



The Victorians

Mary Seacole - The Crimean War

Written by Rob John

- Mary: When I reached the Crimea it was cold and smelly – just as I had been warned – and, at times, very frightening. But I stayed and with the help of friends in London who loaned me money I built my hospital. We called it *The British Hotel*. Everyday my brave maid Sally and I helped to care for the soldiers. Some were wounded, some were ill, most of them were hungry and all of them were frightened and far from home. One day in January 1856 a battle started very near our hospital.
- Mary: Sally?
- Sally: Yes, Mrs Seacole?
- Mary: It's going to be a busy day. We're going to need hot water and fresh bandages.
- Sally: Yes, Ma'am.
- Mary: And soup, Sally. Lots of soup.
- Sergeant: Mother Seacole! Open up! We have wounded here.
- Mary: They're here already. Bring him through. Put him on this bed.
- Sergeant: He's been hit in the head, Mrs Seacole. It don't look good.





- Mary: Let me see. Sally, give me a flannel.
- Sally: Yes, Mrs Seacole
- Mary: And get some hot water..
- Sally: Yes, Ma'am
- Mary: There. Now he's lost a lot of blood...but it looks worse than it is. Try to keep still. Now listen to me, boy. You are not going to die. Now just keep still.
- Soldier: Yes, Ma'am.
- Mary: All day the guns were busy. All day they kept bringing us the wounded, but late in the afternoon there was an unexpected visitor.
- Sally: Mrs Seacole - there is a gentleman here to see you.
- Mary: I haven't got time for that now, Sally.
- Howard-Russell: Mrs Mary Seacole?
- Mary: That's me. What can I do for you, sir?
- Howard-Russell: Mrs Seacole. I am very honoured to meet you. My name is William Russell. I am a writer for *The Times* newspaper in London. I have heard so much about your work and I'd like to write about you for my paper. Would you answer some questions?
- Mary: Mr Russell. Look around you.





- Howard-Russell: Just a few questions, Mrs Seacole. I won't get in your way, I promise.
- Mary: I can't imagine anyone in London would be interested in reading about me.
- Howard-Russell: Oh I think they'd be very interested.
- Mary: Very well, I can give you one minute.
- Howard-Russell: So would you tell me, Mrs Seacole, why do you call this place *The British Hotel*? It's a hospital, isn't it?
- Mary: Florence Nightingale has a hospital, Mr Russell. You go and see her if you want to see a proper hospital.
- Howard-Russell: I've come to see you, Mrs Seacole. I want to see what you do here.
- Mary: Mr Russell, I just want to make a place where soldiers can come and be safe and warm. This one here with the wound in his head. Came in this morning. Looked half dead from cold when they brought him in. When did you last eat?
- Soldier: Before I come here? I don't know, Ma'am.
- Mary: See, Mr Russell? It's not the enemy who are killing our boys, but disease and cold and lack of proper food. I just try and look after them.
- Howard-Russell: And that's why the soldiers call you Mother Seacole.
- Soldier: I thought I was going to die...and now here I am tucked up in the warm drinking soup. You're a flipping miracle, Mother Seacole.





- Mary: So Mr William Russell from *The Times* came to *The British Hotel* and for days he followed us about and watched what we were doing, all the time scribbling down notes in his little black book.
- Howard-Russell: Mrs Seacole! Do you always walk at such a speed?
- Mary: If you can't keep up, Mr Russell, I suggest you go back to *The British Hotel*.
- Howard-Russell: But why are we walking straight towards the fighting?
- Mary: Look, if a man gets wounded up here near Sebastopol he has to be taken down to our place. That's two hours walking. We're just not close enough.
- Howard-Russell: Florence Nightingale says that the wounded must be treated in clean, hygienic well-run hospitals. She says we need proper hospitals.
- Mary: Yes and hers is too far away from the action. We've got to go. Come on, Sally. We've got work to do.
- Sally: Yes, ma'am.
- Howard-Russell: But Mrs Seacole, is it true what they say - that you sometimes treat wounded enemy soldiers as well as the British?
- Mary: A wounded man is a wounded man and whether he bleeds English or Russian blood he still needs my help.





- Howard-Russell: So it *is* true. You do help the Russians?
- Mary: Do you think that's wrong, Mr Russell?
- Howard-Russell: No...no I don't.
- Mary: Later that day Mr Russell left the Crimea and set off home to London. Sally and I were so busy that we soon forgot all about him in the excitement of a great victory. The Russians had been holding a city called Sebastopol since the start of the war but at last the city fell and I decided that when the British troops marched into Sebastopol I would be with them.
- Sergeant: Stop right there. Where do you think you're going, lady?
- Mary: We're going to Sebastopol.
- Sergeant: Oh no you're not. The city's just fallen. No place for ladies.
- Mary: Sally, show the sergeant the letter.
- Sally: It's from the general. Read it, Sergeant it says you've got to allow Mrs Seacole to carry medicine...
- Sergeant: Alright. Alright. You're Mary Seacole?
- Mary: I am.
- Sergeant: I'm very sorry, ma'am. I didn't realise. I didn't know. Corporal, lift the road block. Mother Seacole coming through.





Mary:

And so I became the first woman to walk into Sebastopol from the British lines. The road into the city was lined with British soldiers and when they heard that Mary Seacole was coming they all started to wave and cheer and shout my name. It was the proudest day of my life.

