



# Mary Seacole - Journey to the Crimea

Written by Rob John

Mary:

Mary Seacole...that's me...born more than two hundred years ago in Jamaica. My father was a white man and my mother black. That meant I was a Creole and I was proud to be so. My mother was a famous healer in Jamaica. She was like a doctor and a nurse all rolled into one: a doctress. And when I was a child she taught me all her skills.

In 1854 when war broke out in the Crimea I knew at once I was meant to go there. I read about a woman called Florence Nightingale who was looking for nurses to go with her to help the soldiers. I made up my mind: I, Mary Seacole, would go to the Crimea.

But first I had to get from Jamaica to London. So I bought a ticket and boarded an American ship; but things were not always easy for a Creole woman like me. As soon as I went aboard I knew that something was wrong.

American woman:

And where do you think you're going?

Mary:

To England.

American woman:

To England?

Mary:

Yes, Ma'am.

American woman:

You expect to travel with us on this ship to England.



Mary: Yes, Ma'am. I have a ticket.

American woman: Look around you, woman. What do you see? White faces. American faces.

Mary: But I have a ticket.

American woman: Somebody call the captain!

Mary: I have a ticket!

Nobody spoke up for me. Not one person. But I was Mary Seacole. So I just went and bought another ticket...and this time I was on my way.

When I arrived in England I made straight for the War Department in London. I had an interview to join Florence Nightingale in the Crimea.

Mrs Hamilton: Yes, I'll be with you in one moment. I'm just... Well...that seems to be in order. Good. So...Ah...I see you are...

Mary: I am what, Ma'am?

Mrs Hamilton: I see you are...

Mary: I am a Creole, Ma'am. From Jamaica.

Mrs Hamilton: And you wish to go to war in the Crimea as a nurse, Mrs Seacole?

Mary: Yes, Ma'am. It is my greatest wish.

Mrs Hamilton: And what made you think that you'd be of help, Mrs Seacole?



Mary: Look at my references. It's all there, Mrs Hamilton. I learnt nursing and medical skills from my mother. She taught me about medicines and cures and -

Mrs Hamilton: Magic potions, I suppose.

Mary: There is no magic, Mrs Hamilton. Just skill and care.

Mrs Hamilton: Have you any idea what you'd be dealing with in the Crimea, Mrs Seacole? This is war. A terrible, brutal, cruel war.

Mary: Mrs Hamilton, I want to join Florence Nightingale. I am determined to go to the Crimea. Give me the chance. I won't let you down.

Mrs Hamilton: I am sure you wouldn't. However, I regret to tell you that Miss Nightingale does not have any places for nurses at present.

Mary: I'm sorry?

Mrs Hamilton: Miss Nightingale has all the nurses she needs.

Mary: But I don't understand. There were other nurses here today. You have been talking to other nurses. I don't understand.

Mrs Hamilton: Then let me make it very clear, Mrs Seacole. I am very sorry. You will not be needed.



Mary: I was 'not needed'. But that wasn't going to stop me. If Florence Nightingale wouldn't take me to the Crimea I would go there by myself. And if they didn't want me to work in their hospital then I would build one of my own. So...I bought another ticket on another boat...

Sailor: You're going out to the Crimea are you, Ma'am? You been there before?

Mary: No.

Sailor: No offence, Ma'am, but you must be mad. Four times I sailed to the Crimea and I tell you it's the coldest, dirtiest, smelliest, place I ever seen.

Mary: Really?

Sailor: Whole place is full of thieves. You never seen so many thieves. You'll need a guard.

Mary: A guard? What for?

Sailor: To guard all your stuff when you're asleep. Keep the rats off too. I tell you, in Balaklava once saw a rat eating a man's foot while he was asleep and the weird thing was he didn't wake up...

Mary: I was afraid. I was very afraid and when the ship docked at Gibraltar on the way I nearly got off. But I was Mary Seacole. I was determined. I would not go back. I would sail on to the Crimea and I would build my hospital.