

STANDING  
ON THE  
GIANT'S  
GRAVE  
PAUL  
DUTHIE

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# *For Margaret*

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And the deeper secret within the secret:  
The land that is nowhere, that is the true home.

*The Secret of the Golden Flower*



# 1

*I am thirty-one years old. I have in one of my drawers a purse with eighteen guineas and two seven shilling pieces; there are two twenty shilling notes in a pocket book; in my workbox is my Will. I must be careful with every penny until I learn how far thirty-six pounds a year will go.*

*And I have this journal. I like to feel its weight and to smell its green leather binding. Like my future its creamy-white pages are blank. What will fill them is as yet unknown. I'm quite sure it is of little consequence to the world who I am, let alone who my parents were or what my life holds for me, but it will occupy the lonely hours ahead when my only other employment would be a tedious piece of sewing. In a month I leave and I am determined never to return. So I shall begin by writing an account of my life here. The fire sparks and flares. It is very quiet. It must be cold outside. I reach for the subtle comfort of the quill, the intoxicating smell of ink, the pleasure of paper. I search for my earliest memories.*

## **Up Holland 1784–1808**

At the soft knock at the door, my mother rose immediately but let the servant answer it. Her face was full of apprehension at the sight of Mr Hinde whose son she knew was abroad in the Indies. He was a corpulent, wine-faced man with snowy hair and whiskers. Self-conscious before my mother, he coughed unnecessarily.

‘We have heard from James, Mrs Weeton. He writes from Jamaica,’ he said in an unsteady voice. He took a letter from his breast pocket. Its whiteness made it something almost obscene in the room.

My mother crumpled onto one end of the sofa and shielded her face with both hands. She seemed suddenly smaller as if deep within her something had collapsed or broken. Her lips had turned almost as white as the letter Mr Hinde held. His fingers trembled. I remember his big strong hands shaking.

My mother's voice when it came was strange. I would not have recognised it if I had been in the next room. 'Laura,' she almost croaked, 'please take Ellen upstairs and check that Tom is still asleep.'

My mother would never be young again.

Laura gently bundled me out of my mother's sight. I was frightened. My mother had frightened me. Mr Hinde's trembling fingers had frightened me. 'What's happened, Laura?' I asked when we were in my tiny room.

She put her good, kind arms around me.

'Something dreadful, Missy.'

I hid my face in her starched apron smelling of soap and cleanness. I had seen that Laura too was frightened.

She stayed with me for some time sitting quietly on the edge of my bed. When she rose to leave, she picked up a little book from a chest of drawers where she had placed the candle and put it under my pillow. My father had given it to me the last time he was at home. When I sat for my portrait so that he might take it to sea with him, the artist thought it would look too stiff in a painting, but I would accept neither dolls nor dogs, and insisted on Papa's little storybook. In the darkness my fingers sought its hard comforting edges.

I woke to find my mother sitting on my bedroom chair near the window. She was crying quietly. Her grief-drawn face was like chalk in the half-light.

'Poor Nelly,' she said, 'you have no father.'

My mother had never called me Nelly before. It had always been my father's pet name for me.



The house was changed. My mother was changed. Men, their faces solemn and carrying papers tied with ribbon, came one evening and spoke in serious undertones to her at the big table. I was told that we were now poor. The few pence I offered my mother from the battered tin I kept in my drawer did not bring the response I had anticipated. I was rewarded with no more than a sad, forced smile.



It was a long time before I was able to piece together the stories my mother told me about my father's life. His parents had both died when he was still young and he went to live with his Aunt Gibson and her avaricious and miserly husband. He soon tired of drudging for them and bound himself as apprentice to a ship's captain in Lancaster as soon as he was old enough to run away. When he married my mother he was captain of a merchantman engaged in the African slave trade. With the outbreak of the American War, Rawlinsons, important and wealthy merchants, commissioned him to command a vessel carrying a Letter of Marque. In this vessel he sailed and took many prizes. He returned and was loaded with congratulations for his bravery. My mother told us that they were as happy with each other as any couple in existence. I was born on Christmas Day 1776, and although I was always called Ellen, I had been christened by the name of Nelly. My father was at sea on his favourite ship *Nelly* and my mother thought to win his affection for me by naming me after it, as she had heard him say that he wished all his children to be

boys. I was for some time the only child. We lived in a smart new cottage at the top of Church Street in Lancaster and my mother was anxious for my father to realise his fortune so he could resign from such a dangerous employment and settle at home. When I was four my brother Thomas was born. My father did not see him for over a year, but he now intended giving up seafaring for good. Unfortunately, Rawlinsons would not hear of it, but promised that if he would embark on one final voyage he should find on his return all the accounts settled and his prize money ready for him. My father accepted. A half-remembered scene remains in my mind. It was the evening before he sailed. I see my parents, standing before open, long windows. There are distinct sounds – a band in the street – people, colours. Voices give repeated cheers from outside in the dark-grey air. I see, or perhaps I want to see, my mother peering up into my father's face, smiling her pride. We never saw him again.

For some months merchants brought glowing accounts of my father's valour and successes. What my mother thought and felt during this time, I have no notion. I cannot remember her being critical of my father – not ever – but she attached no romance to his life at sea. She told no tales of ships lurching and creaking under full sail or of fluttering pennants, shrill whistles or of cannons belching smoke. When at last she received a letter fixing the date for my father's return and his solemn pledge never to leave her side again, she was all quiet practicality and tense with nervous anticipation. Perhaps, some superstitious dread prevented her from whispering, 'Your father will be home soon.' But on the night of Mr Hinde's visit, every comfort was prepared for his return. The flagstones were scrubbed; the iron grate gleamed with black lead polish; his linen put at the fire. The warm room held the soft fragrance of lavender and was aglow with cleanliness. The



Jamaica packet arrived – she waited, sitting quietly by the fire playing with her infant son in her lap until he fell asleep and was carried to the nursery. I was nearly six years old.



I heard the circumstances surrounding my father's death from my Aunt Barton. I cannot remember any phrase exactly, but an uncompromising voice comes back, intimidating and unkind. Her truths were harsh and unembroidered, insinuating, self-serving. She could have been a preacher standing above a sober congregation giving a lesson on the theme: 'They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' I can give no sense of my father's personality, but the imagined scene of his death is a distinct memory, thanks to Aunt Barton. It is from her that I have learned to loathe bullies and cowards.

He had wreaked such terrible damage on American ships during the war that a vessel of superior strength was expressly ordered to seek and engage with my father wherever he could be found. They met him and ordered him to strike. He was incensed to discover the Captain was an old school fellow of his and he refused to strike to a traitor and a base rebel to his own country. He was answered with an ear-splitting cannonade from the American ship. His antagonist's vessel was so large and so close that it could not bring its guns to bear upon the hull of my father's ship but did terrible damage to its masts and rigging – and to the men stationed there. The English vessel directed its fire directly at the hull of its opponent between wind and water and it was soon reduced to a sinking state and struck. My father raised a cheer from the men who had survived in the shrouds. At that instant, a chain shot came sweeping past my father and took off half his face. He dropped convulsing uncontrollably on the open

deck. The American ship made off and my father was taken to Jamaica near where the battle had taken place. He died within hours. He was thirty-four.



Rawlinsons never paid my mother the promised prize money or the property my father had accrued, a fortune of at least twelve thousand pounds. She had recourse to the law, but this she was not prepared to do in case it jeopardised the little she did have from a small estate at Sunderland, near Lancaster, which my father had inherited. And even with the strictest economy this soon proved inadequate. My mother sold most of the furniture and removed to Up Holland. Its narrow, cobbled streets and medley of stone houses had been her mother's native place. The cost of coals and rents was also much lower than in Lancaster. We lived in a pretty cottage across the street from St Thomas's churchyard and priory. From my window I could look over the street through the iron railings to headstones, which leaned this way and that under yew trees. At one end of the house was a small, painted, iron gate: the sharp clack as its spring drew it shut comes back to me as I write this. It is now rusted and moss-tufted, but then it gave entrance to the garden. I see myself – small, dark – standing in the centre of a great space, my eyes open and my arms outstretched, whirling around and around beneath leaves, flowers, clouds, until I fall to the grass, my head still whirling like a spun top. In reality the garden was small, but through my childish eyes it was extensive, romantic and beautiful. In spring apple trees were matted in a foam of blossom; in summer it was ablaze with nasturtiums. It gave me a peace of mind, a feeling of security in the world that I have not been able to recover. The upper end contained

an arbour of roses with a stone table and benches where my mother gave little tea parties, for she was soon acquainted with the principal families of the district: Doctor and Mrs Hawarden from nearby Wigan; Mr Braithwaite, the rector of St Thomas's and his wife; Mr and Mrs Prescott, who were what my mother called people of considerable property. I think of that time and strawberries come to mind, and cream, and twirling white parasols, laughter. When the weather was fine Tom and I played in our garden. I joined him in his games of marbles, helped to sail his little boat in the water tub or to trundle his hoop. When it was cold or raining we would write letters to each other, compose riddles or try to build a kite from an assortment of thin sticks, glue and brown paper. I don't remember one ever flying.

An incident surfaces unbidden, another garden scene. Tom, shamefaced, shaking, glares at me; he is holding a stick in his hands. A round cup of mud and straw is broken at his feet, a tiny, too-heavy head wobbles on a thin neck, and a beak opens soundlessly. It is blind, blue skin covers its bulging, veined eyes. I run from the horror, but stop and turn to see swallows flit and arc above the eaves near the water barrel.



Mr Braithwaite had transformed part of his house into a boarding school, which he called The Academy. He taught the sons of the rich who lived in the dark, red-black priory almost directly opposite our cottage. Tom was permitted to attend as a day student and could soon spout a little Latin, which of course was too much for me. He enjoyed this small triumph and revelled in his superiority by quoting Latin phrases at every opportunity. He would never tell me their meaning. I don't think he was particularly clever, nor did

he enjoy learning, but he had a strength of mind and a deep determination to succeed. He liked to compete, but only if he were confident of winning. I can remember clearly how he would rage if I were the first to bring the last of my stones into my corner and win a game of backgammon. But when he was fourteen and articled to Mr Grimshaw of Preston, his leaving was like a death. I felt sure I would never see him again as he then was. He passively accepted our hugs and kisses. He was a little pale, but with a show of manliness he settled his cap, pulled his scarf closer, and climbed the ladder to his seat behind the driver.

‘Goodbye Mama. Goodbye Ellen. I will work hard.’

My throat constricted with emotion and my voice broke to a half-sob. I could say nothing even as he disappeared from our view with a clatter of wheel rims on cobbles. I felt entirely alone.

My mother’s voice was at my elbow, quiet and reassuring. ‘We must do all we can for Tom. One day he will be established in business and he won’t forget us. I know it’s a long time to look to, but it will pass and then we will be together again.’

The house seemed unnaturally quiet, the garden deserted. Tom’s room remained neat, lifeless. I missed his demands, his banter, his noise and his untidiness. My mother began to deprive herself of comforts, even of necessities, to support Tom – and I suffered with her. Visits to the butcher were infrequent. We lived on little more than bread and potatoes and talked and dreamed of the time when Tom would be an attorney at law. Then there would be veal pies, smoking rounds of beef, and green goose! It was a vain expectation, but she did not live to know it.

★

My education was not entirely neglected. Mr Pollard, an usher from Mr Braithwaite's school, taught me Writing, Arithmetic and a little Geography. However, I showed such interest in my lessons and made such quick progress that my mother, who had initially been delighted with my abilities, grew less certain about the project and Mr Pollard's visits became noticeably less frequent. I think she was afraid that I would be ruined for any useful purpose in life if such inclinations were indulged. She was happier to see me shelling a trug of peas in the elbowed seat under the pear tree than to be there reading one of Mr Pollard's books.

I had helped her in the village school she had worked so hard to start since I was eleven years old. I now taught for nine hours a day, sewed a little for hire and helped with the work of the house. We had no servant. There were days when I had no one to speak to. I had no real companion. My mother's pupils were all too young and most of the village girls my own age were so vulgar that my mother would not have allowed me to associate with them even if I had wanted to – and I didn't. I was shy and diffident. Looking from Tom's low-beamed room across the churchyard and beyond the houses to the fields below, I would have gladly gone for a solitary walk, but under no circumstances was I allowed to go beyond the village unaccompanied. I looked, longed and sighed, but kept my wishes to myself. Of necessity I was much alone, but in time it became a matter of choice. Even at the age of eighteen, on the now rare occasion an acquaintance of my mother called, I would flee upstairs rather than join them. I didn't know why. I would often imagine having conversations with men who could discuss science and literature or be deeply moved by music. I would have liked to be thought clever, well-informed, elegant and witty, but I could not afford books and I lived almost

entirely amongst the coarse and illiterate. I craved company but avoided society.

Day followed day in dreary routine. I became ill. For months I suffered from a sore throat, extreme fatigue and stomach pains. A bilious complaint further weakened my digestion. I would heave up quantities of yellow stuff after eating meat. It would eventually contribute to another of my oddities – I eat no meat given the choice – much to the puzzlement and even amusement of the beef and offal eaters of Up Holland.

When I felt I could barely crawl, Doctor Hawarden ordered that I was to have more air and exercise. He was adamant that my very life depended upon it.

‘A holiday, Mrs Weeton, is what you both need. Liverpool – a change of scene would work wonders.’ He settled his substantial frame into a chair with a professional calm and direct gaze. ‘I have a niece in Liverpool who is about the same age as Ellen. You would get along famously with Ann, I’m sure,’ he said, nodding at me kindly.

‘We could stay with the Chorleys,’ my mother said, her voice suddenly more hopeful.

The Chorleys had been friends of my mother in her Lancaster days and although she had corresponded with them for years – every Christmas without fail – I had never met them. I knew they too had a daughter, but to me they were merely names. They were the Chorleys of Liverpool. The thought of actually going there had never occurred to me before. A deep excitement stirred in my very soul. Liverpool!

But later that night, my mother decided she could not afford the time away from her school and that the necessary expenses could not be justified given Tom’s circumstances. Instead the aid of the Prescott girls was enlisted. I was to accompany them every afternoon on the walks considered by

Doctor Hawarden to be necessary for my health. They were young ladies with whom my mother took every opportunity to nurture an intimacy on my account because of their affluence and standing in the community. And their manners *were* superior to mine, but only in the presence of my mother. Alone with them, they never tired of showing me that they considered themselves to be vastly superior to the daughter of a schoolmistress. I'm sure I was no better or worse looking than any other sample of young women, but beside them in their graceful, high-waisted, low-bodiced, sleeveless dresses, I felt self-conscious about my appearance – my worn face, my thinness, my tallness. On one painful occasion we were hardly through the front door before their taunts and snobbish banter began.

‘Well, Miss Dowdy Draggletail,’ said Miss Prescott the elder, glancing at me quickly with undisguised hauteur, ‘you look so smart this morning I feel sure you could pass for our maid.’

Delighted at this first volley, her sister, Elizabeth, was only too happy to continue the assault.

‘No, no, no, silly, she is looking for a man, aren't you Ellen? Tell us what he must be like.’

They were both evidently pleased with their cleverness and smirked with self-satisfied laughter at my expense. My shyness they took for stupidity and because I so rarely took part in their vacuous chatter, they assumed I didn't understand half of their crude hints and barbs. My anger was a fire, but it was too smothered by exhaustion to leap and be dangerous. They walked too quickly for me. My head swam with barely suppressed nausea and I felt sure the added exertion would only slow my recovery. There was a stark stench of rotting vegetation from the choked gutters, which added to my distress. I reeled a little from dizziness. A rat disappeared up

a dripping water pipe dragging its naked tail in behind it. I hoped it would not climb into my dreams.

‘Oh, God! Hurry up a bit,’ said Catherine. ‘Well, for my part,’ she soon continued blithely, tossing her light siren curls which fell luxuriantly over her neck and shoulders, ‘I have two criteria which must be satisfied. He must be handsome, that goes without saying, and he must be as rich as Croesus.’

‘Are you sure you wouldn’t settle for an only son of very, very elderly parents of slightly more than modest means?’ asked Elizabeth knowingly. She turned briefly in my direction. ‘Now Ellen, no doubt you have been inspired by the exploits of our romantic Miss Porter,’ she said mockingly.

Laughter again. I knew something of the Porters of Ackhurst. Towards the end of summer, Janet Porter, who was only seventeen, had gone to Gretna Green and married Mr Saunderson of Preston, who was upwards of forty. He had made frequent visits to Ackhurst ostensibly as a friend of Mr Porter’s. Out riding together one afternoon, Mr Porter almost fell off his horse with astonishment when he was asked for his daughter’s hand. Without a word to Saunderson, he returned home, bundled his distraught daughter into a chaise, drove to Wigan and placed her under the protection of his brother. Her uncle was very fond of her and well-to-do, but she had only been there a short while when one evening she claimed to feel so unwell that she couldn’t dine out that night with her aunt and uncle. Saunderson was waiting a short distance away and their elopement was not discovered for hours.

‘They say,’ said Miss Prescott, ‘that the once prosperous Mr Saunderson now works in a warehouse and earns so little he can hardly support himself let alone a wife.’

I remembered my mother telling me that Mrs Saunderson had returned to Ackhurst only once since her marriage – to ask her father for his forgiveness. He granted it, but left the



house immediately without another word. When he returned, his daughter had gone. ‘Poor Mr Porter has hardly been seen since then – not even at church,’ she had added sadly. But I knew the good church people of Up Holland. They would show no mercy in such circumstances. After Sunday service, they would be like hens in a circle squawking and pecking at the lacerated dignity of the Porters until the last scraps of the scandal were gobbled up. There would be much solemn head shaking and pious solicitude: ‘Oh, it’s a shame,’ someone would be bound to say, in an almost sincere voice. ‘Did you know that Mr Porter would not see his daughter for fear of upsetting his brother?’ someone else would assert, convinced she possessed the truth in every detail of the case. ‘Old Mr Porter is quite well off you know – he can’t afford to upset him,’ would come from a third, secure in his worldly wisdom – and his wealth.



In spite of my walks with the Prescotts, perhaps because of them, I did slowly recover. As the season turned and the days grew shorter and cooler, my strength increased and I throbbed again with the pulse of life. However, fate was only readying me for impending tragedy. My mother had long suffered from a breathing difficulty that Doctor Hawarden called the asthma, and as the chilly, dank days of late November wore on, she became increasingly listless and pale. The mornings were bone-white with fog and damp with droplets of rain. Frills of yellow fungus appeared in the garden and unless a bright fire was kept the very walls ran with moisture. She would wake wheezing and choking in the hours before dawn and be racked with a cough that could not move the congestion on her lungs. She continued to go to her school – until the morning Bill Ramsey confronted her.

The day before, a worthless glass brooch that a child had brought from home had gone missing. Eventually, it was found in the pocket of Edward Ramsey who, rather than endure the gentle wrath of my mother fled to his home in tears. What story he manufactured to explain his early arrival, I never discovered, but he now stood silently, his heavy, round head bowed and his shoulders hunched, while his father shouted angrily at my mother. He had lost all control. Spit flew from his thick purplish lips and tiny muscles in his face worked and twitched, before he turned on his heel taking his son with him.

My mother remained outwardly calm, but I'm sure the shock of the incident triggered the acute attack she suffered that afternoon. She was suffocating for lack of air. Her chest ached. The balsam inhalations Doctor Hawarden prescribed for her had little effect. Her breath rattled painfully as she bent her head covered with linen over the steaming bowl. It soothed, but did not cure. The next morning, the fog turned to grey rain and she was much worse. Doctor Hawarden sat her upright, propped by pillows, and she made noisy little gulps at the air.

When he was leaving, he stopped at the door to pull on his gloves and said with a frown, 'Ellen, if there is a change for the worse, you must send for me. I am well used to venturing out at all hours.' The note of seriousness in his voice betrayed his unease. 'I will call again tomorrow.'

I wished he could have stayed. I missed the kind, grey light of his eyes and the reassurance of his calm decisiveness. I felt very much alone.

The Braithwaites visited in the early afternoon. Reverend Braithwaite, tall, slender, educated, was formal, but he was not the stern, self-sufficient preacher one may have expected. Behind the lectern on a Sunday, he was all authority and

learning, but he enjoyed company and was alive to the beauty of the world. He insisted on caring for the little garden beside the priory himself and early summer saw phlox and roses, red and white, flourishing there. To her husband's strengths, Mrs Braithwaite added tenderness. To the poor of Up Holland, those bruised by an unaccommodating world, she was a familiar figure with her basket, a piece of linen covering her offering of bread or some freshly picked vegetables. My mother used to say that the Braithwaites were two halves of the same whole, they were so well suited to each other. In their presence she seemed to rally a little – I too, began to feel more hopeful. But the thin, blue veins in her temples and the dark shadows under her eyes betrayed her fragility, her invalid state. She soon fell into a restless sleep.

'Remember, Ellen, we are just across the road,' Mr Braithwaite said when they were leaving. Mrs Braithwaite wordlessly put her arms around me with a strength that spoke eloquently of her silent concern.



The night closed in, wet with steady rain and my mother grew agitated.

'You're a good girl Ellen. Oh, and poor Tom,' she groaned, 'no matter how hard he tries he won't have enough money now. I was going to have everything settled in a new Will when you turned twenty-one.'

'You still can. It's not long till Christmas,' I said, trying to be encouraging, but my voice was little more than a whisper.

She shook her head and desperately tried to rouse herself. It was a struggle for her to speak at all. Her voice was weak and tremulous with an edge of urgency in it.

'Ellen, listen to me carefully,' she said between gasps. Her

eyes were unnaturally bright. ‘Tom must have the money from Sunderland. You can keep the school going. Please – will you promise me that? As things stand, the house is yours and you will have the interest from a hundred pounds. If you marry, promise me the hundred pounds will go to Tom.’

I promised. And I will keep my promise.

My mother had exhausted herself. She lay back and closed her eyes. Her breaths now came in slow, harsh sobs, which hollowed and whitened her cheeks. I think my earliest memory is of my mother. I was a little girl. I am not sure how old; she was dressed in white muslin. We were walking amongst birches and alders besides a stream. Late autumn leaves carpeted the ground. She was holding my hand and talking to me. I was happy. I have no recollection of what she was saying. She was a felt presence only.

My thoughts turned to other scenes: my mother with Mrs Braithwaite in her kitchen where there were white cups, slices of cake and laughter; I saw her hurrying along the cobbles to her little school. I remembered her the afternoon of one of Miss Dannett’s visits. Miss Dannett, poor simple soul, was in the habit of being frequently bled for fear of becoming fat. The apothecaries of neighbouring villages refused to bleed her any longer, but Jackson of Up Holland was prepared to – for a fee. She had convinced herself that if she were not bled she would become swollen and so lethargic that she would not be able to move. And this was not her only fear. She had a dread of a terrible presence in the old Mill-house just below hers.

‘In the dead of night,’ she said, ‘the mill wheel turns of its own accord. True as I am sitting here.’ She rummaged in her bag and placed a small jar of homemade jam on the table. She would never visit us without bringing something: half a teacake or some stewed fruit that my mother would inspect suspiciously before consuming. ‘And other folks hear things

too,' she said, 'the tongs, the poker, even the chairs are set a-dancing by it.'

When she had gone, shuffling her bulk along the path, a little pale and wheezing slightly, Tom spread his coat wide and ran through the house moaning eerily. My mother would have none of it. This in a place where hardly a stile, or crossroad, or mossy boulder did not have some old story associated with it – usually grisly. She would not permit us to ridicule Miss Dannett nor to accept her story, but sat us down and urged us to apply our reason to the matter.

'Remember the Lord himself tacitly allowed for such a possibility when the Apostles saw him walking on the water and thought he was a ghost,' she said, so seriously that it precluded so much as a giggle from us. She found the passage in our heavy black-bound Bible and made me read the line she was tapping with her index finger: 'A spirit hath not flesh and blood as ye see I have.'

She was rarely so solemn. Perhaps she had some inkling of the years I would spend alone.

She lapsed into sleep – perhaps it was unconsciousness. The cold night hours passed. I was gripped with the icy fear of certain knowledge. I wanted to send for Doctor Hawarden, but I was frightened to leave her. I stayed – holding her hand. I wanted her to know that I was still there – that she wasn't alone. I grew strangely calm, almost peaceful and listened to her breathing quieten. The shock, when it came, as I knew it must, came as noiselessly as a petal falling. Her breath left her; the colour of her face drained away and was stilled. I gently folded her arms across her chest and kissed her on the forehead. Eventually, I moved to the window and looked out at the chill misty morning, the curdled sky and the sweep of rain.

Old Mr Prescott had died three days before my mother. In a few weeks Mrs Prescott and her daughters left Up Holland. Catherine promised – perhaps superciliously, perhaps because of mutual grief and loss – to write occasionally. I had no legal guardian. Tom was too young and had four years to complete before he could practise law, and the entire care and support of him was now my responsibility.



My mother was buried in Up Holland churchyard. Her grave is only yards from her old school house. It was a cold, blustery day. The last of the leaves on the near-naked boughs were being tormented by the wind and were black against the fish-coloured sky. They would soon be torn from their uncertain anchorage, leaf by leaf, and be swirled and lost amongst the gravestones. Tom, taller and heavier, stood stooped in misery. He was cheese-white. I tried not to dwell on the gaping dark earth in front of me – the dull thuds the wet sods made on the coffin lid – what lay inside the coffin. Mr Braithwaite gently intoned the final words of the service. And then the living turned their backs on the dead – as they must. I felt a terrible need to be alone, but Aunt Barton was beside me.

‘We have a Saviour, child. Dry your eyes,’ she said briskly and without emotion. I winced inwardly. Not a wisp of hair protruded from under her bonnet making her look prim and severe. Even as a child I disliked her – her baggy jaws and narrow, critical eyes. Being respectable was my aunt’s true religion. It was far more important to her than merely being respected – what people might think had guided her unerringly through life. Now in her sixties, with her carefully guarded reputation for moral uprightness in the parish unblemished, she was able to reward herself with the subtle pleasures of

judging the failures and weaknesses of others with impunity.

‘You have suffered a great loss, but you are also fortunate that you have a respectable home with me and your good uncle.’

‘No, no, Aunt,’ I stammered. ‘Thank you, but I will stay in my own house and I will keep the school now.’

‘Alone? That would hardly be proper at your age. Why, you are not yet twenty-one. And my health is not what one could wish. Surely your duty lies with me?’ I felt her observant gaze on me. Tightly dressed in black, her eyes missed nothing – not so much as a stray cotton thread or a frayed hem. How constricting life would be in her house, enduring her affectation, her discipline! Even in the depths of my grief a part of me chose the freedom of lonely solitude in my own cottage. ‘Well?’ she persisted.

‘It was my mother’s wish that I should continue with the school, Aunt. And the Braithwaites are close by if I need them. I think I will be able to manage.’

She grimaced sniffily and a look of annoyance came into her eyes.

‘The Braithwaites,’ she spat out condescendingly. ‘I have heard he plays cards of an evening, and that he is a little too fond of a glass of port on occasions. Are these the people...’

She stopped speaking. She had noticed Mrs Braithwaite coming towards me, her face full of undisguised compassion.

She put her arms around me, searched my aunt’s face briefly, before saying, ‘Mrs Barton, you will of course join us at the priory for a cup of tea?’ We began walking together towards the group gathering in the cold shade between the heavy church tower and the angular, dark brickwork of the Braithwaites’ home, but my aunt did not follow.



I had hardly, if ever, been alone in my cottage. Its mood changed, the rhythm of its life, its rituals, its sounds, and especially its silences – made heavy with the weight of age and the coldness of winter. I was alone with my grief and crushing loneliness. Mrs Chorley had written, kindly inviting me to stay with her for as long as I liked, which was generous, but hardly possible. As I sat at my window looking across at the dark tower of St Thomas’s, Liverpool receded in my mind to become an almost make-believe place, as far away as it had been when I was a child. I had the school now. And there was another difficulty. Tom had returned to Preston, with three pounds in his pocket that I could ill afford. I was starving. I had no money at all. One poor meal a day had to suffice. Then, one of my girls paid me a penny for some thread. A treasure! ‘Well, I will have some dinner today at least!’ I thought. No doubt, if my good aunt were there, she would have warned me about the sin of presumption. I gleefully bought some potatoes and boiled them with plenty of milk. When they were ready I put them above the oven while I fried bacon for the children who often brought their own dinner to be cooked at school. All was nearly ready when a child hurried past and knocked the dish off the stove and onto the floor. Covered in dirt, they were utterly unfit to eat. It was only a few potatoes and I had borne everything bravely until that moment, but it was too much for me. I placed the pan on the floor without a word, left the room and cried bitterly in my frustration. The guilty child stood looking at me in wide-eyed, silent amazement. That afternoon, in Mrs Braithwaite’s kitchen and sitting before a scalding hot cup of tea and freshly baked scones, I laughed as I told her of the disaster. I realised with a quick pang that it was the first time I had laughed since my mother had died. It brought to an end one phase of my life and the faint, uncertain beginnings of another.



My aunt visited me only once in those first weeks. She seemed almost disappointed to see me as clean as a cat in my own house and at least outwardly content. The painted, garden gate shut with a sharp clack as she left and she did not stop at the corner to wave to me.



I remember very clearly one summer's evening about six or seven months later. Mr Braithwaite's little garden was again burning with the cold fire of scarlet flowers and I went for a walk past the jumble of slate roofs and the stale shops and along sun-washed lanes to Tower Hill. The air was so clear I could see the Welsh hills quite distinctly in the distance. Honeysuckle had tangled with pink dog roses in the hedgerows. A pair of plovers called to black-faced sheep. The dull routine and the petulance of the classroom drained away from me as if I had drunk wine. When I returned, I went upstairs to take off my bonnet and shawl. Every window in the house was open to the warm light. The sky had deepened to indigo and the few clouds of tarnished silver were edged with rouge by the setting sun. The evening was so beautiful I was reluctant to leave my window. Some children were playing on the road beneath it. At a little distance from the iron railings of the churchyard, a group of people had gathered around a man who played a flute. He kept time with the help of his hobnailed boots on the cobbles. So infectious were his rhythms that a passing labourer removed his straw hat and a rush basket of tools from his shoulder and began to dance. There was a mood of perfect contentment and harmony as the daylight became more muted and slipped away. The shadows of night drew on and a white thin mist began to fall. The laughter, the music, the distant voices fell quiet. I looked out at a soft, silent moon haloed in cloud. It seemed that all living things had gone to

their rest. And I would too! In a moment I was in my bed where sleep as soothing as rain on water washed over me.

It could only have been an hour or so later when some sound startled me into complete alertness. I heard the muffled sound of a voice – someone was in the house! This sudden realisation took my breath away and I felt a weakness in my chest and knees. I was out of bed in an instant and drew the sword, which had belonged to my father, from underneath the bolster. I had put it there for just such an occasion as this, but it was with a sense of unreality that I crept down the stairs holding the horrible weapon and dressed in nothing but my nightdress. I still wanted to believe that I would discover no one, but to my horror a few steps from the bottom I could see the dark shape of a person walking towards me! I momentarily faltered, but found my voice.

‘What are you doing? Who are you?’ I demanded in a near scream, lifting the heavy sword in front of me.

The response was a loud shriek that frightened me even more, and the person, whose scream had identified her as a woman, bolted to the other end of the room. Another heavier voice shouted from outside the parlour window.

‘Ann! What’s going on? Are you alright?’

‘Oh God, Ellen, put the sword down. It’s me, Mrs Braithwaite.’

Mr Braithwaite then clambered noisily through the open window with a lantern. I stood in amazement, my chest heaving and unable to say a word. My mouth opened and gaped like a carp’s, as I tried to fathom why they were there.

‘Miss Weeton,’ said Mr Braithwaite, looking uncharacteristically embarrassed and flustered. He put the lantern on a table and went to his wife’s side. ‘We saw your windows open and thought you must have been out or

forgotten them. We waited a good long while, but as there was no light, I thought we'd better come over.'

'We did knock,' said Mrs Braithwaite, recovering a little from her fright, 'but we couldn't make you hear, so I climbed through a window to shut them for you. My goodness, I didn't expect to see you in that white nightdress with a sword!' She laughed a little in nervous relief.

'We will be a little more circumspect before intruding on your privacy again, Miss Weeton,' chuckled Mr Braithwaite. 'You could have been Boudicca herself when you were on those stairs brandishing your sword.' He now laughed a rich, ageless laugh. 'Doctor Hawarden will hear of this young lady!'

I could still hear them laughing over the night's exploits on their way home. At first I felt nothing but relief and amusement. It was not until I had locked everything securely, and had gone upstairs again that I reeled at the thought of what could have happened. What if I had struck Mrs Braithwaite with the sword in my terror? What if they were not my well-intentioned neighbours, but were in fact burglars – or worse? What crimes could they not have committed without so much as a lock or bolt to contend with? I would never be so careless again!

But the Braithwaites were to see me again in my white nightdress and with my dark hair all awry in the moonlight.



People have commented to me that they would not like to live alone so close to the churchyard, but I don't feel any closer to the ghosts for all that. I have looked at the gravestones at all hours of the night when I have been unable to sleep. I have stared at their grey shapes, but they have not turned into men dressed in cowls, or ravens or monsters of

any sort – they have remained but gravestones. My brother and I as children were quite prepared to wander through the house at night without a candle to find some item or other we wanted. I am not superstitious. What a miserable time I would have endured alone in my empty house if I too easily granted a supernatural agency to explain all my petty frights and starts. But that is not to say I am entirely free from such fears. One night I was almost completely unnerved at the prospect of climbing the stairs to go to my bed – because of a sound I dreaded – a sound I only heard at night. *Sounds* can do me no harm I reasoned, and comforted myself with the thought that there would be few in my situation as little afraid as I usually was. But my blood turned as cold as an icy stream when I heard it again. Someone was breathing rather hard as if asleep in the room next to mine – my mother’s old bedroom. I crept as quietly as I could and listened outside the closed door trembling in the blue silvery darkness. The breathing was quite audible – rhythmic – even peaceful. The church clock began to strike eleven. I ran in blind terror down the stairs, clawed the bolts on the door open and fled from the house. I had no candle and nothing on my feet. I can only imagine what a sight I must have made standing there in the night outside the Braithwaites. I hesitated, about to knock. ‘They are probably in bed,’ I thought, ‘and what explanation can I possibly give of myself?’ Just then, the bolt on the other side of the door was slid home into its hasp. Mr Braithwaite was on the point of retiring for the night! Fear of being left alone overcame my inhibition and I rapped loudly on the door. Silence. Then again the scraping of a heavy bolt and I could see Mr Braithwaite’s tall form frowning and peering tentatively into the darkness from behind a candle.

‘Oh, Mr Braithwaite,’ I said. I was shaking uncontrollably.

‘Ellen! It’s you,’ he said, opening the door wider. ‘Whatever is the matter? You quite startled me.’

‘I am very ill,’ I answered. ‘Would you be kind enough to send up to my Aunt Barton’s?’

‘Of course, come in. Please come in.’

As soon as I heard his voice I revived. The fire in their parlour was almost out and was starting to smoke, but it rallied with the cool air when the door was opened and with Mrs Braithwaite’s help it was soon a congenial blaze. She brought me a warm rug and urged me to drink a small glass of brandy that Mr Braithwaite had found for me. He offered to go to my aunt’s himself, but my fears now seemed terribly childish. Rather than disturb my aunt’s entire household at such an hour it was decided that Mrs Braithwaite would spend the night with me. But by the time they walked home with me, I was perfectly calm and was quite capable of returning to my bed alone. I’m sure it was only want of company out of school hours that had so unsettled me.

I still hear the sound of breathing most nights. I have got up and gone into the room, turned down the quilt and looked behind the curtains but to no avail. I have found nothing. I had almost concluded the brood of owls that lived in the church tower made the sound until I learned from Mr Braithwaite that they had recently deserted the neighbourhood. It must be a mere fancy – but it was a strong one! It was to become another turning point in my solitary life, for I decided it would be folly to live in a constant state of fear because of a noise – because of what *might* happen to me. I continue to rise in the morning uninjured and refreshed in body and sound in mind. I have even entertained myself with the sounds when unable to sleep by counting their quickness or slowness while holding my own breath at the time. Perhaps I have a defect in my hearing and the sounds can be accounted for in a physical

way. But I have the better of it now and I am no longer afraid.



At length the time when my brother would be free from his clerkship drew closer. The thought that we would soon be living together again encouraged me in my weary routine in the schoolroom, and the deprivations I suffered on his account were borne more cheerfully. I was still plagued by the megrims – very often. But aren't most people employed in activities very different from what their inclinations or talents would naturally lead them? When I received a note from Tom, or some trifling gift, or a book he had borrowed for me, I was encouraged to further efforts. I thought I was lucky to have such a brother! I would write as long a letter as I possibly could to him in spite of the barrenness of my life. I also began to write to Miss Chorley of Liverpool. She was so worldly and refined I was sometimes puzzled by her interest in me, but she proved to be a faithful correspondent. I was so pleased with my 'epistolary conversations', as I dubbed them, that I painstakingly made copies of every letter that I wrote and kept them in a large quarto book. They will one day, no doubt, sit on someone's musty shelf and await destruction from the dusty finger of time. I also had my flageolet. It was my one act of selfishness during all that time. I bought the little flute and a book of simple instructions for a few shillings. For a long while I was restricted to a few psalm tunes I knew from church on a Sunday and played them very badly because I was completely baffled by sharps and flats and played all the notes natural. But I loved it and in the quiet of the evenings its sounds filled the house with a contented longing.

As winter tightened its grip I daily expected to see or at least to hear from Tom. Trees bent to a knife-edged cold, puddles

in cart-ruts froze and ice underfoot shattered into shards as hard as broken pottery. Villagers spoke with white puffs of winter breath, but I remained buoyant with expectation. And then at last, there came a letter from Tom! He was in London! He had gone to London confident of finding employment without bothering to see me first. I thrummed with anger and hurt.

It was to be another three months before I saw Tom. The snowdrops had bloomed and the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks was nascent when he suddenly arrived without any warning. I came home from school to find him staring sightlessly into a smouldering coal fire, his eyes shining as if from raillery and his thin lips a drowned blue. There was an extraordinary pallor about his mouth and his brow – knotted in either pain or anger, I wasn't sure which – was greasy with sweat as if from exertion. His trousers were torn and his wet coat, which he had not taken off, steamed from the heat of the fire. I quailed before his squalid appearance and his dark, threatening broodiness, but he stood up when I came in and embraced me weakly.

‘Ellen, I have come home.’

‘I am glad, Tom. I am glad. I will not be so lonely. But what's happened to you? Are you ill?’

‘What's happened to me? Well, Ellen, let me tell you what's happened to me,’ he said bitterly. He threw himself heavily, almost violently, onto the sofa and his face twisted with insincere amusement. ‘I have had a most wonderful time. I have jostled with the very sweepings of the great city itself for a place in hell. I have been liberally dosed with opium and am presently in need of more. Jackson would give me nothing. I have also enjoyed the most genteel of English pastimes in my forlorn search for a profession. Let me tell you about the bull baiting. I lost all my money. The wretched

animal was supposed to be ferocious and I had managed to get a seat quite near the stake. They waved red flags at it, threw pepper up its nose, twisted its tail. They even poked viciously at it with iron pikes until it bled, but the brute refused to defend itself against the dogs. It was soon pinned and fell to its knees bellowing. I swear to God, Ellen, tears as large as peas ran from its eyes and down its nose. And the smell, the filth!

‘Oh Tom, Tom,’ I bleated.

‘Oh Tom, Tom,’ he mimicked in a bitter falsetto voice. ‘Don’t go Tom, Tom-ing me, Ellen. Mind you, I don’t expect much else from you really except complaints and whingeing about your noble sacrifice and how lonely you are and how hard you have to work! God! How I looked forward to those long cheerful letters of yours!’

I was stunned, and could do nothing but stand there dumfounded. He must have taken my empty silence for calm, which further enraged him. He stood up abruptly and paced in nervous anger about the room like something caged. He looked ill.

‘How can you complain about being lonely all the time when there are people all around you?’ he demanded. ‘What’s wrong with aunt and uncle? The Braithwaites are close enough, aren’t they? Or aren’t they good enough for you? You know, unless someone is a lord or a visiting professor of mathematics they’re not good enough for you, are they? I bet no pimply hobbledehoy has had his hands over you, eh? How old are you, Ellen? Twenty-five, isn’t it?’

He was vicious and unfair and crude in his accusations, but I managed to say, ‘Tom, you’re not yourself. Don’t talk like that. Why are you being so cruel?’

‘I have been lonely too, you know. But the great city has much entertainment to offer.’



‘Tom, I don’t want to know. I don’t want to hear any more. You’re not yourself.’

Suddenly, he shut his eyes. The corners of his mouth drew down tightly and he wept noiselessly, drawing his hands up in an attempt to hide his face. I put my arms around him and tried to comfort him.

‘Tom, you need sleep. I’ll help you to bed. I am glad you are home.’

His weakness and defeat made me strong and he offered no resistance as I helped him up the stairs and led him to the room, which had been his as a child. I got some warm water and put it into a basin and fetched a towel and some dry linen for the bed. He sat on a chair; his face was sallow and flecked with moisture, but he was calm again.

‘I’m sorry, Ellen. I’m sorry. Forgive me.’ He stifled a sob or a cough before he could continue. ‘I have broken God’s law, true enough, but thankfully not man’s law. I’m safe.’

He grimaced from the bite of shame and looked at me directly for the first time. There was something haunted and frightened in his eyes. What had he seen?

‘Go to bed, Tom. You must rest,’ I said, closing the door gently.

‘Ellen,’ he called quietly.

‘Yes, Tom.’

‘Ellen, I have no money.’



There followed three weeks of perfect happiness for me. At first Tom was full of remorse but soon his leaden self-disgust was lightened. His lined face relaxed and was smoothed, his grey-blue eyes cleared and his dark good looks returned – not another word was spoken about London. He was assiduous in his efforts to be cheerful and to please. Tom, I believed then,

was tender hearted, only a little weak in the company of those who would prey upon him. I mended his linen and bought for him pocket-handkerchiefs, neck-handkerchiefs, stockings and cambric for ruffles.

He settled in Wigan, but visited me every Saturday returning that night or the following one. He often talked of the time when I could live with him and he spoke of taking a house in Wigan for that purpose. It was also in Wigan that he became acquainted with Jane Scott, the daughter of a prosperous factory owner, and they were married within two months of their first meeting. They married in secret without the knowledge of her friends or with the approval of her parents. My brother had no house where they might live, so I offered them mine. They came on the day they were married with no prospect of living anywhere else for the coming months. Mrs Weeton! The name seemed odd to my ear and in truth there was a certain vague oddity about her. Not in her appearance, for she had the attractiveness of youth, although she was large boned and her features had a slight coarseness – she would be prone to fatness in the years to come. No one though could deny the beauty of her hair, which, when sun-rinsed, was the colour of melted honey. She spoke in a thin, papery voice and rarely to me, even when Tom was away. She did no household work, either because she was too indolent or too slow or was simply unused to it. I made no complaints. My brother now had responsibilities and again he needed my help.

They had been with me for about a month when I arrived home from school one afternoon to see Tom talking to a man holding a horse. I saw Mrs Weeton's face at a window with a look of passive anxiety. The man was dismissed but he left on foot leaving the horse with Tom who glanced up at me briefly as I approached but said nothing. He was intent on a

letter he held. Breaking the wafer, he read it right through before speaking.

‘It’s from Jane’s mother,’ he said in a slightly unsettled voice. ‘She says she has been persuaded to recognise her daughter in spite of what she calls such an imprudent match and she wants us to come to her as soon as possible on the horse.’

It was soon concluded best to accept the invitation. They left that same afternoon, were reconciled, and I was once more a solitary thing. Tom continued to come most Saturdays, ostensibly to see me, but it was really in the hope of drumming up a little business for himself in Up Holland. He talked of little else except his need for money. I thought of little else except leaving the schoolroom and joining his household.



I saw no more of Mrs Weeton until one overcast Saturday when she and Tom arrived in a gig that rattled and jingled in the still humid air. She *is* Mrs Weeton now. It suits her. I will never call her Jane. Although it was mid-afternoon the light was weak and unsavoury. Distances were blurred into bleached shades of indistinct grey. The street was lifeless, the houses dull and heavy. Up Holland. Poor drab Up Holland. And there was Mrs Weeton unbuttoning her gloves of good kid. Her dress was coloured an intense marine-blue and it was as smooth and as delicately patterned as the porcelain teacups I put on the table. Her extraordinary hair was parted down the centre, curved and ended in ringlets near her chin giving the china whiteness of her face a heart shape. There was a constrained silence about her that was not eased by Tom’s few desultory remarks, nor by the rich aroma of my freshly baked plum cake.

‘How is the school going, Ellen?’ he asked without any real interest.

‘I have fourteen students, but I have a werreting time of it, Tom. I earn little from it.’

He grimaced. Gave a short laugh, a brief, ‘humph’. Local words now irritated him and I immediately regretted my blunder. Silence again. He seemed to be choosing his words carefully, perhaps for that reason when he did speak it was with such direct bluntness.

‘Must you continue with the school, Ellen? You do own your own house and there must be some interest accruing annually.’

‘Tom, this is Up Holland. I long for something more! I thought, I have always thought, that I might live with you.’

There was a quick glance exchanged between them.

‘We have concluded, Ellen, that if you are to live with us you must pay thirty guineas a year for board.’

I studied my cup – my mother’s from Lancaster – with its scalloped edge and its eggshell fineness. I couldn’t think for a minute. Thirty guineas! It was my entire income exactly. How could he know that? Had he been speaking with Aunt Barton? What would I do for clothes? I would have to ask Tom if I wanted so much as a packet of pins. They did not want me with them.

‘The house could be rented or sold and some of the furniture could be taken to Leigh,’ Tom said flatly.

‘To Leigh?’ I asked in confused surprise.

Mrs Weeton now spoke for the first time. Her soft, perfectly controlled voice irritated me. ‘Tom has secured the bulk of a legal practice in Leigh. He is now Mr Thomas Weeton, Esquire, of Avenue Place.’

‘The fact is, Ellen,’ continued Tom as if his wife had not spoken, ‘your stubborn determination to persist in your

degrading position as a teacher is becoming something of an embarrassment to the Scotts – and to me. God knows it's hard enough to make my way without having my miserable past continually on display here in Up Holland.'

I wanted to crush the cup in my hands and watch the spreading stain of my scalding hot anger seep across the white cloth. I wanted to fling the pieces at his head.

'I am perfectly willing to leave the school, Tom,' I gasped. 'Nothing would please me more. But I must be able to live by some means!' My voice was unsteady, almost husky with the emotion I felt. I was struggling to breathe, struggling to control my terrible anger.

'Of course it's not your fault – your father's misfortune, I believe. But to descend to the level of selling oneself in a classroom to make one's living.' This from Mrs Weeton – her voice was clipped and precise, almost sibilant.

'Would you have me winding bobbins for a shilling a week?' I said, angry to the point of ugliness. 'You're unfair! What choice do I have? I think I could have been something better than I am. Something might have been done. I think I had it in me, or might have had. It still wells up inside me sometimes, but what can I do? Would you like me to study divinity? Medicine? I *could* perhaps do these things, but who would employ a female physician? Who would listen to a female divine – except to ridicule? I could almost laugh at the idea myself!'

'No dear Ellen,' said Tom scathingly, 'we thought perhaps you might manage a small farm with a few cows.'

Mrs Weeton smiled.

I felt vain and foolish and was close to tears. 'I will go to Leigh,' I acquiesced. When all is closed off, a small opening can be a great freedom. I could sew, I thought, for my clothes. If Tom has taken a house, thirty guineas would pay for the

rent and taxes. I would be with Tom. I would no longer be lonely.

Tom seemed taken aback. Again a knowing glance passed between them. Tom coloured slightly, but said steadily enough, 'Ellen, Mrs Scott and ourselves have concluded it would be better if you didn't live with us at all. Such a kind of family is always unpleasant and there would only be dissension at every turn.'

Must I live, as long as I do live, I thought, here in this place – without any hope of change? Each day much like another – each bringing its crowded empty routine – stretching out endlessly into the future. How could I face it? A life of insignificance is surely worse than death! I didn't know at the time that it had already been agreed amongst them all that Mrs Weeton's younger sister would live with Tom and his wife at Leigh.



Saturday afternoon. I gaze from my window at the ceremony of sadness that is Up Holland. Rain is letting down swirling veils of pearl-grey. It shrouds the slate tiles of roofs in white smoking air. The trees drip and stone walls are stained with moss. Mr Braithwaite hurries across the sodden churchyard sheltering under an umbrella. A man cloaked and hooded in an oilskin curses as he drives three geese with a stick; they crane their necks low and hiss indignantly. He passes a drayman in a leather apron straining his hairy arms to load barrels in the wet while his horse steams and stamps. It is the most ordinary scene in the world. Each player in the little drama has been drawn by a purpose clear to him and all have been brought together in the frame of my window by the workings of blind circumstance. I feel my separateness – my littleness. The long, listless years since Tom's removal to Leigh have

settled into a painless but joyless pattern. I have few vexations, but little affection from others. Tom now has children of his own. I have no one. Adam, even in the Garden of Eden, was discontented and wanted a creature like me for company. If I could meet with a man I could esteem and love, I would marry him tomorrow, but there is no one. There is no mate for me in Up Holland.

The bulk of my furniture has been sold and my house whitewashed. I have arranged to let it on the 12th of May to a Mr Winstanley, a small middle-aged, slightly dapper man. His wife and children are above the ordinary and they are unlikely to misuse the house. He is a watchmaker and will, hopefully, be on time with my rent! I will give up my school before then. Many of the children have whooping cough. Some are pitted and scarred from smallpox. I will stay with the Chorleys in Liverpool and look for lodgings. Doctor Hawarden has written to his niece, Ann, who is also expecting me. My great hope is to be a governess with a genteel family, but I fear my lack of accomplishments will be a handicap. I have no piano or singing, no French, and no fine manners. On the subject of my departure my Aunt Barton remains silent. The Scotts, who have been at least civil to me over the last twelve months, have also set themselves against it. Perhaps they fear that Mr Tom Weeton's sister may be more publicly known if I leave. As it is, I am buried alive in Up Holland – unknown and forgotten. Tom, though, has promised to place an advertisement for a situation in the papers for me.

In a month I leave Up Holland – scene of my childhood and home of my mother's grave – for Liverpool! I must leave or I will go mad. Desperation gnaws at the soul of this place. It is in the rheumy eyes of the weavers hunched in conspiratorial groups at street corners on their day of rest. It moves and scratches like rats' feet vitiating the mind. It contaminates

and spoils. There have been two suicides. One, an old man of seventy, hanged himself in his orchard. Two small boys found him in the clear light of the following morning. He had had a little property, which had fallen into bad hands. He had allowed it to oppress him and was thought to be the reason for his dreadful escape. The other was an old woman crippled with arthritic cramp. She was found suspended from the tester at the foot of her bed by a thin red cord. They say she could not have done it herself, and are suspicious of her husband – a much younger man – but no proof can be brought. She was buried last Thursday. Scandalous rumour, illegitimate births – ignorance is not bliss in Up Holland. And all the while the Reverend T Meyrick, the incumbent of Up Holland Church, dutifully obeys the injunction to ‘increase and multiply’ – with his servant – and Miss Dannett continues to visit Jackson.