



Nobody seemed to care about Mary. She was born in India, where her father was a British **official**. He was busy with his work, and her mother, who was very beautiful, spent all her time going to parties. So an Indian woman, Kamala, was paid to take care of the little girl. Mary was not a pretty child. She had a thin angry face and thin yellow hair. She was always giving orders to Kamala. Mary never thought of other people, but only of herself. In fact, she was a very selfish, **disagreeable, bad-tempered** little girl.

One very hot morning, when she was about nine years old, she woke up and saw that instead of Kamala there was a different Indian servant by her bed.

‘What are *you* doing here?’ she asked **crossly**. ‘Go away! And send Kamala to me at once!’

The woman looked afraid. ‘I’m sorry, Miss Mary, she — she — she can’t come!’

Something strange was happening that day. Some of the house servants were missing and everybody looked frightened. But nobody told Mary anything, and Kamala still did not come. So at last Mary went out into the garden, and played by herself under a tree. She pretended



she was making her own flower garden, and picked large red flowers to push into the ground. All the time she was saying **crossly** to herself,

‘I hate Kamala! I’ll hit her when she comes back!’

Just then she saw her mother coming into the garden, with a young Englishman. They did not notice the child, who listened to their conversation.

‘It’s very bad, is it?’ her mother asked the young man in a worried voice.

‘Very bad,’ he answered seriously. ‘People are dying like flies. It’s dangerous to stay in this town. You should go to the hills, where there’s no disease.’

‘Oh, I know!’ she cried. ‘We must leave soon!’

Suddenly they heard loud **cries** coming from the servants’ rooms, at the side of the house.

‘What’s happened?’ cried Mary’s mother **wildly**.

‘I think one of your servants has just died. You didn’t tell me the disease is *here*, in your house!’

‘I didn’t know!’ she **screamed**. ‘Quick, come with me!’

And together they ran into the house.

Now Mary understood what was wrong. The terrible disease had already killed many people in the town, and in all the houses people were dying. In Mary’s house it was Kamala who had just died. Later that day three more servants died there.



**All through the night** and the next day people ran in and out of the house, shouting and crying. Nobody thought of Mary. She hid in her bedroom, frightened by the strange and terrible sounds that she heard around her. Sometimes she cried and sometimes she slept.

When she woke the next day, the house was silent.

‘Perhaps the disease has gone,’ she thought, ‘and everybody is well again. I wonder who will take care of me instead of Kamala? Why doesn’t someone bring me some food? It’s strange the house is so quiet,’

But just then she heard men’s voices in the hall.

‘How sad!’ said one. ‘That beautiful woman!’

‘There was a child too, wasn’t there?’ said the other. ‘Although none of us ever saw her.’

Mary was standing in the middle of her room when they opened the door a few minutes later. The two men jumped back in surprise.

‘My name is Mary Lennox,’ she said **crossly**. ‘I was asleep when everyone was ill, and now I’m hungry.’

‘It’s the child, the one nobody ever saw!’ said the older man to the other. ‘They’ve all forgotten her!’

‘*Why* was I forgotten?’ asked Mary angrily. ‘*Why* has nobody come to take care of me?’



The younger man looked at her very sadly. ‘Poor child!’ he said. ‘You see, there’s nobody left alive in the house. So nobody *can* come.’

In this strange and sudden way Mary learnt that both her mother and her father had died. The few servants who had not died had run away in the night. No one had remembered little Miss Mary. She was **all alone**.

Because she had never known her parents well, she did not miss them at all. She only thought of herself, as she had always done.

‘Where will I live’ she wondered. ‘I hope I will stay with people who’ll let me do what I want.’

At first she was taken to an English family who had known her parents. She hated their untidy house and noisy children, and preferred playing by herself in the garden. One day she was playing her favourite game, pretending to make a garden, when one of the children, Basil, offered to help.

‘Go away!’ cried Mary. ‘I don’t want your help!’

For a moment Basil looked angry, and then he began to laugh. He danced round and round Mary, and sang a funny little song about Miss Mary and her stupid flowers. This made Mary very cross indeed. No one had ever laughed at her so unkindly.



‘You’re going home soon,’ said Basil. ‘And we’re all very pleased you’re leaving!’

‘I’m pleased too,’ replied Mary. ‘But where’s home?’

‘You’re stupid if you don’t know that!’ laughed Basil. ‘England, of course! You’re going to live with your uncle, Mr Archibald Craven.’

‘I’ve never heard of him,’ said Mary coldly.

‘But I know about him because I heard Father and Mother talking,’ said Basil. ‘He lives in a big lonely old house, and has no friends, because he’s so bad-tempered. He’s got a **crooked** back and he’s **horrid!**’

‘I don’t believe you!’ cried Mary. But the next day Basil’s parents explained that she was going to live with her uncle in Yorkshire, in the north of England. Mary looked bored and cross and said nothing.

After the long sea journey, she was met in London by Mr Craven’s **housekeeper**, Mrs Medlock. Together they travelled north by train. Mrs Medlock was a large woman, with a very red face and bright black eyes. Mary did not like her, but that was not surprising, because she did not usually like people. Mrs Medlock did not like Mary either.

‘What a **disagreeable** child!’ thought the **housekeeper**. ‘But perhaps I should talk to her.’



‘I can tell you a bit about your uncle if you like,’ she said aloud. ‘He lives in a big old house, **a long way** from anywhere. There are nearly a hundred rooms, but most of them are shut and locked. There’s a big park round the house, and all kinds of gardens. Well, what do you think of that?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Mary. ‘It doesn’t matter to me.’

Mrs Medlock laughed. ‘You’re a hard little girl! Well, if *you* don’t care, Mr Craven doesn’t either. He never spends time on anyone. He’s got a **crooked** back, you see, and although he’s always been rich, he was never really happy until he married.’

‘Married?’ repeated Mary in surprise.

‘Yes, he married a sweet, pretty girl, and he loved her very much. So when she died—’

‘Oh! Did she die?’ asked Mary, interested.

‘Yes, she did. And now he doesn’t care about anybody. If he’s at home, he stays in his room and sees nobody. He won’t want to see *you*, so you must **stay out of his way** and do what you’re told.’

Mary **stared** out of the train window at the grey sky and the rain. She was not looking forward to living at her uncle’s house.

The train journey lasted all day, and it was dark when they arrived at the station. Then there was a long drive