



Learn English Through Stories

M Series

M8

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When Mary woke up two days later, the wind and rain had all disappeared, and the sky was a beautiful blue.

‘Spring will be here soon,’ said Martha happily. ‘You’ll love the moor then, when it’s full of flowers and birds.’

‘Could I get to the moor?’ asked Mary.

‘You’ve never done much walking, have you? I don’t think you could walk the five miles to our cottage!’

‘But I’d like to meet your family,’ Mary said.

Martha looked at the little girl for a moment. She remembered how disagreeable Mary had been when she first arrived. But now, Mary looked interested and friendly.

‘I’ll ask Mother,’ said Martha. ‘She can always think of a good plan. She’s sensible and hardworking and kind – I know you’ll like her.’

‘I like Dickon, although I’ve never seen him.’

‘I wonder what Dickon will think of you?’

‘He won’t like me,’ said Mary, ‘No one does.’

‘But do you like yourself? That’s what Mother would ask.’

‘No, not really. I’ve never thought of that.’

‘Well, I must go now. It’s my day off, so I’m going home to help Mother with the housework. Goodbye, miss. See you tomorrow.’

Mary felt lonelier than ever when Martha had gone, so she went outside. The sunshine made the gardens look different. And the change in the weather had even made Ben Weatherstaff easier to talk to.

‘Can you smell spring in the air?’ he asked her. ‘Things are growing, deep down in the ground. Soon you’ll see little green shoots coming up - young plants, they are. You watch them.’

'I will,' replied Mary. 'Oh, there's the robin!' The little bird hopped on to Ben's spade, 'Are things growing in the garden where he lives?'

'What garden?' said Ben, in his bad-tempered voice.

'You know, the secret garden. Are the flowers dead there?' She really wanted to know the answer.

'Ask the robin,' said Ben crossly. 'He's the only one who's been in there for the last ten years.'



Green shoots

Ten years was a long time, Mary thought. She had been born ten years ago. She walked away, thinking. She had begun to like the gardens, and the robin, and Martha and Dickon and their mother. Before she came to Yorkshire, she had not liked anybody.

She was walking beside the long wall of the secret garden, when a most wonderful thing happened. She suddenly realized the robin was following her. She felt very pleased and excited by this, and cried out, 'You like me, don't you? And I like you too!' As he hopped along beside her, she hopped and sang too, to show him that she was his friend. Just then he stopped at a place where a dog had dug a hole in the ground. As Mary looked at the hole, she noticed something almost buried there. She put her hand in and pulled it out. It was an old key.

'Perhaps it's been buried for ten years,' she whispered to herself. 'Perhaps it's the key to the secret garden!'

She looked at it for a long time. How lovely it would be to find the garden, and see what had happened to it in the last ten years! She could play in it all by herself, and nobody would know she was there. She put the key safely in her pocket.

The next morning Martha was back at Misselthwaite Manor, and told Mary all about her day with her family.

'I really enjoyed myself. I helped Mother with the whole week's washing and baking. And I told the children about you. They wanted to know about your servants, and the ship that brought you to England, and everything!'

'I can tell you some more for next time,' offered Mary. 'They'd like to hear about riding on elephants and camels wouldn't they?'



Camels and Elephants

'Oh, that would be kind of you, miss! And look, Mother has sent you a present!'

'A present!' repeated Mary. How could a family of fourteen hungry people give anyone a present!

'Mother bought it from a man who came to the door to sell things. She told me, "Martha, you've brought me your pay, like a good girl, and we need it all, but I'm going to buy something for that lonely child at the Manor," and she bought one, and here it is!'

It was a skipping-rope. Mary stared at it.



‘What is it?’ she asked.

‘Don’t they have skipping-ropes in India? Well, this is how you use it. Just watch me.’

Martha took the rope and ran into the middle of the room. She counted up to a hundred as she skipped.



‘That looks lovely,’ said Mary. ‘Your mother is very kind. Do you think I could ever skip like that?’

‘Just try,’ said Martha. ‘Mother says it’ll make you strong and healthy. Skip outside in the fresh air.’

Mary put her coat on and took the skipping-rope. As she was opening the door, she thought of something and turned round.

‘Martha, it was your money really. Thank you.’ She never thanked people usually and she did not know how to do it. So she held out her hand, because she knew that adults did that.

Martha shook her hand and laughed. ‘You’re a strange child,’ she said. ‘Like an old woman! Now run away and play!’

The skipping-rope was wonderful. Mary counted and skipped, skipped and counted, until her face was hot and red. She was having more fun than she had ever had before. She skipped through the gardens until she found Ben Weatherstaff, who was digging and talking to his robin. She wanted them both to see her skip.



‘Well!’ said Ben. ‘You’re looking fine and healthy today! Go on skipping. It’s good for you.’

Mary skipped all the way to the secret garden wall. And there was the robin! He had followed her! Mary was very pleased.

‘You showed me where the key was yesterday,’ she laughed. ‘I’ve got it in my pocket. So you ought to show me the door today!’

The robin hopped on to an old climbing plant on the wall, and sang his most beautiful song. Suddenly the wind made the plant move, and Mary saw something under the dark green leaves. The thick, heavy plant was covering a door. Mary’s heart was beating fast and her hands were shaking as she pushed the leaves away and found the keyhole. She took the key out of her pocket, and it fitted the hole. Using both hands, she managed to unlock the door. Then she turned round to see if anyone was watching. But there was no one, so she pushed the door, which opened, slowly, for the first time in ten years. She walked quickly in and shut the door behind her. At last she was inside the secret garden!

It was the loveliest, most exciting place she had ever seen. There were old rose trees everywhere, and the walls were covered with climbing roses. She looked carefully at the grey branches. Were the roses still alive? Ben would know. She hoped they weren’t all dead. But she was inside the wonderful garden, in a world of her own. It seemed very strange and silent, but she did not feel lonely at all. Then she noticed some small green shoots coming up through the grass. So something was growing in the garden after all! When she found a lot more shoots in different places, she decided they needed more air and light, so she began to pull out the thick grass around them. She worked away, clearing the ground, for two or three hours, and had to take her coat off because she got so hot. The robin hopped around, pleased to see someone gardening.

She almost forgot about lunch, and when she arrived back in her room, she was very hungry and ate twice as much as usual. ‘Martha,’ she said as she was eating, ‘I’ve been thinking. This is a big, lonely house, and there isn’t much for me to do. Do you think, if I buy a little spade, I can make my own garden?’

‘That’s just what Mother said,’ replied Martha. ‘You’d enjoy digging and watching plants growing. Dickon can get you a spade, and some seeds to plant, if you like.’

'Oh, thank you, Martha! I've got some money that Mrs Medlock gave me. Will you write and ask Dickon to buy them for me?'

'I will. And he'll bring them to you himself.'

'Oh! Then I'll see him.' Mary looked very excited. Then she remembered something. 'I heard that cry in the house again, Martha. It wasn't the wind this time. I've heard it three times now. Who is it?'

Martha looked uncomfortable. 'You mustn't go wandering around the house, you know. Mr Craven wouldn't like it. Now I must go and help the others downstairs. I'll see you at tea-time.'

As the door closed behind Martha, Mary thought to herself, 'This really is the strangest house that anyone ever lived in.'