

Chapter 6

'I am Colin'

That night, Mary was awakened by the sound of rain beating with heavy drops against her window. She could not go to sleep again, and lay awake turning from side to side for about an hour. Then something made her sit up in bed and turn her head toward the door, listening. It was not the sound of the wind or rain—she was sure of that.

The door of her room was ajar¹ and the sound came down the corridor, a far-off, faint sound of fretful² crying. She felt as if she must find out what it was.

There was a candle by her bedside and she took it up and went softly out of the room. The corridor looked very long and dark, so she went on with her dim light, almost feeling her way, her heart beating so loud that she fancied she could hear it. The far-off crying led her. At the end of the passage she turned left, climbed two broad steps, then turned right, until she found the door she had seen earlier. She could see a glimmer of light coming from beneath it, and the crying was definitely coming from inside this room.

Mary took a deep breath, then turned the door handle. She pushed the door open, very gently, and looked inside. Then she almost gasped—for there, lying on a bed, was a boy, crying fretfully. The boy turned his head on his pillow, startled, and stared at her fearfully.

'Who are you?' he said at last in a half-frightened whisper. 'Are you a ghost?'

'No,' Mary whispered, also a little frightened. 'Are you one?'

The boy stared and stared. 'No,' he replied at last. 'I am Colin.'

'Who is Colin?' she faltered.

'I am Colin Craven. Who are you?'

Mary came fully into the room. 'I am Mary Lennox. Mr Craven is my uncle.'

'He is my father,' said the boy.

'Your father!' gasped Mary. 'No one ever told me he had a boy! Why didn't they?'

'I won't let people see me and talk about me.'

'Why?' Mary asked again, feeling more mystified every moment.

'Because I am always ill. The servants are not allowed to speak about me. If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan't live. I am going to die.'

'How do you know?' said Mary.

'I have been sick since I was born, and everyone thinks I won't live. My doctor does not think I will live.'

'Do you always stay in this room?'

'I stay in this room because I don't want to be moved out of it. It tires me too much. I hate to go out because people stare at me. And I hate fresh air. It makes me sick.'

'Does your father come and see you?' Mary ventured.

¹ *ajar*—slightly open.

² *fretful*—upset or miserable.