Into the Western Wild

by Dragonbat

Summary

When Mary Lennox storms out of Misselthwaite Manor, she finds herself in a rather different garden.

Notes

A/N: Thanks to Kathy and Jaimie for the beta!


"If you send Dickon away, I'll never come into this room again!" she retorted.

"You'll have to if I want you," said Colin.

"I won't!" said Mary.

"I'll make you," said Colin. "They shall drag you in."

"Shall they, Mr. Rajah!" said Mary fiercely. "They may drag me in but they can't make me talk when they get me here. I'll sit and clench my teeth and never tell you one thing. I won't even look
Mary fled. Her heavy, hobnailed shoes made muffled thumps on the threadbare carpets as she ran through the dark, narrow hallways of Misselthwaite Manor. She paid no attention to the doors on either side of her—doors that Mrs. Medlock had forbidden her to open, but she didn't care about that. All she knew was that she had to get out of this dark, oppressive house with its dark, oppressive hallways and secrets and... and hysterical hidden rajahs!

Her thoughts brought a quick, unexpected smile to her small sallow face. It faded almost as swiftly as it had come. If Colin sent Dickon away, it would spoil everything, but she would not obey his whim as everyone else did in this horrible house.

Mrs. Medlock would drag her to Colin if he ordered it, though, and Martha might help. She had to get away. She had to run away! She could go back to India and live in her parents' bungalow. If she could only reach the sea, she was sure that she would be able to hide herself on a ship. Hadn't she spent most of her life staying out of sight? By now, the cholera was over. Surely the natives would have returned to the British compound. They would bring her food. And she would order them not to tell any of the grownups—or anyone else who might send her back—that she was hiding there. She could stay there until she was old enough that nobody could make her do anything she didn't want to do again! But she needed a place to sleep tonight, and she couldn't stay in the house. They would know to look for her there.

Her smile returned. But they didn't know about the garden!

She ran down the stairs to the first floor. Near the kitchen, she slowed, uncertain whether any of the servants would be working at this hour of the evening. She eased open the door carefully. The cook was seated at the table, her back to the door, eating a meal. Mary froze. Presently, the woman got up and walked into the pantry. Mary saw her chance and ran past. In one swift motion, she unlatched the door to the gardens and raced outside. The door slammed shut behind her, which caused a moment of dismay. Well, so they knew someone had run out, and they'd likely guess who before long, but she knew her way about the kitchen gardens, now. She knew which hedges to crouch behind and how to move about without anyone being able to see her from the house.

It was quite different in the dark, though; the shapes of walls and trees, so familiar and inviting by day, took strange and sinister forms by night. Mary nearly cried out when she felt something brush her hand—until she realized that it was only a bit of trailing ivy. She also hadn't expected it to have turned so chilly. Despite her woolen dress, she was shivering. She worried that she would be unable to find the door to the garden in the near-total darkness, but soon enough her fingers found the mossy stone wall. She felt her way along until the stone gave way to wood. She reached into her pocket for the key, but it slipped from her fingers and fell to the ground. With a groan, Mary dropped to her knees and felt about for it, but her fingers found only earth, and twigs, and dead leaves. In frustration she hit the door and was astounded when it flew open.

It wasn't just that the door was unlocked, it was that the inside of the garden was as bright as day. Mary flung her hand to her eyes to shield them from the unexpected light.

"Mary!" She heard voices behind her. "Mary Lennox! Are you here? Mary!"

That was all the encouragement she needed. She stepped hurriedly into the garden and shut the door behind her.

The garden had changed. There was still a tree at the center, but it was a tree that seemed at once young and somehow ageless. Its branches were laden with great silver apples. Nearby, there was a
fountain—one unlike any that Mary had seen before. The water that cascaded down made a faint tinkling sound. She breathed in the rich heady scents of fruits and flowers.

Mary glanced behind her and gave a little cry. The wooden door by which she had entered was gone. In its place were gates of wrought-gold. And there was no ivy now to hide them from anyone who might walk by. Hesitantly, she peered through the slender gold bars and gasped. How could the garden be atop a mountain? There were no mountains on the moor. And yet, here she was. There appeared to be a high barrier of green turf enclosing the garden walls, but outside the gates, the ground dropped off sharply.

Voices carried up to her from below. Mary pushed on the gate and it swung open quite easily. Cautiously, she took a few steps outside. It was still day now, even outside the garden walls, but there was no sign of the paths she knew, nor of Misselthwaite Manor, Mrs. Medlock, Martha, Dickon, Colin, not even Ben Weatherstaff.

"How very strange," she said aloud. She took a few cautious steps forward, just to where the terrain began to slope downward, and looked out. Below her, she could see three figures: a boy and a girl who looked like they might be about her own age, or perhaps a year or so older, and a grandly-dressed lady with skin that was not merely pale, but actually chalk-white, and oh! But no, surely she must be imagining... horses simply did not have wings... But this one did!

The girl was already astride the horse, and the boy—it was he whom Mary had heard shouting—was addressing the lady.

"...Or we'll all vanish," he was saying. "Don't come an inch nearer."

"Foolish boy," retorted the woman, in soft voice that somehow carried up to Mary quite clearly. "Why do you run from me? I mean you no harm. If you do not stop and listen to me now, you will miss some knowledge that would have made you happy all your life."

"Well, I don't want to hear it, thanks," the boy retorted. Perhaps he didn't, Mary thought. Oh, but she did! She was about to call down to the lady, when she realized that despite his harsh words, the boy hadn't moved.

"I know what errand you have come on, for it was I who was close beside you in the woods last night and heard all your counsels." Her voice was melodic, almost hypnotic, like the music that the snake-charmers used to play in India, and Mary felt her thoughts begin to drift. It seemed that the boy and girl were here because a lion had sent them. How peculiar! And yet, somehow, Mary did not doubt it. If she could be on the moor one moment, and on a mountain the next, if a horse could have wings, then surely a lion could give orders. Suddenly, Mary snapped wide awake. What was she saying about the apples...?

"Do you not see, boy, that one bite of that apple would heal her? You have it in your pocket. We are here by ourselves and..."

Mary stopped listening. One bite of the apple would... Colin! She could bring the apple back to make Colin well! And then he would be able to run about and play outdoors, just as she did!

Breathlessly, she walked back to the gates, but now, for the first time, she realized that there was writing above them.

Come in by the gold gates or not at all,

Take of my fruit for others or forbear,

For those who steal or those who climb my wall
Shall find their heart's desire and find despair.

Mary frowned. "Well," she thought to herself, "I've come by the gates and not the wall, so that's all right. And I am taking the fruit for Colin. But..." she realized, "but this isn't my garden. I don't even believe that this one is Uncle Archibald's. And while he did tell me that I could take a bit of earth from anywhere, so long as it's not wanted... someone must want this garden, or they wouldn't take such good care of it. But if I take an apple for Colin, then is that allowed? Or is it stealing?" Hesitantly, she approached the tree and reached up. The apples smelled so good! Her hand closed around a fruit. In one twist it would be hers.

But it isn't mine. She drew back her hand as though the fruit had burned her. "I daren't," she whispered. "If I bring it back with me, they'll be sure to ask where I got it. They'll know there's no apple tree like this in their gardens. And... and... I'm not going back to Misselthwaite Manor anyway, I'm going to India!"

All at once, the absurdity struck her. Go back to India? She knew from her books that India was a large country, far larger than England. How would she ever find her way back to the compound? Were any servants left who would even remember her? She hadn't even let herself think about the long stagecoach ride she'd taken to get to Misselthwaite Manor. Miles and miles of empty land, one part looking so much like another... she'd be as likely to find herself wandering in circles as find a port. She shook her head. There would be no returning to India.

Mary's eyes began to sting and she wiped at them furiously. When she took her hand away, though, she gasped. Padding toward her across the grass was an enormous lion.

Mary stood frozen in place, gazing at the lion. Part of her wanted to flee, part to race toward the great cat and bury her face in its mane, but she found herself unable to do either. The lion drew nearer and now she could hear a low rumble emanating from his throat. It didn't frighten her, as a growl might have. In fact, she thought, it was almost as though the lion was purring.

"Welcome, Mary, Daughter of Eve," the lion said. "Welcome to my garden."

"Your garden?" Mary exclaimed. "It is yours? And the apples too, then?"

The lion fixed her with a steady gaze. "They are. Why do you ask, Daughter of Eve?"

"M-my mother's name was Rose," Mary said quickly.

A series of peculiar aspirations issued from the lion's mouth. It took a moment for Mary to realize that he was laughing. Had it been Colin or Martha or even Dickon who laughed, Mary might have stamped her foot and flown into a fine temper, but somehow the idea of doing so now didn't occur to her.

"I know your mother, Dear One," the lion said. "She, like you, is a Daughter of Eve."

"Oh." She thought she was beginning to understand.

It seemed as though the lion smiled. "You were asking about my apples, Mary."

"Y-yes... sir?" The lion inclined his head. "Will they truly make Colin well again?"

The lion regarded her for a long moment. Then, slowly, he shook his head.

Mary's shoulders drooped. "Then... then he is going to die?"
The lion drew nearer. "That is the fate of all Sons of Adam, and all Daughters of Eve, Mary. But you do not understand. The apples cure illness of the body, yes. But they cannot treat a sickness where one does not exist."

"Then," Mary said, barely daring to hope, "then Colin isn't sick?"

"He thinks that he is because he has heard it said so often. But he would be as healthy as you or Dickon if he could but be brought to believe so. And for that, the apple will not help."

"Then," she asked in a small voice, "what will?"

The lion did smile then. "You, Daughter of Eve."

"Me?"

"You know the truth now, Mary. It is up to you to convince Colin. The task will not be easy, but you can succeed."

"But what could I say that he would believe?"

The lion placed a great velvety paw on her shoulder. "Speak your mind to him, Daughter of Eve. It will anger him at first, but in the end, he will love you for it."

And it was as though a bit of the lion's strength flowed into her, for all at once, Mary felt her back and shoulders straighten and, although she was still a bit afraid of the lion, she found that she could look into his eyes and what she saw there made her feel brave and tall and even a little bit humble.

"I... I think I understand... Sir."

"Aslan," said the lion, for it was he.

"Aslan," Mary repeated. "But, please, how am I to get back?"

"You may return the same way that you entered, Daughter of Eve. Farewell until we meet again."

Mary turned and saw that the gates of the garden were no longer gold bars. Instead, she saw the same familiar oaken door that she knew. And when she turned back, there was no silver apple tree, but a great oak with buds just starting to form on its boughs. The fountain had vanished, and the earth smelled of springtime. Aslan was gone. She pushed open the door and found herself standing on the path that ran through the kitchen gardens.

"Miss! Oh, Miss!" Martha hurried up to her, a lantern in one hand and Mary's woolen cloak over her arm. "Come, Miss. Put your wrap on 'fore ye catch yer death, there's a good lass."

"M-Martha?"

The housemaid set the lantern down and helped Mary into the cloak. "Young Master Colin is in a fine state, he is," she whispered. "I know the two of ye've had a bit of a row, but Miss, won't you come upstairs to him? Please, Miss?"

Mary considered. Now that she was back on this side of the garden door, it was hard for her to believe that she had really been in the magical garden or seen a flying horse, or spoken with a lion. And yet, she knew that she had, and she remembered what Aslan had said to her.

"Yes," she said finally. "Yes, Martha. I'll go to him now." Perhaps, by now, he would have
calmed down enough to want to hear about her day. And if he hadn’t, well then, Mary might just
tell him anyway—and see how he cared for that!

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