

The first dialogue between Mary Lennox and Martha.

Mary: Are you going to be my servant?

Martha: I'm Mrs Medlock's servant. And she's Mr Craven's – but I'm to do the housemaid's work up here and wait on you a bit. But you won't need much waiting on.

Mary: Who is going to dress me?

Martha: Can't you dress yourself?

Mary: What do you mean? I don't understand your language.

Martha: I mean can't you put on your own clothes?

Mary: NO! I never did in my life. My Ayah dressed me of course.

Martha: Well. It's time you should learn. It'll do you good to wait on yourself a bit. My mother always said she couldn't see why grand people's children didn't turn out fair fools – with nurses and being washed and dressed and taken out to walk as if they were puppies!

Mary: It is DIFFERENT in India.

Martha: Eh! I can see it's different. I dare say it's because there's such a lot of blacks there instead of respectable white people. When I heard you was comin' from India I thought you were black too.

Mary: (angry) What! What! You thought I was a native. You – daughter of a pig!

Martha: Who are you calling names? You needn't be so vexed. That's not the way for a young lady to talk. I have nothing against blacks. When you read about them they are always very religious. You always read as a black's a man and a brother. I have never seen a black and I was fair pleased to think I was going to see one close. When I come in to light your fire this morning I crept up to your bed and pulled the cover back carefully to look at you. And there you were, disappointedly no more black than me – .

Mary: (very angry) You thought I was a native! You dared! You don't know anything about natives! They are not people – they're servants who must salaam to you. You know nothing about India. You know nothing about anything! (cries)

Martha: Eh! You mustn't cry like that. I didn't know you would be vexed. I don't know anything about anything – just like you said. I beg you pardon miss. Do stop crying.

(a little later Martha has persuaded Mary to get up)

Martha: It's time for you to get up now. Mrs Medlock said I was to carry the breakfast and tea and dinner into the room next to this. It's been made into a nursery for thee. I'll help thee on with your clothes if you get out of bed. If the buttons are at the back you cannot button them up yourself.

Mary. These clothes are not mine. Mine are black! Those are nicer than mine.

Martha: These are the ones you must put on. Mr Craven ordered Mrs Medlock to get them in London. He said, “I won’t have a child dressed in black wandering about like a lost soul. It will make the place sadder than it is. Put colour on her”.

Mary: I hate black things.

Martha: Why don’t you put on your own shoes?

Mary. My Ayah did it. It was the custom.

2. Questions to the dialogue.

1. What do you think about Mary now after reading this?
2. Do you think Mary should dress herself?
3. What does Martha think about black people?
4. Do you like Martha? Why?/Why not?
5. How were servants treated in India?
6. Do you think it is right to have servants?