

# Josie McFadden

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*An account of a fictitious character who meets 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Edinburgh*

My name is Josie McFadden. I am 17. I work in the home of Mrs and Reverent Whyte in Edinburgh as a serving maid. Mrs Whyte has asked me to share with you a little about the visit of Abdul-Baha to the House. I am honoured to do so.

His spirit is still with us, even though He left us months ago now. I remember it as if it were only yesterday! It's not every day that you have a near prophet in the house! It was such a special time for us all. He was so kind to everybody, even us servants. It's not normal that a guest of the mistress would pay so much attention and be so polite to us. He was really different.

One evening I was off work. Mrs Whyte had told the servants that if we had time off and it wouldn't interfere with our work that we could attend the evening gatherings when Abdul-Baha would speak. That was different too. But when He was here, He wanted everyone involved. And everyone wanted to be.

There were lots of Mrs Whyte and the Reverend's friends there that night - maybe nearly 100! The drawing room was packed! There were mostly women there that night, as Abdul-Baha was planning to speak about Women's matters. I'd never been to a meeting like this before let alone one on the subject of women. What could there be to talk about I thought? Of course I'd heard of the trouble happening with all the protests down in London and Manchester and such, but didn't really understand what it was all about.

There was a great buzz of excitement. I stood near the door, in the corner. Everybody seemed to know each other, all chatting and laughing. Nobody seemed to want to talk to me. I noticed people's clothes - fur coats, silk shoes, lace gloves. I felt really out of place, dressed in my plain cotton stockings and the simple dress that my mother made for me before leaving home. All these people were so confident, so fine, and I felt so out of place, so alone.

Then one lady standing near me called out - 'He's coming, He's on His way!' There was a surge of people towards the door, and I got crushed up against the wall. I felt scared.

Then I saw the top of a white cotton hat bobbing gently up and down as He entered the room. I don't know if you've ever met Him, but He is quite short and in the middle of a crowd, sometimes all you can see is the top of His hat first!

Then He suddenly lifted His head to show two shining blue eyes and a wide smile. It was like the sun rising. He warmly grasped all the hands offered to Him. I really wanted to rush forward to touch His hand, but I felt so shy.

His face is a dark tan color and His skin is worn with deep lines. You can see the years of pain He has suffered. I don't know much about His life, only what Mrs Whyte has told me, but I understand He was put in prison for many years, even though He was innocent. How awful! He wore a long ankle-length white robe, very simple. It looked so different from the fine clothes of the other people. His hair is soft and grey and floated over His shoulders as He moved forward to the front of the room. He was like the bright centre of the crowd, like the hub of a wheel.

He stood on a small stage at the front of the room. He just stood there, not speaking just smiling, as if welcoming each and every person. Then He raised His arms, and lowered them again slowly, bringing a hush over the crowd. All I could think was 'What's He going to say?!' I knew He had something important to tell me, something that would teach me about myself. I had never had that feeling before. I tried to keep calm, all I could hear was my breath.

He began to speak. It was a minute or two before I realized that He wasn't even speaking in English, which was very strange as I felt that I had understood every word! Mr Sohrab, His assistant, was standing next to Him translating. But I didn't want to listen to him! 'Abdul-Baha's voice was all I wanted to hear. The beautiful sounds of His language were mesmerizing, like music. But I also wanted to understand what He was saying, so I forced myself to listen to Mr Sohrab.

Then all too quickly, His speech ended and His last words were drowned out by loud applause. No! I didn't want Him to stop! I really wanted to hear more, but I knew it wouldn't be that day.

Then everybody silently stood up. They were still as Abdul-Baha was guided off the platform and moved to the back of the room. I was standing by the door. He was walking directly towards me. Now was my chance to connect with Him, touch His hand, ask Him a question! I felt very bold to speak directly to one of the mistress's guests, but this was an opportunity I didn't want to miss. As He came closer and closer, thoughts crowded my head, what could I say? Now he was within a few steps of the door - now was my chance - reach out! Speak! Speak!

My hand reached out to touch His arm as He glided past, but before I could reach Him, He stopped, and then turned slowly to look at me. He was within inches, looking at me! Such piercing intensity in His eyes. I could hardly look back, but dared not look away.

Time stopped. I was held in a gaze of pure love and radiant joy. My mouth was dry, I couldn't speak, I could hardly breathe.

I'll never forget what he said to me. "Cultivate your knowledge on many subjects. Fit yourself for responsibility." He spoke in English so I could understand. Then He turned around and walked into the drawing room for tea with Mrs Whyte.

I wondered and wondered what He meant. Mrs Whyte has helped me to understand He was talking about me as a woman. Because we women are not given as many opportunities for education and such, so we should take the responsibility ourselves. Since then, I've started learning the new language Esperanto to cultivate my knowledge on that subject. It's this new language that is going to help to unite people all round the world. Mrs Whyte told me that's something else that Abdul-Baha said - "The unity of language brings about great fellowship between hearts". I figure if I can only do that a little, it would be a great thing.

On the day that Abdu'l-Baha left us, everyone was so sad. He gathered all the servants together to say goodbye. He thanked us, and told us we'd all done a wonderful job in serving Him. He encouraged us to continue in this line of work and said that serving others was the greatest way to worship God. Then He gave us all a guinea each - a whole guinea! I only get 8 guineas a month, so that's really a lot. I still have mine. I don't think I'll ever spend it. Perhaps it's something I can spend in heaven. Well, that's my story. I really must be getting back to my duties in the house. Mrs Whyte needs the silver polishing today!