



# Contents

Acknowledgments	9
1. Nothing but a Girl	11
2. Something on the Wind	23
3. Hallelujahs Coming	33
4. More than Religion	43
5. Forever Changed	53
6. Changing Lives	63
7. Fiery Faith	75
8. Farewells	87
9. Little Number One	101
10. Opening Fire in America	117
11. Light a Fire	127
12. Taking Hold	137
Epilogue	145
Glossary	147



## Nothing but a Girl

“Nothin’ but a girl,” the boy mocked in a singsong chant as he ran into the alley. Black coal dust covered his face, save for pink circles around his eyes and mouth. His empty lunch tin banged the brick building as he cut the corner. “Yer nothin’ but a girl!”

Eliza turned away from him, clearly ignoring him. He’d been taunting her for most of her fifteen years.

“Eliza Shirley,” Beck said as they continued on, “are you going to let him mock you that way every time we come out here to run an errand?” Eliza’s friend Beck was nothing if not loyal.

“What good would it do to argue?” Eliza wished she could keep from letting the likes of Jack Sipes rattle her. With a shake of her head, she said, “I keep trying to ignore him—he’s so annoying! He’ll say anything to get me stirred. If I let him see me riled, he’ll only grow bolder.”

“Why does he tease you?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s just a habit.”

Before Jack went to work in the coal pits at the Coventry Colliery, he had attended free school with Eliza. Each time the schoolmistress called Eliza to the front of the schoolroom for recitation, she could see Jack mouthing those same words from the back of the room—“nothing but a girl.”

“He left school, but he still heckles me whenever he sees me on the street,” Eliza said.

“I still don’t see why,” Beck said. “He never bothers me.”

“I don’t know. I never tried to be anything more than a proper girl.” Eliza paused. “I confess it bothers me, though I don’t know why.” Eliza noticed he often seemed to be around when she had to venture into the mill district. “I’d like to know when Jack Sipes works!”

“All those boys work—and they work hard—but when they are off work, they do seem to look for trouble,” Beck said.

Not that it would be hard to find—the street teemed with trouble. Hungry-looking children darted in and out of alleyways. Eliza watched one boy, with an even smaller girl in tow, lurking near the entrance of a building. He couldn’t have been more than six or seven years old and wore clothes so tattered the *rag picker* would’ve discarded them. Eliza watched him cup his hand to beg a *farthing* or two off a merchant dressed in ruffles and tight *breeches*. She flinched as the man cuffed the boy out of the way and was dismayed when, without even looking to see where the child landed, the man pulled out a handkerchief to wipe the back of his hand where it came into contact with the boy.

“We shouldn’t dawdle in this part of town.” Eliza shud-

dered. She linked her arm through Beck's and pulled her along, as if to hurry her out of the rough streets.

Eliza couldn't avoid these streets. There was no way to get to the mill without traveling through the squalor of the mill district when she carried a message to her father at work.

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught movement before she heard noise. Three grimy boys ran past the girls, chasing an old dog. They'd tied pieces of tin to the dog's tail. The jangle of the tin against the cobbles, the whimpers of the frightened dog, and the taunts of the boys added to the racket of the street.

"Stop!" Eliza yelled at the trio as she picked up her skirts and *crinolines* and ran after the boys. She nearly slipped in a slimy puddle that must have come from a *slops bucket* emptied out the window. *Yuck!* The thought of the foul mess soaking her hem nearly made her retch, but she forced herself to put it out of her mind and keep going. She managed to catch the shirttail of the littlest boy.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"What's it to ya?"

"You were being cruel to that dog."

"He don't belong to no one." The boy wriggled out of her grasp. "Sides, you can't tell me what to do." He jerked out of her grip and darted off.

Beck caught up with Eliza just as she tried to decide whether to give chase again.

"It's a lost cause, Lizzie," Beck said.

"I know, but I hate to see an old dog terrified." She looked down at the stain wicking higher on her hem. She needed to get home and change clothes. What was wrong with her? She had jumped into the fray to help an old dog

while a few minutes before she ignored a man striking a hungry child.

“Those boys’ll tire of it soon, and you needn’t worry,” Beck said, as they continued toward home. “A tinker will gratefully untie the dog to salvage those pieces of tin.” She lifted her skirts, sidestepping an oily pile of fur. The decaying rodentlike smell implied a dead rat.

“Don’t even tell me what that was.” Eliza looked the other way, willing her stomach to unclench.

“Doesn’t it seem like the mill workers and *colliers* get worse and worse?” Beck observed. “Their children as well. More profane and somehow bolder, and yet . . .”

“And yet?” Eliza waited for Beck to finish.

“And yet I sense a change coming—almost like a breeze blowing through.”

“A change? What kind of change?” Eliza looked around at the confusion and couldn’t see anything different.

“I wish I knew. I just feel as if we are on a cusp—standing at a turning point.”

“Oh, Beck, you and your notions.” Eliza laughed, but she knew her friend. Beck paid attention to things and, more often than not, her notions were spot on.

Eliza had grown up in Coventry, but there were many parts of the city she dared not enter alone. The swearing, drinking, gambling—and probably much worse—took place right on the streets and in the alleys. Wagons still rolled down the middle of the lanes, but the horses flinched and side-stepped with the confusion of zigzagging street urchins and hungry dogs. Eliza always felt skittish herself when in this part of town.

As they drew closer to home, the streets grew noticeably cleaner, and the evening sounds of carriages and *costermongers* replaced barking dogs and drunken brawls.

“Beck, do you ever wonder what life would have been like if we had to go to work in the mill instead of finishing our studies?”

“We are fortunate indeed. My da tells me about mothers trying to get their kids on at the mill when they are seven or eight years old. They lie about their ages.” Beck’s father worked at the mill where Eliza’s father was foreman.

Eliza shook her head and made a clicking noise with her tongue. “They’re not supposed to start them until they are at least nine.” She thought of those boys torturing the old dog and wondered if the streets were any better for them than the mill.

“Da says they hate to turn away the little children coming in for work. If they don’t work, they may not get anything to eat.”

“But they need to get a year or two of school in first.”

“Indeed, they ought to be in school, but if they’re not taken on at the mill, they’ll likely end up in the coal pits.” Beck sighed. “I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. Your father must see the same thing.”

“Papa doesn’t talk about it.” And Eliza tried not to dwell on it. “He doesn’t like to burden mother and me.”

Beck didn’t say anything, and they walked silently for a while.

Eliza reached out to run her hand along the iron railing on a fence. She loved feeling the bump, bump, bump against her gloved fingers. “One time Papa gave me an especially

pretty *jacquard* ribbon. When I commented on the pattern, he shrugged it off as if the ribbon vexed him. Said that the company claims to make silk ribbons of ‘unsurpassed beauty,’ but he couldn’t see past the ugliness that went into the making.”

“I know,” Beck said, nodding. “The youngest children start as scavengers.” Beck looked at Eliza in that piercing way. “Lizzie, the machinery is still running while they crawl around under it. If a child’s hair should get caught . . .”

Though they had been best friends for years, Beck—whose real name was Elizabeth Pearson—still surprised Eliza. At fourteen, Beck was a full year younger than Eliza, but she was much more knowing. She was strong and blunt and took pride in meeting things head-on.

How different they were. Eliza didn’t mind not knowing. In fact, she preferred not knowing about ugly things. Eliza looked at Beck’s strong hands and heard the timbre in her voice. She looked down at her own undersized, fluttery hands gloved in pale kid leather. Somehow Jack’s words crept back, *nothing but a girl*.

Being an only child, she knew her parents *cosseted* her. It never bothered Eliza one bit. She longed to live amid beauty and calm. She wasn’t alone. All of gentle English society in 1878, under the example of proper Queen Victoria, worked hard at embracing beauty and calm.

“Do we have to keep talking about this?” Eliza hated the whine she heard in her voice. She ran her hands down her skirt, smoothing the fabric.

“No.” Beck let her shoulders droop. “Besides, I can always tell when you become upset. You smooth your skirts until they’re practically plastered against your legs.”

Eliza plumped her skirts out, arranged her *reticule* on her wrist, and clasped her hands together. “I *do* care. It’s just that I have a bold imagination coupled with a delicate stomach. I want to care without hearing details.”

“Don’t worry, Lizzie. I’m just as bad. I may talk about it, but I do precious little to change things,” Beck said. “After all, ’twasn’t I who went chasing like a *hoyden* after a ragtag bunch of *guttersnipes*.”

Eliza blushed. “Speaking of changing things, I have a new *chipstraw* bonnet, and Papa brought home a long *tartan grosgrain* ribbon. Want to have tea and help me trim my new bonnet?”

Beck laughed. “And tell me again why it bothers you to have Jack accuse you of being a girl?”

Eliza pinched Beck. “There’s nothing wrong with being a girl. I’ve worked very hard to learn to be a proper girl.”

Beck rolled her eyes. “What, pray tell, is a proper girl?”

“Elizabeth Pearson!” Eliza stopped abruptly and turned to face her friend, causing Beck to bump into her. “With all the hours we’ve spent reading *The Habits of Good Society* and all the years we’ve spent practicing the art of proper address, modesty, and womanly arts—how can you even jest?”

Beck just laughed, grabbed Eliza’s arm, and pulled her along.



Later that evening when Eliza put the hat trimmings back into the *linen press*, she lifted out the tiny beribboned cap Mum had made for her christening. She fingered its softness.



She had long heard the story of her birth—how her parents and grandparents were delighted at long last to welcome a baby girl. Mum and Papa often said that, though they came from good church-going families, it was not until Eliza was a toddler that they knelt at the altar to commit themselves and their family to God. Since that day, they did not hold with a Sunday-only faith. Eliza’s mother always liked to say that she had a fiery religion. “I was born in the fire and cannot live in the smoke.”

Papa and Mum doted on Eliza. When her father became a part-time preacher, the congregation loved her as well—definitely a nice way to grow up. While the Shirleys were not wealthy, food was always plentiful and their home comfortable. In truth, Eliza could not recall ever doing without something she wanted.

She had few clear memories of those early years, but she did remember gathering up the silk skirts on her Sunday dress and sitting gingerly on the edge of the rough pew. She always tried to be careful not to crease the intricate drape of her skirt or the tiny pleats around the hem. As Papa began his sermon, she hooked and unhooked the ankle button boots that matched her dress. She learned to do it with nimble, patient fingers instead of the usual buttonhook. Her father laughed when he saw unbuttoned shoes after church—always pretending to believe she couldn’t have done it herself. He’d turn to Mum and say, “Annie, she’s too little. Somebody must have crawled under the pew and unbuttoned Lizzie’s shoes.”

Eliza still remembered standing in the *narthex* with her hands on her hips, nearly stomping her foot out of an unbuttoned boot as she replied, “I do it. Lizzie big.”

Eliza loved pretty things. Some of her first memories were color and smell memories—like the scent of the moss rose climbing over the stone wall in the garden and the colors of the silk floss in her mother’s needlework basket. The feel of things mattered to her as well—smooth fabrics against her skin; starched petticoats; crisp ringlets bump-bumping against her ear. Her mother understood. Mum used to roll her eyes in pretend frustration and say, “It’s a good thing Eliza is an only child since those ringlets take two curling irons and the hottest of fires.”

Despite her delight in finery, Eliza’s clearest memory centered on her father’s sermons. Even before she could read, she learned that the way to keep attentive during the long hour was to try to memorize the whole thing. She worked hard to remember the words, repeating them over and over when her father paused.

Parishioners often remarked to her father about Eliza’s “proper *comportment*” during service. It was sheer concentration, not manners. As she got older, she tried to figure out the bones of his sermon; for as soon as she uncovered the structure, it was much easier to put the parts together. Her parents were amazed at her ability to memorize whole sermons and then mimic her father’s delivery. To this day, she could still repeat many of his sermons.

She’d never forget the time, at the age of twelve, when she walked down the aisle of her father’s church in response to a particularly inspiring sermon. As she fell to her knees, she repeated—word for word—some of the stirring phrases from Papa’s sermon. Her mother cried and, afterward, Beck kept hugging Eliza, practically crushing her skirts. She loved it.

“Oh, Lizzie. I’ve been praying for you for the longest time,” Beck said. “Now you’re saved.” Beck’s strong faith and bold way of stating things always made Eliza feel a little uncomfortable.

“It was an effective message, was it not?”

Beck looked confused. “I’m talking about your profession of faith, not your father’s sermon.”

“Yes, well . . . I’m going to work hard to live up to my father’s challenge.”

Beck didn’t answer.

Nearly a year afterward, while walking home from school, Beck asked her friend about that day. Eliza just laughed in a playful way. “I tried getting forgiveness for sin and following Jesus, but it just didn’t work out quite right.” She shrugged her shoulders. “I’ll just keep working out my salvation as I go—one little piece at a time.”

“Work it out?”

“A little bit at a time.” Eliza laughed and poked a teasing finger at her friend. “Truth be told, coming before God and confessing sinfulness takes more boldness than a gently bred girl can muster.”

Beck said little as they continued their walk to school.



Those memories seemed long past. Now that Eliza was fifteen, she had finished with her studies. Her job was to learn the womanly arts—things like sewing, cooking, mending, cleaning, making soap and candles, and mastering fancy needlework. She also helped her mother call on the church

members and take baskets to the sick and aged. For the most part she loved it and worked hard to please her mother.

The most fun, however, came when Beck called for a visit.

“Lizzie, come out to the garden. Let’s talk.”

Eliza took a basket of socks that needed darning. It was cool in early March, but buds could be seen swelling on many of the branches. She looked at the tangle of vines along the garden wall. In early summer they’d be covered with roses, but on this chilly day she found it hard to believe those dry vines held the promise of such fragrant treasure. For now, the smell of wood chimney fires hung over the garden.

“Are you out paying calls, Beck?”

“Indeed not. That sounds so grown-up.” Beck poked her. “But I guess we’re far too old to say I came to play.”

“Play sounds nice. Sometimes I think I’ll be cooking and cleaning the rest of my life.”

“I thought you loved those things!”

Eliza pulled a holey sock over the smooth wooden darning egg. “I do. Truly.” She jabbed the needle into the sock.

“Well, it’s a fact that we’ll do our share of cooking and cleaning during our lifetimes, but sometimes I pray, asking God for more—for a bigger assignment.”

“Beck!” Sometimes her friend said things that shocked Eliza.

Beck leaned in closer as she changed the subject, “Remember when I told you I sensed a change in the air?”

“I remember the day, though I don’t remember what made you say that.”

“Just a feeling,” Beck said. “Anyway, I just came back from taking dinner to my father at the mill.”

“You went alone?”

“Lizzie, I am not afraid.” Beck spoke those words as if speaking to a not-so-bright child. “I’m a big girl—strong—with a loud voice and fast feet. I’m not about to let a few ruffians keep me from doing what I need to do.”

Eliza laughed. “I guess they wouldn’t want to tangle with you after all.”

“As I walked through the streets, I sensed something on the wind—more than ever.” Beck stopped as if thinking.

“What?” Eliza dropped her sock into the basket and set it on the bench. “Don’t stop now—you’ve got my curiosity stirred.”

“I wish I knew. I saw genteel women dressed in black talking to the roughest of characters twice today. I wanted to find out what they were about, but I wasn’t fast enough.”

“Strange indeed.”

“I know.” Beck sounded perplexed. “If this weren’t jolly old England, I’d almost suspect a revolution about to happen.”

“Goodness, Beck. You’re letting your imagination run wild.”

“No, Lizzie. I know it’s not a revolution but it is *something*.” She shook her head as if trying to shake out the cobwebs. “Without a doubt, it is *something*.”



## Something on the Wind

*I*t's indecent, that's what it are." The charwoman who came to clean house for the Shirley family always had the latest news.

"And wot's so indecent, Sadie?" the dustman asked.

"Aven't ye seen the bills plastered all over town?" Sadie asked, stopping her work.

"Nay. Can't say that I 'ave." The dustman scratched his head. "You mean playbills?"

"That I do, but not for any play, mind you."

Eliza couldn't believe she was eavesdropping. When spring-cleaning time came around, Mum would often arrange to have the dustman or the sweep come at the same time as Sadie—and it made for lively conversation.

"Eliza?" Mum called from upstairs. "Surely you've not finished applying the beeswax and turpentine to the furniture in the front bedroom."

"Not yet." How did Mum always know? Now Eliza lost

her chance to hear about these indecent posters. Whatever could Sadie have been talking about? Eliza would have to find out for herself.

“When I’m finished waxing the furniture, may I call on Beck?” she asked.

“You’ll change to an afternoon gown first, won’t you?” Mum still held to the formal etiquette of social calls. “With Sadie here, I’ll manage without you.”

“May I wear the striped *shirtwaist* and *bengaline* skirt instead?” If she and Beck were to uncover this mystery, she’d want to be dressed comfortably.

“Since it’s to be the Pearsons’, it won’t hurt, I suppose.” Mum rarely said no. “Finish off the furniture and then change quickly or you’ll be too late for proper tea time.”

With a little added elbow grease, it didn’t take long for Eliza to finish her work. She put on a warm *spencer* and bonnet.

Despite the early spring chill, the street was full. Eliza lived in a neighborhood of merchants and clerks, but they often copied the *gentry* in habits—like taking an afternoon *promenade* or making and receiving calls—social visits—during tea. Today, Eliza could sense that the gossips were at work, even though she couldn’t quite hear the tittle-tattle.

Long before she reached Beck’s house, she saw a gaggle of women, heads together, twittering about something. Once in a while she’d catch a phrase, like “Well, I never . . .” or “Land sakes . . .”

Whatever it was, Eliza knew it was *something*.

She didn’t even need to reach the Pearsons’ street. As she rounded a corner, she nearly bumped into Beck.

“I was coming to call on you,” Beck sounded breathless.  
“And I you.” Eliza pulled Beck back toward an ornamental iron fence to let a merchant with a cart go by. “You must have heard the talk.”

“I have. The bills are all over the mill district.”

“What bills?”

“I thought you knew! What have you heard?”

“All I’ve heard are snippets here and there. Everyone seems to be talking, and I cannot seem to catch any details.” Eliza grabbed her friend. “Beck, tell me!”

“I’ll do better than tell you. This you’ll need to see with your very own eyes.” Beck grabbed Eliza’s arm and pulled her toward the shop streets in midtown.

The usual noise and confusion seemed amplified to Eliza. Something was different. Voices were raised and arguments seemed to sprout up everywhere.

“There.” Beck pointed to a poster—the kind they called a bill—tacked to a tree.

Eliza read the words out loud, “Come! Hear! Free!” Eliza leaned in as she read the next words, “Preaching Ladies for Jesus.”

“Keep reading,” Beck prodded.

“What do you mean ‘keep reading’? What is this about?” Eliza’s voice got higher. She ran her hands down the side of her *bengaline* skirt as she mechanically finished reading, “Theatre Royal, 8 P.M. Sundays. Salvation Factory, 8 P.M. weekdays.”

“I knew you’d never believe it unless you saw it for yourself.”

“But what does it mean, Beck? Women can’t preach.”



“That’s what has everyone all stirred up. This group—Christian Mission, I think—does indeed have women who preach.”

Eliza remembered the cleaning woman’s word—*indecent*. “That’s hardly proper,” she said. “And at a theater? No wonder people are in an uproar.”

“Oh, Lizzie, it’s far more than an uproar. My da tells me there have been riots ever since these preaching ladies arrived on Valentine’s Day.”

“Riots?”

“Fights and brawls break out wherever they go. Da says they preach on the street corners, and they’re not afraid to go after the worst of the worst.”

“What does he mean by that?”

“Come. Let’s walk. Want to visit the confectioner on Spon Street?” Beck loved sweets. “We’ll talk along the way.”

Eliza opened her *reticule* to make sure she had enough coins to pay for a sweet or two. “What else did your father say?”

“He said the constables are called nearly every night. Lizzie, people are getting saved—and I’m not talking about church people.”

“Why am I the last one to hear about this?” Eliza wondered how all this scandal swirled around her without her even knowing.

Beck laughed. “I thought you said you liked not knowing.”

Eliza meant to jab her friend in the ribs, but she hit her elbow wrong on Beck’s *corset stay*. “Ouch! I can’t even elbow you properly.” She laughed in spite of the sharp pain. “So tell me about these meetings.”

“I don’t know much more than that. Da said some of the

roughest characters among the mill workers have been attending the meetings,” Beck said. “At first they went out of curiosity.”

“And then?”

“Some of them have changed—truly changed. That’s what’s caused the talk. If it weren’t for the fights and the public conversions of notorious characters, these meetings would have closed already.”

As they turned the corner, the row of shops in Old Spon End came into view. The scent of fresh baked bread, bundles of dried lavender, and freshly tanned leather mingled with metallic smells coming from the *apothecary*. The confectionary was the last shop on the row.

“*Marzipan*,” Beck said.

“Pardon?” Eliza must have missed the first part of Beck’s statement.

“*Marzipan*. I’m going to get one of those sugarplums made of *marzipan*.”

“Have you been thinking about candy all this time?” Eliza loved the way Beck could jump from one thought to the next.

“At least I won’t have to decide what to get once we get there.”

A bell tinkled as they opened the door. The scent of rich chocolate helped Eliza narrow her choices. “I’ll take toffee.” The shopkeeper cut a piece of waxy paper and rolled it into a cone, filling one with Beck’s *marzipan* and the other with toffee. Eliza removed her gloves before counting out her coins. She tucked the gloves in her *reticule* since she planned to eat her chocolates on the way home.

“I shall attend.” Beck announced as they walked toward midtown. She bit into a piece of *marzipan* shaped and colored like a plum. “Mmmm.”

“That *marzipan* cannot possibly be as good as this toffee.” Eliza looked around to see if anyone watched before putting her thumb and forefinger to her mouth to lick the chocolate off. “What will you attend?”

“The preaching ladies’ meeting.”

Eliza stopped walking. “You cannot be serious, Elizabeth Pearson.” Why should she be surprised at anything Beck did? Her friend was nothing if not original. “I’ll admit that I’m curious, but if there are rough characters and fights, ’tis truly no place for a properly bred girl.”

“Remember when I told you I sensed something changing?”

“I remember.”

“I’m sure this is the change. Don’t you think the air almost vibrates with excitement?” Beck was quiet for a time before saying, “Lizzie, I know you don’t feel the same way about your faith as I do. Remember when I told you how I long to go deeper—to be able to do something important?” Beck paused again. “Oh, I don’t know how to explain this.”

“All I know is that I think it’s indecent to have women parading as preachers.” Eliza rolled the end of her cornucopia and put the toffee into her *reticule*. She took out her gloves and pulled them on, working each finger into the leather. “If women preachers were proper, I could dredge up all the sermons I memorized as a child and put on a remarkable show.”

“Do you truly see it as nothing more than a spectacle?”

“Oh, fiddle, I don’t know.” Eliza flicked an imaginary

speck off her glove, dismissing the discussion. “We need to get back.”

Eliza watched Beck’s resolute strides—her head moving and her eyes open to everything around her. She always needed to experience everything for herself. They were so different—and not just in size and looks. She found Beck handsome, although most people described her as strong and plain.

When Eliza’s parents’ friends and parishioners described her, she’d overhear words like delicate, graceful, refined, or diminutives like little, dainty, and sweet. Though she longed to be a proper lady and bring honor to her parents, there were times when her own prissiness practically gagged her. What would it be like to be strong and plain? Somehow it sounded so honest and so true.

No, it wasn’t just looks. Much of the time it seemed as if she and Beck spoke a different language. *I just wish she didn’t seem so fanatical about religion. Sometimes she makes me feel as if there’s something lacking in me.* Eliza kept walking, smoothing the fabric of her skirts with each step.

“Mum, have you heard about the preaching ladies?” Eliza and her mother sat in the *parlor*. With the cleaning finished, they worked on needlework. Eliza stitched an intricate embroidery design onto a piece of fine handkerchief linen. Her mother worked on a piece of mummy cloth, experimenting with one of the new counted-stitch Turkish designs done in metallic thread. A fire blazed and crackled in the fireplace.

“Indeed. Coventry can talk of little else these days.”

“Beck is going.”

“Going?”

“She says she’s going to attend one of the meetings in the Salvation Factory—that’s what they now call the old coach factory on Much Park Street.” Eliza tied off her thread, wove the end into the design, and snipped it off close. She cut a new piece of silk and threaded the needle, knotting the end. “I can’t think that her parents will let her go, but she wants me to join her.”

Just the thought of the so-called Salvation Factory raised Eliza’s curiosity. With so many old, historic churches in Coventry—like St. John’s over on Fleet Street—what would entice anyone to crowd into a rundown old factory-turned-meeting-hall?

None of it made any sense, but Eliza could not keep herself from thinking about it. Ever since she saw the poster, she had thought of little else. Women preachers? Riots? Derelict buildings? Nothing would suffice save to experience it in person. She reasoned that hers was only an intellectual interest. She needed to satisfy her curiosity once and for all.

Mum laid down her needlework. “Your father and I plan to attend a meeting on Sunday evening at the theater. Father tells of amazing changes in some of his workers, and he wants to see for himself.”

“May I go along?”

“Let us go first. I’m not sure if it’s fitting for a young lady.” Mum laughed. “Truth to tell, I’m not sure what’s fitting anymore. But we’ll see. . . . I must say, however, that I do prefer a fiery sort of religion and, by all accounts, those Hallelujahs are not shy about their faith.”



“Hallelujahs?”

“Indeed. That’s what they are calling those preaching ladies—Hallelujah Lassies.”

“For the past *fornight* or so, Beck said she felt a change coming,” Eliza said. Change was the topic on everyone’s lips these days. “Why can’t everything just stay the same?”

“Sometimes it takes a change to shake us out of our sluggishness. Like a boat moored in the harbor—it could float there forever until a storm roars up and breaks the tether, sending it on an adventure.” Mum picked up her needlework again and began to count out the stitches. “Sometimes I feel forever moored in a calm sea.”

Eliza looked hard at her mother. Could she be like Beck—wishing for more? “I, for one, do not mind a calm sea. Floating gently in harbor sounds delightful. There’s little I dislike more than upheaval.”

“I’m not fond of upheaval, either.” Her mother continued to count and stitch for a time. “Two, three, four . . . Have you heard any of the rumors about the mill?”

*Rumors? About the mill?* Eliza’s stomach clenched. How could her mother so calmly bring up such a big subject in such an offhand way?

Her mother looked up at her. “Don’t look so stricken, Pet.” Mum put her hand over Eliza’s. “Your father does not like to worry us, but when you talked about change in the air, I wondered if perchance you caught some talk around town.” She stopped to count, “Two, three, four,” poking her needle into the fabric. “The silk industry in the whole of England is depressed. Though Coventry still limps along, your father hears story after story of mill closings in other regions.”

Eliza stood up and walked over toward the fire, smoothing her hands down the sides of her skirt. “And Papa’s mill?”

“They’ve had to let some weavers go, but so far they still have business. So far . . .”

Eliza thought of all the men she saw during the daytime over near the mills. Had they been let go?

“I daresay there’s no sense fretting over the future.” Eliza’s mother adjusted the lamp flame as she jabbed her needle into the cloth again. “Two, three, four.”

Eliza thought about her mother’s example of the boat safely tethered in the harbor. Somehow, she could almost sense a storm kicking up. Without a doubt, something was rocking her boat. *Forget adventure. I prefer the placid waters of the harbor.*