













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.