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Windmills and Wounded Hearts

Mary!” The shout was punctuated by vigorous pounding on the door.

Mary jumped, poking herself with the sewing needle. She stuck the smarting finger into her mouth to keep the drop of blood from staining the brocade sleeve she’d been stitching.

“Coming!”

She managed to slide her needle into the lining fabric for safekeeping.

The yelling and banging on the door grew more insistent. “Mary Chilton!”

Mary opened the heavy wooden door to find the errand lad, Cornelijs.

His breath came in gasps. “Your father was set upon by a pack of boys. They pelted him with rocks. Isabella sent me

to fetch you.” He pressed his side. “Go quick, Mary. He be bleeding somethin’ awful.”

Her father? Bleeding? Just a few minutes after Mother and the girls went to work at the linen mill, James Chilton had left to take a small stack of bodices to Mary’s oldest sister, Isabella, for embroidery. Whatever could have happened?

“Where is he, Cornelijs?”

“By the windmill near the Grote School. Close to Bell Alley.”

Mary grabbed a jumble of linen strips from the scrap basket and rummaged in the apothecary chest, finding a small packet of sticking plaster. She shoved them into her apron pocket and poured some water from the tin basin into a clay jug before setting out.

She ran along the canal bank, wishing the April thaw had not come. How much faster it would have been if she could have strapped skates to her shoes and skated along the frozen canal like she and her older sisters, Ingle and Christian, did all winter long. Instead, windmills creaked, and the oars from brightly painted canal boats splashed through the water on this breezy spring morning. Doors on many of the cottages stood open as housewives swept or scrubbed their much-prized blue tile floors.

Mary stopped once, bending over to catch her breath, but she did not tarry long. Why did Isabella have to move all the way over to the other side of the tract when she married Roger?

As Mary neared Bell Alley she saw a cluster of people. She made out Isabella talking and gesturing widely to a constable. Drawing closer, Mary heard her sister's anxious voice.

"My father delivered some of the tailoring work to my home and picked up the lace cuffs I finished." Isabella's words caught in her throat. "When he left, I watched from my doorway as he walked alongside the canal."

Isabella spotted Mary. "Oh, I'm so glad you're here, Mary. Elder Brewster came, but I knew you'd be along. I dare not leave the children, and I did not know . . ."

"Go ahead and help the constable finish," Mary interrupted, moving toward the knot of people. Though Mary was nearly twenty years younger than her sister, they understood each other. Isabella hated the sight of blood.

Still sounding flustered, Isabella turned back to the constable and continued. "My father passed the alley, and a gang of boys came out to taunt him. They said something about English killjoys."

Mary could picture it. That kind of thing happened too often. The tolerant Dutch considered it "merriment" carried a little too far. To the sober English Separatists like her family, it felt more like harassment.

William Brewster crouched beside her father. As Mary came near, she cringed. Blood matted Father's gray hair and ran down his face from the jagged gash on his forehead. Mary's lungs stung from running. With the blood, the noise, and the milling people, her knees weakened and started to buckle.

“Do not be alarmed, Mary,” said Elder Brewster. “Scalp wounds bleed heavily, but they are usually not as bad as they seem. Once we get him home, we will fetch the surgeon, Jacob Hey, to stitch the wound.”

Mary stiffened, shaking off the momentary wooziness. “I brought plaster and bandages.”

“Thank you, Daughter,” her father said with a wobble in his voice. “I can always trust you to take good care of me.” He tried to smile but winced instead.

Mary set to work cleaning the gaping wound with water-soaked linen rags. Father closed his eyes and leaned slightly against his friend as she worked. Mary poured a bit of plaster onto a nearby paving stone and dripped two or three drops of water onto the white powder—just enough to make a sticky paste to cover the open gash and stop the bleeding.

As she worked, Mary listened to Isabella tell the constable how the boys picked up stones when Father ignored their taunts. Though they probably intended only to impress each other with their bravado, one rock hit Father with staggering force. The boys scattered.

Mary clenched her teeth rather than risk saying something harsh. She had seen them before. Those boys paraded around Leyden wearing fancy plumed hats and embroidered doublets over puffy-padded short breeches. Instead of a collar they sported enormous stiffened ruffs. Ribbons and bows encircled their breeches and decorated their shoes. They resembled a flock of fancy roosters, strutting to show off colorful plumage.

And, for some reason, nothing infuriated them like the plainly dressed men of the Green Gate congregation.

The constable shook his head as he wrote out Isabella's complaint for the magistrate. "These big boys have too much spirit in them, but soon they will take their rightful place at the mill." He paused and nodded. "Aye . . . and then their proud necks will be bent to work."

When she finished tending her father, Mary hugged her sister good-bye. "Hurry back to the children, Isabella. Elder Brewster said he would help me see Father home."

Isabella kissed her father's cheek and hesitantly left to go back to her little ones.

Mary poured the rest of the water over her hands, washing the plaster off her fingers and drying her hands on her apron. She gathered the bundle of lace cuffs from the stones at the edge of the canal. Taking Father's arm, she and Elder Brewster helped him to his feet. His normally white collar was creased and soaked with blood. Why would anyone act so cruelly?

Elder Brewster kept breathing deeply through his nostrils. Mary had known him ever since her family moved to Leyden. She recognized his agitation.

"James, I am fair worried about our children," Elder Brewster said.

Mary's father stiffened. "Surely you do not think those boys would attack the children of our congregation. The magistrate was right. They just got carried away. Someone tossed a rock and an insult, and it seemed like sport to them." He

stopped to catch his breath as they continued to move slowly along the canal. “The Dutch people have been most hospitable, William.”

“That I know, James, but the Dutch folk are too easy on their children. They allow them far too much and require far too little. I worry about the influence on our children.”

“Aye,” Father said. “The younger children in our congregation prefer speaking Dutch over English, and some of the older ones long for the richly decorated clothing.”

Mary wished she could speak up, but she knew no one would appreciate a twelve-year-old girl’s thoughts on so weighty a matter. For her, ’twasn’t so much wishing for beautiful clothes and the colorful life of the Leyden people; ’twas that she yearned to belong—to really belong.

As they walked along the dike, Mary noticed newly inhabited stork nests atop the roofs on many of the colorful cottages. They passed a windmill with flower-filled window boxes on the first floor where the miller’s family lived. Slivers of green poked through the soil of a well-tended flower garden—the promise of lilies to come. How Mary loved the beauty and cleanliness of Leyden. One day each week was set aside for scrubbing, and the housewives of Leyden scrubbed everything in sight. They hauled buckets of water out of the canals and splashed the water against the houses and onto the street as they mopped and scrubbed and rubbed and polished.

I don’t know where I belong, but someday—if it please the

Lord—let me have a house to scrub. Someday, let me have a plot of land for planting. And someday let me unpack our linens and smooth out the wrinkles and lay them in a press. Someday . . .

As Elder Brewster continued to talk with her father, she silently prayed one final request—*And please, give me room in that someday garden to tuck in a flower or two.* Flowers meant you planned to stay.



Mary remembered very little about moving from Sandwich in Kent, England, to Holland nearly ten years ago. She was still in leading strings when they left, but even now in Leyden, she sometimes dreamed about the smell of salty sea air and the sound of water lapping up against the quay at Sandwich harbor.

She remembered loving her English house with its white-washed stone walls. When she played outdoors she would sing a bumpity-bump song as she dragged her fingers across the rough surface, getting the chalky white all over her hands. Another picture Mary could never forget was the disturbing pile of belongings carefully bundled together and secured with twine—as if the Chiltons were preparing to move at a moment’s notice.

Her memories got tangled with the stories her sisters told, but early on she learned to watch her parents’ faces for signs of worry. Trouble seemed to swirl all around them. Even

though she caught only snippets of what was happening, she understood the danger.

“Do you remember why we left England?” Mother had asked one day a few years ago as she, Mary, and Isabella hemmed linens. Isabella’s wedding was to take place that August, and they were finishing her dower chest.

“Not altogether. I do know that there was trouble and that it had to do with St. Peter’s.” Mary thought for a minute. “When Isabella or Christian or Ingle took me for a walk, I always wanted to go out near the water so I could go in and out of that mossy stone gate.”

“Aye. That was Fishergate. You have such a good memory. You were not quite three,” Mother said.

“And did Mary ever get mad when I had to change the route and take the long way around so as not to pass the church,” Isabella said with a laugh.

“I did not.” It wasn’t anger; it was that funny longing she often experienced. She missed walking by St. Peter’s, because she used to make-believe that the tower was a medieval castle. It was complicated. She did not miss it because it was where she belonged; she missed it because she never had the chance to belong.

“I shall never forget those last days in England,” said Isabella.

“Nor will I,” Mother said as she tensed her shoulders over her hemstitching.

Later her mother had told her about the church service at

the Hooke home when Andrew Sharpe came into the room to fetch help. Mary's mother, along with Goodwife Hooke and Goodwife Fletcher, left in the middle of the service to assist with the birthing of the Sharpe baby. The poor little babe died, and Mother helped lay the tiny coffin into the ground while the elder said words.

The Chiltons knew their church services were illegal. The Church of England had become little more than another institution of the English government, but it was the only recognized church. Church officials were appointed because of the favors their families performed for British royalty, not because they longed to serve God. Though still called a church, it was not a place where people often met Christ or deepened their faith. Church officials spent more time reading the newly released sonnets of the Stratford-upon-Avon bard, William Shakespeare, than they did the Bible—after all, they had met Shakespeare in London.

The Chiltons and many of their friends refused to take part in what they believed were empty rituals, including the meaningless funeral rites. They studied the Bible and wanted to experience a fresh faith and the freedom to worship as they pleased.

The fight was on.

King James believed these dissenters were chipping away at the very foundations of England. Separatists, like Mary's family, were being imprisoned and persecuted all across England. Some were even hanged for refusing to give up

their beliefs. A few slipped out of the country into Holland where freedom of religion existed, but the English authorities watched the ports to keep these troublesome citizens from escaping.

The situation had grown increasingly worse for Mary's family. Church officials paid a visit to the Chilton home. One clergyman spent the entire time yelling and pounding the table till the veins bulged on his neck. They charged her mother with "privately burying a child." According to them, she broke English law and she broke church law.

Mary's father had long been trying to secure passage on a ship out of England, but it was not until the magistrates came with an arrest warrant for Mother that the final details hastily fell into place.

Mary could remember bits and pieces of the event. Words swirled around her—words like excommunication and prison. And always . . . the soft sobbing of her mother, the worried face of her father, and the bundles of their belongings disappearing one at a time as Father secretly stowed them aboard a ship waiting in the harbor.



The last time Mary saw her English home she stood tiptoe on a wooden crate so she could peer over the salty-tasting rail. The ship carrying the Chiltons and all their belongings left the mouth of the River Stour into the Strait of Dover and headed toward the North Sea and Holland. The stone

walls and arched bridges guarding the town of Sandwich eventually faded into the shimmer of water as the flap, flap, flap of sails being unfurled signaled that she was headed into the unknown.



“Mary, are you growing weary?” Elder Brewster’s concern drew Mary back to the conversation between her father and Elder Brewster. As usual she had been daydreaming.

“No, Elder,” she replied.

Elder Brewster took Mary at her word. He turned back to his friend. “The Dutch people have been kind,” said the elder. “I’ll not be finding fault with them.”

“I know,” her father said. “Since coming from England it is so difficult to make a living. Leyden is mostly a good, wholesome place, but it holds little promise for us. We work in the linen mills or the woolen factories, and our wives must work and our children work, and yet . . . we have nothing.”

“Aye,” said Elder Brewster. “When some of our brothers think back to their land holdings in England, it becomes easy to get discouraged. We need to remember the terrible persecution back in England. Here, at least, we worship as we choose.”

“But I long to own land again,” her father said as he wiped aside a piece of sticky blood-matted hair. “Sometimes I look out onto those fields where the drying linen stretches out for miles and miles and I . . .”

Mary knew her father would not finish. He could not put that ache into words, but she often watched the longing in his face as he looked onto the bleaching fields near their home.

He would squint his eyes, and she guessed that he pictured fields of grain like he used to have at home.

But her father always changed the subject away from the sentimental. “It worries me, William, that the English authorities plot to have you returned to England.” Elder Brewster was only a few years younger than her father, but James Chilton took a fatherly interest in all members of the congregation. “You be careful, William Brewster, with that little printing press of yours.”

“Aye. Our *Choir Alley Press* is beginning to rattle a few windows in Merrie Old England.” That was an understatement. The press, sometimes called the *Pilgrim Press*, secretly published several books that infuriated King James and his bishops. Elder Brewster abruptly changed the subject. “So, you are planning on making the move with us then, James?”

Move? Mary dropped her father’s arm. “Move, Father?” Surely she heard wrong. She’d seen no bundles piling up in the hall. “What do you mean, Elder Brewster?”

The elder spoke in a soft voice, “Mary, take your father’s arm. I did not mean to speak out of turn.”

Mary lifted her father’s arm again, and, as he seemed to slump against her, she whispered, “We are almost home, Father.” Elder Brewster’s question still rang in her ears, as she repeated the soothing words, “Almost home.”

A deep ache began to grow in Mary's chest, and no matter how quickly she blinked her eyes, she felt the sting of threatening tears.

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