

Chapter 1 - The Early Years

‘The day has been a strange one’ thought Mary as she walked up the steep gangplank of the ship; her long skirt making it difficult to climb with ease. Reaching the half way point she stopped and turned to face the dockside allowing her eyes to slowly search until they fell upon the carriage she had just alighted from. She was glad to see it still waiting; so raising her hand she gently waved. A moment later a small gloved hand appeared through the open window before beginning to slowly wave back. No face could be seen; not that it was necessary for Mary knew who was waving to her. Watching for a few seconds longer she raised her hand once more before dropping her arm, then turning she continued up the gangplank to finish boarding the ship.

Mary sighed; the journey she was about to undertake would be a long and arduous one but hopefully it would lead her to a new and exciting life. And yet she was filled with such trepidation at what the future would hold for her. After all she had just said goodbye to the only person she really knew in the whole world. The memory filled her with a sadness as she thought about her predicament. But despite that she smiled as she was pleased that Lizzie had come to the docks with her, even though her friend could stay only a short while.

‘We have spent so little time together,’ she thought, ‘but it has helped settle my mind and I will be brave.’

Reaching the top of the gang plank Mary looked round at the vessel as she waited patiently to meet the Captain. The ship appeared quite large; she knew it to be approximately 200 feet in length and, although built to carry goods, it had room for 6 passengers as well as the Captain and crew, a contingent of some 25 men and boys. The ship was normally used for collecting and delivering an assortment of goods but also acted as a passenger liner and postal carrier when necessary, sailing between the Homeland and the smaller British Colonies of the Americas. Mary knew that in all the ship would remain at sea for about fifteen weeks before returning and docking once more in its home port.

“Name please Miss,” asked a young officer.

“Miss. Mary Watson,” she replied formally before holding out her hand to greet the master of the vessel.

Captain Morrison proved to be a most welcoming soul, personally greeting each passenger boarding his ship. Finding herself being warmly welcomed on-board Mary relaxed, silently breathing a sigh of relief at the pleasantness of the man. With the formalities over the Captain introduced her to Adam, the young cabin boy who would be her attendant during the journey. He immediately showed her to the small cabin which would be hers throughout the sea voyage.

As she entered the cabin Mary thought, ‘What a clean little room it is. I think I shall be quite comfortable.’

Being satisfied with her quarters Mary thanked the young boy who left her to settle in. Looking around she was pleased to note that her luggage was already in the cabin. She decided to leave her unpacking until later, after the ship had sailed, knowing that it would occupy both her time and thoughts. Examining the cabin she began to wonder where she would stow what little she had for space appeared limited. Fortunately the discovery of a small chest of drawers meant it would suffice for all her needs.

Satisfied with her quarters Mary returned to the upper deck, once more searching out the carriage so she could wave one last time to its occupant. Watching eagerly she saw the small gloved hand reappear at the window. It gently waved before finally withdrawing inwards forever. Then the driver took up the reins and Mary watched with deep sadness as the carriage slowly left the dock area. Once

it had disappeared from view she turned and wiping a small tear from the corner of her eye she left the ship's side and returned to her cabin, chastising herself for being so silly and emotional.

Once back in her room Mary sat at the small table and from her case took out a small book covered in lavender silk. It was a journal, a gift from her dear friend Lizzie who had placed in her hands as Mary left the carriage.

Surprised she had thanked Lizzie warmly telling her, "It is so beautiful Lizzie dear and so perfect to keep a record of my adventures in. Whenever I look at it I will think of you. Oh how I shall miss you dear one." And she had stopped as the words choked within her. She didn't want to lose control or upset poor Lizzie any more than she already was so quickly kissing her dear friend on the cheek Mary had slipped from the carriage without a backward glance.

Mary though she could while away the hours at sea by writing about her life story so far and then about her adventures as they happened. Sitting at the small desk within the cabin she picked up her pen and began writing.

Mary Watson – September 1881 **My Life**

I was born in July 1861 in the small country village of Marston set in the heart of Hertfordshire.....

Mary was an only child of parents who were in the employ of the local Lord of the Manor. Her Father worked as head gardener and Mother as a sewing mistress. When they met Mother had been a parlour maid but after Mary's birth had taken on the job of 'keeper of the linen.'

Her early life was settled, proving to be uneventful.....

Stopping to gather her thoughts Mary thought, 'I believe I had a joyful childhood living with my parents in the small tied cottage on his Lordship's estate! My maternal Grandmother had moved in to the cottage shortly after I was born having lost her husband some years earlier, so she didn't hesitate when Father suggested she come to live with them and help look after me. The result was that I grew up in a happy and carefree atmosphere.'

Continuing writing Mary remembered how fortunate it was that there was enough room to accommodate her Grandmother.....

There was always plenty to eat; life seemed idyllic and I was also lucky enough in being able to attend the local school which was run by a spinster cousin of his Lordship; taking both boys and girls. It was not normal for girls to be taught the fundamentals of reading and writing....

'At least not common for girls like me who came from poor families? Being taught to read and write at such a young age certainly proved to be to my advantage; and one I have found invaluable in recent years,' thought Mary.....

On Sunday the family would attend the local church and after the service Mary was allowed to play with the other children whilst her parents chatted with friends and acquaintances. Later the family would return home, happily chatting about the people they had met that morning.....

'My Grandmother often told me that the village people thought me a charming little girl but, whether this was true or not, I don't know,' thought Mary smiling to herself at the memory.

She was sure her Grandmother had been biased but what she did know is that she was loved dearly by all her family and certainly seemed to be liked by those villagers she spent time with. Yes, family life had been happy and carefree for quite a number of years. Until the day tragedy struck.....

It was in June 1875. The day had started like any other and Mary's father had gone to the big house fairly early as they were going to celebrate her Grandmother's birthday and he had wanted to finish work early. Mary's mother had gone out not long afterwards, leaving Mary to do chores before

she went off to school. The morning had been bright and sunny; promising to be a good day for their celebrations.

Mr Watson had been working in the garden at the front of the big house when there was a sudden commotion in the backyard. It was later discovered that someone had left one of the stable doors unlocked and his Lordship's stallion had escaped. The horse, was a big, black as coals, fiery creature had always been difficult to handle with no-one being able to control him but his Lordship. The staff were running around trying to catch the horse, to urge him back towards the stables but with little success. Try as they might they could not get hold of the beast and their efforts just frightened the horse until it turned and suddenly stampeded out the yard and away towards the front of the house.

Galloping fast across the lawn the horse had run full pelt into one of the footmen who had tried to halt it, knocking the poor man to the ground and striking the man's head with its flaying hooves, seriously injuring him. Unfortunately, his screams had excited the horse even more and before anyone could stop it the beast had charged across the front lawn headed straight towards Mr Watson. Unfortunately being a little deaf he hadn't heard the shouts of warning until it was too late. When, at the last moment, he looked up it had been to see the horse galloping straight at him. Being on his knees he hadn't been able to get up from the ground quickly enough or roll out of the horse's way so had been killed instantly.....

Mary stopped as tears filled her eyes. The memories of the loss of her father still troubled her, even to this day. Quickly searching in her pocket Mary pulled a handkerchief out to wipe her face.

"Come now silly girl," she chided herself, "You must take control of your emotions. This will just not do," and having wiped the tears away Mary picked up her pen and continued writing.....

Of course everyone was overcome with grief by the accident, especially his Lordship who had arrived and finally managed to take control of the beast. It had been such a terrible tragedy. The shock of losing two of his most trusted workers in such a way (the footman had died shortly after the incident) had so devastated his Lordship that he had shot the horse immediately. The whole village was desolate by the news; but Mary's Mother had taken the loss of her sweetheart extremely badly.

'Little did I know how badly his loss would actually affect her?' thought Mary.....

During this time her Grandmother proved to be a strong woman, doing her best to support both Mary and her Mother by encouraging them to keep going. She was the one who organised the funeral. His Lordship attended and insisted on paying all the expenses. Mary's Mother was inconsolable and it took her many weeks to come to terms with her loss. Mary would often return home to find her mother sitting by the fire having done nothing all day, ignoring all endeavours to help her or to get her to do things.....

'Fortunately, Grandmother and I coped, until she finally began to realise that life must go on. I think my Grandmother kept reminding Mother that she still had me to look after,' Mary remembered.....

The next few months seemed to pass slowly and before long Christmas had arrived. The weather turned for the worse and as such the little cottage suddenly became draughty. Normally Mr Watson would have seen to any repairs but his widow had no thought for doing anything; other than pushing old newspapers or rags into the cracks around the windows and door. Soon the snow began to fall and with the temperature dropping it became colder. It was during this time that Mary's Grandmother contracted pneumonia; a fever soon taking hold of her. Before the Season had passed she too had left this world.

'Grandmother had, so I was told, gone to join her husband in heaven,' stated Mary to herself. But she had often wondered if she had felt so bad at my Father's loss that she just didn't want to celebrate another birthday as it would always remind her of that terrible day.

Losing both her husband and her parent affected Mrs Watson deeply and though she tried her best to carry on it was obvious she was finding it too difficult.....

Stopping writing Mary thought, 'I honestly don't think she ever fully recovered from the loss nor did she ever understand or perhaps realise just how much I suffered as well.'

Being an only child meant Mary had to take on some of the jobs her father would have normally done; such as looking after the vegetable patch, feeding what few chickens they had, collecting the eggs and bringing in the firewood. But even though she tried to keep busy there were moments when Mary too felt lost. The problem was she had no-one to turn to or to talk to about her sense of loss. The villagers were good and rallied round bringing them food and doing what they could to help the pair. But even so Christmas and the New Year was a quiet affair in the Watson household.

However, despite that they managed to cope for some weeks until Mrs Watson fell ill. With her health becoming worse, Mary's mother found she could no longer go to work so gave up her position at the big house. With the cottage being tied to the job Mrs Watson soon realised they would have no alternative but to leave the village. The decision proved to be a hard one, especially for Mary's Mother; after all this was where her heart was. But finally, she accepted that they were left with little choice but to go south and beg refuge with her late husband's relatives. Over the next two weeks Mrs Watson managed to sort out her affairs and packing as much as they could carry, Mary and her mother finally set off for London to stay with her Uncle and his family.....

Stopping writing Mary recalled that journey to mind. 'Up until that moment in time I had never met my relations, although I had often overheard my father talking about his brother,' she thought. Laughing lightly she remembered her father's comments had not always been good ones but being young she had never really understood why he had kept calling her Uncle a layabout; often saying the man could never hold a job down long enough because of the drink. 'To me my Uncle didn't sound a very nice person but by the time we had arranged to go and stay with the family my Mother thought he might have changed,' she recalled.....

In some ways Mary had been excited at the forthcoming journey as she had never travelled far from their village before; the closest being to the annual market three miles away. Setting off the two ladies arrived in London tired and exhausted some long hours later.

Mary was shocked by the hustle and bustle of the place and kept a tight hold of her Mother's hand so she wouldn't get lost. As they walked along Mrs Watson told her daughter, "The family live in a small townhouse. They have been very lucky to get it so cheaply; a nominal rent of 2 shillings a week I think. Whatever happens Mary we must be grateful for their hospitality." Mary didn't answer, she just shook her head feeling bewildered by the whole event.

The dirty, busy streets of the capital all seemed the same; never ending. Finally the pair turned into a side street; somewhere in the poorer part of town. A few yards along the street they stopped in front of a dull brown door; it said number 36. Mrs Watson raised her hand and knocked loudly.

A few seconds later the door flew open and a portly man with rosy cheeks stood looking down at us. He looked so like Mary's father that she stared and for a moment thought her Mother would faint from the shock of seeing him. Before Mrs Watson could say anything the man grabbed hold of her arm, pulled her towards him and hugged her, all the while shouting a hearty, "Welcome, welcome sister, welcome."

Finally letting Mrs Watson go he then held out his arms towards Mary who reluctantly let him hug her. He smelt of ale so Mary was relieved when he let her go before drawing them inside, where there, waiting to greet them was the rest of the family. Mary's Aunt gave both of them a warm, welcoming hug.

After much chatter and questions regarding the journey the elder Mrs Watson made the two exhausted ladies some hot tea and toast which they sorely needed having eaten nothing since breakfast. Once the refreshments were finished Mary and her mother were taken on a tour of the house which proved to be larger than expected; having two bedrooms and a large attic room.

Mary's Uncle explained, "I am working at the local hostelry and Nellie 'does' for a lady who lives in a large house some streets away." Mary was relieved to discover he meant that she cleaned her house.

Unfortunately, Mary's relative's house was damp; not really making it the ideal place for Mrs Watson but as they had no other choice that lady knew they would have to stay and make the best of it. And so Mary and her mother quickly settled in to one of the bedrooms after Mary helped move her Cousin's stuff into the attic room. It was agreed that Mary and her mother would share the second bedroom whilst the three cousins moved into the attic room which was large enough to accommodate all of them with ease. Within a matter of weeks the two ladies had settled into a regular routine.....

'It took me some time to get used to London and to living with other people,' thought Mary; not an easy thing to do when one has lived a quiet life in the country. Laughing to herself Mary remembered that the London air had not been to her liking; being sometimes so smoggy that she often couldn't see her way clearly through the streets. But she knew that neither of them could complain; they were just so grateful to have a roof over their heads.....

'It certainly took me a while but eventually Mother and I got used to living in London,' thought Mary remembering how each day she would help her Mother get dressed before doing chores for her Aunt. When her Mother felt strong enough, she would spend time teaching her daughter and the youngest niece to read and write or help by sewing.....

By August 1878 Mrs Watson and Mary had been living in London for some eighteen months. One day Mr Watson declared, "I am finding having two extra mouths to feed is putting too much pressure on the family's funds and we need to look at ways of earning extra money."

Unfortunately, with her poor health Mary's mother knew she wasn't capable of doing even the lightest of work. She later confessed to her daughter, "What little money I have has nearly gone. You are growing Mary and will soon need some new clothes." Sighing she continued, "Where the money is to come from I know not?"

After much discussion it was finally decided that as Mary was now old enough to work she should be the one to contribute to the household income. The problem was Mary was slightly built so it would have to be light work. Fortunately, when her Aunt discovered that Mary could read and write she took it upon herself to ask her 'lady' if she knew of anyone who might need a companion. Very soon a lady called Mrs Maberley was found. She lived in a better part of the city but it would mean Mary having to leave early each morning to ensure she arrived on time. Luckily, by this time Mary had become familiar with the local streets so no longer had the fear of getting lost and so it was decided she would start work in a week's time.....

Mrs Maberley proved to be the most generous and thoughtful of employers and Mary enjoyed working for her. Arriving in time for breakfast Mary would stay all day, leaving shortly after afternoon tea. Her days were spent doing light chores, such as sewing or mending clothes and linen. Often she would read to Mrs Maberley or write the letters she dictated. The ladies eyesight had been deteriorating for some time so Mary being able to read and write proved to be a godsend. Occasionally the two ladies would go into town together shopping or to visit some friends. As they walked along Mrs Maberley always took Mary's arm as she was wary of tripping on the rough walkways.

'I felt so happy with my lot,' remember Mary to herself, 'The additional money allowed me to pay for a doctor for Mother.'

Unfortunately even with the medicine Mrs Watson remained pale and soon Mary became concerned for her parents health. The little house being damp didn't aid her recovery either and by the time winter arrived the weather was proving to be particularly bad. Mrs Watson contracted a cold and there was a fear was that it would turn to pneumonia. Mary knew her mother was finding it difficult to

shake off the illness as her breathing had become more and more laboured. Those days she spent much of her time in bed trying to keep warm. Even though Mary did her best to encourage her Mother to eat; by making hot broth with fresh vegetables, which should have helped build up her strength, her one fear was that her parent was not improving.

Returning home one Monday Mary was shocked to discover her Mother had developed a fever. The doctor was sent for and after examining the patient he announced that he held out little hope as the fever was taking its toll of her already weakened state. Fear gripped Mary as never before. And so she asked herself, what more could she do?

Finally Mary made the decision to stay home and nurse her mother; sending a message to that effect to her employer. Fortunately, Mrs Maberley was most understanding and Mary was very grateful when she sent a basket of fruit to aid Mrs Watson in her recovery. But it was not to be.

Christmas passed slowly but by the time New Year arrived Mary found she was alone. Her Mother was with her no more. Mrs Watson's health had deteriorated so badly over Christmas that she had passed away in her sleep four days after the end of the old year.....

Once more tears streamed Mary's face and quickly she grabbed up her kerchief to wipe them away remembering how totally bereft she had felt. Not knowing what she would do having lost the last of her immediate family. 'The house was grief stricken but none more so than me,' recalled Mary.....

The following morning a message was sent to Mrs Maberley explaining the situation....

'What kindness she showed me,' remembered Mary, 'Insisting I take as many days away as I needed to organise and attend Mother's funeral. Those are very sad days for me.'.....

Four days after the funeral Mary decided to return to her workplace and was surprised to discover that Mrs Maberley had made the decision to offer her a home announcing, "I think it only right that you come and live with me. That is if you so wish?"

The deep relief Mary felt by the kind offer was truly great as she felt she could no longer continue living with her relations. It seemed that her Uncle's drinking had gotten worse and he had become prone to wandering around in a stupor at night, sometimes entering her bedroom and trying to get in bed with her. Whilst her Mother had been alive it had proved to be no problem but now she was sleeping alone she was worried by the intrusion. Although her Aunt and Uncle had always been warm and caring people towards her, or as much as is possible for someone who is not one of their own, Mary knew she no longer felt safe, nor comfortable, sleeping in the bed especially in one where she had lost such a dear Mother. And so gathering together what few possessions she owned Mary said goodbye to her relatives and left their little house without a backward glance.....

Chapter 2 - Mrs Maberley

It is the beginning of February 1879 and I have been working for Mrs. Maberley for over a year now; she has proven to be full of kindness towards me. Upon returning to my duties after the loss of my dear Mother I found I had been allocated a small bedroom. So warm was the welcome I received I soon felt as though I belonged in Mrs Maberley's home. I must confess to feeling overawed and full of gratitude for the lady's thoughtfulness. My work is light and not taxing, even though my days are filled in attending to all her needs; I still have time for my sewing, lessons and learning to speak French. I am a slow learner and find it a little difficult getting my tongue around the strange vowels but I will persist in my endeavours to master the language; if only to please Mrs Maberley.

Yesterday Mrs Maberley and I spent some time inspecting my wardrobe. She has declared that I must have some new clothes; more befitting of a lady's companion. And so this morning one very excited young woman, me, left with Mrs Maberley on a trip to the dressmakers. I am filled with feelings of gratitude and affection towards her for I know not how I am ever to repay her generosity. It appears to me that my life has improved and for the first time in all my years I have a lot to look forward to and be grateful for.

My days are now quickly settled into a routine and I find my relationship with Mrs Maberley becoming closer and closer. Many months have now passed as I am nearly nineteen. Each day I find myself meeting new people and am amazed at how readily they accept me. Although it is a heady experience it is one that makes me extremely happy. During these last few weeks, I have met a new acquaintance, a delightful young woman: The Honourable Miss Elizabeth Mountford, the only daughter of Lord and Lady Mountford. Even though we come from two different backgrounds we have found ourselves becoming the closest of friends; she has even asked me to call her Lizzie (her father's pet name for her). Life is good and I often pray that it will last forever but if it does not I will accept whatever God has in store for me.

Joining Mrs Maberley for breakfast this morning she has asked me to run a couple of errands for her. I am to go to Dobson's to change some books and then onto the haberdashers to collect a yard of lace for a dress I am altering. It is Wednesday and market day so the area will be busy. Hopefully the good weather will hold as I shall enjoy strolling to the shops. Once outside I discover the air is clear; there is no smog today, which is good for walking. As I stroll along I meet at least three people I am acquainted with; the town seems very busy.

About an hour later as I leave the dressmakers shop I suddenly hear someone calling my name. "Miss Watson, Miss Watson. Thank God I have found you."

Looking around I see it is one of our footmen and he is hurrying towards me. It is obvious he has been running fast for he is panting heavily so I instruct him to calm himself but he insists on trying to talk.

Finally, having regained his breath he manages to tell me, "You must return to the house immediately Miss Watson. You are needed urgently."

He is most distressed but I cannot get anything further from him; he just keeps repeating that I must return to the house immediately. Suddenly it dawns on me that something is amiss so quickly gathering up my skirts I run as fast as I can back to the house, the footman following closely behind me.

As I arrive at the house I find it in utter turmoil; the servants are standing around crying or pacing up and down. Upon entering the hallway I am met by Jackson the butler; he looks exceedingly distressed.

Quickly he explains, "Madam has had an accident, Miss. She was coming downstairs when she missed her footing and fell; the Doctor has been called and he is with her at this moment."

Shocked, I ask him in a whisper, "Is she alright?"

He stutters as he tells me, "I do not know, Miss. Madam has been lifted up to her room and is asking for you."

With a cry I drop my packages and throwing my coat towards the footman I turn and mount the stairs two at a time; quickly racing up and not looking back at the sad faces waiting below. Reaching the landing I dash towards Mrs Maberley's room bursting through the bedroom door without knocking; what greets me shakes me to the core. Poor Mrs Maberley is lying on the bed looking lost, extremely pale and wan. The doctor is standing alongside the bed but moves away as I go forward. Casting a quick glance at him I kneel down; gently taking hold of my lady's hand, tears well in my eyes.

After a moment I turn to look at the doctor but he slowly shakes his head from side to side as if understanding and responding to my unspoken question. His response causes me to take a sharp intake of breath as it occurs to me that it is not good news. My heart is saddened. And I worry that I might lose my dearest companion and friend? Turning back to the bed, Mrs Maberley slowly opens her eyes; a small smile crosses her pale face as she gently squeezes my hand, just the once before her eyes close and she lets out her last breath. A sob is torn from me and as tears stream down my face I find myself begging her not to leave. My heart is broken; I cannot move.

A few moments later the Doctor gently places a warm hand on my shoulder and in a kind voice encourages me to leave the room, "Come away Miss Watson. There is nothing more we can do here."

Reluctantly I rise from the floor, "It's just not possible," I say, "Tell me it's not true. She cannot leave me like this. You must do something."

The doctor sighs and taking me gently by the arm he shakes his head saying, "There is nothing to do. Come away dear girl, come away."

And so taking one last look at my dear departed friend; a woman who had, in reality replaced my lost Mother I reluctantly I leave the bedroom, and walk along the landing in a stupefied daze. Slowly, I descend the stairs, the Doctor following closely behind.

Reaching the hallway the Doctor takes a deep breath, then gently he breaks the sad news to those gathered, "It is with deep regret that I must inform you that Mrs Maberley has passed away."

A sound of shock and horror echoes around the hallway. Tears begin to flow; even Jackson is seen to wipe the corner of his eye, for in his opinion Mrs Maberley was always the most generous and caring of employers.....

Mary once again found her face wet with shed tears as she remembered the sadness of that fateful day. 'Suddenly I found myself all alone again,' Mary thought.

Standing up Mary walked to look out of the small porthole in the wall of the cabin. "What did I do wrong to suffer this way? Can you tell me God?" she asked looking up at the sky, "Was I a bad child? Was I vain and conceited that you felt it necessary to take those I loved so dearly so quickly from me?"

A sudden knock at the door brought Mary back from her thoughts and wiping her face she turned and called out, "Enter."

The door slowly opened and young Adam entered carrying a tray.

"The Captain thought you might like some refreshments Miss," he announced placing the tray on the corner of the desk. Surprised Mary thanked the young man and he withdrew from the cabin. Moving towards the desk she retook her seat and picking up the dainty teapot she slowly poured the contents before sitting back in her chair to enjoy a refreshing cup of tea, smiling to herself at the thoughtfulness of the master of the ship wondering if she was getting special treatment or not.

Having finished her tea Mary took up her pen once more and continued writing in her journal.....

The following days were a blur. Fortunately Jackson was able to take charge; running the household and assisting the Solicitor in making all the necessary arrangements. I have been unable to do little, spending much of my time sitting alone hour after hour in the drawing room, wrapped in my deep sorrow. The room seems to give me solace for it seems to bring me closer to my dear departed friend.

After a few days of suffering in this way I finally made the decision to send a message to Mountford house. I have no-one else to turn to in my sorrow. An hour later my dear friend Lizzie arrives to see how I fare and I soon find myself breaking down, explaining what has happened. Bless her for she immediately takes charge by instructing one of the maids to pack some of my clothes before quickly removing me from the house and taking me directly to her home where I am promptly put to bed. Even Lady Mountford insists a doctor be called to issue me with a sedative and within minutes of him leaving I am fast asleep.

The funeral is planned for next week but I am unable to attend as I know I cannot face seeing my companion laid to rest in the cold earth. Although the days following pass quickly my stay at Mountford house lasts for over a week until I am well enough to return to Maberley house.

As I enter Maberley house I am met by Jackson and a lady I have never seen before but who is introduced to me as Lady Perryman; Mrs Maberley's daughter-in-law. I am surprised by the introduction but even more so when the lady quickly takes charge, promptly demanding of me, "And just who are you and what do you want?"

The question leaves me flabbergasted for in all the years I have worked and lived with Mrs Maberley never have I heard any mention of a relative.

Shakily I explain, "I am..... or rather I was..... Mrs Maberley's companion."

At this announcement her Ladyship announces, "I see. Please follow me into the drawing room. I have something to say to you."

Once in the drawing room Lady Perryman turns and coldly informs me, "As my Mother-in-law is no longer here your services are no longer required. The house is being put up for sale and all the servants will be leaving shortly therefore you can see why there is no reason for you to stay."

It is an understatement to say that I was astounded by the news; in fact I was totally shocked. It appears so quick and....., and calculating.

Eventually her Ladyship continues, "Jackson alone will remain to act as caretaker until the house is sold. You can collect your belongings and leave."

The news leaves me speechless. What was I going to do? And it took me a few moments to gather my thoughts but finally I managed to blurt out, "But your Ladyship I have nowhere else to go at such short notice. My parents are dead which is why Mrs Maberley offered me a home here."

This statement obviously displeased her ladyship who wasn't used to common domestic staff answering back so after a moment's thought, Lady Perryman reluctantly announces, "Very well then. You can stay one more night but you must leave first thing in the morning."

It was obvious I had no choice but to agree to her demands so I left the drawing room feeling destroyed in spirit and soul. As I closed the door I found Jackson waiting in the hallway and although very sympathetic I understood that the poor man was in the same position so there was little he could do to help me.....

Smiling Mary thought, 'I still remember to this day how kind Jackson was and I am pleased to have called him my friend. It was such a pity that the servants were treated in such a manner.'

Laughing out loud Mary declared, "Mrs Maberley probably turned in her grave at the callousness of her relation to her loyal staff."

Sighing Mary knew that there was nothing she could have done as that was the way it is where servants are concerned. They have no rights. Such a pity.....

Returning to her journal Mary continued.....

Retiring that night I lay in my bed sobbing for both the loss of my dear friend and my life as I knew it. And the following morning when I rose I knew I looked pale and wan; sleep had eluded me as I had spent much of my time worrying about the future.

Descending to the ground floor I was met by Jackson who quietly asked, "Is there anything I can do to help you Miss Watson?"

I must have appeared lost as he immediately took it upon himself to lead me below stairs, where we joined the rest of the household staff. Looking around at those gathered there I felt distressed for them as they too were being put out of the only home they had known for many years. It seemed so unfair and cruel.

Over breakfast the cook, Mrs Steadman asked, "What will you do Miss. Mary? Where will you go?"

I couldn't answer; I just sat there shaking my head, before finally saying, "I don't know. I suppose I could go back to my Uncle's house." It was obvious that I was as bewildered by the whole affair as they were.

Finally Jackson suggested, "Perhaps Miss Mountford could assist you, Miss. Watson?"

Of course Lizzie. Why hadn't I thought about her? The idea that she might be able to help me began to grow in my mind. Quickly writing a short note explaining the situation I was pleased when one of the footmen said he would deliver it to Mountford house for me. After he had left all I could do was sit and wait. Time seemed to stretch.

Yet I needn't have worried for within the hour a loud urgent knocking was heard at the front door. When Jackson responded to the insistent banging he found a very agitated Lizzie standing on the doorstep demanding to see me.

Lady Perryman, upon hearing the noise, went into the hallway to see what the fuss was about, being just in time to overhear Lizzie stating most profusely, "I wish to see Mary, Miss Watson. It is my intention to remove her from a place where she is no longer welcome."

I don't think her Ladyship knew what to say for as soon as Lizzie saw her Ladyship she commenced haranguing the lady declaring, "My parents, Lord and Lady Mountford and I are astounded. We find it a sorry state of affairs when good people are put out on the street without a moment's notice. We find such behaviour scandalous."

Quickly turning my face away I hide the smile which has appeared there at Lizzie's audacity and bravado. This proves to me what a true friend she really is. As for poor Lady Perryman she is so taken aback by the forcefulness of Lizzie's outburst that she too finds herself unable to speak. I must confess it has taken all my self-control not to laugh out loud at the look of sheer horror on her Ladyships face.

Without further ado I am instructed to quickly pack up my belongings and obtain the wages due me. Once ready, and after saying my goodbyes to the other staff, I follow Lizzie from the house. It is a sad moment for me as I know I will never again set foot in the one place where, other than my country home I have been settled and truly happy.

Outside I stop and before mounting the carriage I turn to look back once more upon the place that has been my home for one last time. As my eyes wander over the front of the house I spot Lady Perryman watching me from behind the curtains; the look of relief etched across her face is most comical and I resist the urge to smile. Then holding my head high I turn back towards the carriage and climb in, resisting the temptation to look back at the house one more time.