

Frances Hodgson Burnett's

The Secret Garden

*Adapted by
C. Warren Robertson*

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PUBLISHED BY

ENCORE PERFORMANCE PUBLISHING
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STORY OF THE PLAY

The classic story of two emotionally-stunted children who discover, through their love for a garden, and the teachings of a boy of the English moors, that the key to happiness lies in caring for others.

The story opens as two British officers in India discover 10-year-old Mary Lennox alone, her parents having just died in the cholera epidemic. She is sent back to England to live with an uncle, Archibald Craven, whom she doesn't know, in the foreboding Misselthwaite Manor. His son Colin is sickly and bedridden and his cries can be heard echoing down the dark hallways.

Initially Mary is a spoiled, unloved and unloving creature who demands everyone obey her. A housemaid, Martha, encourages her to play outside in the fresh air. Mary soon meets Dickon, a boy of the moors; Ben, the gardener; and even a wild but friendly robin.

She and Dickon unlock the secret garden, vowing to bring it back to life. Soon they are able to encourage Colin to join them. It is a process of healing and self-discovery that even includes Archibald Craven.

About 1 hour and 45 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 m, 6 w, extras. Doubling possible.)

COLONEL MCGREW: British army officer.

BARNEY: His orderly.

MARY LENNOX: 10-year-old orphan.

OFFICER'S WIFE: Nicely dressed.

A WOMAN: Poorly dressed.

ORPHANS: Boys and girls. (Including Basil and a Boy.)

MRS. MEDLOCK: Grouchy, middle-aged housekeeper.

MR. PITCHER: Reserved manservant.

MARTHA SOWERBY: Young housemaid, kind and caring.

BEN WEATHERSTAFF: An old, grumpy gardener.

ARCHIBALD CRAVEN: Mary's hunchbacked uncle.

COLIN CRAVEN: Mary's bedridden cousin, 10.

DICKON SOWERBY: Martha's brother, a boy of the moor,
13-15.

NURSE: A woman of good, common sense.

A robin puppet that is heard more than seen.

*** POSSIBLE DOUBLING:**

Colonel McGrew and Mr. Pitcher

Barney and Ben Weatherstaff

Officer's Wife and Nurse

A Woman and Martha

Basil and Dickon

Another Boy and Colin

If Mary is double cast, the "other" Mary should play the role of the little girl who is led away by the poorly-dressed woman.

The Secret Garden

- 4 -

ACT I: Early 1900s. Late summer through the following fall and winter.

ACT II: Early spring to summer.

SETTINGS

Multiple simple settings which can be suggested:
Outside and inside a cottage in India; a London boat dock; the lower level of the manor house and Craven's study at Misselthwaite Manor in Yorkshire, England.

Settings which should be more fully realized:

Mary's room with a large window, four-poster bed, fireplace, armoire, and breakfast table and chair.

Colin's room with four-poster bed, stool, and curtain with pull cord which covers his mother's portrait.

The garden, behind a green door, with a table and two chairs. Initially we see a broken limb and lots of dead leaves scattered around, but there is a small patch of spring flowers starting to grow.

PROPS AND COSTUMES

Please see end of script for complete list.

SOUND EFFECTS

Haunting East Indian flute music
Deep blasts of an ocean liner's horn
Steam locomotive on railroad tracks
Clap-clop sounds of a horse and carriage
Heavy door knocker
Sound of a child crying
Rain and thunder
Mrs. Medlock's duty bell
Music suggestive of a warbling robin
Bird chirping

ACT I

(The play begins with mysterious East Indian flute MUSIC. As the stage LIGHTS rise, the music fades out. British officer COLONEL MCGREW and his orderly BARNEY appear in front of a bungalow. They are dressed in khakis, pith helmets, and boots or puttees. McGrew has a side arm, Barney a clipboard. It is hot.)

MCGREW: *(Joining Barney.)* Empty. What were the names there?

BARNEY: *(Checking clipboard.)* Arjun and Madhavi Sejnani. *(He pronounces it "Mahthavee Sejnahnee" and checks it off.)*

MCGREW: Good people. Fled to the hills, I suspect.

(THEY continue walking a short distance then stop abruptly.)

BARNEY: Ach. What a smell. *(Pulls out a handkerchief and covers his nose and mouth.)*

MCGREW: The stench of death. More bodies to report up ahead. It's no good, cholera. It strikes everyone - rich and poor alike - old and young - men, women, and children drop like flies. This is India for you, Barney. *(Shaking his head.)* You shan't get used to it. All this death.

(The SOUND of a little girl humming a tune drifts out to them. It is a Hindu lullaby.)

MCGREW: *(Cont.)* You hear that? There is a child in there. Imagine. In a place like this. Check the name.

BARNEY: *(Checking clipboard.)* Captain and Mrs. John Lennox.

MCGREW: Then it's bad news, I'm afraid. They were on the hospital list last night. *(HE taps lightly on the door. The humming stops.)*

MARY: Is that my Ayah? I want my Ayah!

MCGREW: No, Miss. May we come in?

The Secret Garden

- 6 -

(MCGREW and BARNEY go into Mary's room. Her bed is unmade and she is still in her nightgown. MARY is seated on the floor playing with her dolls.)

MARY: *(Sharply.)* Who are you? What do you want?

MCGREW: I'm Colonel McGrew and this is my orderly, Barney. We're checking for survivors, Miss. Are you all right?

(BARNEY is off looking around the room.)

MARY: I fell asleep for a very long time and I've only just waked up.

MCGREW: *(Turning to BARNEY.)* It's the child no one ever saw.

MARY: I'm not a child! I'm Missie Sahib.

MCGREW: She's been forgotten. Actually been forgotten.

MARY: Why was I forgotten? *(Standing up.)* Why does nobody come?

BARNEY: *(Blinking a tear.)* Poor little kid.

MARY: *(Stamping foot.)* And where is my Ayah? I want my Ayah!!

MCGREW: She's fled to the hills, Miss, with the others, I suspect.

MARY: Then you must find me another servant! Immediately. Do you understand? *(Under her breath.)* Daughters of pigs.

BARNEY: *(Holding a portrait.)* Beautiful lady, Miss. Was this your mother?

MARY: What is he doing? If he's your orderly he must stop nosing around and stand at attention.

MCGREW: You heard her, Barney.

BARNEY: *(Puts down the portrait, stands at attention, and salutes.)* Yes, sir.

MCGREW: So. What's your name, Miss? You are a Lennox, aren't you?

MARY: Yes. I'm Mary. Mary Lennox. Where are my parents? Why have I been left alone?

The Secret Garden

- 7 -

MCGREW: *(Crouching down.)* Well, Mary, I have something I must tell you. I'm not sure how. They don't teach these things in officer's training.

MARY: They've gone away?

MCGREW: In a manner of speaking. Yes. They're gone.

MARY: They're dead, aren't they? That's it. They're dead. Dead of the cholera.

MCGREW: Fine people - your parents. Met them once at a rajah's party. Highly thought of, the Lennoxs. You should be proud.

MARY: Who's going to take care of me? *(Kicking her dolls.)* Who's going to dress me? *(She runs to her bed and dives on it screaming and crying.)* What's going to become of me? *(Pounding her pillow.)* Oh, oh, oh, oh, ohhhhhh. I want my Ayah!!! I want my Ayah!!! I want my Ayah!!!

(MCGREW stands and glances uncomfortably at BARNEY who shakes his head and makes a mark on his check sheet.)

MCGREW: We'll see to you, Miss Mary. You have relatives, don't you? Back in England.

(MARY continues crying as the LIGHTS fade out. The FLUTE PLAYS a few more lines of Eastern music and this is followed by several deep blasts of an ocean liner's horn. The LIGHTS then rise on a London boat dock. A group of BOYS and GIRLS come down the gang plank carrying luggage. Mary is dressed in a long black overcoat. An OFFICER'S WIFE is in charge of the group. An ANNOUNCER'S VOICE is heard.)

VOICE: Your attention please. The group of orphans from India is arriving on dock number three.

(A poorly-dressed WOMAN meets the group, says something to the OFFICER'S WIFE, then leads a little GIRL away.)

End of Freeview

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