The Maid’s story: Martha’s first day

By Gordon Lamont

Martha: My name is Martha Tibbot. I’m twelve years old and today is a big day for me, perhaps the biggest day of my life. I’m leaving my family and leaving Eastonhope – the village where I was born and grew up. I’m going to the big house, four miles walk away, to start my new life as a servant, a Maid.

Mother: You mind yerself, Martha.

Martha: I will, Ma. Bye.

Family: Bye, Martha! Bye!

Martha: And then I’m on my way. And now for the first time I’m nervous, but I have to get a move on, because I mustn’t be late on my first day. I have to be there by seven o’clock...

And now I’m here. The Manor, the big house. I smarten myself up, smooth down my dress and...

Mrs. Arnett: Hold your horses, I’m coming.

Martha: Excuse me. I’m Martha Tibbot – the new maid.

Mrs. Arnett: I know who you are, right enough. Come in girl, quick now.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martha:</th>
<th>The door was opened by the Housekeeper, Mrs. Arnett. I found out later that she made a point of welcoming the new staff herself. Which I suppose was kind of her...but she didn’t seem very kind to me then.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Arnett:</td>
<td>Take your things off and we’ll get you into uniform straight away. Come on, through here. You can change in the scullery.</td>
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<td>Martha:</td>
<td>Yes, Miss.</td>
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<td>Mrs. Arnett:</td>
<td>It’s Mrs Arnett. Here’s your uniform - get it on quick and then come out to the kitchen.</td>
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<td>Martha:</td>
<td>Yes, Mrs Arnett.</td>
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<td>Mrs. Arnett:</td>
<td>And don’t look so worried girl you haven’t done anything wrong have you. Well not yet anyway...</td>
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<td>Martha:</td>
<td>I put my bag down and had a good look around the scullery. It was a whole room just for cleaning things – dishes and the like; and for washing and ironing clothes. There was a small fire with irons next to it ready for heating. There was a sink and a tap. Fancy, a whole room just for cleaning things...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Arnett:</td>
<td>Are you ready yet, girl? Mr. Jones wants to meet you.</td>
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<td>Martha:</td>
<td>Nearly.</td>
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<td>But I wasn’t nearly ready. I was day dreaming as usual and now I began to wonder who Mr. Jones was. Surely not His Lordship who lived upstairs?</td>
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</table>
Mrs. Arnett: Come on, girl, you don’t want to start work with a bad record do you?

Martha: Quickly I pulled on my uniform – a long black dress with a white apron and cap, and hurried out with my bag.

Mrs. Arnett: There you are.

Martha: I’m sorry Mrs. Arnett, I just...

Mrs Arnett: It alright Martha – just try to be a bit quicker in future. Fortunately Mr. Jones isn’t here yet.

Martha: Just at the moment the door opened and a tall, smartly dressed man walked in. Beside him was another maid.

Mrs. Arnett: Martha, this is Mr. Jones. Say hello.

Martha: Hello...Your Lordship.

Mr. Jones: Now, now girl, I am not your Lordship. I am Mr. Jones, Head Butler to his Lordship.

Sally: She thought he was the Lord – stupid girl.

Mrs. Arnett: That’s enough, Sally!

Martha: Sally was the scullery maid, the lowest position among us servants, and I watched her laughter vanish in a second as Mrs. Arnett turned on her.

Mrs. Arnett: How dare you speak like that in front of Mr. Jones!

Sally: But I only...
Mrs. Arnett: Get to your tasks. At once!

Sally: Yes, Mrs Arnett.

Mr. Jones: Martha, isn’t it?

Martha: Yes, sir.

Mr. Jones: I was waiting to see you curtsey as you must whenever your betters speak to you and especially if, in time, you meet any of the family upstairs.

Martha: I bobbed my head and bent up and down at the knees.

Mr. Jones: Well, it’s a start but I think you’d better listen carefully to Mrs. Arnett who will show you how to curtsey and show genuine respect, yes?

Mrs. Arnett: Of course, Mr. Jones, and I think we’d better get that apron under a hot iron too girl. It’s a little creased.

Martha: My mind was in a whirl. So much to take in, uniforms, curtsies, sculleries and, as I was soon to find out, a whole world of rules to learn and obey. I quickly hurried back into the scullery and was surprised to hear Sally say:

Sally: I’ve put the iron on the fire to heat for you – it should be ready now.

Martha: I quickly slipped off my white apron and laid it on the table to iron. I sprinkled some water on to it and applied the hot iron...

Martha: Oh, no! No.
Martha: The apron was a real mess. Someone, and it didn’t take much to work out who, had rubbed the iron into the ashes from the fire so when I put it to the apron it made a terrible mess.

Mrs. Arnett: What’s all the noise? Oh!

Martha: For a moment I thought I was for it but then I saw that Mrs. Arnett had taken the whole thing in at a glance.

Mrs. Arnett: Sally, you come with me this instant...

Martha: With a crook of her finger she made Sally follow her. I wondered what would happen to Sally. She was a good deal older than me but had never got beyond being a scullery maid. May be it was her character. Then I forgot all about her and felt sorry for myself, all alone with no family or friends in this great big house. So much had happened and I’d only been here less than an hour.