



*Reluctant Press presents:*

# Lady Lucy

Charlotte Mayo



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A 'YOUNG ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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# LADY LUCY

**by Charlotte Mayo**

## CHAPTER ONE

Where do I begin? Surely this is one of the strangest tales that has ever been told! Never has such an oddity as this story been put onto paper! It will amaze you, Dear Reader, but I can say that what I tell here is God's honest truth. I do apologise for the standard of my writing as I have not long learnt at it being now only in my early thirties and not starting at reading and writing till I was in my late teens. I still find the pen clumsy in my hand and the ink is apt to stain and blot the paper, but, Dear Reader, this is a story that must be told.

It was Lady Lucy's governess, Mrs Welsh, who taught me words and how to string them together to make sentences and all wondrous things like that. I do humbly apologise for my hand which I know to be bad

and far inferior to Lady Lucy's whose words are so precise and perfect that I am in awe of them but this is my tale and I must tell it.

I write my story in secret for I dare not let Lady Lucy see what I write. Now that I am of elevated station she would hate it if scandal were to break upon the family in any way and would, if she found it, as sure as eggs is eggs, burn this manuscript on the fire in the hearth in the bedroom which is where I write and store the book away under lock and key when I am not at my scribbling.

The reason I have entitled it "Lady Lucy" is because my beloved is of such a high opinion of herself that she thinks I am now writing little odes and bits and pieces about her. If she happens upon the work and sees the title, I know she will not look inside. She likes a surprise and to be patted and pampered and told her she excels at all things and how clever she is and how much, much clever she is than a mere male. She holds some very peculiar ideas about gender and believes that Women are superior to Men which goes against God's Will and the teachings of the Bible. But back to my point which is to say this piece of writing she must not see for she would not just burn the manuscript but such would be her ire I would receive a whipping and she would never forgive me for it.

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My story starts like this; my name is Thomas Smith and I was born in the year of our Lord 1864. I was of humble origins – what might be termed "working class". Anyway, by the time my tale opens, both my parents had left me - my mother was in the work house

and my father, an alcoholic, had disappeared. I had no brothers and sisters that I knew of. I was but an orphan in the world and only fifteen years of age. My services were employed at a stately manor home called Ellsworth Manor House which belonged to Lord Randolph Glewyn. He was married to Lady Constance Glewyn and they had one daughter – Lady Lucy. How I came to be in Ellsworth Manor House is a story of mighty good luck and fortune. Lady Constance liked her charitable deeds and was patron of the orphanage where I was housed.

The man who ran it, Mr. Doggs, was a mighty cruel man and very handy with the cane. He had all manner of punishments for us boys if we did not do as we were told or follow his instruction to the letter. So, when Lady Constance asked for a fine young boy under fifteen but above ten to volunteer for work at Ellsworth Manor House so many wanted to be employed by Lady Constance that some was over fifteen and some were only eight or nine. But out of us all, I was the one chosen and given duties in the stable and sometimes in the house if it were cleaning the chimney and such like. I was mighty lucky and loved being at Ellsworth Manor House which made all my friends at the orphanage very jealous and despising of me.

I started work at Ellsworth Manor House when I was twelve years of age, I think. I enjoyed my work there very much. Of course, I would see Lord and Lady Glewyn and Lady Lucy in all their finery but we servants were forbade from talking to their Lordships unless spoken to. We had to take our caps off and stand to one side if we saw any of them coming. I was just a faceless servant. "Yes, My Lady. No, My Lady," always at the beck and call of the senior servants. Mostly though I was holding the reins of horses as one of the

family mounted for they all enjoyed a jolly good gallop. That may be one of the reasons why events took the turn they did!

I rarely ventured into the house as it was out of bounds for folks like me as I had no business there - my business being the stables and outdoor work - sometimes a little gardening; sweeping leaves in the winter; cleaning the carriages and looking after the horses.

I was very low in in the pecking order you might say and my main role was to muck out the horses, clean their harnesses with polish and dubbin their bridles. Then, when that work was done I helped the butlers and if I was too slow or obstinate, then the chief butler, Mr. Arlington, had no hesitation in calling me to his office for a switch of the willow. That's how it worked in Queen Victoria's England - everyone knew their place and their position and no one dare stray from it. It was how God had ordained it. And it worked because England was the best and the mightiest country the world had even known. We English ruled the world!

So there's me, stable lad and general dogs body working in the stable, sleeping there too. I came to the kitchen for food once the senior servants had eaten, generally enjoying life compared to the orphanage and the cruel Mr. Doggs.

Lord and Lady Glewyn's daughter, Lady Lucy, was a slim thing with a head full of blonde curls and a liking for finery and all the best that her indulgent papa could give her. She was somewhat of a spoilt, precocious child used to getting her own way. Being their only offspring, Lord and Lady Glewyn gave into her every whim and she was very strong minded - as I

know only too well! But of course I did not know all that at the time. I only saw her from a distance and thought her a mighty fine young lady and did not have a clue as to her personality.

Anyway, when my tale of woe opens she was fifteen - the same age as me - which I didn't know. I didn't know how old I was at that time as I had so little learning until Lady Lucy took me in hand.

But back to my story - you have me mucking out horses; cleaning harness and bridles; lifting luggage when guests come to stay; helping in the garden in the summer; helping with cleaning the chimneys whilst the family of the house resided at peace – the daily grind alien to their position. Everything was in place from the time they got up to the time they went to bed. If, by chance, anything was wrong, Lord or Lady Glewyn or even Lady Lucy would rebuke the miscreant. Sure as eggs is eggs, the miscreant would get a harsher rebuke from the Chief Butler, Mr Arlington and a clump around the ear or a switch of the willow to teach the miscreant not to upset Lord and Lady Glewyn and Lady Lucy in any way. Our role in life – as God had ordained it – was to ensure that Lord and Lady Glewyn and Lady Lucy had the utmost comfort from morning to night.

Despite all the hard work (rising at 5am and working solid throughout the day), a house position was a good position and much coveted as though pay was not great, there was good camaraderie amongst staff and we had free board and lodging and all things like that. Sometimes we'd have a sing song in the kitchen and general merriment was had. Being a lad of fifteen, there were girls and women around who looked after me as I was an orphan with no one in the world to help

me, my own mother having been put away in the workhouse some years previous. My father was something of an unknown quantity to me.

Then there was Alice. Alice was Lady Lucy's maid. She was a young girl with long blond hair and a thin figure. All the men liked Alice as she had a winning



smile, wily, girlish charms, a fluttering eyelid, a swing of the shoulders and a pouting red mouth that said, "Please Sir, can you help me?"

Alice thought herself better than being a Lady's maid, though it was a good position. Here I have a confession to make – I loved Alice – I thought of her every night, I mumbled around her and reddened. Frances the cook and all the staff would tease me so!

"You stuttrerer," Frances would say. "Why, you must love Alice so."

And I did. With all my heart I loved Alice. Whenever I saw Alice, my heart pounded with desire for her though I knew her to be eighteen and much better than the likes of me. Sometimes the Devil would make my flesh rise at the thought of Alice; when we went to church on Sunday, I prayed that the Lord would banish such thoughts from my mind but He did not because still my flesh rose when I thought of Alice, my heart pounded, my face reddened and my hands sweated and... Well, what more can I say? Cupid's Arrow had struck me fairly and squarely through the heart. I was *so* in love.

She knew of course, that Tom, the stable boy and general dogs' body was on the long list of her admirers. On the odd occasion when she would give me a crumb of hope by smiling at me or by setting her eyes upon me, I was in Heaven. Even a simple "Good morning" sent my heart racing.

However small the crumb that fell from Alice's table, big was my nourishment upon it. And she kept me like that... dangling ... awaiting her sign that my obvious affection was met by equal affection but we both knew that my love was unrequited. There was no way Alice who thought herself so high and mighty would

ever look twice at someone so lowly as Tom, the stable boy.

So we come to the day when my life changed forever and in a way I could never have thought possible. Alice had several admirers or beaux who she kept hanging on; one, a Mister McGoldrick, who I saw as nothing but a fancy fellow from the village, was particularly amorous in his affections and begun to pull slightly at Alice's heartstrings. Whenever free from his job at the foundry, he would come a-wooing and leave flowers and billet-doux for Alice who was very much enthralled to his kind of courtship. Then, he proposed taking Alice to a dance; Alice was as high as a kite – swirling around the scullery pretending she was Princess Somebody in the arms of her Darling Prince Charming. Oh, she danced and waltzed and she even practised steps with the butler. Oh, Alice was so happy but then Frances asked,

“What will you wear?”

Alice's happiness was punctured for the truth was she had nothing to wear being, like the rest of us, as poor as a church mouse and with no money for silks and finery. But Alice was nothing if not inventive. First, she asked Nellie who was a rather good seamstress to make her a gown. Nellie said it would be too much work on top of her job. At any rate she would still need to buy materials. Alice asked us all to contribute to her gown but she got short shift from Mr. Arlington who said she was not to ask such things of staff as we were all trying to make ends meet. Why should we invest in another's pleasure?

Poor Alice. She was so downcast. At night I would think of her and try to come up with solutions which could get Alice to the ball as if she were Cinderella. Un-

fortunately magic does not happen in everyday life and there was nothing for it. Of course, she did not want to go cap in hand to Mr. Fancy Pants, Mister McGoldrick, and tell him she had no gown and so could not countenance attendance at the ball. She could not ask him to contribute to what she was wearing as he had already told her he had laid on transport for them both in the form of a horse and cart from the forge. This was no ordinary country dance, this was a ball being sponsored by the local Mayor. Jack McGoldrick knew there would be many fine and upstanding people there who, though not of the class of Lord and Lady Glewyn, were at least artisans and liked to show their finery. Poor Alice, if only I could have helped her out of her misfortune!

I don't know the day exactly not being well versed with days and months and times and dates and that sort of thing. It was a hot day. Summer, I think. I was in the kitchen having breakfast. I had been up since 5am and had been doing a full shift as Master had gone to town early. I had had to get his horse ready and saddle him up as his Master liked nothing more than a good gallop when the sun was up. I was just enjoying a bit of porridge when in came Alice. Her downcast countenance seemed to have evaporated and she seemed remarkable jolly and pleasant to all, including me, which got me heart jumping.

Alice even asked me if I was enjoying my breakfast; she had never previous enquired nothing about me. I blushed to the roots of my blond hair and said I was and thanked her kindly for her enquiry. Alice proceeded to dance around the kitchen. Frances asked her what had made her so frisky and why she was so happy after having had such a black face on her these

past few days by dint of the fact she had no dress to wear to the Mayor's Ball.

"I think I have solved my problem," she said, her eyelids all a flutter.

Frances placed her large hand on her fat hip. "You've found a seamstress who can sew you a fancy garment using invisible thread in no time at all and material that costs only a penny a yard for the most expensive finery, have you?"

"No," says Alice. "I've found Tom!"

Well, Dear Reader, my heart missed a beat! Not only did it miss a beat but I nearly jumped out of my chair! Not only had Alice used my name for the first time, she also believed I was the solution to her problem! Dear Reader, how can I describe how deliriously happy I was? How can I transport you to that state of blissfulness I was living in when Alice mentioned my name? But my happiness increased a thousand fold at her next words.

"Tom (again she mentioned my name!) When you've finished your breakfast, I'd like a word with you... outside... alone."

Could my happiness be any more? Oh, how I wished I'd died at that moment! How I wished I'd left this mortal coil with those words ringing in my ear!

I pushed away my half-filled bowl of oats and stuttered. "I, I, I I'm ready now, Alice."

"So, come on. Follow me," she said and skipped out of the scullery.

Frances looked aghast as I pushed back my chair from the table. She was long enough in the tooth to know that there was some mischief afoot and that I was

likely to come off the worst. I, being not as worldly wise as Alice and Frances and being so in love with Alice, saw no harm. I was so happy I could hardly contain myself.

So, on that bright, sunny morning I followed her back out of the scullery. We walked towards the stable. She found a quiet nook and started to talk. Alice started to talk to me! Alone. Just the two of us. Had I died and gone to Heaven?

"Tom," she said, all soft and purring like Frances's scullery cat. "Tom, you know I want to go this Ball with Jack McGoldrick and you know too I've nothing to wear but rags that will not show me to advantage?"

"Yes, Miss Alice," says I. "It's been the talk of the scullery for this last week."

"Tom, you know I have always liked you, don't you?" Alice purred.

My eyes filled with tears – not because I was sad but because I was so unbelievably happy. I wanted to touch her, to hold her hand, to kiss her pink cheek!

"I've always wanted to be liked by you, Miss Alice," says I.

Alice smiled. Then, Oh Heaven, she took my hand and whispered. "Tom, I'm so desperate to go the Mayor's Ball with Jack and I am so desperate to look fine, if you do what I am proposing, I will think of you always in the best possible light and I will always adore you."

Tingles of joy quivered up my spine. "What do you want me to do, Miss Alice?"

It was then she outlined her plan. Her voice became matter-of-fact and emotionless.

"I've decided to borrow a dress from Lady Lucy. She has so many and knows not what she has that she will not miss one dress. Anyways, it will be no hardship to her especially as it will be returned. I have sized her up and down and know her dresses will fit me well for though she is three year younger than me, I am of a small build."

"But why do you need me?" I said.

"I need you to collect it from her wardrobe." Alice said.

I was confused. "But will not Lady Lucy just lend a dress to you if you tell her how important it is for you to go to the Mayor's ball with Mister McGoldrick?"

Alice laughed. "It does not work like that, Tom. We are the lower orders and them that's in power over us would rather burn a dress than let a servant have it. There is no way Lady Lucy would let me have one of her dresses knowing it would be shown off to full advantage at The Mayor's Ball and also knowing I would look a lot more handsome in it than she does! No, we must borrow it without Lady Lucy's knowledge."

"How?" I asked. Feeling so full of joy and happiness, I would have agreed to burgle Buckingham Palace itself and steal Queen Victoria's bloomers if it would have meant Miss Alice thought the better of me for it.

"Well, first you must promise me not to tell a soul about our plans."

I promised. With all my heart, I promised.

Alice continued. "Well, then, this is the plan. I will tell you when Lady Lucy is not going to be at home. Then you must gird your loins and sneak into the house and up to Lady Lucy's bedroom. As you enter

her room, she has a another room – an ante-room they call it – to the left. This is full of clothes and finery and the most wonderful things. You need to go to the very back of the room and get me a ball gown – a ball gown with a low décolleté - she has a pink one which I especially like. Borrow that. Take it from the hanger... and shoes as well... Lady Lucy's feet are a bit smaller than mine but they will have to be tight - and undergarments – I need some petticoats and bloomers and a bustle or tournure.

"I will tell you again what I need nearer the time for you are sure to forget, being a mere boy and not at all knowing about woman's things. But tell me true, Tom, you will do this for me and make me the happiest person a life. I so, I will be your best friend in the whole world and I will never, ever forsake you. Tell me true, oh Tom; you will do me this little favour?"

"Oh yes, Miss Alice I will do this for you." I said. My voice filled with a happiness beyond anything I had ever felt before.

My fate was sealed. I was committed to an act of criminality which I did not fully understand nor realise the consequences of. As I say, I had little learning and little understanding. Dear Reader, I am a God-fearing person and have never knowingly done wrong to anyone or stolen anything. I would never break one of the Ten Commandments but what Miss Alice proposed - the borrowing of Lady Lucy's dress, well, that did not sound like stealing, did it?

I did not understand that the adventure I was about to embark upon for Miss Alice was wrong in the eyes of the Law and in the eyes of the Lord. Had I realised that I was to commit a crime and a sin would I have been so easily swayed? But I was like putty in Miss Al-

ice's hands. Putty. I am sure Cupid's Arrow which had pierced my heart would have been too strongly cemented into my heart for me to draw it out and say "no" to Miss Alice. Miss Alice knew this of course. She knew I was but a weak and shivering wreck in her presence and that I would do anything she told me to do.

Over the next few days I was as the happiest I had ever been in my fifteen years. Though Frances and others probed me as to what Miss Alice's scheme was to get a dress, I said not a word to anyone and got on with my work, cleaning and polishing and mucking out the horses with a light heart. I did not much think about Miss Alice's proposal, just being pleased I was part of some secret with her; that our lives were mingled and entwined. I was thrilled that she knew my name and wanted me as a friend, a person whom she would never betray and always keep in her heart. Perhaps then there was a hope for me in the future when Jack McGoldrick had swanned off and all her other fancy men had been and gone. Perhaps then there would be place in her heart for "Dear Tom" as she was want to call me now.

When I said my prayers at night, I didn't ask the Lord for forgiveness for a sin I was about to commit for I did not see it as a sin. In my naivety I did not understand the seriousness of what I was about to do.

Miss Alice worked on her plan. I was to steal into Lady Lucy's room with a hessian bag and stuff the dress, the shoes and the undergarments into it. I was then to make good my escape and store the bag in the stables under the hay. Then, when requested, on the eve of the ball, I was to bring the bag to Miss Alice's room and she would get changed. She would say an

Aunt had posted the dress to her and I had collected it from the village Post Office for her. That was what we would tell the other servants had been my involvement and no one would know it was one of Lady Lucy's dresses.

Then I was wait up for her - all night if needs be - under her room. When she returned, she would signal to me by waving a lantern near her window that she was back. I was to go to her room and wait outside until she passed out the hessian bag filled with the garments. Then, at a time of my own pleasing, I was to return the clothes to Lady Lucy's boudoir.

If I had but thought, if I had used what little brain I had, would I have not realised this was a plan was fraught with danger? That Miss Alice was so intent on going to the Ball and looking as handsome as possible that she had lost all leave of her senses? Would I have not realised that? Would I have not seen that there were more holes in this scheme of Miss Alice's than in the colander Frances used for washing the vegetables?

But I was in love. Smitten. Forlorn. Miss Alice exuded the very picture of femininity and beauty. All I wanted to do was hear her sweet voice and not notice the meaning of the words; to be close to her; to let her take my hand and kiss my cheek. That was all I cared about. No, the ins and outs of the proposal that was put to me completely passed me by – as I'm sure she realised.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

I don't know how many days passed after Miss Alice had hatched her scheme but eventually the time came for me to commit the deadly deed. Lady Glewyn

and Lady Lucy went off in the carriage early one more to visit relatives. Lord Glewyn was in his study working which meant he would be indisposed most of the morning. So, after breakfast, Miss Alice took me outside, passed me a hessian sack and told me that this was the day I must borrow Lady Lucy's dress. She then told me again what was required in terms of garments I must steal or borrow. I stuffed the sack into my shirt and went to work mucking out the horses, awaiting the right time to embark on my adventure. As I worked, I went over and over in my mind the items I must borrow: the pink dress; the bustle or tournure; the petticoats; the shoes; the silk stockings and if possible the bloomers and the stays or corset. If the last was not secured, Alice would have to use her own corset, which, she assured me, was not as rigid and well-made as her ladyship's.

After lunch, his Lordship took the dogs for a long walk and the house was quiet. As there was no dinner to prepare, Frances and the maids were sitting in the scullery, drinking tea. It was time for the great deed to be done! I walked up to the house. As always, I took my shoes off and went inside. I had worked out in my mind a plan of action. I was going to say one of the horses had gone lame and say I needed to speak to Mr. Arlington who was the Head Butler.

I walked into the scullery which was normally the furthest into the house I was allowed to go. I told Frances my story then said I would not trouble her by asking her to get Mr. Arlington; I would go to the front of the house to find him. Frances was suspicious but did not wish to interrupt her rest, so she allowed me to go forward into the house. As I came up into the hall from the scullery, the sun shone through the great stained glass windows and I was amazed at the finery of the

place. The lovely furnishings and pictures of great Lords looked down upon me – their sharp, serious faces covered all periods and all fashions from the Great Armada to the modern period. They were positioned all along the hall and staircase; the floor was covered by a patterned carpet and I could but wonder at the luxury. At the end of the hall, a tall Grandfather clock tic-tocked. I stood for a few moments taking in the scene before me, my heart beating with the thrill of it all. Then I chided myself for losing focus – I had a task to perform – so I steadily walked along the hall, my cap scrunched in my hands, my footsteps soft on the carpet though Lord knows who could have heard them anyway.

The stairs were on my right. Once I was on the staircase, I was in forbidden territory and I would have to go forward and complete my task. The strange thing was I did not feel particularly nervous. The thought of Alice and the joy I would bring to her heart by accomplishing my deed filled me with such glee it overcame any tension I should have felt. There was no one about so I skipped up the stairs, taking them at two and three at a time. I reached the top. Miss Alice had said Lady Lucy's room was third on the left. I walked past two of the immaculate but identical white doors, finally turned the brass knob on the third and walked into Lady Lucy's room.

What a wonder to behold! A large four-poster bed was to the right with a screen and bathing apparatus to the side. An ottoman stood at the foot of the four-poster bed and a chaise lounge at the window. Next to that was a white dressing table decorated with gold trim and a pretty pink stool. To the left was the anteroom exactly as Miss Alice had described. I walked into the bedroom, then pushed open the door to the

ante room. My senses were invaded by the beautiful smells of perfumes and scents; I took hold of one of Lady Lucy's dresses and let the smooth silks run though my fingers. The dress was so different from the stiff leather of a horse's harness or the thick shirts and breeches I wore.

My heart started to race for now I felt nervous. Alice had talked a lot about borrowing a dress but I realised that what I was about to do was *steal* a dress. I was a thief but I could not help myself. I walked to the back of the room and pulled the hessian bag from my shirt. I had not expected so many dresses. There was an embarrassment of riches before me and I was immediately unsure what I should do. I closed my eyes and let my breathing subside. I tried to think. What had Miss Alice asked for? A pink low-cut ball gown. I looked for such an item. But the dresses had many colours and it was impossible to find one that was only pink. At last I settled on one which seemed to match Alice's description. I removed it from the hanger. It felt so heavy – I could not imagine Lady Lucy's small frame being able to bear its weight. Then I thought of the other things Miss Alice required: silk stockings, bloomers, shoes, a corset, petticoats, and, of course the horsehair bustle or tournure. Oh, there was so much to remember! Mentally, I had repeated the list over and over but not being sure what was what in terms of women's wear I was still confused over what items I needed to borrow. Finally, I took what I thought was right, placed everything in the hessian bag and tied it with twine.

Then a noise! I closed the anteroom door. Nancy, the scullery maid, was singing to herself on the landing. The next thing I knew, she had stopped outside Lady Lucy's bedroom door! I heard her turn the handle and enter the room.

Quickly, I pulled the door of the anteroom closed, hid amongst the dresses and waited until she had finished cleaning, polishing, wiping and dusting. At last she left the room and I was able to sneak out of the anteroom with my stash of clothes and undergarments. I walked across the open floor, pushed up the heavy sash window and dropped my bag onto the ground. From there I moved fast. Back down the stairs without anyone seeing me – fortunately, the scullery was empty so I did not have to explain myself to Frances or anyone else. I was outside. I dashed around the perimeter of the house and collected my hessian bag. Then I made tracks back to the stable where I stored the bag under some hay. Mission accomplished. Later, when Frances asked me if I had located Mr. Arlington, I said I had not but it was all right as the horse was not lame. I had made a mistake, it just had a stone stuck in its shoe.

“Did you get the dress?” Miss Alice asked when we were able to sneak off together later that evening.

“Yes, I did and it was a big adventure as I was stuck in the room for over an hour...”

Alice cut me short. “No one saw you?”

“No.”

“And you got shoes, a corset, bloomers, petticoats, a bustle?”

I was so pleased with myself, I wanted her to hear my story. “Nancy, the scullery maid came in and I had to...”

“She didn’t see you?” Alice said, bored by my attempted explanation.

“No but I was so frightened, Miss Alice, sitting in the ante room for....” I tried again to explain. I was ea-

ger to tell her of my adventure and have her think well of me.

Again she cut me short. "And you've hidden the clothes in the stable?"

"Yes."

"Good, you've done well, Tom." With that she kissed my check and was gone.

## CHAPTER THREE

The following day there was a big commotion in the house. Voices were raised. Ladies voices. I don't know how long they lasted but eventually all the staff were gathered together in the scullery and lined up. There were so many of us in the small confines of the scullery, we formed a semi-circle. Mr. Arlington came in looking stern. His face was red with rage, his voice like thunder.

"A crime has been committed. A heinous, horrible crime. Someone has entered Lady Lucy's boudoir and removed objects pertaining to her person. Now, if no one owns up, when we trace the miscreant who has committed this terrible felony, she will be shackled and handed over to the Peelers and will never work in service again. If whoever has done this dastardly deed owns up now, there is a chance the situation can be resolved without recourse to the Peelers. Then the criminal will be sacked and dismissed from service with no reference and their Lordships will be spared the intrusion of the Peelers on their property. NOW, WHO DID THIS TERRIBLE DEED?"

Dear Reader, can I begin to explain how I felt? How nervous and scared I was? How I felt so full of sin for

what I had done that my heart was fair to bursting with panic? My mouth was dry, my face red and my hands sweaty. I looked at Miss Alice; surely she would feel the same? She was a fine actress because not one note of concern or contrition was displayed on her face.

“Step forward, miscreant,” Mr. Arlington said. “I am WAITING.”

Mr. Arlington stood with his hands behind his back; his great chest was puffed out. He moved up and down on the toes of his shoes, so enraged was he. Eventually he moved along the row of servants as if he was a general inspecting his troops. As he moved along the line, looking into the eyes of each in turn, he said, “Never in all my years of service has such a felony been committed. Now, I say again, step forward, miscreant! My patience is waning.”

How could I step forward? To own up would be to betray Miss Alice. Perhaps there was a chance we would not be caught and Miss Alice could still go to the ball?

The clock ticked. Big heavy clunks. My heart beat like a hammer in a forge. Silence reigned.

“All right, I’ve given you the easy option. Now Mrs. Loughton and I will conduct a search of all your rooms. When we find the stolen items, the owner of said room will be guilty as charged and the Peelers will be called to make an arrest. If, however, the miscreant wishes to identify herself, then his Lordship, in his kindness, may be disposed to deal with the matter without the Peelers and courts being involved. The choice is yours,” Mr. Arlington announced.

My mind locked on Mr. Arlington’s word “herself” – he thought a woman had committed the crime! There

was still hope for us. Miss Alice had used me to commit the crime, knowing suspicion would not fall on my male shoulders! I breathed slightly more easily. I looked at the maids, all of whom had frowns and scowls on their faces, knowing their rooms would be turned upside down and ransacked by the search. We all knew that Mrs. Loughton and Mr. Arlington would take no care; when they had finished the servants who lived in would have much tidying up to do.

No one did much work that day. Ellsworth Manor House was filled with gossip about the theft. Names were mentioned; it wasn't long before Miss Alice and the Mayor's Ball was put forward as the most likely reason for the theft even though Miss Alice had a good alibi, having spent the day with three other maids. Even so, Miss Alice was taken to Mr. Arlington's office but she kept a cool countenance and must have denied any involvement. As her room was in good order and she had been with the three other maids all day, there was no evidence against her. She was troubled no further. I don't know when Miss Frances told Mr. Arlington about how I had come looking for him about the lame horse but in the afternoon, I was sent for.

Mr. Arlington looked stern. "Thomas, you're a good lad, and I cannot think why you would be involved in something like this but if you did it for someone else for reasons that are beyond me, you must tell me now. Miss Frances tells me you entered the house to look for me in regard to a lame horse, but you never found me, did you? Have you had any part in this crime?"

I denied all knowledge. Well, what could I say? It was not for me that I feared exposure (well I did a bit) but more for poor Miss Alice who would surely come to my aide if I confessed and told all. For her, I had to

keep quiet. Mr. Arlington dismissed me. I knew he thought that my explanation was truthful for I had never been any trouble to their Lordships. I just got on with my job and did the best I could with a smile on my face and not an unpleasant word for anyone.

Even so, I could not sleep easy at night. The whole talk in Ellsworth Manor House was of the dress, where it had gone and who had taken it. Of course, poor Nancy, the scullery maid, was given quite a grilling because she had been in Lady Lucy's room that afternoon (as I knew only too well). However, there was no proof against her. Though her room was turned upside down and she was in tears because the finger of blame was pointed in her direction, in the end, without the evidence, Mr. Arlington could not have her arrested. Next, rumours started to circulate about the gypsies living on the common ground. They went from house to house selling wears. Maybe one of them had slipped into the house, for they had called at the Manor that very day and Mr. Arlington had given them short shift. The rumour seemed to gain ground as I overheard Mr. Arlington say he was not convinced it was an inside job as he believed all the servants to be trustworthy and God-fearing.

All the while Miss Alice ignored me and did not return my glances which I put down to the fact that she did not wish to arouse suspicion that we were working as partners in crime. It seemed to be working. The Peelers weren't called, the gypsy camp left suddenly and Lord Glewyn seemed to think they had left with one of Lady Lucy's finest gowns (as well as her undergarments). Then I found out something about Miss Alice I didn't like; George rubbed his nose in it and the game was up.