

# Life Lines

A Shared Reading activity pack  
to read wherever you are

Issue 6

***“One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever.”***

*The Secret Garden, Francis Hodgson Burnett*

The Reader is a charity which usually brings people together to listen to stories, extracts and poems in free, weekly Shared Reading groups. In these Life Lines activity packs we hope to offer everyone the same comfort, meaning and connection through great literature that our reading groups provide – wherever it finds you.

Now that we all have time on our hands, we face the strangely demanding task of filling our days in a way that feels good. Each Life Lines pack will bring you some of a story and a poem, which you can read in your own time. Along with the reading, you'll find a selection of thoughts and feelings shared by other fellow readers about the chosen pieces. We suggest that reading the poem or the story out loud is a great way to get below the surface and make your own connection with them. It may feel strange but it does make a difference, so do please give it a try!

*This week we bring you another extract from The Secret Garden by Francis Hodgson Burnett. After all, we all want one don't we? A secret garden to call our own, a retreat from life's stresses, a place where we can feel safe? Mary Lennox and Dickon are two people who have been fortunate enough to find one. The question is: once you've found one, do you share it with others? The young Colin Craven, who for the last 10 years has been ailing away in his bedroom, convinced that he is going to die, has never seen it. Mary thinks he may be just the thing he needs.*

*As always, do feel free to make notes on your own thoughts and feelings as you go through the garden here, perhaps marking words or sentences that particularly stand out to you...*

## ***The Secret Garden* by Francis Hodgson Burnett**

### **Extract from Chapter 21**

*Childhood friends Mary and Dickon share a secret: they enjoy a refuge from the world in the form of a secret walled garden, hitherto locked up for over 10 years but recently rediscovered by Mary. Colin, the young heir to the Misselthwaite estate in which the garden sits, has never been in this garden. Indeed, he has rarely been outside his bedroom, so consumed with fear that he might die. Something awful did once happen in the garden unbeknown to the young Colin: his mother tragically died in it when the branch of a great tree fell down and struck her. Mary and Dickon also know of this. However, rather than lock the garden up as its owner, Colin's father has done, the children decide to share their secret garden with Colin. For the first time in his life, Colin feels the Spring...*

One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. One knows it sometimes when one gets up at the tender solemn dawn-time and goes out and stands alone and throws one's head far back and looks up and up and watches the pale sky slowly changing and flushing and marvellous unknown things happening until the East almost makes one cry out and one's heart stands still at the strange unchanging majesty of the rising of the sun—which has been happening every morning for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. One knows it then for a moment or so. And one knows it sometimes when one stands by oneself in a wood at sunset and the mysterious deep gold stillness slanting through and under the branches seems to be saying slowly again and again something one cannot quite hear, however much one tries. Then sometimes the immense quiet of the dark blue at night with millions of stars waiting and watching makes one sure; and sometimes a sound of far-off music makes it true; and sometimes a look in some one's eyes.

And it was like that with Colin when he first saw and heard and felt the Springtime inside the four high walls of a hidden garden. That afternoon the whole world seemed to devote itself to being perfect and radiantly beautiful and kind to one boy. Perhaps out of pure heavenly goodness the spring came and crowded everything it possibly could into that one place. More than once Dickon paused in what he was doing and stood still with a sort of growing wonder in his eyes, shaking his head softly.

"Eh! it is graidely," he said. "I'm twelve goin' on thirteen an' there's a lot o' afternoons in thirteen years, but seems to me like I never seed one as graidely as this 'ere."

"Aye, it is a graidely one," said Mary, and she sighed for mere joy. "I'll warrant it's th' graidelest one as ever was in this world."

"Does tha' think," said Colin with dreamy carefulness, "as happen it was made loike this 'ere all o' purpose for me?"

"My word!" cried Mary admiringly, "that there is a bit o' good Yorkshire. Tha'rt shapin' first-rate—that tha' art."

And delight reigned.

They drew the chair under the plum-tree, which was snow-white with blossoms and musical with bees. It was like a king's canopy, a fairy king's. There were flowering cherry-trees near and apple-trees whose buds were pink and white, and here and there one had burst open wide. Between the blossoming branches of the canopy bits of blue sky looked down like wonderful eyes.

Mary and Dickon worked a little here and there and Colin watched them. They brought him things to look at—buds which were opening, buds which were tight closed, bits of twig whose leaves were just showing green, the feather of a woodpecker which had dropped on the grass, the empty shell of some bird early hatched. Dickon pushed the chair slowly round and round the garden, stopping every other moment to let him look at wonders springing out of the earth or trailing down from trees. It was like being taken in state round the country of a magic king and queen and shown all the mysterious riches it contained. "I wonder if we shall see the robin?" said Colin.

"Tha'll see him often enow after a bit," answered Dickon. "When th' eggs hatches out th' little chap he'll be kep' so busy it'll make his head swim. Tha'll see him flyin' backward an' for'ard carryin' worms nigh as big as himsel' an' that much noise goin' on in th' nest when he gets there as fair flusters him so as he scarce knows which big mouth to drop th' first piece in. An' gapin' beaks an' squawks on every side. Mother says as when she sees th' work a robin has to keep them gapin' beaks filled, she feels like she was a lady with nothin' to do. She says she's seen th' little chaps when it seemed like th' sweat must be droppin' off 'em, though folk can't see it."

This made them giggle so delightedly that they were obliged to cover their mouths with their hands, remembering that they must not be heard. Colin had been instructed as to the law of whispers and low voices several days before. He liked the mysteriousness of it and did his best,

but in the midst of excited enjoyment it is rather difficult never to laugh above a whisper.

Every moment of the afternoon was full of new things and every hour the sunshine grew more golden. The wheeled chair had been drawn back under the canopy and Dickon had sat down on the grass and had just drawn out his pipe when Colin saw something he had not had time to notice before.

"That's a very old tree over there, isn't it?" he said.

Dickon looked across the grass at the tree and Mary looked and there was a brief moment of stillness.

"Yes," answered Dickon, after it, and his low voice had a very gentle sound.

Mary gazed at the tree and thought.

"The branches are quite gray and there's not a single leaf anywhere," Colin went on. "It's quite dead, isn't it?"

"Aye," admitted Dickon. "But them roses as has climbed all over it will near hide every bit o' th' dead wood when they're full o' leaves an' flowers. It won't look dead then. It'll be th' prettiest of all."

Mary still gazed at the tree and thought.

"It looks as if a big branch had been broken off," said Colin. "I wonder how it was done."

"It's been done many a year," answered Dickon. "Eh!" with a sudden relieved start and laying his hand on Colin. "Look at that robin! There he is! He's been foragin' for his mate."

Colin was almost too late but he just caught sight of him, the flash of red-breasted bird with something in his beak. He darted through the greenness and into the close-grown corner and was out of sight. Colin leaned back on his cushion again, laughing a little.

"He's taking her tea to her. Perhaps it's five o'clock. I think I'd like some tea myself."

And so they were safe.

"It was Magic which sent the robin," said Mary secretly to Dickon afterward. "I know it was Magic." For both she and Dickon had been afraid Colin might ask something about the tree whose branch had broken off ten years ago and they had talked it over together and Dickon had stood and rubbed his head in a troubled way.

"We mun look as if it wasn't no different from th' other trees," he had said. "We couldn't never tell him how it broke, poor lad. If he says anything about it we mun—we mun try to look cheerful."

"Aye, that we mun," had answered Mary.

But she had not felt as if she looked cheerful when she gazed at the tree. She wondered and wondered in those few moments if there was any reality in that other thing Dickon had said. He had gone on rubbing his rust-red hair in a puzzled way, but a nice comforted look had begun to grow in his blue eyes.

"Mrs. Craven was a very lovely young lady," he had gone on rather hesitatingly. "An' mother she thinks maybe she's about Misselthwaite many a time lookin' after Mester Colin, same as all mothers do when they're took out o' th' world. They have to come back, tha' sees. Happen she's been in the garden an' happen it was her set us to work, an' told us to bring him here."

Mary had thought he meant something about Magic. She was a great believer in Magic. Secretly she quite believed that Dickon worked Magic, of course good Magic, on everything near him and that was why people liked him so much and wild creatures knew he was their friend. She wondered, indeed, if it were not possible that his gift had brought the robin just at the right moment when Colin asked that dangerous question. She felt that his Magic was working all the afternoon and making Colin look like an entirely different boy. It did not seem possible that he could be the crazy creature who had screamed and beaten and bitten his pillow. Even his ivory whiteness seemed to change. The faint glow of colour which had shown on his face and neck and hands when he first got inside the garden really never quite died away. He looked as if he were made of flesh instead of ivory or wax. They saw the robin carry food to his mate two or three times, and it was so suggestive of afternoon tea that Colin felt they must have some. "Go and make one of the men servants bring some in a basket to the rhododendron walk," he said. "And then you and Dickon can bring it here."

It was an agreeable idea, easily carried out, and when the white cloth was spread upon the grass, with hot tea and buttered toast and crumpets, a delightfully hungry meal was eaten, and several birds on domestic errands paused to inquire what was going on and were led into investigating crumbs with great activity. Nut and Shell whisked up trees with pieces of cake and Soot took the entire half of a buttered crumpet into a corner and pecked at and examined and turned it over and made hoarse remarks about it until he decided to swallow it all joyfully in one gulp.

The afternoon was dragging toward its mellow hour. The sun was deepening the gold of its lances, the bees were going home and the birds were flying past less often. Dickon and Mary were sitting on the grass, the tea-basket was re-packed ready to be taken back to the house, and Colin was lying against his cushions with his heavy locks pushed back from his forehead and his face looking quite a natural color.

"I don't want this afternoon to go," he said; "but I shall come back tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after, and the day after."

"You'll get plenty of fresh air, won't you?" said Mary.

"I'm going to get nothing else," he answered. "I've seen the spring now and I'm going to see the summer. I'm going to see everything grow here. I'm going to grow here myself."

"That tha' will," said Dickon. "Us'll have thee walkin' about here an' diggin' same as other folk afore long."

Colin flushed tremendously.

"Walk!" he said. "Dig! Shall I?"

Dickon's glance at him was delicately cautious. Neither he nor Mary had ever asked if anything was the matter with his legs.

"For sure tha' will," he said stoutly. "Tha'—tha's got legs o' thine own, same as other folks!"

Mary was rather frightened until she heard Colin's answer.

"Nothing really ails them," he said, "but they are so thin and weak. They shake so that I'm afraid to try to stand on them."

Both Mary and Dickon drew a relieved breath.

"When tha' stops bein' afraid tha'lt stand on 'em," Dickon said with renewed cheer. "An' tha'lt stop bein' afraid in a bit."

"I shall?" said Colin, and he lay still as if he were wondering about things.

They were really very quiet for a little while. The sun was dropping lower. It was that hour when everything stills itself, and they really had had a busy and exciting afternoon.

## Food for Thought...

***Well, how do you rate that for an afternoon outing? Was it worth the trip? If we were to tell someone else about the secret garden, what would we remember and want them to know? What stays with us?***

The garden clearly has a strong effect on all who enter it. The opening paragraph of the chapter seems to map this out for us. Did you notice how we began? It's worth a re-read...

***'One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever...And it was like that with Colin when he first saw and heard and felt the Springtime inside the four high walls of a hidden garden. That afternoon the whole world seemed to devote itself to being perfect and radiantly beautiful and kind to one boy.'***

It is interesting to think about – the feelings that are being explored here. What is it to feel 'now and then' that 'one is going to live forever and ever and ever...' There may be different moments in our lives when we experience such a feeling, but for Colin it happens right here and now, in the walled garden.

How long can the feeling last for though? There's a lot of focus on Springtime, which is in itself only temporary. Also, there feels something quite unique to this particular afternoon, when 'the whole world seemed to devote itself to being perfect and radiantly beautiful and kind to one boy.' We might be thinking 'well the garden hasn't really blossomed on purpose just for 'one boy', that's just a child's fantasy'? But would that lessen the value of the moment that is shared by these young people in the garden?

There's a lot about feeling safe in the garden too, about not feeling afraid isn't there? Is this another fiction? Does it matter if what is being experienced here may only be temporary? Can it last in other ways beyond this afternoon?

Perhaps we need to test it out for ourselves and take a closer look at nature and consider what it might do for us? Mary and Dickon bring lots of growing things from the garden for Colin to look at. ***'They brought him things to look at—buds which were opening, buds which were tight closed, bits of twig whose leaves were just showing green, the feather of a woodpecker which had dropped on the grass, the empty shell of some bird early hatched.'*** What would you bring back with you? What might we hope to find for ourselves, for someone else?



## ***Time to pause with a poem ....***

We'll pick up with another story again in our next issue, but now a pause for some poetry. Poetry isn't always easy for everyone to get going with. In our Shared Reading groups we read a poem out loud a few times, to give ourselves a bit of time to hear it aloud. Give this a go yourself and see if it helps you to feel comfortable with the words, even if you're still not sure what it's all about!

We aren't looking to find an answer here, or what the person writing it might have meant when they wrote it. We're just looking to see if any feelings or ideas come up when we read it – and often we find that the more time you allow yourself to simply be with the poem, the more thoughts and feelings will come through.

One of the keys is to enjoy yourself: take your time, read it out loud, have a think about any bits you like, or that puzzle you, then... have another read!

*This week's Featured Poem is called **A Thing of Beauty** by John Keats. What do we think of when we hear the word 'beauty'? Indeed, what might a 'thing of beauty' be? Is it something to believe in? They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder, as if it might mean different things to different people? Is this true or are there also some types of beauty which are recognised by everyone?*

*Have a read of the poem anyway and perhaps we may find some further thoughts to consider... See what stands out for you.*

## **A thing of beauty by John Keats**

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.  
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing  
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,  
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth  
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,  
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways  
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,  
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall  
From our dark spirits.

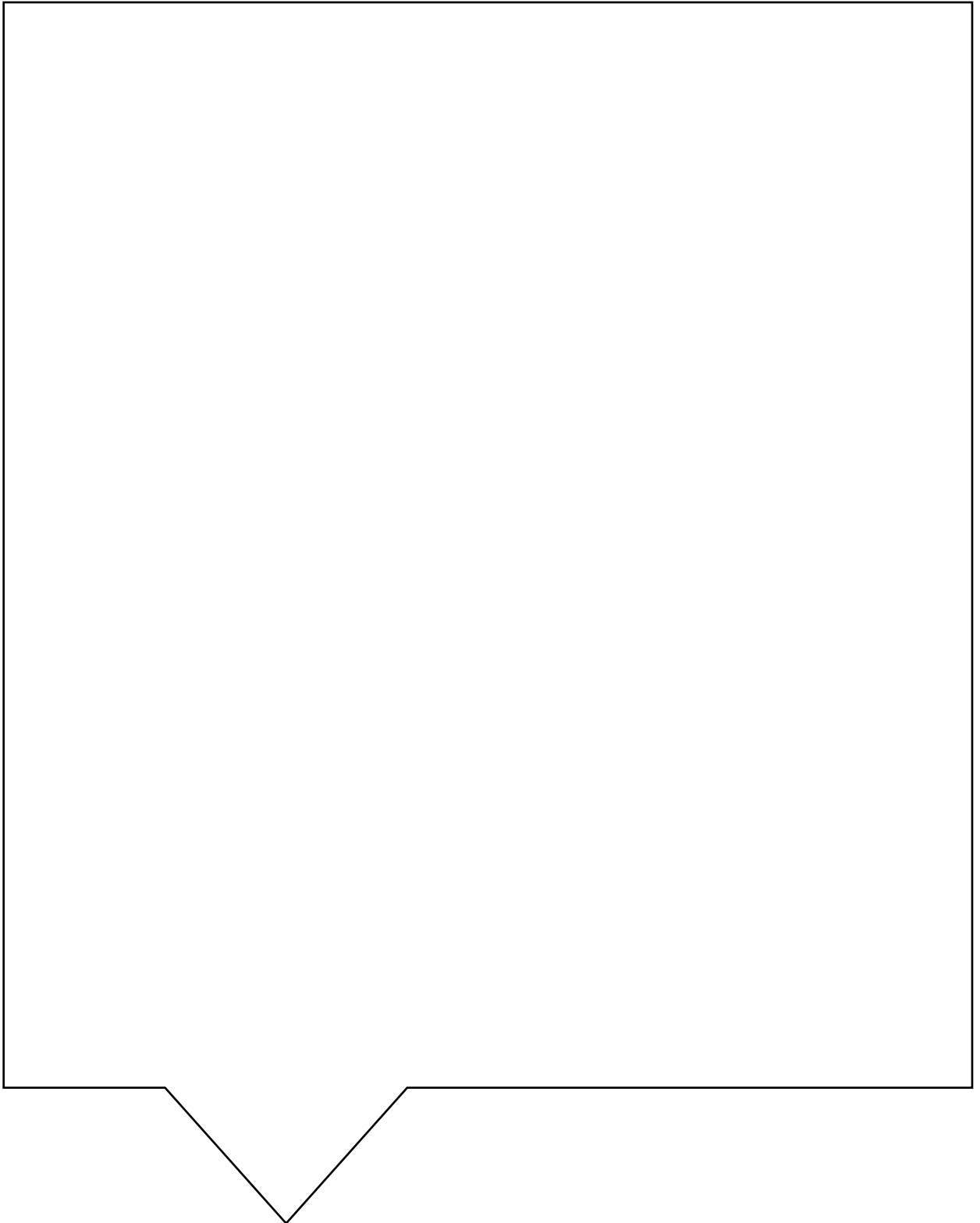
***Well, how are we feeling? Have you circled any words yet that are standing out to you? Maybe you want to read it again as a first response?***

In the poem it talks about beauty being 'a joy for ever', how 'its loveliness increases' and that 'it will never pass into nothingness'. They say nothing lasts forever though don't they? What's different about the kind of beauty being explored here? Are there some things in the world that will always be there for us?

Are we being looked after by something bigger than ourselves in the poem perhaps then? The line about beauty keeping 'a bower quiet for us, and a sleep/ Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing' feels something of a sanctuary? The Secret Garden comes to mind again here, with its restorative stillness, but perhaps the 'bower quiet' could also mean other things, other ways of finding solace?

There's clearly a need for such beauty. Life can be very tough at times – a toughness recognised here with 'the gloomy days,/ Of all the unhealthy and o'er darkened ways'. But there is help on hand, 'some shape of beauty moves away the pall'. And there's comfort in that.

*We've left this page blank for you to make notes, draw a picture, have a go at writing yourself or jot down something you'd like to tell us...*



*As well as reading materials, we've also included a word search for you to have a go at while you're having a cuppa.*

*The Secret Garden was first published in 1911, but many of us know the story through film or television. It has been adapted for the screen many times, the latest version released this year 2020. Have you ever seen a great book made into a great film? The wordsearch below gives us some good examples!*

## Films from Books

E	E	B	G	T	N	I	N	U	E	G	N	T	T
R	T	E	N	R	R	D	I	N	D	O	A	H	R
S	A	L	I	A	E	G	E	D	E	R	M	E	U
D	N	O	N	I	D	U	T	E	H	E	A	H	E
R	I	V	I	N	L	H	S	R	O	H	T	U	G
I	N	E	H	S	R	O	N	T	H	T	I	N	R
B	E	D	S	P	O	G	E	H	D	A	L	G	I
E	R	H	E	O	W	I	K	E	E	F	D	E	T
H	A	R	H	T	T	R	N	S	S	D	A	R	N
T	K	N	T	T	S	D	A	K	B	O	T	G	T
U	A	S	S	I	O	E	R	I	E	G	L	A	I
D	N	P	R	N	H	S	F	N	K	E	R	M	O
G	N	H	R	G	G	T	N	T	R	H	D	E	G
T	A	A	H	A	S	R	E	G	E	T	I	S	H

FRANKENSTEIN  
 TRUE GRIT  
 UNDER THE SKIN  
 THE HUNGER GAMES  
 THE SHINING  
 MATILDA  
 TRAINSPOTTING  
 THE GODFATHER  
 THE BIRDS  
 ANNA KARENINA  
 BELOVED  
 GHOST WORLD