



Learn English Through Stories

M Series

M9

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4. Meeting Dickon

Mary spent nearly a week working in the secret garden. Each day she found new shoots coming out of the ground. Soon, there would be flowers everywhere - thousands of them. It was an exciting game to her. When she was inside those beautiful old walls, no one knew where she was.

During that week she became more friendly with Ben, who was often digging in one of the vegetable gardens. 'What are your favourite flowers, Ben?' she asked him one day.

'Roses. I used to work for a young lady who loved roses, you see, and she had a lot in her garden. That was ten years ago. But she died. Very sad, it was.'

'What happened to the roses?' asked Mary.

'They were left there, in the garden.'

'If rose branches look dry and grey, are they still alive?' asked Mary. It was so important to know!

'In the spring they'll show green shoots, and then – But why are you so interested in roses?' he asked.

Mary's face went red. 'I just... wanted to pretend I've got a garden. I haven't got anyone to play with.'

'Well, that's true,' said Ben. He seemed to feel sorry for her. Mary decided she liked old Ben, although he was sometimes bad-tempered.

She skipped along and into the wood at the end of the gardens. Suddenly she heard a strange noise, and there in front of her was a boy. He was sitting under a tree, playing on a wooden pipe. He was about twelve, with a healthy red face and bright blue eyes. There was a squirrel and a crow in the tree, and two rabbits sitting on the grass near him.



'They're listening to the music!' thought Mary. 'I mustn't frighten them!' She stood very still.

The boy stopped playing. 'That's right,' he said. 'Animals don't like it if you move suddenly. I'm Dickon and you must be Miss Mary. I've brought you the spade and the seeds.'

He spoke in an easy, friendly way. Mary liked him at once. As they were looking at the seed packets together, the robin hopped on to a branch near them. Dickon listened carefully to the robin's song.

'He's saying he's your friend,' he told Mary.

'Really? Oh, I am pleased he likes me. Can you understand everything that birds say?'

'I think I do, and they think I do. I've lived on the moor with them for so long. Sometimes I think I am a bird or an animal, not a boy at all!' His smile was the widest she had ever seen.

He explained how to plant the seeds. Suddenly he said, 'I can help you plant them! Where's your garden?'

Mary went red, then white. She had never thought of this. What was she going to say?

'Could you keep a secret? It's a great secret. If anyone discovers it, I'll... I'll die!'

'I keep secrets for all the wild birds and animals on the moor. So I can keep yours too,' he replied.

'I've stolen a garden,' she said very fast. 'Nobody goes into it, nobody wants it. I love it and nobody takes care of it! They're letting it die!' And she threw her arms over her face and started crying.

'Don't cry,' said Dickon gently. 'Where is it?'

'Come with me and I'll show you,' said Miss Mary.

They went to the secret garden and entered it together. Dickon walked round, looking at everything.

'Martha told me about this place, but I never thought I'd see it,' he said. 'It's wonderful!'

'What about the roses?' asked Mary worriedly. 'Are they still alive? What do you think?'

'Look at these shoots on the branches. Most of them are alive all right.' He took out his knife and cut away some of the dead wood from the rose trees.

Mary showed him the work she had done in the garden, and they talked as they cut and cleared.

'Dickon,' said Mary suddenly, 'I like you. I never thought I'd like as many as five people!'

'Only five!' laughed Dickon.

He did look funny when he laughed, thought Mary.

'Yes, your mother, Martha, the robin, Ben, and you.' Then she asked him a question in Yorkshire dialect, because that was his language.

'Does tha like me?' was her question.

'Of course! I likes thee wonderful!' replied Dickon, a big smile on his round face. Mary had never been so happy.

When she went back to the house for her lunch, she told Martha about Dickon's visit.

'I've got news for you too,' said Martha. 'Mr Craven's come home, and wants to see you! He's going away again tomorrow, for several months.'

'Oh!' said Mary. That was good news. She would have all summer in the secret garden before he came back. But she must be careful. He mustn't guess her secret now.

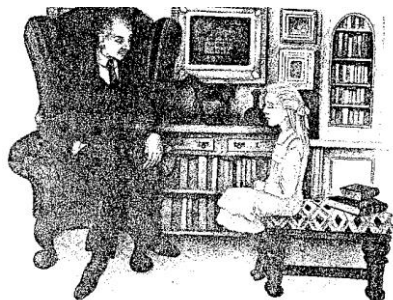
Just then Mrs Medlock arrived, in her best black dress, to take Mary down to Mr Craven's room.

Mary's uncle had black hair with some white in it, and high, crooked shoulders. His face was not ugly, but very sad. During their conversation he watched her in a worried way. Perhaps he was thinking of other things at the same time.

He looked at the thin child. 'Are you well?' he asked.

Mary tried to keep her voice calm as she replied,

'I'm getting stronger and healthier.'



'What do you want to do, in this big empty house?'

'I... I just want to play outside - I enjoy that.'

'Yes, Martha's mother, Susan Sowerby, spoke to me the other day. She's a sensible woman - and she said you needed fresh air. But where do you play?'

'Everywhere! I just skip and run - and look for green shoots. I don't damage anything!'

'Don't look so frightened! Of course a child like you couldn't damage anything. Play where you like. Is there anything that you want?'

Mary came a step nearer to him, and her voice shook a little as she spoke.

'Could I - could I have a bit of garden?'

Mr Craven looked very surprised.

'To plant seeds in... to make them come alive!' Mary went on bravely. 'It was too hot in India, so I was always ill and tired there. But here it's different. I... I love the garden!'

He passed a hand quickly over his eyes. Then he looked kindly at Mary. 'I knew someone once who loved growing things, like you. Yes, child, take as much of the garden as you want.' He smiled gently at her. 'Now leave me. I'm very tired.'

Mary ran all the way back to her room.

'Martha!' she shouted. 'Mr Craven's really a nice man, but he looks very unhappy, He said I can have my own garden!'

She was planning to work in the garden with Dickon every day, to make it beautiful for the summer.

5. Meeting Colin

In the middle of the night Mary woke up. Heavy rain had started falling again, and the wind was blowing violently round the walls of the old house. Suddenly she heard crying again. This time she decided to discover who it was. She left her room, and in the darkness followed the crying sound, round corners and through doors, up and down stairs, to the other side of the big house. At last she found the right room. She pushed the door open and went in.

It was a big room with beautiful old furniture and pictures. In the large bed was a boy, who looked tired and cross, with a thin, white, tearful face. He stared at Mary.

'Who are you?' he whispered. 'Are you a dream?'



'No, I'm not. I'm Mary Lennox. Mr Craven's my uncle.'

'He's my father,' said the boy. 'I'm Colin Craven.'

'No one ever told me he had a son!' said Mary, very surprised.

'Well, no one ever told me you'd come to live here. I'm ill, you see. I don't want people to see me and talk about me. If I live, I may have a crooked back like my father, but I'll probably die.'

'What a strange house this is!' said Mary. 'So many secrets! Does your father come and see you often?'

'Not often. He doesn't like seeing me because it makes him remember my mother. She died when I was born, so he almost hates me, I think.'

'Why do you say you're going to die?' asked Mary.

'I've always been ill. I've nearly died several times, and my back's never been strong. My doctor feels sure that I'm going to die. But he's my father's cousin, and very poor, so he'd like me to die. Then he'd get all the money when my father dies. He gives me medicine and tells me to rest. We had a grand doctor from London once, who told me to go out in the fresh air and try to get well.'

But I hate fresh air. And another thing, all the servants have to do what I want, because if I'm angry, I become ill.'

Mary thought she liked this boy, although he seemed so strange. He asked her lots of questions, and she told him all about her life in India.

'How old are you?' he asked suddenly.

'I'm ten, and so are you,' replied Mary, forgetting to be careful, 'because when you were born the garden door was locked and the key was buried. And I know that was ten years ago.'

Colin sat up in bed and looked very interested. 'What door? Who locked it? Where's the key? I want to see it. I'll make the servants tell me where it is. They'll take me there and you can come too.'

'Oh, please! Don't - don't do that!' cried Mary.

Colin stared at her. 'Don't you want to see it?'

'Yes, but if you make them open the door, it will never be a secret again. You see, if only we know about it, if we – if we can find the key, we can go and play there every day. We can help the garden come alive again. And no one will know about it - except us!'

'I see,' said Colin slowly. 'Yes, I'd like that. It'll be our secret. I've never had a secret before.'

'And perhaps,' added Mary cleverly, 'we can find a boy to push you in your wheelchair, if you can't walk, and we can go there together without any other people. You'll feel better outside. I know I do.'

'I'd like that,' he said dreamily. 'I think I'd like fresh air, in a secret garden.'

Then Mary told him about the moor, and Dickon, and Ben Weatherstaff, and the robin, and Colin listened to it all with great interest. He began to smile and looked much happier.

'I like having you here,' he said. 'You must come and see me every day. But I'm tired now.'

'I'll sing you a song. My servant Kamala used to do that in India,' said Mary, and very soon Colin was asleep.

The next afternoon Mary visited Colin again, and he seemed very pleased to see her. He had sent his nurse away and had told nobody about Mary's visit. Mary had not told anybody either. They read some of his books together, and told each other stories. They were enjoying themselves and laughing loudly

when suddenly the door opened. Dr Craven and Mrs Medlock came in. They almost fell over in surprise.

'What's happening here?' asked Dr Craven.

Colin sat up straight. To Mary he looked just like an Indian prince. 'This is my cousin, Mary Lennox,' he said calmly. 'I like her. She must visit me often.'

'Oh, I'm sorry, sir,' said poor Mrs Medlock to the doctor. 'I don't know how she discovered him. I told the servants to keep it a secret.'



'Don't be stupid, Medlock,' said the Indian prince coldly. 'Nobody told her. She heard me crying and found me herself. Bring our tea up now.'

'I'm afraid you're getting too hot and excited, my boy,' said Dr Craven. 'That's not good for you. Don't forget you're ill.'

'I want to forget!' said Colin. 'I'll be angry if Mary doesn't visit me! She makes me feel better.'

Dr Craven did not look happy when he left the room.

'What a change in the boy, sir!' said the housekeeper. 'He's usually so disagreeable with all of us. He really seems to like that strange little girl. And he does look better.' Dr Craven had to agree.