

# The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett's story *The Secret Garden* was first published as a series in *The American Magazine* between November 1910 and August 1911 and the book came out later that year. Frances Hodgson Burnett was a British-American novelist and playwright, best known for three children's novels – *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden*. She was born in Manchester, but emigrated with her family to America in 1865. Because the family needed money, she started to write stories to magazines. In the 1890s she bought a home in England where she wrote *The Secret Garden*, one of the classics in English children's literature.

The story is set in England at the turn of the 20th century. Mary Lennox is a sickly, neglected, unloved girl, born in India to wealthy British parents who never wanted her. Native servants take care of her, letting her grow up to a spoiled, selfish and irritating child. When a cholera outbreak kills her parents as well as the servants, Mary is left alone in the empty house. After living a while with another English family, she is sent to Yorkshire, England, to live with Archibald Craven, a wealthy uncle who she has never met. He lives in Misselthwaite Manor, an enormous country house on the Yorkshire moors, in the middle of nowhere. Mary hates her new home and the surrounding moors until a friendly maid tells her about her aunt, who had spent hours in a garden surrounded by high walls, where she grew roses. After she died in an accident in the garden, Mr Craven was overwhelmed by grief, locked the door to the garden and buried the key.

The garden awakens Mary's interest and she enjoys the company of Martha, the maid, Ben Weatherstaff, the gardener, and a small robin redbreast (rödhnake). Her health and mood get better when she goes out to explore the moors, but she thinks a lot about the secret garden. One day when she is in the park, the robin draws her attention to a space where the soil looks different and she finds the key to the locked garden. Mary asks Martha for gardening tools and Martha sends her some with her brother Dickon, who is 12, spends most of his time out on the moors, can take care of animals and knows a lot about gardening.

One night Mary hears some cries in the house and decides to follow the sounds. To her surprise, she finds a boy of her own age, who lives in a hidden bedroom. The boy's name is Colin and he is Mary's cousin. He cannot walk because of an unknown illness and spends most of his time in bed. She visits him every day and tells him stories about the moors, Dickon and his animals and the secret garden. When Colin asks if he can see the garden, he is placed in a wheelchair and brought there. He hasn't been outside the house for years. Mary, Colin and Dickon now spend almost every day in the garden. Colin's health gets better and when his father comes home from abroad, the garden is flourishing and Colin can walk.

The first filmed version of *The Secret Garden* was made in 1919 and new versions followed in 1949 and 1993. Television and stage adaptations as well as animated versions have also been created over the years. Even a multimedia web series titled *The Misselthwaite Archives* was released on YouTube five years ago. The 2020 film version, starring Colin Firth, known from *The King's Speech*, *Bridget Jones' Diary* among others and Julie Walters, who has starred *Billy Elliot*, *Harry Potter*, *Mamma Mia!* and several other films, will be released in the UK on 14 August after being postponed due to the corona pandemic.

*Read the text above and work in pairs, please. Write at least five questions which cannot be answered by just "yes" or "no" each. Swap questions and answer your partner's questions.*

