words to Mary suggest that Mrs. Sowerby actually knew Mary's mother and further, that she might not have been as bad of a person as Mary's isolated childhood would lead one to believe. This reminds the reader that people are complex and can contain both good and bad.*



*By assuring Colin that his mother's spirit exists in the garden, Mrs. Sowerby helps guide Colin further in the direction of coming to terms with his mother's death. This allows him the emotional skills to look for mothering figures in more places, while also pointing him in the direction of the parent he still has. Her insistence that Mr. Craven will come home soon offers another place in which positive thinking may have an effect on someone other than the person doing the thinking.*



*By situating Colin and Mary's story in a greater narrative of the power of thought, the narrator suggests that this is the main takeaway of the novel: positive thoughts can change a person for the better, while negative thoughts can condemn someone to a life of fear and anger, like how Colin used to live before finding the garden.*



The narrator says that at the same time as the **secret garden** is "coming alive," along with Colin and Mary, Mr. Craven is wandering around Europe as he's done for the last ten years, thinking of how heartbroken he is. During this time Mr. Craven has forgotten his home, and his thoughts poison the air. He only stays a few days in each beautiful place. However, after leaving Mary and giving her permission to grow a garden, he takes a walk in the Austrian Tyrol and sits by a stream. He gazes into the stream and notices all the growing things. After a while, he stands and says that he almost feels alive. The narrator notes that this happened at the same time that Colin entered the secret garden and declared that he was going to live forever.

Mr. Craven sleeps better that night than he has in a long time. This brief period of calm is short-lived; he soon wanders on and returns to his dark thoughts. The good moments continue to occur, however, and he doesn't know that he's coming alive at the same time as the garden. As the summer progresses, Mr. Craven starts sleeping better. His body grows stronger and his soul feels better too. He starts to think about going home and wonders how Colin is doing.

One evening, Mr. Craven falls asleep at the edge of a beautiful lake. He dreams that Mrs. Craven is calling to him from the **secret garden** and wakes up to a brilliantly beautiful morning. A servant is there and offers Mr. Craven his mail. As Mr. Craven flips through it, he remembers his dream and thinks that the garden is locked and the key is buried. He has one letter from Yorkshire. It's from Mrs. Sowerby, asking him to come home.

Mr. Craven arrives in Misselthwaite a few days later and realizes he's thinking often about Colin. He realizes that he didn't intend to be a bad father, but he'd never felt like one and had inadvertently neglected the boy. Mr. Craven wonders if ten years of neglect is too long to recover from. The narrator notes that this thought represents bad Magic, but Mr. Craven doesn't yet know how to properly use Magic. Mr. Craven decides to stop in and see Mrs. Sowerby on his way to Misselthwaite. He finds only eight of her children, however, as Mrs. Sowerby is helping a woman with a new baby. He gives the children money and starts off across the moor.

*Notice that the narrator suggests that Mr. Craven has forgotten his home. Especially when considered alongside the way the novel vilifies India, this suggests that one's home—and specifically, one's English home—is the only place where a person can truly grow and flourish. Traveling, on the other hand, will lead to negative thoughts and in the case of Mr. Craven, isn't an effective way to deal with his grief. The fact that Mr. Craven starts to improve when Colin enters the secret garden shows that positive thinking can affect others.*



*Specifically because Mr. Craven starts to think more about Colin as he improves, the novel offers some room for someone to interpret "home" to mean a person, not just a place. Just as Ben is able to make Colin's Magic work within his own faith tradition, this allows the reader to think of home in a way that works for them.*



*While not exactly the work of Magic, Mrs. Sowerby's letter offers the reader another example of how to help someone else through positive thought: in this case, by doing something concrete and asking for something specific. When combined with the dream, this is shown to be one of the most effective ways to create change.*



*When the narrator picks apart Mr. Craven's thoughts and applies Colin's tenets of Magic to them, it shows that the narrator intends the reader to take what they've learned about Magic and apply it to their own lives. Further, by suggesting that Mr. Craven will go on to learn how to properly use Magic, the novel suggests that anyone can learn and harness the power of positive thinking.*



On the drive across the moor, Mr. Craven thinks of how calming and beautiful the moor is and vows to find the key to the **secret garden** and open the door. When he arrives at Misselthwaite, the servants notice that he looks better. He summons Mrs. Medlock immediately and asks her about Colin. She explains that nobody can figure out if he's better or worse: he started eating and then stopped; he's stopped throwing tantrums and started going outside; and he spends all his time outside with Mary and Dickon. He also laughs. Mrs. Medlock says that Colin is in the garden now. This piques Mr. Craven's interest and he heads outside, walking slowly, in the direction of the secret garden.

When Mr. Craven gets to the walk by the walls covered in ivy, he walks slowly and tries to remember where he buried the key. He hears strange sounds from within the garden that sound almost like children playing and trying to stay quiet. Finally, he hears them laughing and running and the door flies open. Colin and Mary burst out and Colin runs straight into his father's arms. Mr. Craven looks over his son and Colin introduces himself, explaining that the Magic in the garden saved him. He declares that he's going to be an athlete, and Mr. Craven joyfully sees that his son is a normal, healthy boy. Colin says that he's going to live forever.

Mary and Colin show Mr. Craven into the garden and show him all the autumn flowers in bloom, including **roses**. Mr. Craven says that he thought the garden would be dead, and they all sit under a tree. Colin tells his father his story, and as the boy speaks, Mr. Craven becomes even happier. At the end, Colin says that his good health doesn't need to be a secret anymore, and he's never using the wheelchair again.

While all this is going on in the **secret garden**, Ben Weatherstaff sits in the servants' hall drinking beer with Mrs. Medlock. Mrs. Medlock wants to know if Ben's seen Colin or Mr. Craven, but Ben says only that he's seen the two together. Mrs. Medlock asks how Colin looks and Ben replies that everyone is going to discover a secret. A minute later, Ben points across the lawn. Mrs. Medlock shrieks and all the servants race to the windows. They see Mr. Craven walking with Colin, laughing.

*Mr. Craven's belief that the moor is beautiful shows that though he's been an unhappy man since his wife's death, he has the capacity within himself to find beauty in nature. This again shows the reader that this capacity exists within everyone, no matter how miserable and bogged down in negative thinking they may be. His understanding that he needs to trust the truth of his dream and head for the secret garden suggests that the dream was the work of Colin's Magic and his wife's spirit.*



*Colin and Mary's exit from the garden mimics a birth of sorts; they leave the maternal and safe world of the garden and enter into the adult world where Colin's father lives. However, the things that Colin tells his father shows that he's ready to make this transition and inhabit the wider world. Now that he knows how to use Magic, he also knows that it's not something unique to the garden: he can make it and use it anywhere.*



*Allowing Mr. Craven into the garden allows Mr. Craven to come to terms with his wife's death and see the garden as responsible for Colin's health more than her death. By offering him the ability to reframe, the garden introduces him to the power of positive thinking.*



*Now that Colin's secret has come to an end, everyone at Misselthwaite will be able to be happy and healthy. This reinforces that in order to be good and helpful, secrets need to have an end date—and adults shouldn't endeavor to keep secrets from or about children, as the children will inevitably find out and rise above, as Colin did.*





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