

A new life in England

Mary waited a long time before her father's friend found her.

'Why has no-one come?' she asked.

'My dear child,' he answered. 'There's no-one here. Everyone was terribly ill in the night. I'm so sorry, but your parents are dead.'

This news was impossible to believe.

'What will happen to me?' she asked.

'You'll go to England on a ship. Your uncle, Mr Craven, lives there. He'll look after you,' said her father's friend.



A few weeks later Mary arrived in London on a cold winter's day. She felt lost, alone and unhappy.



Mary's uncle sent Mrs Medlock to take Mary home.

On the train Mrs Medlock talked a lot, but Mary tried not to listen. She did not like this woman who worked for her uncle.

'What do you know about your uncle's house?' asked Mrs Medlock.

'Nothing,' answered Mary.

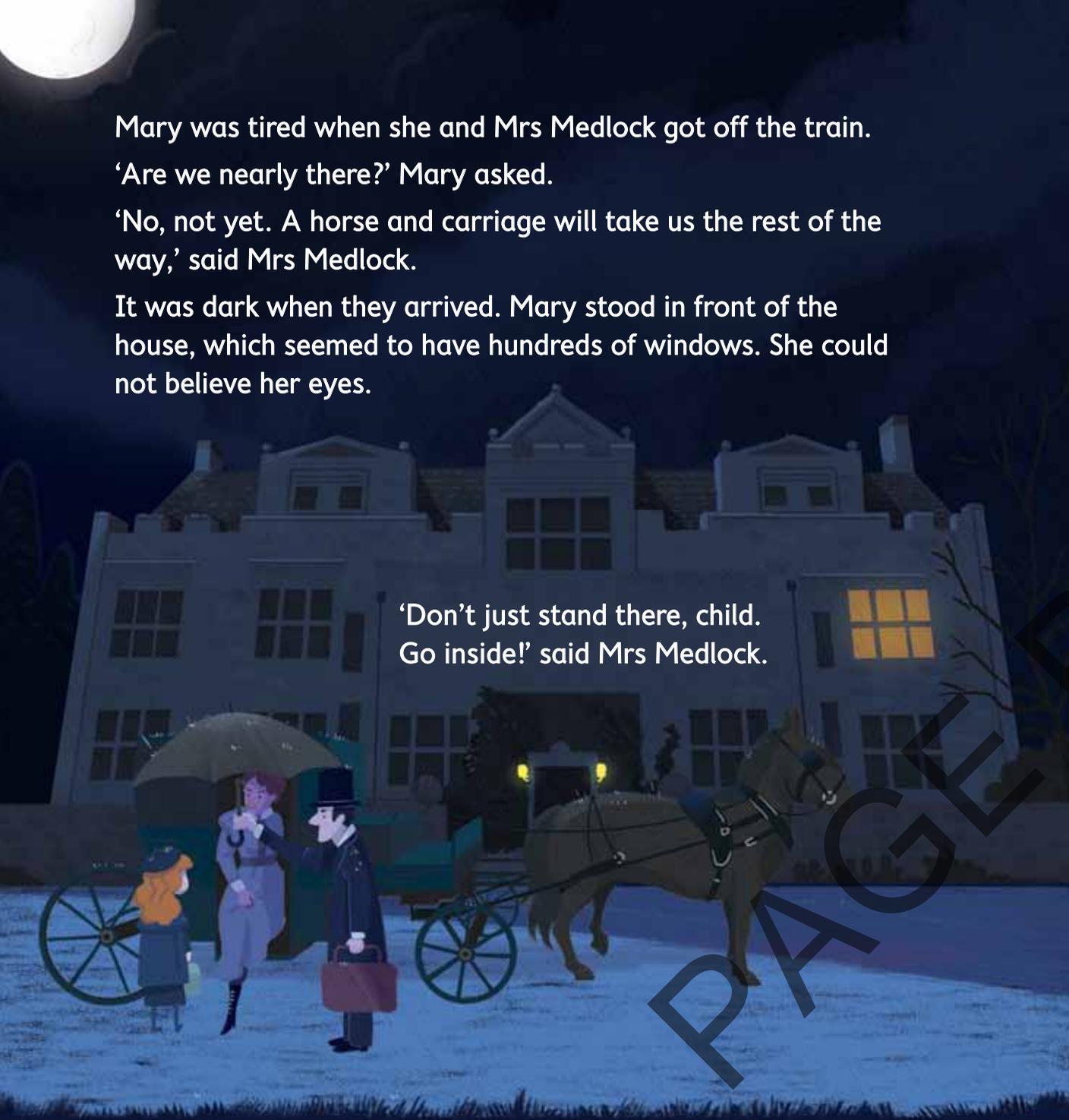
'Then I'll tell you. It's a lonely place, far from anywhere else. It's big and has a park and gardens all round. Once it was a happy place, but after your aunt died everything changed. Mr Craven, your uncle, doesn't like being there so he doesn't often visit.'

Mary was tired when she and Mrs Medlock got off the train.

‘Are we nearly there?’ Mary asked.

‘No, not yet. A horse and carriage will take us the rest of the way,’ said Mrs Medlock.

It was dark when they arrived. Mary stood in front of the house, which seemed to have hundreds of windows. She could not believe her eyes.



‘Don’t just stand there, child. Go inside!’ said Mrs Medlock.

Poor Mary felt that she was not welcome. Her uncle was not there to meet her and she felt sad. She just wanted to go back to India.

The next morning Mary woke up in her new bedroom.

A young woman was smiling at her.

‘Good morning!’ she said.

‘Who are you?’ Mary asked.

‘I’m Martha. I’ve brought your breakfast,’ she replied.



‘I don’t want breakfast,’ said Mary. ‘Where are my clothes? Hurry up and dress me!’

Martha was not pleased. ‘You’re a rude little girl,’ she said. ‘Can’t you dress yourself?’

‘My Indian nurse always dressed me and she did what I asked,’ shouted Mary.

‘Things are different here,’ said Martha.

Mary began to cry. It was true – things were very different in England.

Martha took some new clothes from a cupboard, and helped Mary to dress.

‘I like these,’ said Mary. ‘They’re nicer than my black clothes.’

‘Yes, and they’re lovely and warm, too,’ agreed Martha. ‘It’s cold outside. You mustn’t get cold. Before you go out, you should eat your breakfast.’

So Mary ate some bread and drank some tea. Then she remembered something.

‘Martha,’ she said, ‘I heard someone crying last night.’

‘It was the wind,’ said Martha. ‘Nothing to worry about.’

Then Martha gave Mary a present.

‘Take this skipping rope,’ she said. ‘You can play with it outside.’



Winter in the gardens



Mary was pleased to be outside, but the air felt as cold as ice. She pulled her hat down over her ears, and her scarf tight around her neck. When she breathed out she produced a kind of mist.

Some of the trees looked dead. Other trees were green and beautiful. Mary saw a small animal with a red coat and thick tail. It was a squirrel. It was jumping from tree to tree.

‘I can jump and stay warm, too,’ she thought. She ran along the path and played with her skipping rope.