

# A Door into History

## By 8RC

You've heard the expression 'If only these four walls could talk, the stories they'd tell'; well unfortunately Montalto is not renowned for gossiping walls. I however do speak and I have many tales to narrate... Oh I forgot to introduce myself; my name is Doris and I am the imposing front door of this unforgettable stately home." If you visit the estate, come close to me and look out at the stunning landscape I gaze upon daily. Lean against the cold stone pillars that guard me, close your eyes and listen as the voices of the past come rushing back...

My story is one of entrances and exits; some are more memorable than others so if you are comfortable, I'll begin...

### A Romantic Entrance

The staff were running about the house making sure everything was perfection. The butler was racing around; the chamber maids were making the beds with beautiful brightly-coloured sheets and getting the rooms sorted for the Master David returning from Italy. There were rumors circulating Montalto House that David's mistress was called Madelina, she was only fifteen and was a talented Italian opera singer. The rumours were right. Everyone couldn't wait to see what she looked like and their excitement was at bursting point when they first arrived.



I held my breath expectantly as the old, tired footman hopped down from the footboard onto the hard cold gravel and rushed to open the stunningly decorated carriage door. At long last out stepped the one and only Mistress Madelina, this



gorgeous, tan, Italian opera singer with her long wavy hair as black as a midnight sky with a little yellow flowers to compliment it and her eyes as blue as the heavens on a bright sunny summer's day. The young woman gazed all around taking in the house; even scanning the smallest details carved into the bark of the trees. She began to pivot slightly as she stared intently like a hawk at the grand house. I watched in great amusement as a smile lit up across her flawless face. David Ker was smiling happily. He paced slowly over to Miss Madelina. An almost silent whisper came out of his mouth "Please Miss would you like to come this way?" he asked nervously. "Yes

thank you - grazie,” she replied in broken English. They asked to walk alone because they wanted some privacy. “You look beautiful my darling.” “Thank you” she replied. As the trees glistened brightly high above them, it was a beautiful scene down below. I noticed how she picked up her own bags and the expression on David’s face had turned to shock. He let out a bellowing laugh and asked her why she would do such a thing. Madelina explained how back in Italy her family didn't have servants to do everything for them. David rung the bell and almost instantly a cold hand had grasped my handle from the inside. My hinges let out a loud shriek as they hadn’t been oiled for a few months. The master sharply issued an order to take Madelina’s bag to the grand suite of the house. The maid scurried away like a mouse being chased by a cat, clutching the heavy bags in her ice cold hands. If I had eyes I would roll them.

Meanwhile, Madelina was looking at her new beautiful home, just standing there. Staring. Not knowing what was ahead of her. She looked very uneasy and shy.....maybe even worried. On closer inspection, you could see a hint of excitement deep down. She started to approach the house, taking one very slow step at a time... As they entered, Madeline was gob smacked by the furniture and famous portraits. She exclaimed “Home sweet home!”

I shall never forget that romantic entrance – the house had never seemed happier and there was so much hope and promise in the air. Yes for many years after the house was filled with love and laughter and cheer. The couple was blessed with four energetic, sometimes unruly children who played all day with the toys Mr Ker bought for them. They had marbles that they used to throw at me or the skipping rope they used to twirl on sunny days- that made an awful sound. The girls had rocking horses with real horse hair manes and dolls houses full of beautifully-carved miniature furniture. The boys used to play with clockwork trains. They also used to play ‘squeak pig squeak’, that was terrifying to me.

### **A Sad Exit**

Sadly, the laughter stopped the fateful night my mistress died. The serious-faced doctor whispered in the narrow, tiled hallway to David Ker." I'm so sorry Mr Ker to tell you this dire news..." "Yr yr your wife has passed". David Ker looked frightened, pale faced -I have never seen him like that, my poor master. I could hear the children upstairs in the nursery playing around filled with mirth, oblivious to what had happened. I could see his countenance fall. His hands shook sorrowfully. He ran to the Diana statue and slumped down in grief. The shouting and the high pitch screaming of the jolly children upstairs in the nursery continued but outside the lonely figure sobbed in the darkness. David truly loved his wife and so did the children love their mother. Later that night they all sat beside the fire, crying in true misery. The lights beyond the snug were all turned off and the place was in complete silence.

And so through the same door she entered as a beautiful bride, she was carried out in a coffin. However, her funeral was not the saddest scene I have witnessed... far from it!

## An Entrance No More

Co. Down had suffered poor harvests for many years now and as a result starvation and homelessness were the new normal.

Each night, a few families of ill mothers and starving children camped out under the looming pillars without food, water or warm clothes. I could see their skinny stomachs; I could hear their faint whimpering. From my spyhole, I even witnessed these frail children desperately drinking water from the whale-shaped lake. Right in front of me echoed their vague cries of hunger and pain, and I couldn't do anything about it. It was the beginning of a cold, wet winter and the young children's bodies were shivering for weeks in some cases - until they died...

Sometimes they would be treated dreadfully. My Master's own children would stand in front of me, or at their bedroom windows, and throw little crumbs of bread or food in their direction. They threw them about a few feet in front of the hopeless people so they would come scrabbling out into the open for a tiny chance of living a little bit longer. They were being treated like monkeys, I felt. They probably used to be in a home in front of a fire and never would have expected being homeless, skinny, half-naked and fed like animals. Nobody would; nobody could imagine it, but it could happen, and it did. It may be unbearable hearing about it but it was even worse seeing it a few feet in front of you. I wished I could just fall from this doorframe and walk far away.

Those scenes of starvation and misery were not to mark my saddest day however. That came when I witnessed an act of coldness that still sends shivers through my timbers today. Seeing my master take things into his own hands with his bitter face as he strolled through me was eerie. His change in character had started when my mistress died. I overheard him discuss some plans with a local man with a horrifying face. He had grey skull-like hair, and his eyes to me looked 'sinister' like a slithering snake's. He had scary tools in his chunky hands. That was when I saw a huge wrecking ball being wheeled around the corner.

They were tearing down the porch's façade – my home! They even brought dynamite. It all stuck together - my master detested the poor people rummaging through the dirt and camping out on his porch where there was shelter - so he was getting rid of it! There was rubble and debris everywhere before my eyes.

When it was nightfall, all the homeless people came back to the house but they found out that they had no food or shelter. They had no idea that this would never happen. They were very sad and lay outside of this grand house in the freezing cold. One worn-out woman laid her child on the cold ground as she huddled beside her. In the morning she saw her baby was grey and cold as ice. That was one of the saddest things I ever seen.



As long as I live I will never be able to wipe that horrific memory. My master's life also descended into darkness and he was never the same since Madelina's death.

As death ripped Madelina from David's bare hands he spiraled into a pit of regret and debt. When the drink started to appear more than often, so did the angered yells through the battered walls. In the silence of the night the weeping of the children who once had the loudest laughs of joy (ones that matched their father) echoed around the house. The beautiful paintings he bought didn't cure his heart, instead his money shrank and shrank. He thought these could fill his heart in the space that was left for Madelina. They never did nor did his second wife. There was too much sadness and he sadly passed away.

### **The Final Exit**

Which brings me to his last exit in a gloomy, wooden coffin...

I heard the crunching of the gravel and the echoing knocking that went through me. The undertaker had arrived. I was swung open instantly into the mournful hallway where David's sons and daughters were dressed



in black with tears running down their cheeks. Coffin bearers followed after the maid and returned with the heavy coffin. My master David Ker was dead. I felt empty... first Madelina and now my master's body was being placed in the same grand black carriage that he and Madelina had arrived in from Italy. The flowers in the carriage were red roses; the same type that first decorated the wedding cart.

I watched the grey smoke that rose from the gravel as the hearse trotted off down the twisty lane and into the glowing sunset. My Master David Ker had left Montalto for the last time. His legacy is mixed and his life was definitely colourful. But he loved this beautiful mansion and this distinguished estate and so he gets written into the pages of its history. I saw many more sights and watched other interesting dynasties make their entrances and exits but those are stories for another day...



