I wish I'd written The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It's the book that I loved most as a child — even more than Enid Blyton's Famous Five books, which is really saying something! There are many reasons why I think The Secret Garden is such a great book. For starters, I really like the opening sentence with its description of the heroine as "the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen". Mary Lennox is such an unlikely heroine when we first meet her, and I think it's the utterly convincing development of her character throughout the story that I admire most about the book. I also think that the tragic story of the garden is about as romantic a plot as you can get in children's literature! The minor characters are great — especially the maid, Martha, and Ben Weatherstaff, the gardener. The relationship between stroppy Mary and her equally stroppy cousin Colin always makes me smile. I love the bringing together of Mary and the garden — both of them unloved and unwanted — so that Mary can experience for the first time, what it feels like to really care about something. In fact, I've been so influenced by this book that the novel I'm currently writing is about a girl called Mary who loves the story of The Secret Garden so much that she sets out to find a garden which she can turn into a secret for herself!

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett is available in many editions but our illustration by Jason Cockcroft is from the Kingfisher Classic (0 7534 0602 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 7534 1214 4, £5.99 pbk). Gwynneth Rees' latest book is The Mum Detective (0 330 43453 5, £4.99) published by Macmillan.