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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.

ing 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.



Farewell to Leyden

Mary, your father left for Isabella's to finish the last of the *breeches* for *Mynheer* van Blitterswijck. Ingle and Christian hastened to the weavers for cloth. We still have much work to be completed." Mary's mother paused in her sorting and bundling of *doublet* pieces.

Mary sensed there was more, but she waited for her mother to go on. From the sound of Mother's lighthearted movement this morning, it was bound to be good.

"Mistress Tilley invited you to come to their house. She said that Elizabeth could help you *baste* these *interfacings* so that they'll be ready for Father to tailor. Mistress Brewster said that Fear can come as well."

The spring day had already dawned fair, but to Mary it got even brighter. A whole morning spent with her friends Fear and Elizabeth. "Thank you, Mother. We shall work hard."

Mother smiled. "How I wish you did not have to work so

hard, but even with all of us working we barely put aside anything.” She looked toward the open top half of the door, but her eyes did not seem to focus on anything in particular. “If only . . .” Her words drifted off.

“Oh, Mother, I’m happy to help. And when my friends sew with me, ’tis ever so much more fun.”

Mother now stayed home to help with the tailoring—no more going off to the mill each morning. With all of them working—Isabella at her house and Mary and her sisters at home—they were able to satisfy Father’s tailoring customers much sooner.

’Twas not the only change. So much had happened in the year since the rock-throwing incident. Though talk continued off and on about an eventual move, no immediate plans developed. Some in the congregation talked of going to the Virginia colony, but the news coming back from America sounded grim. The rumors included deaths, savages, and starvation. Others in the congregation read of Sir Walter Raleigh’s lush tropical Guiana and wanted to settle there. Mary tried to ignore the talk that circled around their Green Gate congregation.

Elder Brewster had sailed for London a year earlier on business for the congregation. Nearly every morning Father met with Pastor Robinson, Deacon Carver, and the other men to pray for the elder’s safety. The English searched continuously for Elder Brewster. Some of the congregation’s Dutch friends told them to keep a watch out for English officials secretly sent into Holland to find him, but so far God kept Elder Brewster safe. Now he traveled right under English noses.

Farewell to Leyden

No real future existed for the Pilgrims in Leyden. Mary knew that, but she savored her time in Holland. If she could just freeze the rush of time as winter freezes the flow in the canal, she could be happy. As long as Mother did not start bundling their belongings, Mary was content. Bundles piling up in the hall always signaled that change was in the air.

“Mary, come help me sort and stack, so you can be on your way,” Mother said.

“Sorry, Mother.”

“Woolgathering again?” When Mother smiled, her eyes seemed to crinkle into their own merry smiles. “I’m half afraid to mention that Mistress Tilley invited the three of you to stay for dinner and then work the afternoon as well.”

Mary pressed her lips together for fear that no sensible word could possibly form on her lips. She longed to run and jump for the sheer joy of it, but a girl of thirteen no longer hopped around like a child.

Mother packed the market basket with work while Mary pulled her shawl around her shoulders and pinned it. She started to curtsy her good-bye to Mother, but reached out and hugged her instead. Swinging the basket, Mary headed along the canal toward the Hopkins’s home.

She couldn’t help the bounce in her step. The sunshine falling on her face felt warm for spring. She smiled at everyone she met along the way, even the workmen unloading sheaves of thatch from a cart.

Mary hummed the melody of the *Old One-Hundredth*. Before long the words began to form, just as she had learned them from the *Ainsworth Psalter*.



Shout to Jehovah, all the earth;
Serve ye Jehovah with gladness
Before Him come with singing mirth;
Know that Jehovah He God is

She rounded the corner toward Green Gate and hurried to join Fear Brewster at the door of the Tilley cottage. Elizabeth opened the door before they knocked. Mistress Tilley stood behind her.

“Welcome, friends,” said Elizabeth, sounding grown-up. “Come in.”

Elizabeth’s mother laughed. “Elizabeth wants to play the perfect hostess, but I keep telling her ’tis a work party not a merriment.” Mistress Tilley straightened Elizabeth’s cap to cover more of the girl’s soft brown hair.

“It’s merry enough for me,” said Mary. “Thank you for inviting us. Having a whole day to visit will be like the old times when we could play for hours and hours without a care.” Mary stepped inside and felt the warmth of the banked fire.

“I do not remember feeling carefree,” said Fear. “I used to worry that Elizabeth would fall in the canal.” Fear’s eyes always widened when she recalled some of Elizabeth’s hair-raising antics.

“That’s why they named you Fear.” Elizabeth teased Fear about her name, but they all knew it stood for Fear of God. Her parents chose descriptive names—like her younger brother’s name, Love. It was short for Love of God. Her littlest brother was Wrestling, taken from Wrestling with the Devil. Their names afforded them no end of teasing.

“Tis a wonder I did not push you headlong into the canal, Elizabeth,” Fear said.

“Before you two start a brawl, shall I divide up the work?” Mary placed her workbasket on the table.

Each girl claimed her favorite spot on the benches at the table. Mary put the basket of work beside her and handed pieces of corded silk and woolen *interfacing* to her friends. Fear took her *needle case*, *pin poppet*, and *thimble case* out of her embroidered *sweetbag*. The other two settled in and did the same. Their sewing tools numbered among their most prized possessions. Needles and pins were especially *dear*. As the girls talked, they threaded needles and took felted pieces of wool and began to *baste* the felt to the silk outer fabric. Mary showed them how to curve and shape the fabric as they laid in the stitches. They talked and stitched, bending the cloth over their hands just where the curve of a shoulder would come and laying in *basting* stitches to hold the shape.

“Mother decided to cook hodgepodge for dinner,” Elizabeth announced. “And a boiled pudding.”

“Mmmmm.” Mary loved the taste of savory Dutch hodgepodge stew, and nothing was quite as good as a boiled pudding served with butter.

“Father keeps wishing for Indian corn to add to the stew,” Elizabeth said. “When Father’s cousin sailed to Jamestown Colony and back, he brought corn.”

“Indian corn? I thought he starved while he lived in America,” Fear said, looking up from her sewing.

“He didn’t starve all the time.” Elizabeth always managed to bring up their cousin’s travels in America. Very few in their

congregation had traveled far, let alone to the struggling Jamestown Colony.

“Please, let us not talk about faraway places.” Mary wished they could stay in the Tilley’s hall forever. “Maybe the Lord kept your cousin safe so he could come home to his family and so he could tell our congregation about the dangers abroad.”

“But he does not fear the dangers, Mary.” As Elizabeth shook her head, a strand of her hair loosened from under her *coif*. “He yearns for the rich land of America.” She finished a side panel and reached for another.

Mary frowned, stabbing her needle into the fabric with an audible clink as it jammed against her thimble.

Elizabeth tilted her head as if she did not understand. “Mary, surely you know that Elder Brewster and Deacon Cushman already received our *patent* to journey to Virginia.” She paused, looking hard at Mary. “All that remains is to buy a ship and arrange for provisions.”

Fear spoke gently, “I thought you knew, Mary. The men talk about it at every gathering.”

Mary smoothed her work and wove the needle into the lining for safekeeping. Placing her piece in the workbasket, she stood up without responding and politely excused herself. Let her friends assume she went outside to the *privy*. Mary could not bear to sit a moment longer. Her stomach felt hollow. *Leaving Holland? Could this be true? Maybe our family will not be going—after all, Father is sixty-three years old. He is the oldest man in the congregation.*

And what about my sisters? Isabella has two little children—she just started her life. Surely she will stay in Holland. Ingle’s

Farewell to Leyden

Robert lives in Leyden, as does Christian's beau. Would they leave?

The once-sunny day dimmed. As Mary walked between the canal and the Hopkins's cottage, she ran hands along the brick wall—humming a sad bumpity-bumpity song from days long gone.

Am I the only one to feel like a dandelion puff about to be blown to the wind? Mary looked up in time to see a stork flying to the nest above the roof. A verse she had once memorized from Scripture came suddenly to mind: *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

So I'm not the only one to feel this way, thought Mary, as she walked back into the hall filled with savory smells and quiet conversation. It helped to remember that her Lord knew.



Her friends were right. Three months later Mary sorted through belongings with her mother and sisters, bundling the essentials and stacking them in the passageway. The Chiltons had decided to join the first wave of Pilgrims traveling to the New World.

Not all the Chiltons, thought Mary. *How will I ever say farewell to Isabella?* Her oldest sister yearned to come, but her children were still so little. Roger told her they would join the congregation in America later. Each time Mary saw Isabella, they reminded each other that someday they would be together again. It did not help stem the sadness.

Even worse, Ingle and Christian had decided to stay in

Holland. Mary refused to even think about the days ahead of them. The few times she contemplated the farewells with her sisters, her chest tightened till she could barely draw breath. She wondered if a heart could really break; hers felt as if a cruel hand encircled it, ever squeezing, tighter and tighter.

Yesterday the congregation had called a day of Solemn Humiliation. That meant that the entire day was spent in deep prayer or, as Pastor Robinson instructed, a time for “pouring out prayers to the Lord with great fervency mixed with an abundance of tears.”

Mary contributed plenty to the abundance of tears. During a break in the service, Mary and her friends walked along Stink Alley together—trying to keep from declaring everything a “one last time” event.

Elizabeth walked ahead. Mary held Fear’s hand.

“How shall we live without you, Fear?” Mary couldn’t bear that Fear must stay behind to help care for those of the Brewster family left in Holland.

“We’ve talked long and we’ve talked hard. We cannot all go. We truly do not have the funds.” Fear sighed deeply and spoke slowly, as if she were explaining it to a child.

Mary knew that Fear had explained it too many times already. “I know,” Mary said, squeezing her friend’s hand. “But it does not make it easier, does it?”

The Green Gate congregation had hard decisions to make. Pastor Robinson declared that if more than half the congregation decided to go to America, he would go with them. If less than half went, Elder Brewster would accompany them. As the numbers were tallied, Pastor Robinson was to remain in Holland.

Farewell to Leyden

“The worst part,” Fear said, “is that I cannot bid farewell to my father.” Elder Brewster hid in England—he was still a wanted man. He planned to find a way to slip aboard the ship while docked in England.

“Tell me what you wish to say to him, and I promise I shall deliver your exact words.”

Fear said nothing for several minutes. “I want to ponder this, Mary. I wish to find the perfect words. Thank you for your offer.”

Fear and Mary caught up with Elizabeth and headed back toward the Meeting House. As they entered, they heard the swell of mournful singing from the pages of the Psalter.

Pastor Robinson opened the Bible to Ezra 8:21 and read, “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.”



Mary stepped out of the canal boat onto the landing berth at Delft Haven. Leyden lay far behind. Father hoisted bundle after bundle, containing all their worldly possessions, onto a *dray* headed to the ship waiting in the Delft harbor.

A row of canal boats floated on the River Maas, anchored alongside Mary's. The whole Leyden congregation came to see the Pilgrims off. Mary could not bear to look at faces. She reached down and scooped up a handful of soil. *Truth be told, I never belonged to Holland, but Holland worked its way into my heart.*

She could not bring herself to cast the soil down, so she

wrapped it in her hankie and tucked it deep into her leather pouch.

Pastor Robinson fell to his knees, and everyone did the same as he committed the little band of Pilgrims to the Lord. As the prayers ended, the group silently looked 'round the circle. Mary tried to memorize each face. She could not help but wonder if this would be their last time together this side of eternity.

Mistress Brewster stood with her two young boys, Love and Wrestling. Tears streamed down her face as she kissed her three older children good-bye.

Mary could put it off no longer. Her sisters had already bid wrenching farewells to their parents. Mary hugged Isabella and Roger and the babies. "Next year, Isabella," Mary insisted. "Next year you will come to America."

"Aye, Little Sister. Aye." Isabella could say no more. As she pulled away, she pressed a twine-wrapped bundle into Mary's hands. "For America, Mary."

"Write letters to us if you can," Mary said to Ingle and Christian. "We must not lose each other. I will watch for each ship, praying that it brings word from you."

Mary watched her sisters huddle together. Over the last few weeks they had all talked about being brave, but now that the time for parting had come, the Chiltons wept openly.

As Mary and her parents began to move toward the *Speedwell* docked at the *quay*, Fear rushed up to embrace her friend. "Tell my father that I love him," she whispered, "and that I will care for things in Holland. Tell him that I will walk with the Lord, and I will come to America as soon as he sends for me."

"I will tell him those things," Mary said. "I promise."

Farewell to Leyden

As she picked up a bundle and headed toward the *quay*, Mary prayed, “Keep them safe, Father. And keep us safe as well.”

Later, as the *Speedwell* headed out toward the North Sea, Mary took one last look at the beautiful Delft Haven and added another short prayer. “And, Lord, let me find a place to belong—to really belong.”