

4th May 1982

I decided this morning that I am going to try to get out a bit more. Not downstairs, obviously, but out into the gardens. They are trimmed and mowed and look more like a park or the gardens of a stately home than the kind of gardens ordinary people have – those real lived-in gardens with bikes and trikes and swing-ball posts and laundry on the line. The gardens here are lovely, but a bit unfriendly – I half expect to see a 'Do not walk on the grass' sign. But there isn't one. Not yet, anyway.

I have been here years, but have never spent much time exploring. Re-reading *The Secret Garden* has made me want to look around. I'm not foolish enough to think that I will find new friends out here, but I do think being away from *her* would be good. A bit of head-space.

I spent this evening exploring. I crept out while they were all together watching *Buck Rogers*. The further away from the house you go, once you are beyond the gravel drive where Pete parks his Cortina, the more amazing the gardens become.

Just past the apple orchard, I found a lovely spot, surrounded by bushes. It is almost like an outdoor room. The bushes are trimmed like a wall and there is an

archway cut into the trees with a wooden door in it. In the middle is a statue of a child on a pedestal. It's beautiful. It is lovely and quiet and from inside those green walls I can't see Thornhill – so *they* won't be able to see *me*.

On my way back I bumped into Jane and Pete in the garden. They looked surprised to see me and then went a bit red. Are carers allowed to get together? I don't know. It's none of my business, I guess.

I came back in and went to my room. The other girls were busy crashing in and out of each other's rooms, raving about their favourite bands, laughing in an exaggerated, overloud way, or rehearsing lyrics to songs they had recorded from the radio. I walked past doors with posters from *Smash Hits* stuck on them, through wafts of sickly sweet hairspray and up into my room. None of the others had seen me go in or out. I am invisible again and I am glad.

I have found my own secret garden.

8th May 1982

I have had a lovely day. Alone, but quiet and calm. I have spent it outside in the garden, my garden, completely absorbed in making body parts for my new puppets. I prepared my materials last night: the scraping tools for shaping clay and needles for definition and an airtight tin for keeping the bits in and put them all on a tray. I sneaked down to the kitchen at 7am, before everyone else was awake, as Kathleen was just taking off her coat and slipping into her apron. She must have seen me slope out with a yoghurt and an apple in my pockets on the way to wedge open the wooden garden door, because when I went back to collect my tray of puppet-making stuff, she had prepared a bacon sandwich wrapped in tin foil and a flask of tea – which she balanced alongside the rest of my stuff with her usual wink.

I can't tell you what a sense of relief I have to be outside, how it feels as though the shadow, the weight of Thornhill, evaporates as I step further away from its walls. I feel a thrill of freedom to know that I can't be seen or heard by any of them, even though I am within the grounds.

I spent the day in my enclosed garden, hidden from

the house, sitting at the base of the statue with my tray of equipment spread out on the stone step. It wasn't sunny but I didn't feel cold – I was too engrossed in making arms and hands, upper arms, thighs, lower legs and feet. I am making Colin and Dickon from *The Secret Garden* to keep Mistress Mary company. As I designed all the shapes and measurements, I knew exactly what I was aiming for, exactly what would evolve from my fingertips, as long as I concentrated.

Unwrapping Kathleen's bacon sandwich was a treat. I sat under the statue, munching away, surrounded by teeny Plasticine body parts, listening to birdsong and the hum of invisible traffic somewhere, and felt as safe and calm and happy as I do when I am up in my room.

I write this back upstairs, the row of arms and legs laid out on my bedside table with the darkness outside my window. I know my night will be disrupted. I know *she* will be here. But I can smell fresh air on my skin and have made and planned and feel more myself somehow.

And I can go back tomorrow.

9th May 1982

Kathleen had a flask of tea and a bacon sandwich already wrapped up for me when I went down with my tray of puppet pieces this morning. I like Kathleen. She is kind without any fuss.

The birds were singing and the sun was warm. I felt stronger and happier with each step as I walked across the gravel drive. The sounds of music and the clatter of crockery from the kitchen faded as I walked deeper into the garden, beyond the orchard, behind the toolshed and under the archway into the enclosed garden. I worked quietly and steadily, gluing strands of embroidery thread to Dickon's head to make his hair. My fingers were cold from the glue, but I could feel the sun on my back and my neck. I thought it was funny that a squirrel came bounding across the grass towards the statue where I was sitting – just as if I was Dickon and the animals wanted to be near me.

Out there today I felt the embarrassment of their taunts and tricks ease away from me. Out there I couldn't imagine anything sillier than being afraid of a bit of hanging on a door.

As I ate my sarnie I thought about how strange the

statue I had been sitting under is. It is a young child in a long dress – like an angel, but without any wings. She has her hands cupped, held out in front of her, as if she is asking for something, or waiting for something to be put into them. Begging almost. She is odd, but I like her. I might think of something precious I can give her.

I have been up here in my room since darkness began to fall. I am going to get back to my designs for Dickon's clothes.

10th May 1982

I rushed out into the garden after school today. I needed to be away from them all.

I *had* done my homework. I *had*! But when I went to take it out of my bag it was gone.

Mrs Davies was furious. Clearly any concern she may have almost felt for me a few weeks ago was gone. She asked me to stand up in front of the class and explain where it was. But of course, I couldn't. One, because I was in the classroom and she knows, just like all the other teachers, that I can't speak out loud in front of the others; and two, because I just don't know where it is. I remember putting it into my bag this morning. Someone – one of them – must have taken it.

I could hear some of the others in the class sniggering as I stood there. My cheeks were blazing hot. But I didn't cry. I won't ever let them think they have got to me. I just stood and thought of Jane Eyre and how she had been humiliated at her school and tried to let Mrs Davies's accusations that I was 'sloppy' and 'not taking responsibility for my own actions' wash over me.

No one wanted to pair up with me for the experiment

in science, so I had to do it with Mr Braithwaite. At lunchtime I sat alone, but still one of them managed to walk past my table and pour orange juice into my stew.

On the way home from school I kept my head down but I could hear comments like, 'Where's your homework, Mary?' and 'The mysterious case of the invisible project!'. They think they are so funny. But they are not. It isn't funny at all.

So I ran out to the garden as soon as I got home and sat there under the begging girl. I listened to the birdsong and the leaves on the trees, the distant traffic. And I waited until I was calm enough to come back in. I had missed dinner. But when I got up to my room there was a foil-wrapped sandwich and a flask outside my door.

15th May 1982

Secret garden? Ha! I can't even get that right. I can't believe I thought I had something, somewhere to myself outside this room.

I didn't notice them at first. I was so wrapped up in what I was doing. It was only when something bounced nearby that I realized someone was throwing tiny hard apples at me from over the wall of hedge. At first they landed close to me, then one hit the side of my head and another knocked Dickon's head. Then they came thick and fast – bouncing and pattering around me like rain. Pelted.

Pathetic.

The quiet was over. I tried to gather together my tray of stuff, as if I was packing up anyway, but I was trembling and my face was hot. A flying apple stung the back of my hand. Another caught my neck. I loaded the tray and began to walk, ignoring them as I went under the archway, and back towards the house. They called out after me.

'Weirdo!!!'

'Can we play dollies too, Mary?'

'Mary talks to her dollies! We heard you Mary!'

'Freak!'

I ran. The tray shook. Dickon's head tumbled and I

didn't stop to pick it up. When I got back to my room, all I had on my tray was spilt varnish, unused clay and some tiny apples.

I am so cross that my place has been discovered. I am humiliated, as usual, but mostly I'm sad. Sad that I have left one of my puppets out there. I know it's silly but it feels like I have abandoned a friend. Poor Dickon! Was I talking to him as I made him? I don't know. When I am making my puppets I feel like I am somewhere else. Someone else. And having them around the room with me like this makes me feel less alone. I don't know if that makes me a freak. They called me a freak. I don't care if I am. But I do care that I have left him out there, abandoned, with no one to care for him.

I'll go out early tomorrow and look for him.

They have taken the garden from me. But not my room. I still have up here. I have my books, my puppets and my words in this diary. I can speak my mind on these pages in a way I can't outside this room. And I can protect it all from them. This is *my* place, and *they* are locked out of it.

Right now I am writing this by torchlight in bed.
It is 2am.

And I can hear her footsteps climb the stairs.