Silently Beloved

by Rosa Cotton

Summary

Through years and seasons of change, a garden’s occupant witnesses a young girl and lad grow and change, too.

Notes

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The first time Mary swung on the swing winter had not yet ended.

It creaked as it moved in the gentle breeze. Dry leaves brushed against each other, their rustle loud in the quiet surrounding. The swing looked both inviting and foreboding, grey and dead amidst the garden that had been shut up for so long. Mary tentatively sat on it, swinging lightly with her feet remaining on the ground. Her gaze moved over the old ropes to the branch it hung from and wandered over the rest of the garden.

She was brought from her thoughts when Dickon, who had moved close to her, softly commented that this was where the accident had happened ten years ago. The girl’s eyes had widened slightly, and she understood the uneasiness that seemed to surround this spot.
Dickon’s cheerful face had darkened slightly as he briefly recounted what had happened. Mary did not resist when he reached out and carefully pulled her off the swing. For a long moment the children stared at it in silence. Then they had moved to another part of the garden with the robin’s singing lifting the somber mood. It was a while before Mary noticed Dickon had not released her hand.

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The second time Mary swung on the swing spring had chased away winter’s chill.

The garden was no longer grey and dead but full of color and life. There were flowers blooming everywhere. And small animals and birds had made their homes there. It was like a new place.

Colin had brought a camera to take photos of the garden. He then took some of his cousin and friend. He had Mary on the swing while Dickon pushed her. Her breath had been taken away each time Dickon’s push sent her so high up. She felt like she could reach out and touch the sky that was so clear, so blue, and seemed so near.

Colin told them to now hold still, and he ducked behind the camera. Muffled laughter and giggles escaped into the air as Dickon and Mary did their best to keep still for the “official” pictures. Then the photographer ordered Dickon to sit on the swing with Mary and both look at him.

The swing moved from side to side slightly as the boy settled on the swing. His cheeks dimpled as he looked at Mary, who clung to one of the ropes. Mary’s smile slowly faded as Dickon’s steadfast gaze remained on her. She liked it when he looked at her like this, his eyes shining, and his scent full of the garden. Sometimes Colin looked at her in a similar way, but it was not as nice, and she –

“Hey!” Colin shouted.

The magic moment was lost, and both children looked towards the slightly vexed boy.

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There were hints of autumn coming soon when Mary went to the swing the third time.

The girl took a long, slow look at the garden which had been a constant part of her life since she came here to Misselthwaite Manor. Until now. Early tomorrow morning she would leave for boarding school. In earlier years she had convinced her uncle, Mr. Craven, she was not ready to go so far away for school, not when the garden and the moors were doing her such good. But now that she was twelve years old, her uncle had put his foot down. She must go and obtain a proper schooling, in London, as Colin was.

As soon as she had finished packing, with Martha’s help, the girl had rushed outside to enjoy the grounds a last time and bid the moors farewell. She visited her garden last, wanting to put off this farewell as long as possible.

Martha had asked her what she would miss the most. Why, her garden, of course, and her uncle, Ben Weatherstaff, Martha, Colin, and even Miss Medlock. Was that all, Martha had asked, a secret smile tugging on her lips.

Well…

Mary glanced at the boy sharing the swing with her. They did not fit on it as comfortably as they had when they were younger. There was barely an inch separating their bodies. Dickon, too, was gazing about the garden, which was preparing to sleep during the cold months. Flowers were
beginning to wilt and the grass starting to turn brown.

The boy suddenly caught her thoughtful gaze. His cheeks had lost much of their baby fat, and he was now a head taller than Mary. She had also been growing. She no longer looked like the sour-faced child that had arrived several years ago. Her hair was long, her cheeks no longer pale, and her eyes – her best feature – were large and clear. She was now a very pretty girl. She was completely unaware of her growing beauty; but Dickon was aware and at times thought unhappily about the lads and young men she might meet while away.

“You and Ben will take care of the garden for me?” Mary asked uncertainly, clasping and unclasping her hands.

“Aye, we will, Miss Mary,” he assured her quietly. His eyes, usually so nice and shining, gazed at her with a dull light.

She nodded slowly. “Thank you kindly,” she said, attempting to smile. She looked around a final time and rose from the swing. “Goodbye, Dickon.”

She had taken a step back when the lad reached out and grasped her small hand in his large sturdy one. He held it for a moment and squeezed it before letting go. “Goodbye, Mary,” he whispered.

The girl held his eyes for a heartbeat before turning and quickly hurried off. As she passed through the door, her heart pounding and tears welling in her eyes, she wondered if it had been only her imagination, her ears not hearing properly. Or maybe it had been the magic of the garden playing a trick on her for her abandoning it.

“Goodbye, my Mary.”

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It was fall when Mary sat on the swing again.

She had not been in her garden for four years. During all her holidays her uncle had taken her and Colin on voyages to America and other exotic places, even returning to her first home, India. Mary had cried often, wanting nothing more than to return to the manor, the garden, and…

She received news through Martha, who wrote her often, telling about everyone at the manor, her family, and the moor. The girl was relieved when Martha mentioned in one letter how Ben and Dickon tended to her garden every day. Even when it was buried in snow, the lad went.

Now she had returned at last. A frown covered the girl’s face as she slowly swung on the swing. Something did not seem right. The garden was again going to sleep for the winter. The animals were preparing for the upcoming cold months. The air was becoming chillier.

Mary shook her head. She had thought she would feel more joyful being in her garden again. But…she was not. She felt almost disappointed. Was it because she could not see the garden in all its glory, when the roses and other blossoms were open, with the animals running through the grass, with the buzzing of bees and smells of perfumes in the air? Was that why she was not happy? No, it was not that.

The girl stood quickly, irritated and frustrated. What was it? What was wrong? Was it…She trembled. Was the magic gone? She blinked back tears.

Suddenly she heard a far-off sound like a merry chirping. Her friend the robin? She was looking about for the robin when the door in the wall opened and a young man entered. He had his cap resting at an angle on his head, and a hoe was over his shoulder. He was lean and very tall.
looked so different, but his eyes were the same – dark and shining.

He fell silent when he saw her near the swing. Her hair was piled on top of her head, and she wore a dress of the latest fashion that showed off her new curves. For a moment he just stared.

She saw him try to speak. It was when her name passed soundlessly over his lips that she ran to him. He dropped his hoe and took three steps before Mary reached him and threw her arms around him, burying her face in his jacket. He smelled of dirt, grass, and his pony. Slowly Dickon’s arms wrapped around her, and he rested his cheek against her head, his breath coming quick.

The garden was now complete, alive and filled with magic. As the young people’s faces drew close together, they both knew they were finally home. Behind them, the swing moved in the wind, rejoicing.

THE END

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