

# Eliza James

## the maid

**M**y name is Eliza James. I'm 13 years old and the eldest of 11 children – though only five survived. I've been in service as a maid for Sir Archibald Carew and his wife, Lady Agatha, since I was ten, when I left school. I can read and write a bit, even though I didn't get much learning with having to stay at home to look after the kids most of the time.

It's hard work having to get up at 5am, especially in winter when it's freezing cold. Sometimes I have to break the ice in the washbasin to wipe my face.

I don't stop 'till after midnight, but it's better than being at home, where the kids all sleep in one bed and mam and dad are forced to work in filthy factories. My dad coughs all the time and my mam works 14 hours a day at the match factory, working for less than 5s a week. Lots of girls have died there because the chemical they use to make the matches is poisonous.

I worry about my mam – but they have to pay the rent and buy clothes and food.

At least here I have a clean uniform and my own bed. And there's always plenty to eat. I get a bath once a week, too – after everyone else. I don't get paid much, about £10 a year, but the cook is nice, not like some, and she gives me scraps to take home on my half day.

When I get up, I go straight down the servants' stairs at the back of the house to start on the fires. I have to black lead the grates, and clean, set and light the fires in the kitchen, the downstairs rooms, and all the family bedrooms.

Then I go back down to the kitchen to help Cook and the kitchen maids prepare breakfast. After that it's into the scullery.

This is where I do all the washing up, from the best family china to the servants' crockery, Cook's bowls, and the pots and pans. I have to scrub and peel all the vegetables for all the meals: breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner. You can guess how long all that takes. Apart from the master and mistress and their son, there are 14 servants in their London house – and even more in their house in the country.

