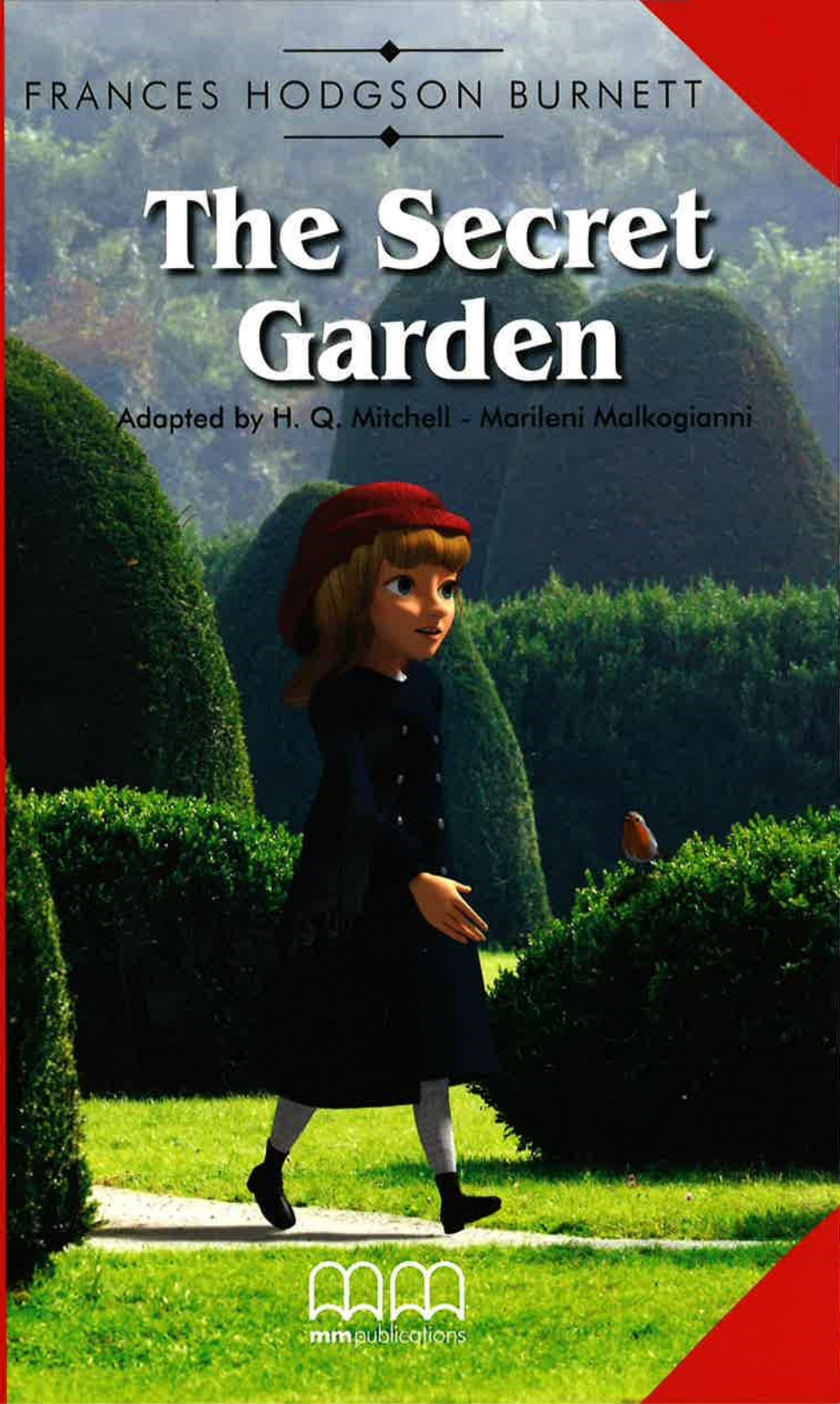
TOP READERS

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

The Secret Garden

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CHAPTER 1

NINE-YEAR OLD MARY LENNOX LIVED WITH HER MOTHER and father in a huge house in India. She was not very pretty and had yellow hair and a pale face because she was often ill. She was an only child but her parents didn't have a lot of time for her. The Indian servants looked after her and did everything for her; Mary became a very bossy little girl with no friends.

Then, one day, a terrible disease killed Mary's parents and most of the servants in the house. The rest of the servants ran away at night. Everybody forgot about little Miss Mary and she stayed in the empty house alone.

Two army officers went into the house to investigate.

"There is a child here! She is all alone! Who is she?" an army officer cried out when he saw the girl.

"My name is Mary Lennox," answered the girl angrily. "Where is everybody? Why are my servants not here?"

"Poor little kid. Everybody has left," said the officer.

"What are we going to do about her?" asked one of the men.

"She hasn't got anyone here in India," said the officer. "But I've heard of an uncle in Yorkshire. Maybe she can go there."

It was a long journey to England. When the ship arrived, Mary's uncle wasn't there to meet her. Mrs Medlock, his housekeeper, was waiting for her.

Mrs Medlock was a strong woman with red cheeks. She was a good servant but she didn't know anything about children. They travelled by train and on the way to Yorkshire Mrs Medlock turned and looked at the girl.

"Do you know anything about your uncle?" she asked.

"No," said Mary. She tried to look like she didn't care.

"Mr Archibald Craven lives in Misselthwaite Manor," said the woman. "It's six hundred years old and it has over a hundred rooms and lots of gardens. Your uncle has got a bad back and he is a difficult man. You see his wife died a few years ago and…"

"Oh! She died?" Mary jumped in.

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"Yes, she died," answered Mrs Medlock. "He misses her very much. Now he doesn't care about anybody. He isn't going to spend time with you; in fact, he often goes away. There is nobody to play with you at Misselthwaite. You can play outside but you can't explore inside the house. There are rules. You mustn't open locked doors or play in the corridors! Mr Craven won't like it."

Mary said nothing but she wasn't happy. She didn't like rules and she didn't like getting orders from a servant.



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CHAPTER 2

MARTHA, A FRIENDLY YORKSHIRE GIRL, WOKE MARY UP ON her first day at Misselthwaite, "Good morning Miss Mary, I've brought your breakfast," she said.

Mary looked at her. "Are you my servant?" she asked.

"Oh no, I work for Mrs Medlock," answered Martha. "I'll clean and bring your meals but the rest you have to do yourself."

"Who is going to put on my clothes?" asked Mary.

Martha laughed. "You're nine years old! You can put on your clothes!"

"You are only a servant! You know nothing!" shouted the girl. "In India my servants did everything for me! It's so different here. I hate it!" she said and started crying.

"Oh, no… please don't cry, Miss Mary," Martha said kindly. "I'm sorry. Look, I'll help you get dressed and tell you about my family."

Mary stopped crying.

"That's better. Well, I've got eleven younger brothers and sisters and they all live in a little house on the moor!" began Martha.

"The moor?" asked the girl.

"Yes," said Martha. "Look out the window. There's the beautiful Yorkshire moor."

Mary looked at the grey sky and empty land. It wasn't beautiful.

"My brother Dickon loves playing on the moor," Martha said. "The wild birds and animals are his friends."

"I'd like to have an animal friend," thought Mary. She sat down for breakfast but didn't eat much.

"I don't want it," she said and pushed her plate away.

"You don't want your breakfast!" exclaimed Martha. "Then go out and play in the gardens."

"But what can I do there?" asked Mary.

"I'll tell you a secret," said Martha and she looked around. "One of the gardens is locked. Nobody has been in it for ten years."

"Why?" asked Mary.

"Mr Craven closed it when his wife died. Maybe you can find it," said Martha.

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It was a cold, winter day. The gardens were quiet and empty. Only an old gardener was outside, but he didn't talk to her.

Suddenly, a bird started singing. It was in a tree behind a big wall but she couldn't see a door in the wall.

"How do I get into that garden?" she asked the man.

"What garden?" he said coldly.

"Where the bird is," said Mary and pointed at the little bird.

The old man looked up and smiled. He called the bird and it flew down to him.

"Oh, it knows you," said Mary. "What's your name?"

"Ben Weatherstaff," answered the man. "I've worked here for years. This robin is my only friend."

"I haven't got any friends," said Mary.

Ben smiled. "You're lonely like me but I think this robin likes you."

"Do you think so? Will you be my friend little bird? Will you?" said Mary sweetly and the robin sang back. Then it flew behind a tall wall.

"Oh, no," said Mary. "It's behind that wall. Where is the door?"

"There is no door," said Ben and stopped smiling. "Nobody can get into that garden! Go and play now, I have no time," he said and walked away.

That evening she asked Martha, "Where is the secret garden?"

Martha looked at her. "Well, listen," she said. "The garden was a special place. Your aunt and uncle spent hours there. She always sat on the branch of an old tree but one day the branch broke… it was a very bad fall… she died. Mr Craven locked the door and threw away the key. Nobody knows where it is," said Martha.

They sat and looked at the fire when suddenly the wind opened the door. Mary heard a strange noise.

"Do you hear anyone crying?" she asked Martha.

"No," said the servant. "It's the wind."

"But listen," said Mary again. "It's a child! In the house, at the end of the corridor!"

Martha got up quickly and closed the door.

"There's nothing there, only the wind," she said and looked at Mary.

Mary said nothing but thought, "This house is full of secrets."

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